

Tempering Trauma with Humor in Argentine Post-Dictatorship Theatre: Laughing to Recover,
Reimagine, Rebuild

By

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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This project examines how theatre productions of Argentina use humor to dialogue with three moments of crisis at the socio-political level in the country from the 1970s through the present. I first look at the dictatorship itself (1976-1983), then at the Guerra de Malvinas and simultaneously the end or decline of the dictatorship (1982-1983), and finally, the Economic Crisis (spanning the late 1990s through its culmination in 2001). I argue that humor creates an epistemological approach to suffering and surviving crises, and functions as an affective opening to dialogue with segments of society in the theatre space and time. In each chronological moment, I analyze two key theatre works that encompass a feeling for the theatrical poetic and theme of the period. Each of the selected works illustrates a unique manifestation of Argentine humor on the stage that evolves, recycles, and pushes forward to innovate in a climate of crisis.

Argentine modes of humor are, in broad terms, characterized by degrees of darkness, pessimism, irony, and often biting criticism of society or government. Each historical moment creates a different need for affectively addressing these crises and thus, humor on the Argentine stage has been used to different ends. For example, in a dark work interspersed with moments of light humor like *Antígona furiosa* by Griselda Gambaro, humor works to reassess history while

raising awareness about the violence of remaining passive during the military dictatorship. Contrastingly, *Continente viril* by Alejandro Acobino reveals the absurdity of the lived reality of the Guerra de Malvinas by the use of exaggeration of characters, and by ironically making fun of rigid, antiquated nationalism. In a different vein altogether, *Postales argentinas* by Ricardo Bartís simultaneously expresses hopelessness and failure yet approaches the need to reconstruct and build towards a possible future through an aesthetic of recycling and the humor of parody. The humorous strategies deployed range from accessing the locally grown mode of *grotesco criollo*, to truly black humor, and physical slapstick. I have found that all of these strategies express the fact that Argentine humor is not one, but is multi-faceted and evolves constantly to best dialogue with new challenges that the Argentine population faces. To understand the impact and resonance of something as ephemeral as humor and an experience as inexplicable as trauma, my research draws upon several intersecting fields. I rely upon knowledge drawn from Argentine history and historiography, Argentine theatre traditions, affect and audience response theories, trauma and recovery studies, and humor research, primarily, in order to analyze and interpret the affective communication of humor on the stage and in the audience.

My major interventions into the field of contemporary Argentine theatre studies are twofold: Firstly, it is my contention that the cognitive experience of humor when accompanying themes of crisis and feelings of trauma leads audiences to new forms of understanding that are not based in traditional forms of knowledge but rather begin to construct knowledge from a base of affective experience. In the theatre this brings about new considerations and feelings of national identity in Argentina, and, the possibility of large-scale recovery. Secondly, in my research, I see Argentine theatre as providing a space of togetherness, an interaction that creates temporary community among spectators and the bodies bringing stories to life on the stage which

critically assesses and addresses the evaluation of being Argentine together. To examine this microcosm of the nation, I bring together text and performance moment in my analyses, approaching theatre pieces as literature but also from performance studies.

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Introduction: A Grimace and a Guffaw

“We need a type of theatre which not only releases the feelings, insights and impulses possible within the particular historical field of human relations in which the action takes place, but employs and encourages those thoughts and feelings which help transform the field itself.” -Bertolt Brecht (In *Brecht On Theatre*)

As Bertolt Brecht points out, the theatre has always been posed and ready to take on our social and political realities which exist *outside* of the very theatre’s walls. Moreover, in the above quote, Brecht links the human experience which is naturally understood through our emotional interpretations of such to our spectatorship and agency, highlighting the transformative power of emotional knowledges when applied to social life. This study is deeply anchored in cultural production in the theatre, but also is rooted in the real experience of the Argentine audience members at the theatre, and therefore is inseparable from social and political experiences and histories from the dictatorship period onward. Argentina is also a country where the political import of the theatre has been paramount since the years even before independence, as a nationally unique form of theatre started to take shape to address the lived experience of its citizens.¹

Politically, Argentina’s post-independence period can be characterized by cycles of instability, revolution, and resistance. That is to say, the country has experienced cycles of crisis. Specifically speaking to repeated economic crises, one journalist explains that, “Economic crises besiege Argentina with the regularity of earthquakes over a tectonic plate.”² Such economic instability is mirrored by or perhaps directly correlated to that of the political governance. While

¹ See Osvaldo Pelletieri’s *Historia del teatro argentino en Buenos Aires: El período de constitución (1700-1884). Vol. I*, for a complete overview of how national theatre formed in Argentina.

² Timerman, Jordana. “We Should All Cry for Argentina’s Economy.” *The World Post*, Dec. 15, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jordana-timerman/argentina-economy_b_8807804.html

alternatingly experiencing totalitarian, centralized, liberal, or socialist governments, these shifts came to a poignant head during the 1976-1983 period of the “Process of National Reorganization”, or, the most recent military dictatorship which was headed by various military generals. Vast abuses of human rights such as kidnappings, torture, disappearance, separation of families, imprisonment, and exile were carried out by State organizations frequently during this time period and these same organizations officially denied such actions. The victims of this State-led repression were swaths of society characterized as ‘subversive’, be it as intellectuals, journalists, thinkers, known communists, or suspected sympathizers with any of these groups or related parties. This period can be classified as a crisis on a national level which was composed of layers of violences and shocks to the individual citizens living under this system of control. As cultural production tends to do, the Argentine artistic sphere contested and intervened with injustice and pain experienced under dictatorship even in its midst, albeit often in occult or allegorical ways to avoid censorship and further repression. As Elizabeth Jelin reminds us, “la memoria es obstinada, no se resigna a quedar en el pasado, insiste en su presencia.” (2), revealing how a period of such depth of crisis calls the contemporary artistic community to continue to engage with these themes well into decades beyond the initial crisis and into the return to democracy.³ This is readily apparent in the array of theatre pieces in focus in this study (written and produced in the years spanning 1986 through 2013), which all reach back to crisis in order to continue contending with the aftershocks.

This study examines how theatre productions of Argentina dialogue through humor with three moments of crisis and trauma at the socio-political level in the country from the 1970s through the present. The aims of this study are, to uncover the role of cultural production and

³ Jelin, Elizabeth. *Los Trabajos De La Memoria*. Madrid: Siglo XXI de España Editores. Social Science Research Council, 2002.

particularly the unique space that theatre has forged in Argentina, and, to illuminate the import of humor as a method of communicating about these poignant moments on stage. The three moments that are examined closely in this study are: the military dictatorship (1976-1983), then the Guerra de Malvinas and simultaneously the end or decline of the dictatorship (1982-1983), and finally, the Economic Crisis (spanning the late 1990s through its culmination in 2001). As I move through these three moments chronologically, I have selected two key theatre works to analyze that encompass a feeling for the theatrical poetic and theme of the period. In each case, the selected works illustrate a unique manifestation of Argentine humor on the stage that evolves, recycles, and yet pushes forward to innovate in each crisis climate. These modes of humor are, in broad terms, characterized by degrees of darkness, pessimism, irony, and often biting criticism of society or government. Each historical moment creates a different need for affectively addressing these crises and thus, humor on the Argentine stage has been used to bring about catharsis, to communicate frustration with current issues, to reveal absurdity in reality, to teach valuable and sticking lessons to younger generations, to express hopelessness and failure, and contrastingly, as a way to approach the need to reconstruct and build towards a possible future. Argentine humor is not one-dimensional, but is multi-faceted and evolves constantly to best dialogue with new challenges that the Argentine population faces.

My major interventions into the field of contemporary Argentine theatre studies are twofold: Firstly, it is my contention that the cognitive potentials of humor when accompanying themes of crisis and feelings of trauma leads audiences to new forms of understanding that are not based in traditional forms of knowledge but rather begin to construct knowledge from a base of affective experience, humor being but one powerful way to communicate this alternative, ‘feeling’ form of knowing about how events have affected us. In the theatre, this brings about

new considerations and feelings of national identity in Argentina, and, the possibility of large-scale recovery. Secondly, in my research, I see Argentine theatre as providing a space of togetherness, an interaction that creates temporary community among spectators and the bodies bringing stories to life on the stage which critically assesses and addresses the evaluation of being Argentine together. Both the experience of a work of theatre and the contemplation of something humorous which is laughter-producing require a gathering of people and therefore are naturally linked to the collective. It is my contention that the sense of belonging to a nation and examining one's citizenship do not occur in an isolated vacuum, but rather depend on our interrelationships. The experience of humor is similarly born in the in-between space as individuals and groups position themselves in concert, offering a pointed mirroring of the microcosm of the nation that we experience when participating in the theatre. Finally, community is necessary in the theatre of crisis in Argentina in order to consider what to do with the weight of having experienced trauma. As a group, recovery can be approached and togetherness can be conceived of outside of the theatre space, that is, as a nation.

Each variant of humor lends new perspective through theatrical medium to eras that are, simply put, difficult to contend with and often so wrought with feelings of trauma that they seem impenetrable until the affective mode is shifted. The apparent 'reality' that was lived and 'history' that has been recorded and passed on is thus revealed to be multifaceted and complex. A humorous approach to each crisis captures nuances of experience that aid in understanding the value of emotional knowledge and other alternative knowledges. Upon undertaking this research, I had observed humor in Argentine theatre of crisis as a recurring pattern and connecting thread which, while obviously present, required more focused study. I have approached my analysis of humor in contemporary Argentine theatre both chronologically to show its evolution and

adaptations, and also thematically by crisis, in order to understand how different moments may require varied humorous methods to approach and diffuse them. In particular, I have found that the Argentine grotesque or *grotesco criollo* makes frequent reappearances in contemporary theatre that treats crisis moments: it is a mode of laughing that is familiar to the Argentine public, but also expresses a feeling of being Argentine as a nation together, including failures and incompleteness at which they are able to poke fun. Also, the absurd which was an aesthetic of the 1960s in Argentine theatre returns in new variations to reveal that reality (political or social) is more absurd than not at times. Finally, humor expressed through parody appears repeatedly in the plays of the contemporary period in Argentina, highlighting simultaneously the historical legacy upon which Argentine society and cultural production is firmly based, but also looking inventively towards the future and recycling or creating newness out of the old.

In order to analyze portrayals of a violent and traumatic nature that tackle such issues by incorporating the humorous, the human body becomes the instrument of communication and reception. The art of theatre is similarly, highly dependent on a close examination of the interaction between human bodies, and the development and communication of emotional states therein, thus, theatre works in my study are considered in their performed format and also in the presence of an interacting audience body. For example, throughout Griselda Gambaro's *Antígona furiosa*, the protagonist Antígona laments the death of her brother, wailing and pleading for justice, as she suffers immense psychological trauma. All the while, two onlookers (Antinoo and Corifeo) sitting casually on stage and observing the 'mad' woman, refuse to take Antígona seriously. They alternately ignore and turn their backs to her and poke fun at her suffering, joking about her plight, and sometimes even involving the audience in the merriment that revolves around a woman's trauma. This moment implicates us as audience seated closely

surrounding the stage, entrapping the actors within and ultimately we act as voyeurs of distraught Antígona. The piece plays with the audience's emotional response as it both causes laughter and begs for moments of reflection, offering an example of the complex and significant blend of humor and violence that I examine in this project. Moments like this exhibit the nuances of humor that combine with *darkness*. 'Darkness' in this context is a term that I use to group together all of those experiences and imageries found throughout the selected theatre works which are traumatic, violent, torturous, sinister, twisted, malicious, painful, or cruel. Ultimately, I find that this frequent combination of humor alongside darkness interacts with and communicates how we feel and contend with trauma, creating poignant dissonance for the spectators to contemplate and an imperative to do so. Humor innately calls us to action, corporally first, and breaks passivity.

Beyond activating individual bodies, both the space of the theatre and the affective dialogue undertaken by humor bring our bodies into conversation as a collective. The theatre provides a space of togetherness, and is an interaction that creates temporary community among spectators and the bodies bringing stories to life on the stage.⁴ On a smaller scale then, the theatre space during performance is representative of community that when multiplied represents the struggles of a nation and is a space in which to test out different solutions or ideal outcomes in a ideological or theoretical setting. In this project, I propose that one mode in which national crisis and resulting human feelings of trauma are most effectively approached and dealt with in the field of Argentine theatre is through the lens of humor. Humor detoxifies and resists feelings

⁴ Jill Dolan's book *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre* is a helpful and contemporary reference in how the theatre provides and nurtures these spaces of togetherness. As Dolan explains, "*Utopia in Performance* argues that live performance provides a place where people come together, embodied and passionate, to share experiences of meaning making and imagination", and she continues, "This book investigates the potential of different kinds of performance to inspire moments in which audiences feel themselves allied with each other." (2)

of hopelessness, and resituates our interaction with crises under the lens of a new affective light, illuminating previously unconsidered nuances to what previously appeared unapproachable or unnamable (such as the legacy of the three crisis moments examined within this study).

Both textual representations and live performance experiences lend insight into the arguments I develop throughout the project. I emphasize the study of contemporary Argentine theatre as a live, dynamic exchange between people, analyzing the experience of the live performance over that of the written script. Therefore, methodologically, my research takes me into the archives and into the theatre. To understand the intangible and ephemeral interconnection of affect in the theatre, my research requires the witnessing and consideration of live performances. In order to gather research based on live performance moments, the methods I employ when researching involve compiling and comparing reviews published in newspapers, online, and in journals of performances, watching videos, and attending live theatre whenever possible. Triangulating all of these sources of information and experiences is fundamental, especially as I try to understand the very local and nationally specific humor and messages communicated thereby. I recognize that my individual experience with the theatre piece may differ from that of an Argentine spectator, and additionally that the experience of one single performance moment may not represent the overall impact of the piece. These considerations inform my methodological approach to investigating this project.

Some of my driving questions that propel this project forward are: What kinds of humor are salient in the Argentine model of post-trauma (post-dictatorship)? To what end does humor appear in many Argentine plays of the post dictatorship era, and moreover, why is it that humor is often accompanied by darkness, violence, and trauma? What role does humor play in the cultural realm of a nation in the midst of a recovery process in the arts and in society at large?

What advantages does a humorous tone linked to trauma have in communicating which a more realistic or serious tone might lack? How ought we pass on knowledge to future generations about the mass disappearances that occurred during the military dictatorship in a way that communicates the atrocity? How can we capture the lingering and resounding feeling of failure that the ‘Malvinas matter’ has left us with?⁵ How can we convey the complex web of damage done throughout society, culture, and politics by the suffered economic crisis that came to a head in 2001? Finally, in concluding, I approach the question: How can the approach to trauma recovery through humor allow us to consider new spaces in trauma and recovery studies and ultimately aid in recoveries in other cultures, on different scales, or with traumas other than dictatorship? Some of these questions perpetually remained unanswerable and distant in Argentine society due to the painful and charged nature of what they imply. However, I aim to keep these questions in mind throughout the body of my research and to move towards addressing them, at the very least, keeping my audience conscious of them.

Political and Historical Contexts

This study is necessarily contextualized in the surrounding social and political history of Argentina from the 1976-1983 dictatorship onwards. Theatre in the country has always coexisted with the socio-political environment: actively in conversation with this setting, the theatre responds to, evolves in tandem with, or pushes forwards towards anticipated possible futures. Since the days of the establishment of *circo criollo* (the local mode of circus performance) by the Hermanos Podestá in the country in the late 19th century and Armando Discipolo’s nationally grounded theatre pieces which arguably generated the very first national theatre genre (the *grotesco criollo*) in Argentina at onset of the 20th century, this tradition of engaged theatre

⁵ “El asunto Malvinas” is a term used by Vicente Palermo in his book, *Sal En Las Heridas: Las Malvinas En La Cultura Argentina Contemporánea*.

marks the Argentine tradition.^{6,7} The body of spectators in the country has been raised in this tradition and expects such engagement of their nation's theatre. While artists felt compelled to converse with the political sphere, this calling to engage with it was due to the continuously tumultuous political history that has also defined the Argentine nation since the time of independence. Even before the most recent dictatorship, Argentina has experienced a pattern of repressive governments and previous dictatorships that alternated with democratically elected leaders, therefore establishing a repetitive history of repression followed by democratic opening.

Specifically, government in Argentina has swayed between rigid poles of more socially aware government organization, and more totalitarian regimes. Immediately after independence, the Federalist and the Unitarians fought battles physically and also on ideological fronts, expressing concerns about how to govern a nation so vast and varied in peoples and geography, while maintaining a total unity necessary to any political entity wishing to be classified as a nation. Many social advances and improvements came to the country in the late 19th century

⁶ A summary of the characteristics of the *circo criollo* by Livio Ponce explains that the Argentine circus is, "El circo con escenario, donde las obras teatrales juegan el más importante rol artístico, creación netamente argentina y uruguaya es el verdadero circo criollo...En esta forma de espectáculo con primera y segunda parte radica la esencial diferencia entre el circo criollo y el extranjero, sea americano, europeo o asiático." That is to say, it is not a mere big top spectacle of the strange, odd, large, and extreme, incorporating rarely seen acts and animals, but rather, is a series of performance acts with a narrative arc.

⁷ "Armando Discépolo no sólo adaptó e innovó en relación con el grotesco pirandelliano sino que también transgredió las características del sainete: mientras que fundamentalmente el sainete tenía un fin humorístico o cómico, las piezas de Discépolo insertas en la estética sainetesca lo que persiguen es una sonrisa trágica que provoque una reflexión ideológica, en especial en torno a la vida de los inmigrantes. Los argumentos de las piezas teatrales pertenecientes al denominado grotesco criollo tratan los sueños frustrados de las clases bajas, fundamentalmente de los inmigrantes, insertos en un sistema económico opresivo. Las gestualidades, los diálogos, las caracterizaciones se proponen provocar el oxímoron «una risa triste». Un ejemplo del grotesco canónico en Discépolo es *Stéfano* (1928): pieza que consta de un acto y un epílogo. En ella se dramatiza la patética trayectoria de un aspirante a compositor musical que comprueba al final de sus días el fracaso de su proyecto musical y familiar. *Stéfano* es un inmigrante napolitano que lleva a sus padres desde Italia, se casa con una argentina y forma una familia numerosa, pero las dificultades económicas terminan por socavar la moral de todos ellos. En esta obra, Argentina se muestra no ya como una tierra de promisión sino como el lugar donde el inmigrante malvive y fracasa al no poder realizar sus sueños." (Luna Sellés, Carmen. "De lo cómico a lo trágico en el sainete rioplatense." *Publications numériques du CÉRÉDI*, Jan. 23, 2013, <http://ceredi.labos.univ-rouen.fr/public/?de-lo-comico-a-lo-tragico-en-el.html>)

under Bartolomé Mitre and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento. Soon after, Julio Roca led a government which kept power close to him, and conflicts and strikes were answered with police violence and repression. In the early part of the 20th century however, more socialist leaning governments brought further representation to the people, such as the presidency of Hipólito Yrigoyen. An earlier coup relative to that which is the central focus in this study, in 1930, Yrigoyen was overthrown and replaced by José Félix Uriburu in a moment where economic instability was being felt worldwide and was responded to in Argentina again through restrictive means which centralized power to a few elite when faced with the fear of the economic unknown. Political corruption and electoral fraud characterized that coup moment and are just one piece of evidence that illustrate how Argentina arrived to the modern day with a tradition of distrust of political figures and rampant fraud as a part of its political history. Leftist citizens were also detained and executed in this period of rule by the conservative right in the 1930s. Another coup occurred in 1943, and soon after, populist leaning Juan Domingo Perón came to power. After over a decade of Peronist policies focusing on social justice, economic independence, and political sovereignty, another coup in 1955 deposed Perón. In the 1950s and 1960s, a pattern of frequent coups d'états and political uprisings continued, and economic stability continually faltered. Yet another notable coup took place in 1966 in which Juan Carlos Onganía siezed power and fiercely opposed communism and liberal democracy. This era truly began a contemporary cycle of authoritarian rule in the country. Through all of these epochs, however, patterns that are observable are those of: economic boom and bust which continued to plague the nation, prosperity and slump, unreliable political states which incorporated elements of corruption, repeated abused of citizen and human rights during restrictive regimes, and at

times, the introduction of socially aware policies which were then countered by restraints and heightened political control.⁸

Therefore, cultural production in the recent post-dictatorship era (from 1983 onwards) has been informed and influenced by this characteristically unstable and repressive pattern of governance.⁹ Humor has mixed with darkness for many years in Argentine theatre, and in every political climate it has had to adapt and grow to fit the given scenario. For example, during the years of the recent dictatorship, the tool of humor was often employed in theatre works, taking the form of parody or metaphor, in order to communicate with audiences in spite of drastic censorship. Specifically, *Teatro Abierto*, a movement of independent theatre (1981-1985) spoke out against the repressive dictatorship in veiled yet subversive ways and frequently leaned on humor to do the work that could not be done by open or direct denouncement. Works by Eduardo Rovner such as *Concierto de aniversario* or Griselda Gambaro's *Decir sí* are notable examples of this cultural show of resistance to the political system and demand for a return to democracy. Explaining the overarching goal of the five cycles of *Teatro Abierto*, Luis Chesney Lawrence says that in these plays, "su marco de acción tuvo una clara y definida orientación, cada autor con su temática y estilo, pero todos con un fuerte cuestionamiento del régimen dictatorial gobernante y una confianza en su proyección popular." concluding that these works "muestra[n] la alienación, el terror, o bien, recursos escénicos avanzados de metáforas y símbolos teatrales

⁸ While this political history is highly summarized and truncated to give the reader a focused idea of the tumultuous swaying trends of Argentine politics especially in the 20th century, deeper reading into the political foundations of the Argentine nation and the patterns of governance since independence can be found in: Hedges, Jill. *Argentina: A Modern History*. I.B. Tauris, 2011 or, Calvert, Susan. *Argentina: Political Culture and Instability*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989.

⁹ Other cultural productions in Argentina were informed by the repressive governance and frequently sought expressions of resistance through veiled, allegorical, contestatory artwork: (Revista Humo®, music such as rock nacional, stories and novels (Manuel Puig's *El beso de la mujer araña*, Luisa Valenzuela's "Cambio de armas"), etc.)

sobre las contradicciones generadas en la realidad argentina, especialmente de los años ochenta.”¹⁰ The very adept theatre-going audience at this time, familiar with the use of stock characters from the *sainete criollo*, with allegorical plots (extreme power opposed to extreme subservience), and with subversive expression of resistance in coded ways (laughter in particular) on the stage, was able decipher hidden messages expressed through more veiled means, as humor coped with the current environment and continued to assert and establish truths for society, empowering people to continue to think and express themselves in opposition to the totalitarian forms of government in power. Other movements carried on the energy of *Teatro Abierto*, such as *Teatro Comunitario* and *Teatroxlaidentidad*.¹¹ On one hand, *Teatro Comunitario* concentrated on bringing theatre as a mode of creative interaction to non-professionals, to neighborhood communities, exploring ways of transmitting knowledge and forming togetherness in Argentina during the reentry into democracy. It is defined by a,

¹⁰“El Teatro Abierto argentino: un caso de teatro popular de resistencia cultural”.
http://web.archive.org/web/20090919053832/http://dramateatro.fundacite.arg.gov.ve/ensayos/n_0002/teatro_abierto_argentino.html

¹¹ Marcela Bidegain explains that, “El teatro comunitario de vecinos y para vecinos es una poética teatral que recupera la cultura del trabajo y la cultura perdida del esfuerzo. Cada grupo involucra a un promedio de cuarenta a sesenta integrantes (aunque hay agrupaciones de más de ciento veinte) que, por necesidad, se reúnen para pensar la realidad y expresarla a creativamente [...] El teatro comunitario tiene un objetivo ampliamente superador al de concebir un producto estético solamente. El proyecto de los grupos que trabajan con vecinos no profesionalizados es un verdadero trabajo en donde no solamente se actúa, canta, diseña el vestuario y realiza la escenografía sino que está centrado en la recuperación y reconstitución del entramado social sensiblemente vulnerado en nuestro país a partir de las diversas crisis socio-económicas que atravesamos. Como práctica teatral surge en Argentina en el año 1983 con la ilusión de la recuperada democracia y tras diez años de un gobierno de facto que destruyó y prohibió toda forma de quehacer artístico.” Bidegain, Marcela. “Teatro Comunitario Argentino: teatro habilitador y re-habilitador del ser social. Recorrido cartográfico por las temáticas de los espectáculos.” *Stichomythia*, 11-12, 2011, 81-88. Teatroxlaidentidad explains on its webpage its mission, “Teatroxlaidentidad (txi) nació en la profunda necesidad de articular legítimos mecanismos de defensa contra la brutalidad y el horror que significan el delito de apropiación de bebés y niños, y la sustitución de sus identidades de un modo organizado y sistemático por parte de la última dictadura cívico-militar argentina. txi apela, a través del teatro, a la toma de conciencia y la acción transformadora de cada uno de nosotros, como ciudadanos de un país que aún no ha zanjado sus deudas históricas en materia de derechos humanos, a pesar de los logros obtenidos en los últimos años. Teatroxlaidentidad es un movimiento teatral de actores, dramaturgos, directores, coreógrafos, técnicos y productores que se inscribe dentro del marco del teatro político, y es uno de los brazos artísticos de Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo. Un movimiento cuyo objetivo es hacer propia la búsqueda de nuestras queridas Abuelas, quienes desde hace más de tres décadas siguen el rastro de cuatrocientos jóvenes que aún tienen su identidad cambiada.”,
<http://www.teatroxlaidentidad.net/contenidos/quienessomos.php?s=1>

“voluntad comunitaria de reunirse, organizarse y comunicarse, parte de la idea de que el arte es una práctica que genera transformación social y tiene como fundamento de su hacer, la convicción de que toda persona es esencialmente creativa y que sólo hay que crear el marco y dar la oportunidad para que este aspecto se desarrolle. Una de las facultades más mutiladas en el hombre es su capacidad creadora y el permitir desarrollarla es un auténtico cambio personal, que genera modificaciones en la comunidad a la cual éste pertenece.”¹²

Teatroxlaidentidad however has a more focused thematic mission of writing and performing theatre which specifically addressed the issue of disappeared people and children during the dictatorship, the loss of these family members, and also the loss of identity. The *Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo* are the backbone of this organization that aims to spread awareness about the disappeared and therefore aid in the recovery of *nietos* or grandchildren who had been lost. While each with a separate and distinct mission, similarly, these movements were popular, community-based and highly successful in involving and soliciting public participation in the years after the dictatorship. These from-the-ground-up theatre movements point to the need of the society at large to continue to dialogue with the lingering issues from the dictatorship years. Looking closely at the historical context (years during dictatorship, the moment of the dictatorship’s fall, and the post-dictatorship and entrance into new democracy) I establish relationships between the humor used in theatre and these periods, which ranges from absurdist and abstract humor to grotesque, pedagogical, or playful. In the following paragraph, I explain in brief some of the relationships I have found to exist between historical context and humor genre.

In the immediate aftermath of the dictatorship, a theatre work such as *Antígona furiosa* (1986) harshly criticizes the systems of power that repressed and traumatized the nation through juxtaposing serious and light attitudes in a clash of emotions. This manner of dialoguing with horrendous human rights abuses opened a new space for feeling differently and an unexpected

¹² www.teatrocomunitario.com.ar

affective approach to a serious topic resituated spectators as they were asked to look at themselves as part of the system that allowed such repression. Alternatively, another piece that also returns to the topic of the years of dictatorship but from many years further along, *Mi vida después* (2009) examines the dictatorship's impact in a lighter humorous tone. Due to this distance from the trauma, younger generations are able to reflect with playful and lighthearted humor that captures the experience of another segment of society, bringing more citizens into the conversation about recovery. *Islas de la memoria* (2011) also attempts to draw in close the youngest generations of Argentine school children, to inform them of the complex history that led to the Malvinas crisis in 1982. This piece integrates the historical segment with their sense of national identity while appealing to the pleasure provided through masking and clowning techniques, and humor serves as a pedagogical tool. Another Malvinas focused work performed by the comic troupe Los Macocos, *Continente viril* (2000) addresses the place of Malvinas in the Argentine imaginary leaning heavily on slapstick and a revamped yet familiar *grotesco criollo* styling. *Postales argentinas* (1989) revisits an absurdity previously familiar in 1960s theatre which appropriately reveals the very absurdity of the lived reality of the growing economic crisis while also utilizing adept parody requiring an audience versed in local traditions and tropes. Finally, *La tempestad reciclada* (2013) layers parodies densely in order to simultaneously scaffold and question the place of Argentina in the global sphere and also that of Argentines in their own neoliberal experiment of a country. Parody delights but also seriously focuses on the need to innovate and exalt *Argentinidad*, even in the advent of a new globalized environment.

Argentine Theatrical Traditions

Having developed this distinctly autochthonous identity, Argentine theatre as a genre continues to rework itself, and be inspired by previous forms of the same.¹³ A certain cyclical evolution has occurred and continues to occur through the decades in this country's theatre tradition. Productive recycling meaningfully creates further depth of layers for the local audience, self-referencing, and thereby deepening while conversing with the local cultural codes. In my research, I especially look to three primary traditions: the *circo criollo*, *sainete criollo*, and *grotesco criollo*, as foundational to the country's theatre. These genres establish a locally specific theatrical language and a recognizable cultural reference in all of the pieces I examine. All three mentioned genres are fundamentally linked to humor and draw upon what I would call related modes of humor. The familial resemblances we can observe between how each genre produces humor on stage (through closely combining the painful and the laughable, the tragic and the hopeful) is important to understand how contemporary theatre works have evolved out of this heritage. The *grotesco criollo* tradition which was made famous by the work of Armando Discépolo in the 1920s and 1930s provides a major frame for the contemporary versions of the darkly funny. His most well-known pieces that truly define the genre have in common, "atmósferas depresivas y la exaltación de las contradicciones de sus protagonistas que— tras una máscara de absurda comicidad— sobrellevan un profundo dolor y viven aferrados un tiempo avasallado por el "progreso" que los asfixia."¹⁴ This is to say that Discépolo deals with a drastically and quickly changing social sphere by means of theatre works that blend humor and

¹³ I use the term 'autochthonous' here and in this study to describe those theatre traditions, "formed or originating in the place where found", in this case, Argentina. The quoted segment of this definition is one possibility found in the Merriam-Webster dictionary entry.

¹⁴ <http://www.alternativateatral.com/persona2015-armando-discepolo>

darkness, perhaps deepening the sadness and despair by way of the contrast with the seemingly out-of-place humor which pops up unexpectedly and outrageously. His grotesquely twisted, comical, yet tragic works portray for the audience a set of social problems, hidden behind the mask of the grotesque in order to entertain while appealing to the audience's humanity. Hopefully, though masked, the audience is ultimately able to recognize their own, perhaps twisted, reality. Discepolo's works have become famous in Argentina and are well known throughout many strata of Argentine society. His work has the ability to be impactful both within and outside of the theatre's walls due to a widespread knowledge of the grotesque in Argentine culture.

Argentine clowning is another performative style that is often referenced and used as a critical practice on stage to provoke spectator mirth and contemplation simultaneously. Clowning in Argentina is a dominant phenomenon, evidenced by the existence of schools of clowning, and many simultaneously running theatre pieces of the clown genre.¹⁵ Like the *grotesco*, clowning is a tradition that was inherited from immigrant Europeans, which was then adapted to fit the *porteño* environment. Again uniquely '*criollo*', or locally of the Río de la Plata region, this clowning technique was different from typical circus clowns of the time in that,

“Pepino fue un payaso para adultos, sus chistes eran intencionados, satíricos, críticos, fue el creador de una corriente que continuó en los escenarios porteños, la del cómico que riéndose de las situaciones cotidianas logra expresar, quizás con mayor crudeza, fuertes críticas y cuestionamientos a la actuación de políticos y funcionarios.”¹⁶

¹⁵ The work of *Los Macocos* treated in chapter two of this study relies heavily on this clowning tradition. Another clowning expert using humor to do serious work on the stage in Argentina is Lila Monti. See her work *Povnia* for example. https://www.clarin.com/teatro/lila-monti-povnia_0_Hy5oQhiDXe.html

¹⁶ Molinari, Alejandro, Roberto Martínez, and Natalio Etchegaray. “Circo criollo” <http://www.infocirco.com/articulo.php?id=60>

Also relevant to tracing the lineage of this early theatrical humor form is an understanding of the intended audience. This was a performance style directed at the popular crowds and intended to speak to the mass of lower to middle class citizens that attended the circus. Moving forward in time to follow how the clown figure has continued to manifest itself in Argentine performance, I note that the contemporary Argentine clown is not limited to the theatre, but has established a presence in the public life. For example, the work of *payamédicos* (a neologism that has its roots in the words ‘clown’ and ‘doctors’) are a frequent part of medical recovery in the Argentine hospital that concentrate on psychological recovery for patients. The Argentine vision of ‘clowning’ works to present serious topics under the guise of an entertaining show, to lighten weighty issues, or to deal with pain through humor. A final Argentine theatre tradition that forms an important background for this study is that of the *sainete criollo*, which is closely linked to the *grotesco*. Like the *grotesco criollo*, the tragic and comic are often found nearby in the *sainete*. Generally, the *sainete* incorporates more buffoonery and light hearted laughter that comments on social issues without delving into the dark twisted nature of the *grotesco*.¹⁷

Humor Studies and Philosophies of Laughter

From Plato and Aristotle’s vision of humor as an emotion which overrides rational self-control, towards the more recent scholarship of Peter McGraw who explains all humorous situations as the combination of the benign with that which violates expectations or norms, this study establishes a pool of references for treating the place of humor in communicating, learning, and interacting on a human level, in and outside of the theatre. I consider, in the contexts of different plays, both ‘humor’ and ‘laughter’ (the latter being the most extreme outward, physical, embodied response to experiencing humor). Related to the experience of humor and laughter,

¹⁷ See Osvaldo Pelletieri’s work, *El sainete y el grotesco criollo: del autor al actor* for further distinctions.

mental experiences of humor such as enjoyment, and smiling hold important places on the spectrum of humor as a part of the theatrical experience. I have found humor to vary in its intentions in Argentine theatre; it can draw our attention, make us face forgotten or hidden memories, pass on experiences, shock, provide catharsis, give a new perspective, or help us to form a closer relationship with a presented situation. Playwrights may devise different strategies for how they envision this humor to unfold on stage, but depending on the actors' embodiment and interaction between each other, and given the specifics of the moment of presentation (Who is in the audience? Where is the play performed?), the real-life manifestation of humor and laughter differs in every instance. However, it is certain that humor cannot be formed and felt without interaction between human minds and bodies. This is a scenario that the theatre naturally presents us with. It is due to the existence of the actual production of humorous moments outside of the written theatre script that so much of my analyses in this project depend on reviews, videos, and personal experiences of theatre-going.

In order to bring humor studies into dialogue with the experience of humor in the theatre setting, I revisit the classic theories which explain the production of humor, depending highly on both Simon Critchley's and John Morreall's clear and articulate contemporary descriptions which pull centuries of humor theories into conversation. It has generally been accepted that there are three fundamental reasons that humans find humor in situations, which can be explained by the theories of superiority, relief, and incongruity. Critchley contends that the theory of superiority is the oldest and causes laughter when someone perceives themselves to be superior to others when we consider and compare our situations. For example, Plato, Aristotle, Quintillian, and Hobbes have each written about laughter as explained by superiority. The relief theory comes about in the 19th century according to Critchley and explains how laughter

provides pleasure in the release of built up emotions. Sigmund Freud and Herbert Spencer were two well-known proponents of this theory. Finally, and most pertinent to this investigation, the theory of incongruity (traced back to the 18th century by Critchley and championed by those like Francis Hutcheson, Immanuel Kant, and Søren Kierkegaard to name a few) establishes that, “Humor is produced by the experience of a felt incongruity between what we know or expect to be the case, and what actually takes place in the joke, gage, jest or blague” (Critchley, 3). Recently, Peter McGraw revisited these theories, combining them into one as his “Theory of Benign Violation”. I believe McGraw’s new framework to be highly useful to encompass a broad variety of experiences causing humor, but do not abandon previous theorizations either.¹⁸

Argentine modes of humor are, in broad terms, characterized by degrees of darkness, pessimism, irony, and often biting criticism of society or government. Each historical moment creates a different need for affectively addressing these crises and thus, humor on the Argentine stage has been used to different ends. This vein of laughter and the comic which is so often nuanced by the dark, serious, violent, or traumatic could be described as “dark laughter”. This term is used by Juan Egea in his work which describes the connections between understanding a Spanish modern national sense of self and laughing along to the cultural production of cinema.¹⁹ The term “dark laughter” is certainly applicable to the Argentine case as well, as it brings people viewing and experiencing theatre together to reflect upon contentious elements that form central parts of their national story. The laughter in the theatre highlights a unique ability of dark humor to bring us together to deal with the difficult and problematic, it unites us in our humanity or as citizens even while we face the tragic. Egea importantly connects the fomentation of this “dark laughter” in the Spanish case to the very historical and social specificity whence it comes,

¹⁸ See McGraw’s book, *The Humor Code: A Global Search for What Makes Things Funny*.

¹⁹ Egea, Juan. *Dark Laughter: Spanish Film, Comedy, and the Nation*. The University of Wisconsin Press, 2013.

underlining, “Thus nationality and dark humor can be productively conflated in an investigation that would make the latter its main gateway into the specifics of a cultural identity” (27) and which I believe to closely resemble the Argentine case as well. The instances of humor which are placed into focus in this study are highly contextualized and are the result of a unique national evolution of humor tendencies, nexuses of national characteristics, and carry on unique and specific dialogues with the local.

Tangentially to theories which explain humor as an affective state and an emotional evaluation of pleasure, happiness, or amusement, to explore humor on stage requires an understanding of theories of play, and the playful, and thus the body’s connection to these affective states. One primary focus that I give to the body’s role in humor is intimately connected to the already mentioned *grotesco criollo*, a humor genre of the Argentine stage which places the laughable and horrifying, the gruesome and the comic, into close contact. Ultimately, laughter and pain are both bound up in languages of the body and implicate the physical as well as the physiological. As J.M. Bernstein notes, extreme pain and other “limit conditions”, like laughter, imply our recognition of the instinctual, out of control body.²⁰ Our spectator bodies are drawn into the discussion as we experience the ironic and two-faced laughter accompanying the *grotesco criollo*, bringing about a new understanding of moments of trauma and crisis such as those depicted in the six theatre pieces in this study. I connect humor as an experience to the individual body, but also focus closely on how humor brings our bodies into contact as a whole, as a community, in the theatre space and time. A network of laughter is often built as moments of the theatrical piece are responded to by a few audience members, and then further audience members respond to one another, off-stage. It is in the power of these moments of a collective

²⁰ Bernstein, J.M. *Torture and Dignity: An Essay on Moral Injury*. University of Chicago Press, 2015, p. 203.

creation of feeling, that a microcosm of the nation is formed temporarily inside the theatre for an adjusted approach to understanding, and developing an emotional knowledge of the crises portrayed. Both connected to concepts of the body, humor and laughter lend themselves especially well to an examination through affect. We naturally, innately feel affect without deep cognition, and because affect flows and travels between plural humans, in a liminal, in-betweenness that is never fully actualized.

Affect Studies and Audience Response Theories

Another way in which this study is very dependent on the performed theatre moment is in the discussion of the importance of affect in feeling, communicating, and understanding through humor. Ultimately the performed piece provides for the possibility of affect to be transmitted in the space between bodies (between characters as the audience observes, between the characters and the audience, and also between multiple audience members). Ideas of affect theory help us to understand how bodies, while not physically touching, do impact one another and interact invisibly through coexistence in shared moments. Affect is a potentiality that lingers and that we activate instinctually, or, in other words, it is the pure feeling that exists before we evaluate or put words to feeling.²¹ Affect explains a communication that humans engage in (whether knowingly or not). I rely on the work of Teresa Brennan, Sara Ahmed, Brian Massumi, Jill Dolan, and Jill Bennett in particular in this field. Ahmed defines a “contact zone”, or the text/performance, as a necessary link between people and emotions. As she establishes, the theatre work does not contain emotions but instigates them and pulls them to the surface to be experienced by people. Brennan supports this study in further examining affect’s power of transmission, as the senses take in and interpret feelings when faced with a stimulus (such as a

²¹ According to Brian Massumi in “The Autonomy of Affect”.

text or play). Furthermore, she extends her study into the social realm, treating the interactive dynamics created in an affective-rich situation that grounds my treatment of theatre audiences as they experience both pleasure and emotional pain upon perceiving the given theatre works. Finally, Jill Bennett places affect and trauma into dialogue, suggesting that contemporary art which engages trauma and creates sensation in an audience “is a catalyst for critical inquiry.”²²

Audience Response Theories and the Buenos Aires Theatre Audience

In my endeavor to analyze the ways in which humor works specifically in the setting of the theatre, I bring scholars of audience response into conversation with affect studies. The works of Susan Bennett, Daphna Ben Chaim, and Jorge Dubatti lend insight into how the production of a play in public, interacts in a real and living way with its audience to create a unique moment (or a *convivio*, according to Jorge Dubatti) and how this unique moment creates communication not otherwise possible from simply reading a theatre work as a text.²³ It is in this discussion of audience composition and dynamics that the unique characteristics of the Argentine audience are paramount as well. Given the multiple levels of theatre present (from commercial venues and pieces on Calle Corrientes and government funded arts theatre to independent companies or productions in small neighborhoods all over the city, Off-Corrientes) and the mere quantity of staged performance in the city of Buenos Aires in particular (easily up to 100 works are presented a night, depending on the day of the week and the season), it is apparent that the theatre is a well-established tradition in Buenos Aires and the country widely.²⁴ It is also

²² Bennett, Jill. *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*. p. 7

²³ For more on the Dubatti’s concept of “convivio”, see his work, *El convivio teatral: teoría y práctica del teatro comparado*.

²⁴ A quick search on alternativateatral.com displayed 86 shows just in the capital city of Buenos Aires on the night of Saturday, February 4, 2017, for example. This encompasses both on and off Corrientes shows, puppet shows, children’s theatre, State venues, stand-up comedy, and independent theatre.

important to mention that although this study focuses on many pieces presented initially in Buenos Aires, they also each enjoyed success as they toured the country, with *Islas de la memoria* in particular deserving a special mention for their efforts to visit non-traditional theatre-going audiences and those outside of Buenos Aires.²⁵ Additionally, *La tempestad reciclada* is the creation of the troupe *Espacio Inverso*, based in Salta, Argentina, indicating this theatre prevalence nation-wide. Turning back to the capital, in one recent article, Proteatro (Buenos Aires' government organization which supplies funds for much of the independent theatre scene) stated that, "there are six public theatres, 12 private commercial theatres— which receive no government subsidies— and 200 independent theatres, 70 percent of which are actually unconventional spaces like warehouses, private homes or abandoned factories." adding up to literally hundreds of venues where theatre is being produced simultaneously all around the city on any given day of the week.²⁶ Jean Graham-Jones reflects on the history, tradition, and strength of the theatre experience in Buenos Aires:

"The city's independent theatre movement began in the 1930s as socially committed, resolutely self-funded and self-managed groups that presented contemporary, and often the latest avant-garde, works from Europe and the United States as well as Argentina. Over the years the lines demarcating the three circuits have blurred, with so-called independent theatre directors staging commercial shows and the independent theatres now eligible to receive very modest municipal funding. Today's artists move fluidly across the three circuits; productions may relocate from a municipal theatre to an independent theatre to extend a run, and the independent artists return time and again to their smaller spaces. I know of no other city with so much theatre taking place in converted warehouses and storefronts, community centers, recuperated factories, subway cars, living rooms, backyard cabins, and ... theatres. Audiences respond in kind: it is commonplace to see theatregoers lined around the block regardless whether the curtain is 4:00 p.m. on a Saturday, 9:00 p.m. on a Thursday, or 1:00 a.m. on a

²⁵ In an interview, the troupe proclaims that, 'La intención es que sea "legible para un público que no es el tradicional de la ciudad de Buenos Aires o de los núcleos urbanos de las provincias'."

<https://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/espectaculos/10-30739-2013-12-05.html>

²⁶ Valente, Marcela. "Independent Theatre Flourishing in Buenos Aires." *Inter Press Service*, Aug. 19, 2010, <http://www.ipsnews.net/2010/08/independent-theatre-flourishing-in-buenos-aires/>.

Friday... the city's independent theatre scene has weathered Argentina's ongoing socioeconomic and political challenges through resilience, innovation, and a spirit of artistic exchange. Other theatre cultures may have the budgets for complexly rendered sets and the infrastructures to sustain established, fully funded seasons; Buenos Aires's independent theatres have actors, directors, playwrights, designers, and musicians."²⁷

I would add to Graham-Jones' list of the attributes that set apart the theatre community in Buenos Aires and which lead to its continued vibrancy and success, a dedicated, curious, and continually present audience body. It is my contention that, due to this established history of both making and attending theatre in Argentina, the experience of being an audience member and in taking part of the theatre moment as audience is also a tradition that permeates much of society. It is true that the demographics of audience vary between venues and show types. Nevertheless, the variety of performance available, the very inexpensive (and discounted for students and seniors, or sometimes paid for only by donation) tickets, and the geographically widespread commonality of spaces of theatre throughout the city makes attending the theatre in Buenos Aires a common experience shared by much of society.

Trauma and Crisis Theories

Two terms which hold significant weight in this study (alongside 'humor', 'laughter', and 'affect') and which are examined repeatedly from various entry points and angles are 'crisis' and 'trauma'. To conceive of a drastic, unforeseen, difficult, threatening situation on a national, economic, political, personal, or emotional level, I use the term 'crisis'. In this project, 'crisis moments' are referred to in each chapter, denoting extreme situations which throw into question the status quo, the idea of nation, the safety of the citizen as a member of Argentine society, and such an intense moment of threat that inevitably some drastic change must come to pass to

²⁷ Graham-Jones, Jean. "Buenos Aires's Independent Theatre Scene." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 68, no. 2, May 2016, pp. 249-260.

resolve the crisis moment. When viewing ‘crisis’ as emotional pain or extreme illness to the human body, we can even use these as frameworks more broadly, or at an allegorical level (the nation as an ill or emotionally pained body). The language of physical illness, pain, and healing is often used to explain these moments, for example, a newspaper reporting on the causes of the 2001 economic crisis stated that in December, President De La Rúa, “failed to offer any *prescription* for dealing with the crisis” [my emphasis].²⁸ Another reporter in 2015 observes about the Argentine populace, “It seems we’re always *recovering from* or preparing for some sort of economic *shock*” [my emphasis].²⁹ The Argentine social body is repeatedly facing ways of coping with and recovery from crisis. As I work through this study, it becomes more apparent that beyond isolated moments of crisis, in the case of Argentina, the terms ‘endemic crisis’ or ‘slow trauma’ could be used to describe this unendingness which blends into a constant background.³⁰ However, the three principal crisis moments that are studied in depth are the military dictatorship, the Guerra de Malvinas, and the 2001 economic crisis. They inevitably run together and impact one another. I conceive of each ‘crisis’ to be ideological and psychological on a national level, equated to a destruction of national morale and a confusion surrounding the idea of and future of Argentina as a nation.

A related term, “trauma” is often experienced by the subject in times of crisis, or is the result of crisis. Trauma, it may be said then, is the response *felt* after crisis. It is often associated with pain, whether felt physically or emotionally by the subject. Cathy Caruth has defined ‘trauma’ as, “a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or set of events, which

²⁸ Luna, Daniel. “Argentina’s Crisis Explained.” *Time Magazine*, Dec. 20, 2001.

²⁹ Timerman, Jordana. “We Should All Cry for Argentina’s Economy.” *The World Post*, Dec. 15, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jordana-timerman/argentina-economy_b_8807804.html

³⁰ For more on slow, non-episodic trauma and crisis, see: *Cruel Optimism* by Lauren Berlant, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Everyday* by Veena Das, or *Slow Violence* by Rob Nixon

takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event”, noting that, “the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it” (4-5). Caruth’s insistence that trauma is dissociated could be rephrased by stating that ‘trauma lingers’. As Giorgio Agamben describes the lasting impact of such a powerful social disruption, “One cannot want Auschwitz to return for eternity...it is always already repeating itself” (*Remnants of Auschwitz*, 101). Even three decades past the return to democracy, echoes of the state imposed violence remain in the collective consciousness. Elizabeth Jelin also insists upon the ever-presentness of trauma after it has occurred, indicating that it becomes, “un permanente retorno”, or an event to which we are constantly returning and re-working.³¹ The very existence of theatre works which continue to reach back many years to the three crisis moments described in this study shows that trauma lingers, continuing into the present, continually reproducing the need to deal with it. For example, yet in 2009, Lola Arias works with secondary generation members to re-address the experience of the dictatorship years of their parents, alternatingly re-constructing and de-constructing this crisis from an entire generation’s distance. Though ‘trauma’ bears an individual psychological weight, it also naturally binds us together into networks that must contend with the trauma of our community. Trauma cannot be isolated into one individual body though that body may have been the initial point of traumatic experience. Jelin points out that, “Estos procesos [de lidiar con la memoria del trauma], bien lo sabemos, no ocurren en individuos aislados sino insertos en redes de relaciones sociales, en grupos, instituciones y culturas” (19).

Although trauma and recovery studies were initiated in the psychological and mental health fields by experts such as Judith Herman who looked at the psychological effects of trauma

³¹ In *Los trabajos de la memoria*, p. 14. Also see her chapter entitled “Trauma, testimonio y ‘verdad’” within the same book.

on individual patients and their ability to recover physically and mentally, trauma studies are pertinent to this study of Argentine theatre in explaining how trauma occurs to a *social body* and how recovery processes can be applied to society as a whole. Just as studies have been written arguing for the possibility of a collective memory (for example, those proposed by Maurice Halbwachs), this study maintains that a collective recovery is approachable by means of artistic communication and expression (here: through theatre). Finally, the study of moments of crisis and trauma that a society faces allow for new insight into the identity of this community. Jelin postulates, “Los períodos de crisis internas de un grupo o de amenazas externas generalmente implican reinterpretar la memoria y cuestionar la propia identidad” (26). As crisis moments unsettle the functional fabric of society, identity is often questioned and reassessed in an attempt to heal the wound, comprehend more fully, or move forward, carrying the trauma as a valuable archive. In this study, the characteristics of Argentine identity as manifested through the communication undertaken by local humor help audiences to understand and reassess their belonging to the Argentine nation. I will posit and explore further in the upcoming chapters the idea that resiliency and also a repeated ability to deal with crisis in fact form a part of Argentine identity, due to crisis’ overwhelming presence in Argentina.

In common to each crisis moment treated in this study, Argentine artists expressed through cultural production their ability to deal with, understand, and move beyond the crisis their community faced. It might even be suggested that crisis in fact breeds further creativity and inspiration for the Argentine artist, a statement which can be backed up by generations and seemingly endless cycles of crisis and resurrection since the birth of this nation. Journalist Eloïse Cohen-de Timary raises the question, “¿Se puede decir que la inestabilidad permanente y la atmosfera caótica de Buenos Aires son un estimulante para la creatividad?”, and concludes her

article after having interviewed several playwrights and film directors about the economic crisis by saying that, “parece necesario recordar que las crisis puedan también ser momentos en los cuales se desarrolla el potencial creativo de una sociedad.”³²

Argentine Humor in Theatre of Crisis

Argentine playwrights and scholars acknowledge the importance of mixing laughter with darkness and its prevalence as a theatrical trope in the country’s contemporary theatre. What could be deemed a uniquely “Argentine humor” has become a common strategy deployed in theatre from the late 19th century (in the work of Armando Discépolo, or that of the Hermanos Podestá) through the dictatorship (often a very dark humor was present in works of *Teatro Abierto*) and into the present day of the post-dictatorship. Playwright and director Rafael Spregelburd notes in an introduction to his play *Un momento argentino*, that his country’s theatre, “Es un teatro letal, efectivo, y en la mayoría de los casos, muy cómico. La alianza con el humor es condición *sine qua non* del nuevo teatro. Nuestro sentido del humor es negro, veloz, mestizo, de una saludable imprecisión” (143). I argue that Argentine humor which tackles dark themes has a renewed suitableness and new iterations in the post-dictatorship era. I therefore examine 1) the historical trajectory of the darkly funny combination, 2) the end goal or purpose of this rhetorical tool’s perspective, 3) the truly Argentine nature of trauma combined with humor, and therefore a connection to an aspect of national identity, and 4) the possibility of this violence blended with humor to aid in large-scale understanding, memory formation, and re-considerations of identity in the post-dictatorship period.

³² “En Argentina, la crisis de 2001 no ha refrenado la creatividad.” *Otro lunes: Revista Hispanoamericana de Cultura*, Año 3, no 10, octubre 2009, <http://otrolunes.com/archivos/10/html/este-lunes/este-lunes-n10-a01-p01-2009.html>

This project is informed in a significant way by the studies of Jorge Dubatti and Osvaldo Pellettieri who are both well known for their work on Argentine theatre of the years surrounding the dictatorship. Both identify theatre traditions (the *grotesco criollo* and *sainete* in particular) in Argentine culture and suggest their influence in contemporary theatre. Pellettieri lends a perspective on the reception of Argentine plays by their audiences through the key years in this study that surround dictatorship, helping to give a broad panorama over the Buenos Aires theatre world and especially the formation of an Argentine audience and the growth of the spectator community. Pellettieri examines the uses of parody, spectator implication, the use of dark laughter, and the significance of the emergence of the *neogrotesco criollo* which I rely on to focus on the communication possible through humor mixed with violence in the post-dictatorship.

Jorge Dubatti has also highlighted the contributions of the *grotesco criollo*, *sainete*, and *circo* in contemporary Argentine theatre and published a chapter in his book *El teatro teatra*, entitled “Nuevas funciones de la risa en el teatro argentino de la Postdictadura” (251-260) which sets the groundwork for humor in theatre of the contemporary moment. He asserts that the laughter of the post-dictatorship is one that questions, subverts previously accepted discourse, and combats the seriousness of the post-dictatorship social climate. Like Spregelburd, Dubatti recognizes the importance and new life of laughter in Argentine theatre in the post-dictatorship compared to its appearance in previous Argentine theatre Dubatti affirms, “La risa cumplió siempre en la historia de la cultura argentina funciones catárticas (relajación y desregulación simbólica, liberación de presiones, encauzamiento de pulsiones negativas) y de conocimiento (critico-reflexivas), pero esas funciones adquieren en la Postdictadura una dinámica singular” (*El teatro teatra*, 251). In a different study, Dubatti envisions the role of the cultural production to

undertake this reevaluation of identity after dictatorship, observing, “Los teatristas de la postdictadura han sabido encontrar los mecanismos para transformar la fragilización, la pobreza y la violencia en opciones creativas” (*El teatro jeroglífico*, 22). That is to say, humans have a great potential to overcome adversity, and to not only overcome, but to construct upon it as well, as will be illuminated in this study. Humor is shown to be one productive conduit which allows artists to resist the status quo, suggest new ideas, provide their audience with a twisted mirror, or even a cathartic release. Humor responds, dialogues, creates, and deepens our emotional implications with difficult subject matters. I have alternately relied on aspects of classical humor theories of incongruence, superiority, and relief to explain different specific moments of humor in the six theatre works treated in this study. No single theory is adequate to explain all instances of humor present in contemporary Argentine theatre.

Chapter Overviews

Chapter I. A/Effectively Laughing It Out: Strategies of Relating and Remembering the Experience of Dictatorship

In the first chapter of this study, I explore two works which both treat the effects of the dictatorship on society, but from two chronologically different perspectives. The historical time period that frames the presentation of each piece is important in informing the kind of humor that is both acceptable, and best able to interact with the given audience. The social tone of 1986 (the year in which *Antígona furiosa* premiered) was yet seriously charged and complex due to its position between several important political markers.³³ The most immediately relevant of these was the 1986 *Ley de Punto Final* passed by congress under president Raúl Alfonsín which put an

³³ Other important dates surrounding 1986 which are relevant context are: 1984, the year in which the *Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas* (CONADEP) was completed and published as *Nunca Más*, 1985, the year of the *Juicio a las Juntas* in which the generals were put on trial, and in 1987, the passing of *La ley de Obediencia Debida* which established that lower level military personnel were simply following orders and therefore should not be held accountable for their crimes.

end to further persecution of perpetrators of violence during the dictatorship. While Griselda Gambaro's piece treats seriously the injustice of letting these crimes go unpunished along with the troubling missing loved ones who were disappeared under the oppressive military regime, she purposefully accesses the kind of darkly twisted humor that she has honed over the years to further the conversation around these issues with the audience. Gambaro plays with the audience's relationship to watching passively or actively, presenting ethically challenging situations on the stage which unfold between the pained female protagonist (*Antígona*), and her cruel tormentors (*Antinoo* and *Corifeo*), and by demanding of the audience emotional responses through humor which shocks. The concept of 'comic distance' helps to explain the way in which the audience perceives, receives, and responds to the comic moment. A sort of friction is created between fiction and reality, between expectations and actuality. The *grotesco criollo* tradition is built upon as it exaggerates, twists, and deforms reality, and therefore elicits laughter from shock, generated by comparison and contrast with the 'real', and finally, evaluation of the presented situation. The audience is affected and acted upon, and in a troubled or uncomfortable state, they are asked to interpret the clash between laughter and shock.

While Gambaro's work actively dialogues with a fluid and changing political environment, Lola Arias' *Mi vida después* (2009) takes on the legacy of the dictatorship years from many years beyond the events of violence that characterized that national crisis. Nevertheless, the return to this theme points strongly to the fact that Argentina is still within the post-dictatorship period, and still requires dialogue. Comic distance is present in a different way in *Mi vida después*, as the actors onstage represent not the generation which took part actively in the dictatorship, but rather, the children of those protagonists. These second-generation members were either born under dictatorship or after, and have had memories of the experience passed on

to them whether consciously or not, by their parents. Their generational distance from the epicenter of trauma allows humor to be used in a different way in this piece. The characters on stage expose the incongruousness of the dictatorship experience and highlight how the national crisis continues to affect an entire nation, long after the violent events had ceased. One way in which these two works share strategic approaches is through both playwrights' insistence on purposeful affective interaction with their audiences through conduits of humor. The nuances of humor established in this first chapter show clearly that 'humor' is more than a pleasant and one-dimensional affective response, but rather, on the Argentine stage, it has developed dark, complex, grotesque, and troubling refractions that are much more complex emotional responses that require further contemplation and working-through.

Chapter II. Argentine Theatre of the Guerra de Malvinas: Didactically and Grotesquely Laughing through a Crisis of National Identity.

The crisis moment examined in the second chapter has two distinct faces: the entwined moment of the Guerra de Malvinas (1982) and the downfall of the dictatorship (1983) are addressed through two pieces which also appeared on stage more than a decade apart. Again, the lingeringness of social crisis is evident in the return to these issues. That which is seriously at stake in both theatre pieces, is the reconsideration and understanding of contemporary Argentine identity after deep crisis. Especially linked to the political and emotional place that the Malvinas islands hold and have held in the Argentine sense of nationality, these pieces playfully explore geographical connections to national identity in the post-dictatorship. In Los Macocos' work *Continente viril* (2000), farce highlights a more visceral and immediate humor, one that is instinctual to react to with laughter, connecting to the audience through "popular humor, physical movement, and its emphasis on popular culture", invoking elements of the carnivalesque that

Bakhtin examines as it allows a temporary liberation.^{34,35} Though originally regarded as a popular genre and perhaps still seen as a ‘light’ or ‘meaningless’ form of humor, Priscilla Meléndez notices that “many Spanish American playwrights of recent decades are using farce to underscore but also to undermine the traditional view of the genre as ridiculous, playful, meaningless and contradictory”.³⁶ *Continente viril* also ties in the geographic space of the Argentine Antarctic, a real space that demonstrates and troubles international interactions as well as the pseudo-reality of national borders, or separations and conversely, relationships or shared spaces in the sense of nation. The relationship between physical space and an emotional sense of national identity are brought into question.

Islas de la memoria (2011) shares with *Mi vida después* the imperative work of communicating with younger generations about a critical recent past that is at risk for being forgotten if not revived meaningfully and memorably. The route to this communication often relies heavily on the body: that which is communicated through a closeness and a recognition between the bodies of the young, lost Malvinas soldiers (shown repeatedly in photographs on stage), and through closeness between the actors and audience (effected by eliminating the traditional theatre space and opting for a more popular *teatro corral* format). This piece was created with the purpose of directly addressing Argentine school children, therefore speaks in a language of humor that is tailored to connect with this audience demographic, by immersing them in interactive storytelling and drawing their attention to this complex historical knot especially through documentary theatre techniques, masking aspects of the *grotesco criollo*, and

³⁴ These characteristics of farce comes from Priscilla Meléndez’s study, *The Politics of Farce in Contemporary Spanish American Theatre*, p. 21.

³⁵ In *Rabaleis and His World*.

³⁶ In *The Politics of Farce in Contemporary Spanish American Theatre*, p. 24.

reliance on farce, exaggeration, and clowning techniques. Both works treated in this chapter leave the audience with a renewed call to understand the place of their nation in relation to the crisis brought about in the years 1982-1983, and ask for this contemplation of contemporary Argentine nation to take place collectively, in community, as is exemplified by the theatre.

Chapter III. Parody: The Humor of Recycling and the Aesthetics of Resilience in the Theatre of Economic Crisis.

In the final chapter, I explore the ways in which humor in Argentine theatre mitigates the crisis caused by vast economic inflation and the disaster of neoliberalism in the 1990s and the climax of the economic crisis in December 2001. Just as crucial to understanding this crisis moment is the social context of Argentina which relied on recycling as a survival mode, strategy to climb out of despair, and creative possibility of production that was both in tune with the time and forward looking. I examine other forms of recycling which organically formed out of the rubble, such as the creation of community cooperatives, collectively reclaimed factories run by workers, and the *cartonera* literary phenomenon. It became apparent in examining theatrical cultural production which dialogued with the economic crisis, that parody was the humorous form of recycling most adept at addressing this moment. According to Linda Hutcheon's work, parody "is a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text." Additionally, it features, "repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity" (6). Jean Graham-Jones says that parody depends, "ultimately, on a shared language between the text and its intended audience" ("Broken Pencils", 602), highlighting again the audience's role in live theatre in essence 'completing' the joke of parody by being present and contemplative.

Postales argentinas (1988) by Ricardo Bartís was first presented at the early onset of the inflation, but appears to offer early warnings and a dire science fiction portrayal of the ills of

neoliberalism. Bartís uses recycled elements visually on stage, in costuming, accumulated clutter, and repurposing of props throughout the performance. He additionally recycles, quotes, appropriates, and recontextualizes segments of literary and popular culture texts and citations which creates a dizzying effect of intertextuality. His recycling of texts is incredibly conspicuous and playful, which blatantly calls into question authorship, plagiarism, and the possibility for unique creation in the hypermodern world. The entire work is a genre parody, recycling the *sainete criollo* and yet he updates this genre with the current climate in focus.

La tempestad reciclada (2013) by Idangel Betancourt shares with *Postales* an extraordinary visual depiction of refuse, recycling, and repurposing of the artefacts that surround us which have been reproduced *ad infinitum* under neoliberalism. While this visual element is playful, it is also troublesome and bothersome, as characters constantly contend with the gathered items on stage. In addition to recycling costumes and props, Betancourt has his actors constantly shift roles, taking on new characters on stage right before our eyes. Additionally, the entire piece is a parody (or adaptation highlighting similarity and difference) of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. While Shakespeare's piece portrays a shipwreck on a Caribbean island and the interactions between locals and Europeans, Betancourt's version depicts the disaster of 2001 as 'the eye of the storm' hits Argentina. The reference provided by Shakespeare's piece keeps the audience informed and actively creating connections between the two works and contexts. Similar to *Postales* as well, Betancourt weaves in a deeply layered intertextuality that draws especially on characters and quotes from Argentine traditions and which lend texture to the concept of *Argentinidad* from the past through the recent present. Evita comes back to life for a time, a ghost of a Malvinas veteran marches on stage, the Argentine national anthem is sung, and protesters in the Plaza de Mayo face off with police. By relying heavily on parody, both works

require the audience to be versed in the references made, and draw especially on their ability to recognize the local quotes and texts which have been recycled to create that which is present-day Argentina. Moreover, the tone presented in both pieces seems to teeter between overwhelming failure and hopelessness, and on the other end of the spectrum, creativity and collective collaboration through recycling to create anew in the face of crisis and work towards a collectively engaged future.

In the chapters that follow, I examine at the many manifestations of humor alongside darkness in post-dictatorship era Argentine theatre and the objectives with which playwrights deploy this humor-creating techniques or plan for humor to result from the audience interaction with their work. Ultimately, this project focuses on the role this combination of humor and trauma has played in the theatre in the post-dictatorship years through the contemporary period, and how it has helped to inform a part of recovery and reconsideration of identity after the dictatorship. I conclude that this method of processing recovery through troubled humor in the theatre can in fact make a difference or change national reality on a level outside of the theatre. Partaking in the systems of humor and the affective charge that it supposes allow for the experience of ‘dealing with’ and ‘working through’ for the witnessing audience members. Moreover, these feelings are impossible to restrain solely to the limits of the theatre space and performance moment. Humor effectively and affectively explodes beyond these boundaries, implicating the individuals who carry the affective experience with them in their emotional memory, but also impacting their social surroundings thereby spreading the influence of this powerful emotional expression, born in the theatre, into society at large.

Chapter I. A/Effectively Laughing It Out: Strategies of Relating and Remembering the Experience of Dictatorship

While each of the two plays selected to be examined in this chapter differ drastically (in stylistic approach, tone, characters, language, degree of realism, year presented, etc.), the ability these pieces have to elicit laughter and painful memories connected to the recent Argentine dictatorship inspires contemplation and pulls them together. The focus for this section is to look closely at theatre works of the post-dictatorship in Argentina which reach back to the very years of dictatorship and process the memory of those years by way of humor. Both *Antígona furiosa* (1986) by Griselda Gambaro and *Mi vida después* (2009) by Lola Arias are written and presented after the country's return to democracy however, the fictional time within each work reaches back in time to the years of dictatorship (1976-1983). Violent and scarring events which transpired in the dictatorship years are the germ for the dramatic works' context and themes which circulate around memory creation, trauma, social violence, and the possibility for exploring and articulating identity, and finding happiness, peace, and healing after violence. More than simply treating themes which reach back to the years of dictatorship, these two works share a similar approach of using humor in prominent ways to treat contexts of violence and pain. Both pieces use humor that lingers around a pervasive darkness, and the whole system of dark playfulness provides an affective lens that is necessary for the audience to be able to process the works. Nevertheless, the two approximations to telling the story of violence and suffering vary drastically. Each playwright's reasons for the incorporation of humor (to shock, to commiserate with others, to draw attention, to lighten the weight of these stories, etc.), the nature of humor implicated (absurd, playful, escapist, biting, etc.), and the reason for each artist's engagement with humor for the audiences (to awaken consciousness, to allow for personal reflection, to grow a sense of belonging to a group, etc.) are unique and for this reason the two

works were selected. Beyond proving the social functions of humor, I also hope to show how humor can indeed have a unique epistemological function, allowing us to approach ways of creating knowledge about traumatic histories through an emotional lens.

Playfully Displaying Wounds to Incite Contemplation: Treatment of Dictatorship in *Antígona furiosa* by Griselda Gambaro

I begin this chapter looking at the theatre piece *Antígona furiosa*, written by Griselda Gambaro in 1985-86 and performed in Argentina for the first time in 1986, just years after Argentina's return to democracy. This first work is one which uses humor as a very different tool in contrast to that which will be seen in the second half of the chapter as I look at the 2009 production, *Mi vida después*. Though the humor deployed interacts with the audience through contrasting approaches, both works treat the normally somber and dark in a lightened and surprisingly playful atmosphere at times. Both works also share an intimate relationship with those watching (and thereby participating tangentially in the production of the pieces) who somewhat resemble Boal's Spect-Actor.³⁷ I propose to develop in my work a spect-actor who interacts emotionally and affectively with the stage as a reality, and I am less concerned with the audience's physical intervention and interaction with the stage space. While the audience is drawn close together and into *Mi vida después* through the creation of affective bridges aided by a humorously playful atmosphere, on the other hand, Gambaro plays with her gathered audience, drawing them in close only to startle them into awareness, as she incorporates humor that depends on both the spectators, and those who are observed— that is to say, the audience and the characters on stage. It will become apparent as various humorous moments are dissected and reassembled with humor in focus, that humor by definition cannot exist independent of an

³⁷ “By taking possession of the stage, the Spect-Actor is consciously performing a responsible act. The stage is a representation of the reality, a fiction. But the Spect-Actor is not fictional. He exists in the scene and outside of it, in a dual reality...By transforming fiction, he is transformed into himself.” (*Theatre of the Oppressed*, p. xxi.)

audience or receiver and this is what both of these playwrights depend on as they present their dark yet laughter-inducing pieces to audiences.

One of the many ways in which *Antígona furiosa* is uniquely Argentine and truly a contemporary adaptation of a classic is evident in the dark humor that crops up repeatedly throughout. The influence of the Argentine *grotesco criollo* is of particular relevance to the comic element that wanes and grows. The Argentine grotesque in its older manifestations and in more contemporary interpretations has become thought of as, “una relación de discrepancia entre lo risible y lo horroroso.”³⁸ Additionally, that the Argentine *grotesco* tradition, “usa los recursos cómicos como forma de cuestionamiento y acusación de todo un sistema cultural, social y político.” is often identified as an integral part of porteño identity.³⁹ Juan Carlos Ghiano even goes so far as to state that, “la tragicomedia [es] la forma más adecuada de visión porteña.”⁴⁰ More than a mere manifestation of that which is *bonaerense*, the *grotesco criollo* seems to speak to an even deeper realm of identity of the resident of Argentina. It not only reflects identity, but is, “una manera nuestra...de procesar la crisis, de hablar de nosotros, de reflexionar la identidad” and thereby takes part in the reevaluation of identity for the Argentine audience working through different times of turmoil or crisis.⁴¹ Antigone is thusly tonally re-situated to the Argentine context.

³⁸ Roster, Peter. “‘Lo grotesco’, ‘el grotesco criollo’ y la obra dramática de Griselda Gambaro”. *Poder, deseo y marginación: aproximaciones a la obra de Griselda Gambaro*. Eds. Mazziotti, Nora and Ure, Alberto. Puntosur Editores, 1989, p. 60.

³⁹ Kaiser-Lenoir, Claudia. “La particularidad de lo cómico en el Grotesco Criollo”, *Latin American Theatre Review*. Vol. 12, No. 1, Fall 1978, p. 21.

⁴⁰ Cited in: Giella, Miguel Angel. “El victimario como víctima en *Los siameses* de Griselda Gambaro. Notas para el análisis”, p. 68. Original text: Ghiano, Juan Carlos. *Antiyer: Corazón De Tango*. Talía, 1966.

⁴¹ Mazziotti, Nora. “Identidad, confusión y marginalidad: Griselda Gambaro y el grotesco criollo” in Mazziotti and Ure, p. 94.

Gambaro is influenced by the *grotesco criollo* in her tragicomic work, and implements it as a recognized and familiar mode of theatrical communication in Buenos Aires. She addresses an Argentine audience and creates an emotionally engaging experience that jumps back and forth between on and off stage, and ultimately asks for reflection and questioning from those who participate in the theatre moment. Directed at an Argentine populace that has all too willingly turned a blind eye to the horror that occurred habitually and repeatedly during the dictatorship (this purposeful self-blinding is described by Diana Taylor: percepticide), Gambaro selects an alternate route to call attention to a moment of the past that does not deserve to nor relinquishes itself to be left in the past.⁴² While employing a variety of techniques with the same end in mind of rousing spectating interest and investment, the ultimate motive here is to awaken a forgetful or passive citizenry enough to leave them pondering their role as a part of a community that has suffered a deep and unfinished trauma, long after the play has ended. To understand how Gambaro comes to affect these mental changes in her audiences, I first examine the embedded layers of what I will deem ‘the watchers’ and ‘the watched’, or the ‘outer spectators’, ‘inner spectators’ and the ‘object of spectacle’. I then explore to what end Gambaro mixes trauma and humor, how the audience affectively processes the ‘humorous moments’ on stage, the role of the buffoon in Argentine tradition and as interpreted here, the use of metatheatrical moments, and the humor conveyed through parody.

Referring to the shocks of World War I and the indescribable nature of the trauma experienced, Susan Sontag observes that this war, “seemed to many to have exceeded the

⁴² Percepticide is a term coined by Diana Taylor in *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's 'Dirty War'*, and that she uses to reference the self-blinding of a population. Taylor explains, “But seeing, without even admitting that one is seeing, further turns the violence of oneself. Percepticide blinds, maims, kills through the senses” (124).

capacity for words to describe.”⁴³ A journalist for *the New York Times* even commented that “The war has used up words” (25). This feeling of the incomprehensibility, indescribability, or inability to be artistically represented, haunts nearly every attempt to convey or communicate trauma. Perhaps the most accurate and productive representation of trauma demonstrates, “not only the immeasurability of the loss, but the imperfect structure of memory itself.”⁴⁴ Some might argue that the visual presides over the verbal in offering more varied ways of representing trauma. Although these are hard claims to make and prove, I believe it is important to simply acknowledge the *difficulty* of communicating and relating trauma, both for first hand sufferers of trauma, and for those trying to artistically communicate their own stories or the stories of others. Theatre’s advantage is that it takes a multidirectional approach to representation. Through a combination of dialogue, sound effects, musicality, corporality, lighting, and other strategies of communication, the theatre is more nuanced than a more uniform or one-dimensional forms of art that may try to depict or communicate trauma. One unique element made possible through the art of theatre that I explore further, is the possibility to achieve affective responses from the audience. In the case of Gambaro’s *Antígona furiosa*, I explore how humor, provided by and through the watchers Antinoo and Corifeo, is able to capture an affective state that fills what would otherwise be the void left for incomprehensibility and indescribability in other art forms which regard trauma. The layers of spectatorship are constructed by Gambaro through a continuous metatheatrical tactic which places two characters, Antinoo and Corifeo, in the position of constantly watching and commenting on the actions of the most inner layer, or ‘object of spectacle’, Antígona. Metatheatre in this play allows the ‘outer spectators’, or the

⁴³ Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. Picador, 2003.

⁴⁴ Patraha, Vivian. *Spectacular Suffering: Theatre, Fascism, and the Holocaust*. Indiana UP, 1999, p. 127.

traditional gathered theatre audience to reflect on the action that they themselves are taking part in: observing and watching others: as they in turn observe and watch others who in turn watch suffering. A Cortázaresque trick seems to be played on us by the playwright, as she disallows us to feel comfortable or in control of the situation in which we are constantly aware of playing a part, or of which we simply form another layer to the drama unfolding.⁴⁵

The characters that I deem the ‘inner-watchers’ in this play (those in the middle layer sandwiched between ‘outer watchers’ (audience) and ‘object of spectacle’ (Antígona)) are Antinoo and Corifeo. In this work, however, we must keep in mind that there are two sets of watchers, as the outer audience surrounding the stage in a circular fashion forms the final layer of watching all on stage and Antinoo and Corifeo form the inner layer of watchers that observe Antígona throughout the work. As commentators and spectators, Antinoo and Corifeo are one principle alteration that Gambaro incorporates in her new telling of the tale. They add the possibility for commentary, audience identification (or rejection of identification) with characters that supposedly represent the passive Argentine populace during the years of military dictatorship, and these commentators or inner spectators both engage in laughter themselves (which we then observe and interpret) and ultimately allow humor to unfold and do its work within the theatre space. These two characters represent typical porteños (residents of Buenos Aires), having a coffee in an outdoor café, when interrupted by Antígona, who unhangs herself, literally becoming undead, in order to tell her story posthumously. While they play several roles during the work (for example, Corifeo sometimes uses a sort of shell which functions like armor to portray the despotic king, Creonte), their basic and primary role is that of two everyday citizens, commenting on the plight of the suffering Antígona, who has been deprived of the right

⁴⁵ Julio Cortázar’s “Continuidad de los parques” similarly keeps readers uneasy of their position of readership and makes us uncertain as to our implication or role in the story.

to bury the body of her dead brother, Polinices. While she wails, they sip coffees, while she wrestles with the heart-wrenching and prohibited duty of burying her brother; they mock her, torment, and call out to the absent waiter to bring them another drink, so they can continue with their day of leisure. Their role portrays a sense of being porteño in those every-day activities such as café-going that form an integral part of life in the city of Buenos Aires, while it also depicts the role of a watcher of fellow humans. After all, the café goer is a watcher by nature as well.

Nearly every depiction of Antinoo and Corifeo enjoying themselves in mundane activities is juxtaposed with the traumatic suffering of Antígona on the same stage. Sometimes they deliberately mock her by carrying on with their day of relaxation and play, while other times they seem not to notice her at all and do not purposefully direct their enjoyment at her lack thereof. In *Antígona furiosa*, the incongruity provided by these moments, which might result in a disbelieving guffaw from the audience, reflects a community of Argentines that is portrayed as disinterested, uninvolved, or unwilling to participate throughout the dictatorship. There is something striking about observing an adult ignorant of or disengaged from the painful reality naturally connected to the context of the dictatorship. This contrast provokes yet another moment of humor that highlights the incongruity of carrying on with daily life in the midst of trauma.

One theory of humor that may help us to understand the moments that bring about laughter in the audience while watching *Antígona furiosa* is often dubbed the Theory of Incongruity. While many philosophers and academics have reworded and approached this idea from slightly differing angles (to name a few: Kierkegaard, Kant, Hobbes, and very recently Peter McGraw), the general theory can be summed up in the following way: humor is born when the unexpected and the expected collide, or as John Morreall explains, “Laughter is an affection

arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing” (323).⁴⁶ Our familiarity with both Sophocles’ original text and the Argentine context of the most recent dictatorship form the context for our viewing of this piece. Many of the moments that cause laughter in the audience do so precisely because they interrupt the somber mood of (theatrical) tragedy (*Antigone*) and trauma (military dictatorship) with unexpected and incongruous elements. I more closely examine some examples of the incongruous in the following sections.

One incongruous component of this piece can be seen in the seemingly two-faced Antinoo and Corifeo. As they passively, and easily watch the torment that Antígona undergoes, their watching is actually a very antagonizing act. Watching can be violent, depending on the words or actions that accompany watching and the passive or active nature that one adopts. Passivity here is an extension of violence done to Antígona, and in a way, the audience’s passive ‘outer watching’ can be seen as violent too. Though Antinoo and Corifeo certainly play the role of victimizers of Antígona, this frequently vacillates and at times blends with the light-hearted role of buffoons. They are undoubtedly victimizers of the agonized Antígona, for although they may not have committed the initial injustices against her nor prohibited her from burying her brother, they prolong her suffering. The two buffoons/victimizers psychologically deepen the pain she is going through by belittling, ignoring, and making light of her pain, or even by embodying the aggressor as Corifeo takes on the role of Creonte when donning the shell-like covering on stage. Antígona is able to perceive and hear both victimizers throughout the piece, though she exhibits a disconnectedness and often does not engage with them as they taunt her, but rather carries on in her mourning, ignoring, internalizing, and maintaining some degree of self-defense after all that she has suffered.

⁴⁶ Morreall, John. *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*. State University of New York Press, 1987.

Regardless of their perpetuation of inflicted violence, many of their spoken lines place them in dialogue with the role of the ‘bufón’ or jokester that is well known in the theatrical tradition.⁴⁷ In one moment, Corifeo not only mocks Antígona, belittling her wails and denying that he acknowledges her pain, but he also acts the role of the slightly dim-witted, light hearted buffoon who exaggerates and ridicules for the sake of easy laughs:

Corifeo: ¡No oí nada! ¡No oí nada! (Canta tartamudeando, pero con un fondo de burla) No hay...lamentos ba-ba-ba-jo el cielo, ¡ta-ta-tá n sereno! (201)

However, this sort of ‘bufón’ is not innocent nor does he provide a lighthearted slapstick sort of humor, rather he is the twisted opposite of the bufón and exhibits likewise the qualities of what is called an ‘excessive buffoon’ or a pain-inflicting and dark buffoon.⁴⁸

Between the stage notes which indicate their mockery through smiles, laughter, cruelly mimicking tones, exaggeration, and parodying Antígona, and through the use of word play, we recognize Antinoo and Corifeo as the fools, albeit cruel, unlikable fools. These two add a humor scattered throughout the play that ranges from truly dark, to absurd or ridiculous, or even light and off the cuff (which nearly always results in an awkward, out of place laughter that springs from one of the two bufones). The audience is meant to laugh, and to join in with Antinoo and Corifeo when the stage notes indicate laughter between the two porteños, who also represent the

⁴⁷ Like the *grotesco*, clowning is a tradition that was inherited from immigrant Europeans, which was then adapted to fit the *porteño* environment. Clowning and the character of the *payaso* have played an established role in Argentine theatre since the turn of the century as well. Entering into clowning and the elements this performative tradition contributes to the discussion on twisted humor, the *circo criollo* and characters like Pepino el 88 are jumping off points for the contemporary vision of clowns in both Argentine theatre and society. The contemporary clown in Argentina is not limited to the theatre, but has established a presence in the public life. For example, the work of *payamédicos* (a neologism that has its roots in the words ‘clown’ and ‘doctors’) are a frequent part of medical recovery in the Argentine hospital that concentrate on psychological recovery for patients. The Argentine vision of ‘clowning’ works to present serious topics under the guise of an entertaining show, to lighten weighty issues, or to deal with pain through humor.

⁴⁸ Cruelty and buffooning are sometimes found alongside one another as Chris Holcomb describes in *Mirth Making: The Rhetorical Discourse on Jest in Early Modern England*, “A final class of jests associated with the excessive buffoon are those that are inordinately cruel, bitter, or severe” (135).

chorus members of the Greek tragedy. While for the audience, much of the humor stems from incongruity (our instinctive expectations of a somber and serious situation being shockingly met with playfulness, mockery, or jokes), on the other hand, the laughter that is represented on stage by Corifeo and Antinoo as they mock and ridicule Antígona can be explained by the Superiority Theory of laughter.

Perhaps the oldest theory of why humor is created and laughter commences, the superiority theory, proposes that, “laughter is an expression of a person’s feelings of superiority over other people.”⁴⁹ One of the first to posit this theory, Plato claimed that as we enjoy laughing at others, “our laughter involves a certain malice toward them, and malice is a harmful thing...”⁵⁰ For Plato, laughter is not a positive response to the experience of emotional pleasure, but rather an experience to be avoided because, “In heavy laughter...we lose rational control of ourselves, and so become less than fully human.”⁵¹ Though we may momentarily lose control of ourselves and react instinctively to the affective atmosphere by smiling or laughing along with the buffoons’ jokes at the expense of Antígona, many humor scholars since Plato have seen the reflective and beneficial nature of uncontrolled, spontaneous laughter. *Unlike* the two ‘buffoons’ on stage, as the outer-spectators (the audience) we process the humorous situation unfolding in order to reflect on the laughter that just escaped us, or the smile that started to grow on our face, and experience another emotional layer, a questioning of having indulged in this humor ourselves. Here laughter serves as a great point for reflection and allows for an opening. Though it is not likely to be processed to such a degree in the moment of the theatre presentation, this

⁴⁹ Morreall, John. *Taking Laughter Seriously*. State University of New York, 1983, p. 4.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

crack or opening in ‘the real story’ of the years of dictatorship provided by laughter in the midst of anguish allows for the possibility of contemplation of the following and successive steps that Gambaro leads us to understand as indispensable: preserving the memory of those tortured or disappeared, re-assessing national identity, and assuring that perpetrators of crimes do not go unpunished in the real world. As Annette Wannamaker asserts, this play, “subvert[s] the goal of the military government to permanently erase ‘subversive elements’ from the collective memory of the social body.”⁵² One of the many ways that this piece is subversive is through the tone of humor and laughter that causes a rupture in the assumption of ‘the truth’ or ‘true story’ of the years of dictatorship and allows for the possibility of further questioning, reevaluation, and growth as an Argentine community.

The subversion that *Antígona furiosa* undertakes is orchestrated by re-inserting possibly forgotten or ignored elements of torture and violence into the collective consciousness with affectively entangled scenes. This assembled group of theatre goers is unlikely to soon forget the representations put before them. Commonly, Gambaro’s work asks a lot of the audience and disallows their passivity. Fernando de Toro contends that, “...el espectador tiene, en este tipo de teatro, una actividad productiva enfatizada, constantemente confrontada a la denegación...en el caso del teatro de Gambaro, las estrategias pragmáticas no van destinadas a guiar o a orientar la percepción y la actividad receptiva, sino a desorientarlas” (50). That is to say, there is no single way that Gambaro would like her work interpreted, but rather would hope that the audience becomes so active in processing the work that they become involved with it, and the outcome should lead to further reflection outside of the theatre space and ideally action. De Toro

⁵² Wannamaker, Annette. “Memory Also Makes a Chain”: The Performance of Absence in Griselda Gambaro’s ‘Antígona Furiosa’. *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, Vol 33/34, Vol 33, no. 3- Vol. 34 no 1, Autumn 2000-Winter 2001, pp. 73-85.

furthermore observes that, “Gambaro con su teatro produce un espejo espectral, pero un espejo grotesco deformado, donde el mirarse produce horror...” (51). Involving humor in the transmission of these scenes plays an integral role in delivering scenes that require our reaction, evaluation, and judgment, to the spectator as she contemplates not simply information, but emotionally charged information. As Peter McDougall states, “It is well recognized that almost any emotional excitement increases the suggestibility of the individual” (59) which conveys the idea that heightened emotions allow for greater impact of the material linked to those emotions.⁵³ Here, Gambaro opens her spectators up to the suggestibility (rather than telling her audience what to think or feel in a didactic way, we are allowed to process and feel for ourselves) of real crimes perpetrated and not brought to justice in the period of military dictatorship. But perhaps more striking to the gathered group is her suggestion that the citizenry of Argentina may have a responsibility yet and an active role to fill in the healing of a nation and the reevaluation of national identity. It is now up to the audience and each member to decide how to fulfill those residual feelings of being summoned to act.

While the role that Antinoo and Corifeo is that of instigators of an affective transmission of emotions that occurs as the audience participates in dealing with the trauma set before them, the two bufones are not the focus of the piece. Our interaction with them allows for an emotional development and permits the audience to play a principal role, taking their place as the real Argentine citizenry. In fact, it is Marguerite Feitlowitz’s opinion that through this twist to these two watchers (who I have previously identified as watchers, victimizers or torturers), Gambaro, “avoids the torturer-as-most-fascinating-character pitfall through demystification, buffoonery,

⁵³McDougall, William. *The Group Mind: A Sketch of the Principles of Collective Psychology, with Some Attempt to Apply Them to the Interpretation of National Life and Character*. G.P. Putnam's sons, 1920.

and ridicule” (4). Gambaro avoids any sort of blind, passive identification with the tormentors, while allowing for interaction with them. That is to say, we do not identify with these comedians even if they do make us laugh. We laugh or smile, and then distance ourselves to evaluate. Built-in and intended moments of reflection in the form of laughter followed by discomfort, is evidenced in the text and in theatrical representations by the use of pauses after humorous lines, the indication in text of laughter by Corifeo and Antinoo, and stage directions that specifically interpret the emotional delivery of lines. One exemplary moment that shows such troublesome laughter at work for the audience to smile at and then contemplate we see as Antígona attempts to explain the source of her suffering to Corifeo, Antinoo, and the general audience. As she states that she will not marry Hemón, Corifeo responds cheekily, “¿Y para cuándo el casorio?”, followed by the stage notes, “(Ríe, muy divertido, y Antinoo lo acompaña después de un segundo. Se pegan codazos y palmadas)” (199). After Antígona’s somber reflection then, the two inner-watchers jokingly lament the absence of a wedding night instead of more logically or humanely trying to understand what tragedy could have come to pass to inhibit Antígona and Hemón’s wedding and offer assistance. In essence, a primary role of Antinoo and Corifeo is to illustrate passive feelings of the everyday Argentinian citizen during the military dictatorship, to illustrate the feeling of looking away, of refusing to recognize the pain of the families which continue to search for their disappeared family members, or to illustrate a sense of putting the past behind us, a sort of ‘it’s over and done with, so what?’ attitude. For instance, one episode in the café plays out:

Corifeo (vuelve a la mesa): Siempre las riñas, los combates y la sangre. Y la loca esa que debiera estar ahorcada. Recordar muertes es como batir agua en el mortero: no aprovecha. Mozo, ¡otro café!

Antinoo (tímido): No hace mucho que pasó.

Corifeo (feroz): Pasó. ¡Y a otra cosa!

Antinoo: ¿Por qué no celebramos?

Corifeo (oscuro): ¿Qué hay para celebrar?
Antinoo (se ilumina, tonto): ¡Que la paz haya vuelto! (200)

The previous section of text illuminates in an indirect and yet referential way an extreme and parodic version of an attitude held by society after the dictatorship ended- *let's move on*. Although some members of their society may have been calling out for justice, crying out to be heard and to find some peace by being able to locate the bodies or something tangible left from their disappeared loved ones, (like Antígona), others may have simply turned away, calling those seeking closure, 'locas' (like many called the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*), and decided to forget and move on. An audience member might not so radically identify with Antígona's plight, or be drawn into her suffering, if not for the extreme juxtaposition with her fellow citizens, Antinoo and Corifeo. By being truly cruel buffoons that laugh at her agony (a technique that we see directly linked to the *grotesco criollo* tradition), the audience is even more appalled than if they had simply witnessed again the telling of the story of Sophocles. In this way, the addition of Corifeo and Antinoo is paramount to both the 'Argentinization' and to the revised way of focusing on spectatorship in Gambaro's work.

Antinoo and Corifeo also at times simply ignore or turn away from Antígona's emotional pain and seemingly meaningless, wandering actions. This attitude of 'if it can't be seen, it must not exist', is discernible when Antígona scrapes dirt over the corpse of Polinices, represented by a shroud or cloth on stage, she covers his (invisible to the audience) body with her own, and rhythmically pounds two stones together, imitating the carrying out of funerary rites. In response to this action occurring on stage, Corifeo responds, "Mejor no ver actos que no deben hacerse" (202). This refusal to be a spectator or a witness is depicted as Corifeo chooses actively to *not* see, bear witness to, or intervene in a situation while having some awareness of the occurrence of the event. The "bystander effect" is a term coined in the field of psychology that describes the

violence exacerbated by non-intervention of potential witnesses and is meaningfully applied to the Argentine context of the dictatorship years in this play, showing the audience that individual perpetrators of violent acts (the military, generals, soldiers, police, etc.) are not the sole forces responsible for traumas inflicted upon the country.⁵⁴ A fissure, crisis, or pressures which entirely permeate society seem to be the underlying causes for passively watching as violent acts or suffering transpires. As previously mentioned in this chapter, Diana Taylor's term "percepticide" captures the specific hue of non-interventional bystanding that occurred habitually and pervasively throughout the years of dictatorship. Taylor describes this passive form of violence acknowledging, "The triumph of the atrocity was that it forced people to look away--a gesture that undid their sense of personal and communal cohesion even as it seemed to bracket them from their volatile surroundings...the self-blinding of the general population" (123).

Sometimes when witnesses or spectators to the violence during the years of the military dictatorship chose to look away even though violence was happening under their very noses, a common held belief was that 'they must have done something wrong if they're being detained or taken away', or in Spanish, 'Por algo será.' This attitude is reflected by our two commentators/inner-spectators/buffoons as well, as Corifeo and Antinoo dialogue with Antígona about her punishment. Here we also witness Gambaro's adept use of stage notes in parentheses which are indispensable as clues to the emotional delivery of lines and often laughter, mockery, irony, and other tones of amusement and playfulness:

Corifeo (bondadosamente): El castigo siempre supone la falta, hija mía. No hay inocentes.

Antinoo (bajo): ¿Nunca? (*Se recompone*) Lo apruebo: ¡muy bien dicho!

Corifeo: Y si el castigo te cayó encima, algo hiciste que no debías hacer. (211)

⁵⁴ "The bystander effect occurs when the presence of others hinders an individual from intervening in an emergency situation. Social psychologists Bibb Latané and John Darley popularized the concept following the infamous 1964 Kitty Genovese murder in Kew Gardens, New York." (<http://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/bystander-effect>)

At times it seems as if there is a distance or dissonance between Antígona and the two inter-spectators/commentators. They appear to be having one experience, and she, disconnectedly, another. She does not always realize when they make fun of her, she carries on with her monologues, endlessly lamenting the absence of burial for her brother, while they watch and comment. Taylor notices this distancing that occurs between Antígona on one hand, and the inner-spectators (Antinoo and Corifeo) and spectators (the audience) on the other hand. As Taylor describes this disjointed behavior,

“Antígona seems to exist on a separate, distant, ‘tragic’ plane, a dislocation made immediately evident in the play by the fact she does not know what coffee is, and which was highlighted in Laura Yusem’s 1986 production by the fact that Antígona was in a pyramidal cage throughout. The other two characters occupy the roles of contemporary spectators watching Antígona’s ordeal and enablers who contribute to the current tragic dénouement” (212).

The use of the theatre space both on stage and around the stage is paramount to highlighting the watchers and the watched. As it was shown in Yusem’s production (which is the first and one of the most prominent productions of this piece), the layout of the theatre space very literally ‘sets the scene’, establishing a predetermined hierarchy of positions that facilitate watching and being watched, even before spectators fill the seats. The stage is a slightly raised center square, at about eye level. Instead of the traditional stage set-up in which the audience faces a stage which has a behind the stage and off stage area where actors can wait in the wings behind the curtains, this stage is completely revealed and open. The audience surrounds the space, filling the entire 360 degrees, all facing center. Corifeo and Antinoo are nearly blended into the seating arrangement of the audience. Their table and chairs that form the outdoor café space where they will sit and watch from are hardly distinguishable from the other watchers’ chairs, save the fact that the two

bufones' chairs are slightly elevated. Antígona, although located in the center of our gaze, is eternally trapped within a cage and therefore separated from the crowd of watchers.

Sometimes however, the distance lessens, and she reacts to their laughter, which is nearly always at her expense. In the following scene, we can again see the importance of the emotional delivery of lines noted in the stage directions:

Antínoo: ¡Es algo grandioso oírle decir que comparte el destino de los dioses!

(Ríen)

Antígona: ¡Se ríen de mí!

Corifeo: ¡No, no! (Ríen)

Antígona: ¿Por qué ultrajarme antes de mi muerte, cuando respiro todavía?

Corifeo: Bueno, ¡fue una broma! ¡No te ofendas! (Tentados, ríen apretando los labios, tragándose la risa). (210)

As audience members, we feel these distances or spaces too, and work through finding our place in them. Although at times we may laugh briefly or lightly (or perhaps just smile) along with the jokesters, in other moments, we may simply watch them laugh. In one recent production from the Escuela Metropolitana de Arte Dramático, from the film archive of this production, we can witness that the laughter is not jovial, loud, booming or constant, but small audible moments of light laughter indeed are noticeable in the opening scene and in moments when Antínoo and Corifeo take on exaggerated parodical actions.⁵⁵ There is a sharp contrast between the joking banter and playfulness of the two watchers and the darkly tortured and pained actions of Antígona. Poignant transitions between characters seem to heighten the audience experience of shock and contemplation. Upon realizing that we, the audience are laughing while she experiences pain, we may be shocked and somewhat disturbed at our own behavior. Allowing us to feel this affective response is a large part of Gambaro's technique of communication with the

⁵⁵ This production directed by María Florencia Ayo was performed from March through October 2012 in Buenos Aires at the Escuela Metropolitana de Arte Dramático. Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=maAXpVd-98k>

audience. If we were to simply watch Sophocles' *Antigone*, we might connect with Antigone's pain and sadness, but these feelings, lacking complication or moral dilemma, would leave us soon after exiting the theatre. During the play, Gambaro's technique of playing with laughter, spectating, and affective responses takes place by means of interactions that are filtered through the characters Corifeo and Antinoo. Gambaro creates a constant game of identifying with, or feeling closer to, and then drawing away from these characters throughout the play, allowing us to experience a range of emotions and reflect upon our own emotions.

More playful or parodic moments are sometimes indicated by stage directions such as when Corifeo first begins playing the role of Creonte and Antinoo, "(Se inclina, exagerado y paródico): ¡El rey! ¡El rey!" (202) indicating the non-serious tone with which we are allowed to understand the actions of the two men. We may feel more comfortable with Antinoo and Corifeo at times, watching them play, exaggerate, laugh, or act out scenes in a parodic fashion, but this quickly turns into cruel mockery, harsh statements that condemn Antígona's actions, and some purely cruel moments during which we noticeably tense up upon experiencing. Humor, playfulness, and the sometimes accompanying light laughter or merely smiling appear to be tools used by the playwright and director to help us realize the horror and trauma experienced by Antígona. By laughing (or at a minimum experiencing some pleasure or smiling), being shocked at our own laughter or pleasant reaction, and finally evaluating why we experience enjoyment, we come to understand our troubling role as bystanders which can be more active or more passive, and which certainly can prolong and exacerbate violence through mere passivity. While humor could be useful in this same progressive way on a more universal level in other contexts, I believe that the fact that this process takes place in the theatre space makes the reflection that much more likely to occur and more a part of the experience of humor. That is to say, as we are

presented with a play (or any piece of art), it naturally calls for more reflection or interpretation than other every-day moments in our lives. Spectators are left with a more, impacting reaction to Antígona's story that lingers for thought as they work out the dilemmas they have faced on stage.

Emotional communication and affective transmissions do continuous work in Gambaro's play. It has already been suggested in this project, that through spectating, and especially throughout the combined levels of outer spectators, inner spectators, and finally the observed (Antígona and her trauma), emotions play a primary and productive role in transmission of memory of trauma. In this moment, I specifically refer to the struggle to establish a collective memory of those disappeared during the dictatorship, a trauma in the fact that not only were they kidnapped, tortured, and held prisoners, but moreover, their bodies were not permitted to have dignity by burial. The Argentine community holds these memories of trauma and maintains, reevaluates, or refreshes, and adjusts these memories constantly by different cultural mediums such as theatre. Within art in general and theatre more specifically, this is not a new idea. Artwork is a cultural production that is ripe with emotional transference. Daphna Ben Chaim believes that the power of emotional connection between viewers and spectators of theatre and film is a strong mode of communication available uniquely to such interactive, corporal, and vociferous art forms. In her work *Distance in the Theatre*, she explains how emotions work differently through artwork than in our everyday lives, claiming that, "Though emotion is by nature unreflective, a reflective consciousness can always direct itself upon emotion, but this reflection requires special motivations. This is, of course, precisely the condition created by art, especially as understood in terms of its basis in distance" (71-72). By being confronted with a work of art, we are already placed in a mindset or a frame of reflection. The work is naturally asking us to consider our interaction with it.

Distance also plays a role in allowing for reflection when faced with a work of art. When we feel genuine emotions, caused by an ‘artificial’ or ‘constructed’ environment (the theatre, as compared to the ‘real’ world outside the theatre), these emotions function initially in the same way as they would in any setting, real or ‘artificial’, as they are instinctive human reactions. The unique artistic moment is apparent in the distance that art and theatre provide us with for reflecting. When Corifeo and Antinoo make us laugh or smile, our response is instinctual. When we reflect on that pleasure from humor and contemplate why we experienced that feeling, that moment is inspired by the artistic setting. Ben Chaim identifies the usefulness of being drawn into a theatre production, and then distancing oneself, stating, “a sudden increase in distance may produce an increased awareness of fiction...an increased awareness of the ‘larger perspective’...an increased consciousness of emotion (reflection on one’s previous emotion) and perhaps even a critical examination of that emotion” (77). While similar to the idea of distance as established by Bertolt Brecht to raise awareness in the theatre by making the familiar strange, Ben Chaim focuses on the role of emotion in this process of evaluation.⁵⁶ In essence, theatre which inspires intensely juxtaposed emotions can work through this affective access point to allow us to examine through a new filter, a different perspective. In the case of Gambaro’s *Antígona*, we are reexamining the residual trauma and memory of contemporary (meaning 1986) Argentine society through the unlikely yet meaningful and productive lens of humor— humor as a possibility presented to the audience to engage with theatre— instead of as a factual recounting of the atrocities and inhumane treatment of bodies that led to such a communal feeling of trauma.

⁵⁶ See: *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, in which Brecht argues for the avoidance of audience empathy with the characters on stage because, “when something seems ‘the most obvious thing in the world’ it means that any attempt to understand the world has been given up” (71).

The trauma felt and experienced by the Argentine population escapes words. So, when words fail (as has often been observed post-atrocity and as stated by Susan Sontag, cited previously in this chapter) a translation of that trauma may be attempted through art, and through the emotions that art gives us special access to analyze. Antinoo and Corifeo provide a unique identification and rejection of identification for the spectators, because these two characters represent at times passive watchers (representing average citizens), antagonists (representing more active participants such as those in the military), and victimizers (perhaps representing the institutional involvement in traumatizing its people) to varying degrees throughout the play. Argentines in the audience come to recognize themselves in the two buffoons, and as Ben Chaim states, "...the emotions are literally 'owned' by the spectator and therefore so are the qualities that are conferred upon the object. The spectators come to realize, at least tacitly, that the characters they are imagining embody aspects of themselves" (71). This self-recognition is moving and meaningful, in spite of the fact that Antinoo and Corifeo do not conspicuously represent the members in the audience (these characters come from Greek tradition, at times the play borders on abstract, etc.), but rather, the audience must come to understand and recognize their similarity, something that develops and manifests itself affectively. This gradual and processual realization is a powerful tool that Gambaro successfully implements. The spectators to this play turn out to be directly involved with the action onstage. As Marguerite Feitlowitz inquires, "Now where are the boundaries between onstage and off? Who, really, is providing the spectacle? Those performing or those who lend their eyes?" (10).⁵⁷

In the end, Gambaro's work is successful if the audience can be uncomfortable, from their comfortable seats. She does this by turning our attention to ourselves, to the watchers. It

⁵⁷ In the introductory note to the English language translations of three of Gambaro's most well-known works, *Information for Foreigners: Three Plays* by Griselda Gambaro.

seems to Taylor that, “[Gambaro’s] main response in plays like *Information [para extranjeros]* is to focus not only on the acts of violence themselves but also on the spectators watching them, on the act of watching” (170). We the witnesses are some of the most important characters in the performance. By being witnesses to a play which deals with residual, lingering trauma and suffering, it is possible that the audience members might remain passive, safe, and unmoved, because after all, it’s just fiction.⁵⁸ Taylor observes that, “The theatricality of torture, then, tries to make violence ‘safe’ for the audience. The audience feels it can remain on the sidelines. We can pretend we are neither directly involved nor responsible” (169). But if the spectators to *Antígona furiosa* remain passive, Gambaro makes sure that passivity will be ironic, because that is precisely what they are viewing Antinoo and Corifeo do while watching Antígona during the entire performance. After the play is finished, remaining unchanged, and NOT questioning their current reality must be a conscious act. As Taylor suggests regarding the role of the spectator to Gambaro’s plays, “In referring to we, the spectators, I do so consciously in order to emphasize that Gambaro forces us to relinquish our comforting assumptions about violence, our claims to deniability, innocence, and quietism. Instead, she urges us to analyze what prompts it, what makes it politically expedient, what makes it possible” (170). As before suggested, we leave the theatre space with work yet to do in evaluating and taking action based on the way the work engages us, substantially through the affective uses of humor and laughter, both on stage and off.

Simply because we the spectators are at the theatre, doesn’t mean that we should be shown a violence that is comfortable and therefore easy to watch. Through watching the watchers (Antinoo and Corifeo) passively and cruelly watch Antígona deal with pain, the inner

⁵⁸ “Residual trauma” is a term used by Judith Herman in her work *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence--from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* to describe the after effects of a traumatic moment or episode that linger on to affect individuals or societies. It is the symptom of the experience of trauma that is not or cannot be dealt with yet.

spectator informs the outer spectators (the audience), and heightens the importance of the audience's active role in this re-working of a classic theatre piece which dares to undertake a wound so fresh with its contemporary audience via the unorthodox lens of humor.

The Creation of Affective Bridges and a Spectating Community through Humor and Laughter in Lola Arias' *Mi vida después*

In what follows, I examine the ways in which the experience of laughter and moments of humor add to the documenting of life during dictatorship as well as the transfer of collective memory of the years of dictatorship from an older to a younger generation in *Mi vida después* by Argentine Lola Arias. The 2009 biodrama uses actors playing themselves as real people and additionally, real documents and artefacts from their lives while developing its own distinctive strategy of inciting spectators' curiosity.⁵⁹ Arias communicates with her audience about the past by creating emotional bridges between spectators and the stage through a variety of techniques in the course of the work. While playing games, recovering their perspective as children, or by juxtaposing the very serious with the very mundane, the actors work with these techniques that tell a complex story of searching in the present for a truth about a past. This play does not intend to merely document trauma, but rather to draw our attention and to heighten spectator investment, initiating feelings of togetherness and involvement by illuminating stories from the perspective of the youngest and current generation towards the legacy of the Argentine dictatorship. For a play that recounts many personal as well as national atrocities, from minutia

⁵⁹ The term 'biodrama' originates with Vivi Tellas' project by the same name started in 2002 in Buenos Aires in the teatro Sarmiento. For a short definition of the term, in the *Diccionario del pensamiento alternativo*, Alan Pauls describes the biodrama as a, "género de representación teatral que consiste en poner en escena la vida de una persona real, viva, que viva en la Argentina...el género biodrama propone recuperar la vida personal como experiencia única, singular, enigmática, que resiste a la mediatización y perturba su hegemonía con fuerzas específicas como lo informe, lo crudo, lo cotidiano, y lo insignificante... Aunque el género presupone ciertas invariantes susceptibles de repetirse y aplicarse infinitas veces, cada biodrama es un 'original', en la medida en que tanto sus materiales como sus soluciones formales sólo se definen en el aquí y el ahora de la relación entre teatro y vida" (69-70).

of the every-day to nationally known horrors, there is a surprising amount of laughter that circulates within the theatre during the performance of this work. Why does this laughter take shape in this context? What purpose does it hold and what does it achieve while so closely linked to the surrounding violence? I explore the creation of genuine laughter (meaning an instinctive human reaction to a pleasurable situation) in response to rehearsed moments that are presented as if for the first time. How does the spontaneous and genuine laughter emitted by a trusting and engaged audience fit together with the scenes which are repeated on stage every night imitating and presented as reality? These are some of the questions that frame this work as the role of humor and emotional communication are examined as key entry points into this goal of examining memory, and the past, along with the possible future in the context of contemporary Argentina.

In large part, the emotional atmosphere created and sustained throughout the performance is due to the *manner* in which Arias has chosen to portray the past. Documentary theatre, such as *Mi vida después*, by its very nature puts us face to face with the real. Not only do the stories anchor themselves in artefacts and documents (photographs, toys, clothing, voice recordings, and the pet turtle inherited by one actor from his father), but moreover, all of the stories presented on stage stem from the imagination (here I refer to dreams or envisioning how something might have been unfolding at a time when they were not present physically or temporally, though their parents did experience these acts), real life experiences, and memories of the actors. Their testimony was gathered and assembled from interviews conducted by Arias, and reworked into a flexible script by the playwright. And while a text of the work does exist, it is liable to change on stage from performance to performance since moments embedded for improvisation are incorporated or present themselves, especially when unpredictable elements such as a child or a

turtle emerge. I work here with the idea that documentary theatre involves actors playing the part of themselves and retelling nonfiction narratives in the theatre space. With each performance, documentary theatre actors reenact, relive, and re-inscribe events (some which encircle trauma more closely and others more distantly) through which they have actually lived. Furthermore, the actors in *Mi vida después* both act the role of themselves as well as embody the roles of their blood relatives, including their own parents. In this way, it is as though they bear both a responsibility and a sort of genetic fiat that enables them to speak for themselves and to be the voice of those to whom they are related. Therefore, this very genre then exposes what happens on stage as a continued part of the spectators' reality instead of as a fiction separate from reality. As the audience, we are able to take part in the creation of the work, contemplate the ideas of truth and reality and how these two concepts may (if at all) differ from the idea of fiction that we typically associate with the theatre. As Paola Hernández explores in her article on the play, the borders between reality and fiction become blurred frequently, destabilizing what the spectating body assumes to be documentary or real.⁶⁰ This shifting ground we find ourselves on goes as far as parodying reality, entering into representations of dreams, and on the other end of the spectrum, examines artefacts in a process not unlike exposed museum curation. Hernández sees this playful space between fiction and reality as a way of opening various possible suggestions about how we can retell the past from the perspective of the present. This idea of opening new space for telling the past by way of untraditional methods, and considering new forms of communication that are not purely testimonial will be useful here too as forms of emotional and affective communication and especially that which works through humor and laughter will be considered as valid and powerful methods of telling, experiencing, and integrating the past into

⁶⁰ Hernández, Paola. "Biografías Escénicas: *Mi Vida Después* De Lola Arias." *Latin American Theatre Review*, Vol. 1, 2011, pp. 115-28.

the present. These non-traditional sorts of communication previously cited take place while those on stage (the actors, also real people who have been implicated in the stories of trauma and violence linked with the military dictatorship and the disappearance of their family members) communicate openly, directly, candidly, and conversationally with the audience, requesting certain types of participation in watching and listening.

The aforementioned characteristics of documentary theatre contrast with much of the previous theatrical portrayals of the violence inflicted by the dictatorship and the trauma felt by Argentina and Argentines as *Mi vida después* does not solemnly mourn, nor does it fictionalize or represent the occurrences of the years of dictatorship in the tradition of realist theatre, or absurdist theatre. Nor is it propagandistic political theatre. Though the genre itself is unique, the subject of the piece is not that novel. Rather, many theatre works since the return to democracy in 1983 have centered on the recent past of the country and in particular the trauma of disappearances, unbridled control over ideologies and bodies by the military institution, and the trauma of a country devastated by this state institutionalized violence. Again, the way in which Arias innovates here is by means of the portrayal of memories of the era of the dictatorship via documentary techniques and the tone that these techniques help to establish.

Arias' way of approaching documentary theatre works to display the very real and intimate details of everyday life woven together with personal memories of six Argentines, honing in on the time in and around the years of dictatorship. This work follows in the tradition of Vivi Tellas' *biodramas*, one of the most foundational and notable examples of contemporary Argentine documentary theory and which Hernández mentions are described by Tellas as "*archivos vivos*" or 'live archives'. Hernández explains that in the *biodramas*, the audience members, "entran y salen de la ficción teatral a través de la repetición, las narraciones, y la

construcción del espacio” (116). Much has been written about the innovative aspects of the genre of documentary theatre which differentiate it from traditional theatre— from its inception and creation to the ‘textlessness’ and incorporation of improvisational elements on stage, as well as other matters of staging. Although the novel attributes of this piece itself are important to a complete understanding of *Mi vida después*, and Arias’ specific adaptation of the genre in this Argentine work, here I would like to draw our attention to some of the techniques that pertain to the documentary that allow for further emotional connection and thus communication with the audience. In Hernández’s words, I focus on how it is that the audience is permitted to enter and leave fiction while they participate sensorially with the piece. Beyond the audience’s experience of the frontiers of reality and fiction, ultimately, I will focus my study on the specific emotional instances of pleasure and entertainment that stem from moments prepared with a humorous intent and that are ripe for the experience of humor when and if the audience is prepared and present, which sometimes wells up to the point of laughter, even as the audience is faced with a sobering overall context: the years of the most recent military dictatorship.

Alongside the implementation of documentary theatre techniques, a highlighting of emotional communication strategies pushes this piece beyond previous limitations of documentary or testimony pieces on this subject. Both documentary techniques and strong elements of participatory, audience engaging theatre techniques work together here. What I will deem ‘affective bridges’, are created and sustained thanks in large part to documentary theatre’s guiding principles and elements that create a tight bond, based on an extension of reality with the audience. The piece extends to the audience the idea that what they are experiencing is in fact ‘real’ and not pretend, lending a feeling of hallowed reverence to these moments of sharing ‘the real’. While theatre which allows audiences to emotionally connect with characters on stage and

to disengage from reality (thereby complacently experiencing a catharsis) has historically been looked down upon by such innovators as Augusto Boal and Bertolt Brecht, the emotional engagement is quite different with this piece. While allowing a certain connection to take shape between the audience and the stage, the affective bridges built in this space especially through humor, are not openings for complacency but rather invite curiosity and extension of these personal stories beyond the realm of the theatre space and time. That is to say, relating to the actors on stage is not the equivalent of removing oneself as an audience member from the socially and politically charged context.

Humor that builds and reverberates throughout the theatre works many times alongside candor and sincerity. The frankness with which the actors address the audience, their lines delivered as if never before rehearsed, feels similar to the admission of a friend or the statements made to a counselor, rather than that of performers in a spotlight on stage. Lorena Verzero comments on Arias' continual dialogue with affect and its importance in her work, stating, "Tiene que ver con cómo en estas obras en primera persona se ponen en escena los modos de afectar y de ser afectado. Tiene que ver con la emotividad, es decir, con la búsqueda de autenticidad en la expresión de las emociones y las formas en que es puesta en escena."⁶¹ This absence of theatricality (for lack of a better description) and unmediated and direct speech form draws us close and establishes our utter belief in the speaker. Even from the moment the audience enters the space of the performance and sits down, the playbill establishes the reality that will be witnessed and experienced.

"Seis actores nacidos en la década del '70 y principios del '80 reconstruyen la juventud de sus padres a partir de fotos, cartas, cintas, ropa usada, relatos, recuerdos borrados. ¿Quiénes eran mis padres cuando yo nací? ¿Cómo era la

⁶¹ Verzero, Lorena. "Lola Arias y su obra". *Revista Conjunto*. No. 162, enero-marzo 2012.

Argentina cuando yo no sabía hablar? ¿Cuántas versiones existen sobre lo que pasó cuando yo aún no existía o era tan chico que ni recuerdo?”⁶²

Beyond re-presenting past realities, a new reality is created as the past is brought into the present, especially through the help of artefacts. A new present is created at the moment of performance as we focus on the second generation that struggles to find their place in this often confusing, contradictory history in which ‘truth’ and ‘fact’ are impossible terms to grapple with.

Though traditional documentary might be focused purely on the factual, here it feels as if fact and truth are distinctly and knowingly exposed as problematic concepts when speaking about the experience of living through the recent dictatorship. Documentary theatre is certainly an inspiration and jumping off point, but perhaps more importantly, allows for a dialogue to emerge about the relationship between truth and fiction in dictatorship era narratives.⁶³ For example, in moments of personal testimony, the presented work in front of us becomes so real that we start to disbelieve that what we are taking part in is even theatre at all. A second wave of questioning might overtake us as we realize that despite the frankness and seeming reality, this *is* in fact rehearsed and re-presented on different stages and in different cities. These feelings of truth vying and alternating with fiction establish a necessary approach to interacting with this piece. The ‘re-makes’ in particular, which are mini-metatheatrical pieces imbedded throughout the work in which a group of the actors imagine what scenes from their parents’ lives might have looked like, or perhaps merely what those scenes looked like in their mind and memory as children. ‘Re-makes’ are often fantastical, overly-exaggerated and playful. Though they may

⁶² Text from the playbill of *Mi vida después*

⁶³ Hernández comments on this in her article, "Biografías Escénicas: *Mi Vida Después* De Lola Arias." While she questions the role of the ‘real’ and the ‘document’ within the fictional frame of that which is ‘theatre’. Here I will be more concerned with the suspension of belief that can be aided by the blurring of boundaries between reality and fiction through documentary theatre.

seem utterly false and impossibly far from anything that might be considered truth, we come to realize that a realistic depiction is not the goal of the actors, nor what we are enjoying on stage. These ‘re-makes’ may be the most realistic portrayal into the minds of witnesses of much of the trauma associated with all social classes during the dictatorship. A child’s mind plays with ‘truth’ in a funny and powerful way. This child-like mentality is rescued and resuscitated here in a most meaningful way, even if factual, historical truth about a very specific incident may never be known. The way in which the ‘re-makes’ are able to connect with the audience affectively is much more important than any revealed new truths that could be documented and factually proven. We have moved far past an era of collecting data about the trauma, and here I wish to highlight how ‘emotional truth’ (a term I’ve coined here to express the idea that feelings contain veracity and validity that is worth preserving and acknowledging) is the more valuable and current truth examined throughout creative contributions to the theatre scene in contemporary Argentina such as in *Mi vida después*.

Due to the emotional atmosphere created by reaching into the memories of innocent and naïve witnesses and through the documentary theatre genre itself, affective bridges are made throughout the work. Audience and actors interact with these personal journeys back in the minds of six individuals. Although the context of dictatorship, disappearances, torture, intolerance, and the trauma of individuals let alone a nation are anything but light topics, it is easy to enjoy the presentation. While gentle nostalgia, melancholy, sadness, and serious reflection definitely emerge from time to time, those more serious moments are evenly interspersed with light, jovial, playful, humorous, and pleasurable moments. Upon exiting the theatre space, the audience members probably find themselves surprised at the amount of joviality experienced during the two hours. In this way, Arias’ work breaks with the expectations

about treating the subject matter of the years of dictatorship. This is obviously not unique to this work alone, as a whole body of ‘disobediently humorous’ works have popped up in the years after dictatorship, defying the expected treatment of such a solemn subject.⁶⁴ However, the reasons for the humor in such theatre works, as well as the specific type of humor expressed on stage, as well as the blending of humorous and seriousness varies greatly among these works. For example, *Mi vida después* rarely uses truly dark and gruesome humor, and the humor does not often openly shock or disturb us. The tactic here is rather more playful and ludic. We, the audience, can feel the environment lighten as the actors play games and certainly feel as if we are taking part in playing with the actors, all the while aware that the dictatorship lingers nearby, woven throughout all of the storytelling, no matter how tangentially.

The very intimate, personal, mundane, and ordinary are displayed and told with such detail, and these stories are treated with such care and focus that the individual and the specific become an entry point into the bigger discussions. Moreover, we are not hearing first-hand accounts and no one directly implicated (neither victims of torture, nor military membered who took part in kidnapping, etc.) is present on stage— either as a character or in person. The military soldiers and generals are absent, the ‘subversives’ and *montoneros* are not here. Fiercely propagandistic theatre works belong to another era. This decision to stray from those who are typically considered the protagonists of the story (victims and victimizers) and instead illuminate the perspective of the more recent second-generation (and that of their parents— every-day citizens), updates the story of the years of dictatorship in a way meaningful to contemporary Argentines of all ages. By distancing the first-hand victims and victimizers, this work allows the entire audience to draw in close and listen to the stories told, because it does not matter if you

⁶⁴ For example: many works of Teatro abierto, or in pieces by Roberto Cossa, Griselda Gambaro, Eduardo Pavlovsky, and many others.

affiliate yourself with the left or right, with the *peronistas* or the military. Additionally, an array of actors representing differing social spheres and political affiliations have been chosen to portray themselves, from those whose parents were perpetrators, kidnapping for the military, as well as those whose parents were kidnapped and disappeared. The variety of perspectives allowed to mingle in this same time and space is unique among post dictatorship works that deal with this same context and provides openings for all audience members to find a space in which every spectator will find something relatable. As spectators, we undertake the task of inserting ourselves into the provided narrative more easily, due to this open atmosphere. Here, we listen to individuals' experiences that do not cast judgment, but simply tell. It is then left up to the audience to complete the tales told with their own evaluation, which I argue here is more easily attainable due to a strong affective communication.

Information which is communicated through emotional lenses, and especially that of humor, would seem to tie itself to a place in our cognizance more easily than factual information deployed as if from a text book. This has been proven in fields such as advertising and teaching, and I believe can be extended into the realm of theatre also.⁶⁵ Whether in television ads, a classroom environment, or in the theatre space, humorous situations involve a minimum of two people if not a group of people for humor to work and thus communicate. These situations are conjured up by one person or group, and interpreted and reacted to by another person or group which gives way to the emotional experience of humor (which is both mental and physical). The messages or stories conveyed through that humor lens requires us to be active thinkers or

⁶⁵ Berk, Ronald A. *Professors are from Mars, students are from snickers: How to write and deliver humor in the classroom and in professional presentations*. Stylus Publishing, LLC., 2003. Another example of the application of humor to situations that demand attention: Beard, Fred K. *Humor in the advertising business: theory, practice, and wit*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2008.

processors, searching for further meaning, creating neural connections, and storing the instance mentally. Humor is a form of human communication.

Arias purposefully chooses to couch the stories of the second generation inside the frame of humor to elicit certain audience responses such as feeling like a part of the traumatized community and evoking meaningful and useful interest and investment. Here I will explore this connection between the second-generation and story-telling that relies on humor. As we have already seen, the stories being told and represented on stage both belong to the actors themselves and in part, belong to their parents. The actors are accessing their parents' experiences through their postmemories (which Marianne Hirsch describes as often partial, fragmentary, and incomplete), and also their experiences through their childhood memories. Many articles have been written examining the treatment of postmemory in Lola Arias' work, and indirectly, this concept will play a crucial role here too.^{66,67} Through the second generation's perspective, we are allowed access to their emotional take on the situation, their affectively-charged reactions to what they naively witnessed as children— children who at the time of the described incidents were unaware of the deeper future implications. Therefore, here I turn our focus to the affective communication that takes place as a result of the decision to access memories of the dictatorship period via the second generation. As Arias' has so aptly noted in many interviews about *Mi vida*

⁶⁶ “‘Postmemory’ describes the relationship that the “generation after” bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before-to experiences they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory’s connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation.” According to Marianne Hirsch and as quoted from www.postmemory.net

⁶⁷ “Biografías escénicas: *Mi vida después* de Lola Arias” by Paola Hernández, “My life after (2009): Non-normative acts of mourning in the aftermath of Argentina’s dictatorship (1976-1983)” by Cecilia Sosa, or “Their lives after: Theatre as testimony and the so-called ‘second generation’ in post-dictatorship Argentina” by Mariana Eva Perez, are primary examples.

después as well as *El año en que nació* (the Chilean production of a similar inspiration and form), “Era muy importante que no fuera una obra sobre la dictadura oscura, panfletaria, sino que tuviera el humor y el desparpajo con la que nuestra generación toca el tema. El humor me parece un elemento súper corrosivo para enfrentar el horror y la tragedia, un elemento que a veces te hace reflexionar mucho más que el dolor”.⁶⁸ For the playwright, a playful tone was nothing short of intentional and intricately woven into the telling of tales of living through and now remembering the dictatorship. For Arias, humor lends a very appropriately impactful way of confronting such a difficult context and subject matter. No matter how something as horrifying as the Argentine dictatorship is treated, it is certain that there is a difficulty in accessing this period and conveying the lasting impact of the time period to others. Plays that have previously undertaken themes associated with the dictatorship have treated the uncertainty of the identity of the children of the disappeared, or the culture of fear and the warped power structures that influenced daily life.⁶⁹ A persistent and overwhelming darkness that openly or allegorically condemns the dictatorship is common to these pieces. Both physical as well as psychological violence occurs in most of these earlier commentaries on the years of dictatorship. Most of these end-of-dictatorship and early post-dictatorship works have focused deeply on one dimension of emotion that we are overly familiar with in connection with coping with the dictatorship: pain, darkness, loss, fear, and sadness. Arias suggests that the treatment of such horror with humor might allow for even more complex reflection than pain does. Most importantly, she also

⁶⁸ In this case, about *El año en que nació*. Interview done with *La Tercera* newspaper. <http://diario.latercera.com/2012/01/20/01/contenido/cultura-entretencion/30-97832-9-debuta-el-ano-en-que-naci-la-obra-sobre-la-historia-personal-de-chile-bajo.shtml>

⁶⁹ Some representative examples of those darker, more dramatic and fear-focused works might be *La malasangre* and *Decir sí*, alongside other works by Griselda Gambaro, *Cuarteto* by Eduardo Rovner, *El señor Galíndez* and *Telarañas* by Eduardo Pavlovsky, *Daños colaterales* by Roberto Cossa, or *Una pasión sudamericana* by Ricardo Monti.

suggests that humor may be the mode of communication about tragedy that most suits the newest generation. Here we see a passing of the torch of memory from one generation to another as the humor that continuously develops through the performance is distinctly connected to the perspective from which the new generation approaches the era of the recent dictatorship.

The idea of humor as a generational perspective towards trauma is explored more throughout this chapter. As Hirsch believes, the key to postmemory is not appropriation of the memory of others, but rather the reanimation of memories of the previous generations via the individual perspective of the narrator as each one takes their turn to reach back in their mind and bring some of the past to the present. What results is a collage, a fragmentary representation, and an often seemingly random selection of snapshots of an era, with a very personal expression. When the past is buried deep, several sorts of triggers are capable of unearthing it, including connections with artefacts or physical objects, and sometimes the welling up of similar emotions as those previously experienced, or a distinct sensation like a smell or noise. While postmemory is often aided by documents, artefacts themselves can be static, immobilizing, and still, even when they hold key information about the past.⁷⁰ Inert museum pieces need help to speak. This is seen repeatedly in *Mi vida después*, as the children attempt to reanimate their parents' lives, bringing the past into the present with different techniques of embodiment and close contact with artefacts passed down through the generations. It also follows that these close connections and efforts at animation often take place through emotional ties. Affect allows here for a more powerful connection with the stories told. Not only do the children access their parents' experiences through emotion, they also portray and pass on this emotionally charged narration to a highly-invested audience who all still deal with the dictatorship's legacy in one way or another.

⁷⁰ Marianne Hirsch suggests this in a discussion on ways to memorialize and retain memory of the Holocaust in different settings in her book *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*. See pages 24-25

Accessing second-hand and filtered memories works effectively in this context to address the topic of the recent, yet past, traumas. The post-memories of this newest generation are permanently scarred; though they were not first-hand witnesses of the most traumatic, they do act as nexuses between generations, vessels containing evidence and artefacts, and finally interpreters of the time period that was their childhood. They retain the clues of destruction and devastation of families, society, and a nation, while carrying these memory fragments with themselves to the present day. By telling their stories in this theatre environment, they ensure that these stories will not be forgotten. Rather, through telling in the present, the audience will be encouraged to think more deeply about the connections between the past and present. These stories bring the past and present into close contact before our eyes, re-animating simultaneously, their parents and the country's past, within the context of the present. The convergence that results is a profoundly unique space and opportunity to manifest the potential usefulness of "exemplary memory", as coined by Tzvetan Todorov.⁷¹ One principle reason that the past should be resurrected in the present is in order to glean meaning or implications for our present condition, whether individual, communal, or universal. As Todorov explains,

"El uso ejemplar...permite utilizar el pasado con vistas al presente, aprovechar las lecciones de las injusticias sufridas para luchar contra las que se producen hoy día y separarse del yo para ir hacia el otro...Una vez restablecido el pasado, la pregunta debe ser: ¿para qué puede servir, y con qué fin?" (32-33).

One facet of Arias' project then, aims to incite awareness in the spectator body, to remember with a purpose, as Todorov would put it.

⁷¹ Todorov, Tzvetan. *Los abusos de la memoria*. Paidós asterisco, Argentina, 2000. Exemplary memory refers to the use of individual, specific instances of memory to extrapolate messages or implications that are more universal or general and that can therefore be useful to other communities, other individuals, or situations beyond that of the original context. Todorov sees this use of memory as the most beneficial possibility. Memories that are not able to be recalled or accessed for exemplary purposes are destined to remain stagnant and unproductive, in the past, and will not serve a purpose when drawn into the present.

Memory stays alive, piquant, and purposeful, as long as a connection can be made with the present, and especially in the very moment that the past is brought present in the very play itself. By speaking, sharing, and circulating personal memories, they are therefore passed on to others; this reanimation by way of the participation of voices and bodies is one of the only ways the past can leach into the present and remain vital. Jordana Blejmar considers these moments of memory recall to be more like actions or ‘exercises’ of memory. She explains that, “...los ejercicios de memoria que propone *Mi vida después* están muy lejos de la nostalgia. Cuando los actores reproducen situaciones serias como la militancia, la revolución o el exilio, lo hacen con humor.”⁷² Though this live presentation or performance of theatre as well as the moment of humor are ephemeral, as they take over our bodies for a short amount of time, the effects of humor, as well as the repercussions of trauma are psychologically lasting. The interplay between the lasting and the fleeting are key concepts used by Arias that I dig into here in order to understand how trauma can be treated with humor.

Temporality— literally the state of existing within or having some relationship to time— describes the ability or inability of things to last, fade, persist in memory, or be forgotten. Humor depends heavily on time and finds itself in an ever-delicate balance with time and timing. Time relates to humor in the historical context surrounding a funny situation, how much time has passed since a painful experience that is treated humorously, or even when establishing or missing the correct ‘timing’ of a joke between its telling and the climactic punch that bursts our bubble of expectation. We also typically think of a moment of humor as something which exists spontaneously and sporadically, momentarily created with the right combination of elements, and then which vanishes in time. One must be present at a specific intersection to experience

⁷² Blejmar, Jordana. “Reescrituras del yo. Apuntes sobre *Mi vida después* de Lola Arias” *Revista Afuera*, mayo 2010. <http://www.revistaafuera.com/articulo.php?id=79&nro=8>

humor and humor often can't be recreated in exactly the same way twice. Moreover, humor exists in the space between people (here between the actors on stage and the audience), and is non-existent without a dialogue between humans physically and or mentally. The theatre shares many of these qualities, especially documentary theatre that depends so deeply on a feeling of the uniqueness of the moment, or the spontaneity and improvisation of a special moment that creates something we feel as 'real'. This 'happening' is also fleeting and highly dependent on circumstance and the correct combination of elements, just as is humor. While humor and the theatre performance share this extreme of temporality, trauma and the memory of trauma are lasting and continuous. While they are lasting, they do not exist endlessly without mediation and stagnantly, rather, they are continuously re-animated and evolve through repetition. Trauma and the memory of trauma resurface through every narration of a traumatic moment, and through every artistic interpretation that resurrects the legacy of that trauma. How then can we see humor in the theatre context (and their very time sensitivity) as a useful perspective on trauma and the memory of trauma? While trauma and the memory of trauma are lasting and remain, they are ever-transforming, ever evolving. In order for new generations to contemplate the recent past and identify it as a continuous part of their social reality, different strategies of re-animation must take place. Whether by the passing of information orally, or the participation in a theatre performance or other cultural production, there are numerous interactive and collective means by which trauma is continually processed and reborn in the present. In fact, Cathy Caruth believes that passing-on depends so foundationally on acts of interaction that she states, "the history of a trauma, in its inherent belatedness, can only take place through the listening of another" (10-

11).^{73,74} And when undertaking this telling, creative and emotion-inducing ways of reanimating memory lead to more complex contemplations and processing.

As we participate in the performance moment of *Mi vida después* we engage with the piece affectively. That is to say, there is a constant process of transmission of affect taking place during this theatre moment. Teresa Brennan reminds us that “our thoughts are not entirely independent...the person is not affectively contained” (2) and while she references thoughts, as an extension of this idea, we must recognize that our emotions are not contained either, and in fact exist in the case of humor and laughter, exclusively as a result of interaction between humans, existing in potential in that space between us. Supporting the interpersonal and communal trait of laughter, in a Radiolab podcast on the topic of laughter, Robert Provine points out that laughter, “is about social relationships”, adding, “When you’re alone, laughter basically disappears.”⁷⁵ Laughter is located in that in-betweenness. In the same segment, Provine claims that all that is necessary to cause laughter is laughter itself. In other words, in the case of affect surrounding humor, laughter does much of the communicating work, transmitting and reverberating between us instinctively. Humor may be one of the easier affects to track or ‘see’ (literally: hear) in its latent phase, as we can perceive the sound waves of laughter between us, before the sonorous input has been translated mentally into emotions that are contemplated. Affect is ever-existing between the bodies of the spectators and actors, corporally, vocally, tactilely, sensorially, innately. These are emotional modes of communication that have not yet

⁷³ Caruth, Cathy, ed. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

⁷⁴ See Cathy Caruth’s work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996., or Ruth Leys’ *Trauma: A Genealogy*. University of Chicago Press, 2000. Leys summarizes for example that, “the trauma experienced by one person can be passed on to others.”, expanding, “the trauma of one individual is understood as capable of haunting later generations- as if the ghosts of the past could speak to those living in the present, contagiously contaminating them in turn” (284).

⁷⁵ “Laughter” RadioLab Podcast. <http://www.radiolab.org/story/91588-laughter/>, aired in 2008.

come to be cognitively identified with articulate words, yet exist. Raw impressions, or as Brian Massumi would say, the potentiality or intensity in the air, are our first connection to an emotional moment. This raw affect is physiological, though not yet mentally or cognitively evaluated. According to Massumi, opposed to affect, “emotion is qualified intensity...it is intensity owned and recognized” (277). Before we mentally arrive to evaluate our feelings, we receive sense messages affectively, in a nearly automatic, innate manner. That which lingers in between us, that latent potential, is what I have deemed “affective bridges”. As spect-actors of *Mi vida después*, we are bombarded with this sort of affective communication and experience pain and humor along with our stage counterparts throughout the piece, and it is this powerful ability to construct these bridges with spect-actors that participate in the moment that is the ultimate achievement of this piece.⁷⁶

As we engage affectively with the actors and stories told on stage in a very present moment that we become wound up with the piece (blending what is fiction, what is true, what belongs to the stage realm, and what to the outside world) and in this way, we aid in reformulating the past in the present. The concept of time, the progression of it, or coexistence of times as times past are resuscitated in the present becomes a major conduit through which this work communicates. Ileana Diéguez Caballero sees how new Argentine theatre takes on or approaches, “el horror histórico del pasado reciente como un acontecimiento del presente...” as a common thread through much of post-dictatorship Argentine theatre.⁷⁷ The conduit through

⁷⁶ This term created by Augusto Boal I use here to describe broadly the engagement between the spectator and the performance or theatre work. Boal’s term references the dual role of those who are actively involved as both spectators and actors (even if their role as ‘actor’ is as minor as the creation of additional meaning, or as involved as corporal interaction with actors in the stage space). Boal involves, humanizes and awakens the spectator by deeming them a ‘spect-actor’, restoring passive watchers to their full capacity as active, engaged humans. This idea originally came out of Boal’s work *Theatre of the Oppressed*.

⁷⁷ Diéguez Caballero, Ileana. *Escenarios liminales: Teatralidades, performances y política*. Atuel, 2007, p. 111.

which spectators can be connected to their history (which can seem so impersonal, stagnant, and objective as the temporal distance from dictatorship grows) is through the very personalized tales narrated in first person on stage. Though the actors in *Mi vida después* are not direct witnesses to the worst of the dictatorship's horror, they too have had history passed on to them. They are the new porters of the recent atrocities and the aftermath thereof. They in turn transmit this history of horror and trauma through direct eye contact with the audience, uttered genuinely as if never before spoken, and with a great deal of playfulness or humor— humor that bubbles up many times as a coping strategy of the individual that is then passed on and transmitted to the observing body. Humor too has a deep connection with time (timing), momentaneousness or spontaneity, durationality or lastingness, just to mention a few ways in which time and humor are interrelated.

Though time and history may seem linear and are often conceived in a linear fashion in Western society, historical time in *Mi vida después*, is complexly layered. It is neither presented as absolutely linear nor does it avoid entirely a progressive historical chronology. In the establishing scene for this work, one character-actor (Blas) draws a timeline that stretches from 1972 through 1983 on the stage floor with chalk and the entire cast of character-actors lines up in accordance with the year in which they were born. Character-actors overlap their bodies with their birth years written on the floor, juxtaposing their very personal life story with the bigger-picture world, Latin American, and Argentine history in striking contrasts. They each share a short statement, situating themselves in the year, thereby giving the audience an initial contextualization of our viewing of this piece as a piece deeply intertwining the personal with the impersonal or historical. For example, Carla introduces herself into the story, stating, “1976. Se declara el Golpe militar y un mes después, nazco yo. Soy un bebé muy rebelde.” These statements are offered in a dry, no nonsense fashion, as the actors stand facing their audience

with neutral facial expressions, no costuming to hide their bodies (they don street clothing), and a general absence of other corporal gestures. The way in which their small offering of a personal anecdote is juxtaposed with a major historical happening seems to hit the crowd with a slightly ironic tickle. That is to say, we find ourselves amused by the juxtaposition or intersection of two so different planes of information. This is a clear example of humor as brought about by the unexpected or the incongruous. In these examples, personal time and historical time intersect to find themselves meeting at the plane that is unexpected and new, therefore, humorous as the serious and quotidian mingle.

As we look at different variations on time in this piece and regardless of the presence of a physical line that takes place on stage at one point (it should be pointed out that this line is in fact erased and removed as the play carries on), this resuscitation and recycling of history that surges up in a cyclical and very layered fashion is proof that history may in fact be more interconnected and cyclical, rather than progressive and linear, an idea strongly supported by many indigenous and traditional conceptions of time in Latin America.⁷⁸ By bringing the past to the present and involving a new audience, the collective nature of this past history is engaged and emphasized.

While humor and the theatre performance may be momentary, their effect is not. Humor strikes in a moment as different planes of meaning collide, offering the witnesses a previously un contemplated situation to enjoy. While the initial experience of humor must be raw and unpredicted, after affect hits (the instinctual reaction) and emotion sets in (that is, we begin to give a name to our feelings and interpret them), humor has a durational effect.⁷⁹ The theatre

⁷⁸ The Aztec calendar known as the Piedra del sol, or time as approached in many Jorge Luis Borges stories (*Las ruinas circulares* o *El sur* perhaps), finally, time as a theme in *Cien años de soledad* by Gabriel García Márquez, are some fine examples of the importance of circular time in Latin American perception.

⁷⁹ According to the American Psychological Association article “How laughing leads to learning” by Zak Stambor, humor attaching information to our memory and has been proven to be more easily retained and accessed after the moment of humor. <http://www.apa.org/monitor/jun06/learning.aspx>

shares these time-sensitive qualities. The audience has a raw experience that impresses upon us initially only once. After the initial experience of the theatre, we settle in to revisit the experience and process it for a much lengthier time. Having made this temporal link between humor and theatre, it gives reason to the constant re-exploration of this affective strategy that impacts the audience as communication is achieved and sustained for contemplation via humor that is experienced, often (although not always) combined with laughter.

Humor itself is not an emotion (we do not describe our feeling after a joke as ‘humor’, but rather ‘happy’, ‘surprised’, or ‘shocked’ even) nor is it an affect (an unqualified, corporal, bodily change or charge that wells up with potential to actualize into an identifiable emotion, according to Massumi). It is rather the result of a specific kind of pleasure, surprise, or excitement that is experienced in a joyful, jovial, dynamic, or even shocked state. Often humor is linked to a feeling of pleasure of some kind, whether long-lasting, or fleeting, but that is not always a reliable ruler to measure the existence of humor either. It can be stated with certainty that humor is a dynamic relationship between cognition and affective response. It provokes curiosity, it peaks our interest, and moreover, it results from a pleasure that is slightly unexpected or shocking in some way. Some humor theorists, such as Immanuel Kant, have likened this moment as a shift from one state to another. As Kant describes it, we experience humor as, “the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing” in his *Critique of Judgment* (133).⁸⁰ And more recently, John Morreall has theorized that, “laughter results from a pleasant psychological shift” (39).⁸¹ In this shifting moment, it can be recognized that humor is play for our mind. That is to say, joy is experienced in the work of contemplation that we have to do upon

⁸⁰ Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgment*. Translated by John H. Bernard, Cosimo Classics, 2007.

⁸¹ Morreall, John. *Taking Laughter Seriously*. State University of New York, 1983.

confronting such moments. Ultimately, this sort of humor results from having to mentally work out a puzzle, a confounding moment, a clash of expectation with the unexpected. Peter McGraw describes humor as a response that is cognitive (a judgment or the realization of something being funny), emotional (a positive feeling of amusement), and behavioral (a natural bodily response to that which seems funny).⁸² Affective responses, and eventually emotions (that have been cognitively evaluated, even if for a very brief moment) result from humorous situations, that is, situations ripe with humorous potential. Some of the emotions commonly linked with humor are: happiness, pleasure, or joy, delight, or amusement.⁸³ However, more often than not, these emotions that take the form of evaluated responses to a humorous situation do not develop in pure form but alternate with or are mixed with more negative feelings of apprehension, fear, guilt, or anger, just to name a few.⁸⁴ It is fundamental to the production of humor that our minds interpret the situation in a vacillating sense, evaluating the situation with a slight mixture of disapproval and approval. The gradual growth of the response to humor then is something that will be examined throughout this work. Our initial or innate response might be thought of as the affective part of emotional communication provided by humor. Then, as the reaction is evaluated

⁸² “The Humor Code: What, exactly, makes something funny? A bold new attempt at a unified theory of comedy” http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/features/2014/the_humor_code/what_makes_something_funny_a_bold_new_attempt_at_a_unified_theory_of_comedy.html

⁸³ John Morreall’s extensive work on humor and laughter, Henri Bergson’s *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, and also Simon Critchley’s book, *On Humour*, are all sources that corroborate the mentioned range of emotions that result from the humorous situation, focusing on the very fact that the humorous does not result in one emotion, but rather is open to a varied spectrum of emotion.

⁸⁴ What Critchley deems the “black sun at the centre of the comic universe” (50) is a good example of the vacillation between positive and negative emotions that ultimately forms most humorous moments. Morreall and McGraw both highlight the quality of humor as resulting from a shift between emotional states or between anticipation and reality. In *Taking Laughter Seriously*, Morreall observes that, “But what leads to the laughter here is the emotional change between these two states of fearful tension and relaxed security.” (46) According to McGraw, we often laugh at what we find to be both wrong and not wrong simultaneously. Of course, there is space for the purely humorous that comes from the purely positive and produces only positive emotional responses, however this project is concerned with that more tainted, impure form of humor that complicates matters by mixing our emotions, allowing for more evaluation, reflection, resistance, and learning through humor.

mentally, cognitively pondered (instead of simply reacted to instinctually), we begin to establish words and more precise descriptions for what we feel— this is the evolution from affect to emotions. Although brief, this short period of reasoning and evaluation often leads the person experiencing humor to weigh positive and negative emotional responses, the combined force of which can be said to be the entire moment of humor.

Certainly one sole theory cannot be depended on to explain all instances of humor and even a single dramatic work travels through a range of humor tones. This variance in humor (light, dark, grotesque, slapstick, parodical, ironic, satirical, punny, etc.) develops emotional depth and dynamism which often lead to further intrigue in a dramatic piece, and therefore carrying the spectators' attention. Certainly, most works can be characterized by one or two major humoristic tones, but I am interested in looking at the interplay provided by the ebbing and waning of humor tones within each work. I approach looking at the instances of humor in *Mi vida después* by calling on Peter McGraw's theory of "benign violation", which although recently coined and theorized, really combines the ideas of many previous humor theorists.^{85,86} As McGraw explains, humor starts with a violation— that is to say, something that is wrong, unsettling, or threatening⁸⁷. A violation, by definition, breaks with the way you see the world or the way the world ought to be according to your perspective. Described broadly, violations can

⁸⁵“The Humor Code: What, exactly, makes something funny? A bold new attempt at a unified theory of comedy” http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/features/2014/the_humor_code/what_makes_something_funny_a_bold_new_attempt_at_a_unified_theory_of_comedy.html

⁸⁶ Soren Kierkegaard and Immanuel Kant are two of the most well-known philosophers to think about humorous situations as stemming from the incongruous.

⁸⁷ It is important to note that ‘violation’ is a term that McGraw uses and has developed. In my study its use comes directly as McGraw's terminology and with no further implications. While ‘violation’ can be a very complex term, and at times is seen as overly negative and even violent, here it maintains none of those implications associated with a more loaded term. One could just as easily think of ‘violation’ as synonymous with ‘disruption’ or ‘break’, here, a break with the expected, the norm, or the preconceived.

be physical threats, threats to social norms, to cultural norms, or even linguistic norms. While things that are wrong or bad normally produce negative emotions, that is not always the case. We often experience some degree of pleasure, even react by laughing to things that fall into these categories, and most often perhaps, we experience a mixture of positive and negative emotions. The important caveat to violations that allows for humor to enter is that these violations must be benign as well; that is to say, the person perceiving the situation must conceive of them as safe, ok, or acceptable. In order to recognize violations as benign, it is helpful for some sort of distance to be created between the person perceiving them and the violation. That is to say, being distant from a tragedy (such as the social and individual trauma caused by the military regime during the Argentine dictatorship) helps to heighten the possibility for humor.

While this distance can be physical, temporal, or even more distant to an individual (i.e., a violation that happens to a stranger versus one that happens to a friend), there is certainly no recipe to tell us when a traumatic or serious situation has reached an appropriate distance in order to be able to be treated with humor comfortably— that is, for it to have reached a seemingly benign state. Some would argue that certain situations or events could never reach such a distance to be considered humorous (the persecution and killing of Jewish people by the Nazis in the Holocaust, and the torture and disappearance of 30,000 Argentines, among other crimes against humanity and violations of human rights, for example).⁸⁸ However, contrary to this thought, there is in fact a large body of artwork that seems to surround such atrocities which approach these topics from an angle of humor. Although the existence of such texts may at first seem curious, this project examines how these situations engender humor, and to what ends the

⁸⁸ The graphic novel *Maus* (1991) by Art Spiegelman, and *La Vita e Bella* (1997) directed by Roberto Benigni are two contemporary examples of art which looks back at the Holocaust with a lens of humor.

pleasurable mingling with the painful might productively push our understanding and ability to cope with such situations.

Lola Arias laughs on purpose in her documentary work that reexamines dictatorship from the point of view of the new generation. It is no accident that what is considered perhaps the deepest wound in Argentine identity is treated with a tone that is consistently genuine, communicative, and engaging, but moreover, quite humorous. Journalist Diego Zúniga comments, “De hecho, Lola Arias se ríe. Se ríe, por ejemplo, cuando recuerda que en Argentina le dijeron que era esnob por darle humor a la obra. Me dijeron que qué me creía al tratar el tema así, porque no se vestían todos de negro y lloraban.”⁸⁹ One can imagine that the first artistic works looking back on the dictatorship with such a lack of solemnity, and contrarily, with quite a bit of jocundity, might be met with public surprise— shock, uncertainty, questioning, and most certainly attention. While certainly not unexpected, the reaction of the initial Argentine public upon experiencing Arias’ treatment of the theme is worth noting, for many people may have never before considered treating the theme in this manner. Though it may be true that laughter and dictatorship do not often mix, here coexistence of both emotional states is achieved— and not just to make a rebellious or shocking point— but rather, to achieve a new perspective and shed new understanding on a situation that would seem to be already known. When re-working this project for the Chilean audience, Arias’ maintained the tone and simply went through the creative process of the collection of stories with new actors. Commenting on the striking presence of humor in the Chilean performance (which I interpret as her opinion relating to both pieces), Arias believes that humor seems to be a very corrosive element by which to deal with

⁸⁹Zúniga, Diego. “Las vidas de Lola Arias” Online Journal *Qué Pasa*.
<http://www.quepasa.cl/articulo/cultura/2011/11/6-7009-9-las-vidas-de-lola-arias.shtml>

and confront horror and tragedy, an element that creates more reflection than simply feeling and expressing pain.⁹⁰ Arias not only points to the new perspective on the dictatorship years facilitated by humor, but she also acknowledges its helpfulness in the action of *reflection*, which implies a sort of looking back, creating temporal distance while remembering. It is not surprising that the humorous treatment of such a solemn moment in Argentine history would be scoffed at, because this approach would not have been feasible nor productive without distance from the dictatorship years. As Peter McGraw develops in his theory of benign violation (which again, creates a hotbed for humor), some distance from the violation, often is key to finding a space for humor. Jordana Blejmar notices this in *Mi vida después* too, explaining, “La ausencia de solemnidad en esa evocación del pasado tiene acaso que ver con que la memoria de la postdictadura es eficaz sólo si reconoce la distancia que nos separa de los años del fracaso del proyecto revolucionario y del golpe.”⁹¹ So through the production of this piece, alternate ways of dealing with and reflecting on a painful past are suggested— an alternate reflection that is both eased by distances (generational and historical) and fomented by humor.

Throughout *Mi vida después*, rather than centering the plot around direct and physical forms of violence, small and indirect endemic causes of violence take center stage. A lightened atmosphere is created and sustained in contrast with the weight of the themes that form the core context of the play— those themes which juxtapose the very serious with the comic. The seemingly mundane (such as the ways in which a news reporter was made to report on current events, or the daily life of a banker who was told to look less like a subversive if he wanted to

⁹⁰Etcheverría, Estefanía “Debuta *El año en que nació*, la obra sobre la historia personal de Chile bajo Pinochet”, January, 2012. <http://diario.latercera.com/2012/01/20/01/contenido/cultura-entretencion/30-97832-9-debuta-el-ano-en-que-naci-la-obra-sobre-la-historia-personal-de-chile-bajo.shtml>

⁹¹Blejmar, Jordana. “Reescrituras del yo. Apuntes sobre *Mi vida después* de Lola Arias”, *Revista Afuera*, mayo 2010. <http://www.revistaafuera.com/articulo.php?id=79&nro=8>

keep his bank job) begin to be recognized as significant by the audience. These subtle forms of violence have not been highlighted in such a way in previous performance work, and here these subtleties begin to take on star roles. The ways in which minor disturbances and forms of oppression begin to reveal how they form a part of the fabric of the social trauma endured by the Argentine populace during the last dictatorship are prominent in this piece. After all, although the stories being told here are not directly violent in themselves, the trauma inflicted upon the future generations is evident and must be considered, similar to how Rob Nixon theorizes slow violence which occurs, “gradually and often invisibly”, accumulating over time.⁹² Furthermore, the range of traumas is nearly as great as the range of implicated ‘actors’. We witness and thereby participate in emotionally-mediated evocations that pull from the stories of parents who were secret police and kidnapers, exiled families, parents who as news reporters were obligated to deliver certain news to the nation, parents who were disappeared, militant parents who were killed, and others. The stories narrated throughout the work are carried by re-animated voices and bodies of the newest generation on behalf of these victims of state-organized violence. While these stories certainly relate trauma and scars, trauma here does not radiate a shocking, violent, nor gruesome tone, but takes on a more personal, individual tone and places a magnifying glass on many easy-to-overlook daily situations that were common in the years of dictatorship.

In this piece, Arias helps us move beyond the purely informational and big picture history, instead drawing us closer to the personal, mundane experience by allowing emotion and individual perspectives to flow through the testimonials presented. The emotional lens that every actor places on their experience adds a sometimes dream-like quality to the scenes presented. Not only does this add more dimension than a realistic dramatic presentation would, but the

⁹² Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard University Press, 2011.

emotion displayed and communicated by the actors, which is then felt and responded to by the audience, aids in the impact of each scene. That which is emotionally charged and connected with laughter will lodge itself in the mind of the viewer much more forcefully. Here it will be turned over and accessed by the individual theatre spectators for evaluation in the future, thereby extending the stories beyond the theatre space.

The scenes in *Mi vida después* which produce an ideal combination of elements for humor to be born and laughter to respond share a common essence and similar strategies to elicit such affective responses. One technique the humorous scenes share is the elaboration of ‘re-makes’. What Lola Arias deems ‘re-makes’ are moments in which the actors re-enact a scenario from the imagination or childhood, often using techniques of dress-up and embodying others in mini-theatre pieces. These metatheatrical moments reflect much of the child-like nature of the narrating character when they observed this scene in their past or when adults told them about it. The re-make is playful, ironic, and might be likened to children playing dress up, imitating what they envision real adult life to be like. Many moments of humor emerge from the juxtaposition that an adult audience can see in these moments when comparing the child-like interpretation of the years of dictatorship to their present-day knowledge. That is to say, the distance provided between childhood and adulthood, and between the years of dictatorship and today, are both necessary distances to make the presented scenarios benign and therefore foment humor in spite of (or perhaps because of?) small violations, according to McGraw’s theory. A re-make about the many possible ways a father died, for example, is serious in content, but humor is created through the lens of the remake and imagination of a child who has been told so many versions of his father’s death that each seems equally likely no matter how ridiculous. Other techniques that are laughter provoking are tied to or found within the re-make. To list a few of these: the

incorporation of toys or figurines, dressing up, mimicking or imitating adults via corporal gestures, and imitating ironically the language or sayings of adults. These techniques form a part of the re-makes that each actor takes a turn at both directing and simultaneously narrating from their own perspective while their fellow actors assist in completing the scene as extras.

Beyond the concept of the re-make and those smaller techniques of which they are comprised, there are many further moments of humor throughout the work. Although varied, they maintain the same tone as the remake in many ways. The tone could be described as charming, innocuous, raw, and child-like, in which the feeling of sharing deep secrets frankly from the space of the stage with the gathered audience is garnered. Frequently, technology plays a role in facilitating playfulness as projected images via live video cameras enable the actors to physically draw on photographs for the entire audience to view. Undeniably child-like, these drawings which take shape live produce a feeling of intimacy as we feel like the first ones to witness these props unfolding before our eyes. In one playful moment as Vanina narrates her story about her father, a photograph is projected in which he and other male family members pose. Vanina describes what she sees as a group of men with multiple attributes of police. They have, “police moustaches, police attitudes”. While her dry, ironic voice that points out how she sees this photograph of her family members is in itself humorous, it only adds to the laughter that the pen drawing on the projected image exaggerates the moustaches of the men, making them cartoonishly big and then circles the hands resting on the hips of all of the men as she points out their ‘police-like attitudes’. We see this photograph through her eyes: a mixture of her memory as a child and also her perspective today, reexamining the past together, in simultaneous layers.

In some instances of humor, the bizarre or unexpected mixture of the light hearted or silly alongside the serious, adds humor in moments that would otherwise be quite somber. A cascade

of garments silences the audience, drawing our eyes to the stage as the work begins. The deluge halts as abruptly as it began when a human body falls, wrapped in the clothing, into the pile below. Both the waterfall of clothing and the appearance of a human among the falling clothing are unexpected, strange events.⁹³ This is a lightly humorous scene, as we watch the human body fall— perhaps because of the contrast to the empty human forms that the mass of clothing imitates, or because of the shocking thought of a human falling from the sky in the first place.⁹⁴ While the unexpected produces humor, it is a hesitant smile or laugh that marks the curious while waiting to learn more. Whose clothing is this? Where are all of the people that should be or were wearing it? And who is the lone person who appears among the figures of many ‘husks’ or empty clothing? As the play unfolds, we begin to see that the clothing could stand to represent the bodies of those who are disappeared and can no longer fill the pieces strewn about the stage. Specific garments also stand for specific disappeared people, which we come to recognize as a few of the actors try on their parents clothing: ill-fitting, out of style, but which still holds some idea of the body that was once inside of the clothing. These pieces are evidence that their former owners did indeed exist and have a corporal form to fill up the left-over clothing that is now an empty shell. Swimming in his father’s cassock, Blas looks nearly clown-like. As Carla and Pablo dress Liza in her mother’s work clothes, they treat her body like a mannequin, manipulating her as she continues to talk, violating the expectations of how one ought to treat a body versus an

⁹³ Given the context of the dictatorship years, there are many references that this scene might bring to the forefront for the audience in relationship to mounds of clothing and falling bodies. For example, the many household belongings of those disappeared were also carried off by military personnel and stored in clandestine detention center depositories, forming storehouses of the artifacts of every-day life of the disappeared. Also, the infamous ‘Death Flights’ might be a reference point, during which the bodies of drugged ‘subversives’ were tossed from planes into the ocean to dispose for good of the kidnapped disappeared citizens.

⁹⁴ The first-hand experience of watching this scene performed, and also the experience witnessing how an audience watches it (and of all described scenes from this work) come from video footage available on Lola Arias’ YouTube channel. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IkkzTeauia8>

inanimate object. The clothing is also reactivated throughout the work- it falls on Liza as she reads the news as if it were raining, overwhelming her face, while wearing her mother's dress. Clothing strewn about on the floor gets in Pablo's way as he tries to dance the *malambo*, a dance his father taught him, while wearing his father's boots. It also is thrown at Liza, muffling her as she reads from her father's book.

The clothing both helps in the remakes, as the narrator's take their parents' places in reenacting some events, but it also plays a separate part- a mass of unidentified clothing that gets in the way, overwhelms, heaps up, and can be played with and in like a pile of leaves. The clothing represents a sort of child-like activity of play fighting, and frequently acts as a sort of time machine which when one interacts with, one is carried back in time to the years of the dictatorship- whether to their own memories or those of their fellow actors. Of course, we must not forget that the clothing that is constantly put on and taken off on stage, for all the audience to see, is a prop or costume too. The difference between this use of costuming and more traditional theatrical costuming is that here, the behind-the-scenes donning and removal of costumes is revealed for the public. We watch as characters transform on stage, as their bodies enter and exist these props or costumes from the 70s and 80s and which help them literally, 'get into character'. At the end of the work, all of the characters take part in dressing up a line of chairs in clothing and continue to play in the clothing as Liza and Pablo play music on guitar and drums. These 'chair mannequins' look funny too as if mimicking people, albeit poorly. We laugh at their odd, clumsy look, but that too is contrasted with the idea of vacant clothes, clothes hanging strangely on forms that are not bodies because bodies are absent. We could say that like their children playing dress up, the chairs too act as place holders for people who are no longer here- whether

killed, or disappeared. They come to represent an uncomfortable, unresolved, yet odd-enough-to-provoke laughter sort of absence.

I have already established that a child-like, often naïve approximation is carefully developed in this piece, encouraging a comfortable, approachable atmosphere and a very new take on a time period often interpreted through memory and artistically as dark and onerous. Another key point around which humor congregates and that is connected to this unaffected and playful essence is the incorporation of unpredictable elements onstage such as the live turtle that predicts the future and the child that runs around on stage and uses a water gun to squirt the actors in the face while they foresee their own deaths. Both the role of the turtle and child assist in cementing the raw, unrehearsed, testimonial nature of this work, but moreover, add humor. These violations of the expected (the turtle and the child) that use humor to break with theatrical norms (performing the rehearsed and expected) in order to produce laughter. The turtle, that belongs to Blas' father and was born in the same year as his father, is asked to walk towards "Sí" or "No", drawn in large chalk letters on the stage floor, to predict if Argentina will experience a revolution. In a recording of one performance, the turtle does not move at all, even when coaxed by Blas. This lack of movement perhaps incites even more laughter from the expectant audience, as the alternate to yes or no was never even considered. Of course in many performances, the turtle selects yes and in many others, it selects no. This element of unpredictability heightens the excitement the audience can feel as they witness a work unfolding in front of their eyes as if for the first time, a unique work that they then form an integral part of too by witnessing as the audience.

In several other unpredictable moments, Mariano's young son Moreno joins his father onstage. He takes part in the clothing fight at the end, jumping gleefully in the clothes, and

throwing them at the other actors. In a final scene called “*El día de mi muerte*” or “*The day of my death*”, each actor improvises a fictitious future death for him or herself. For example, Blas exclaims, “Yo me muero el 9 de febrero del 2060. Me muero ahogado en mi cama durmiendo con mi pijama predilecto.” Often the absurdity or randomness of their predictions provoke laughter, which is aided by young Moreno smiling and shooting each adult in the face with a water gun as they attempt to speak through the water striking them and running down their face. Moreno’s role highlights the importance of the child-like perspective carried throughout the work, while emphasizing the humor that can result from play-fighting or play-shooting— a strange mixture of imitating a violent act, but in such a harmless way that the violation is deemed benign and therefore funny. Play and death become closely linked, showing that we can sometimes laugh even at something as solemn as death, when it is presented with enough distance; here the distance is provided because these are hypothetical and future deaths, the weapon is a *toy* gun, and the predictions are not aimed at cruelly predicting someone else’s death, but their very own death.

Faced with playful scenes that loosely hinge darkness to humor, such as the innocuous prediction of future deaths that is accompanied by being symbolically shot with a water gun, the audience reacts simultaneously uncomfortably and comfortably with laughter that is shared by most of the spectating body. Mariana Eva Perez notices this creation of a very precise mood in order to aid reception, commenting, “The performers seem to try everything they can to transmit their parents’ stories, and they do so in a playful mood. In an interview I conducted with Carla Crespo and Mariano Speratti, they explicitly used the verb ‘to play’ to allude to these moments, experienced by both as a relief from the ‘testimonial’ sections of the piece” (7). Establishing this mood throughout the piece helps spectators to ‘read’ or tonally understand the work in front of

them. It is akin to giving the audience a dictionary with which they can translate the language being used: here this is the language of play and humor. While we as spectators are never directly confronted with violent deaths, we are consistently aware of the surrounding context of the dictatorship and the many crimes committed during that time unsettling us while not repelling us. The distance provided by the time elapsed since dictatorship, and the narrating of these stories through the next generations' eyes, in addition to the softened playful mood, all assist in making this most serious of subjects one that can be understood through positive emotional responses such as smiles and laughter and moreover, will be actively remembered instead of resulting in a moment of shock that leaves one merely unsure of how to process.

As we emotionally connect with each narrating actor who opens up and bears all to the captive audience, the sense of feeling and responding instinctively and emotionally to one another seems to be an automatic mode of communication and presentation that can be dubbed the creation of affective bridges. We cannot help but to take part in and draw in close to these personal experiences. Affect is uniquely in the position to be able to shape the surfaces of individual and collective bodies, according to Sara Ahmed and I contend that we certainly see this process developing here. While 'emotion' can involve appraisals, judgment, and attitudes, the idea of 'affect' connotes a more visceral, innate, instinctual communication than takes place in the emotional realm.⁹⁵ Ahmed sees the circulation of communication that takes place *between* bodies and finally which, initiates individual bodily feelings of change as a process called affect. The sharing of these feelings by a group or collective is a key concept in understanding shared

⁹⁵ Though emotion may involve a process of cognition, it may also have the same visceral and immediate attribute that here I am considering the core of that which is called 'affect'. There is certainly room for overlap between the concepts of 'emotion' and 'affect' and different theorists from throughout the ages have seen the two to be more or less innate human reactions. Here I wish to distinguish 'affect' in that it always will maintain a automatic, visceral quality of emotional reaction, and moreover, it takes place between entities and plays a role of instinctual communication that is on a different level than the verbal. See Sara Ahmed's work *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* and Teresa Brennan's *The Transmission of Affect*.

narratives, such as that of the history of the Argentine dictatorship. In addition to providing more profound understanding of a narrative, the emotional treatment of a narrative experienced by a collective can also begin to develop orientations toward the larger narrative and other bodies and groups linked to it. Ahmed believes that, “Emotions are relational: they involve (re)actions or relations of ‘towardness’ or ‘awayness’ in relation to such objects” (8). The narrative in *Mi vida después* is not easily classified or identified as belonging to one very certain community, due to the variety and depth of individual perspectives presented and woven together. This more complicated approach to narrating the years at hand is, I argue, a productive complication. By telling their stories from the perspective of multiple backgrounds, this approach forces the audience to develop an orientation emotionally towards what they witness and experience firsthand, but it is not a pre-established or easy orientation to form. The affective angle that works here does not allow an easily defined group (for example political leftists) to simply develop negative feelings towards an easy-to-identify opposition group (the military dictatorship for example), but makes a binary impossible to come by. One might say that we as the audience are judges free of prejudices here, contemplating the humanity of those individuals directly before us, and not punishing their parents’ loyalties or leanings. In an Artaudian way, as Beatriz Trastoy would say, this piece is an example of, “una dramaturgia del espectador que llene los vacíos con emociones, imágenes y sensaciones, pero también con palabras, ya que el receptor se ve obligado a armar su propia historia” (14). *Mi vida después* calls out to the audience to construct their own ‘life after’ story too, in the very title, “Mi” referencing the personal, intimate story that we all possess. The testimonial style of the actors in the work captures our belief in their realness, humanity, and makes relatability easier. So much of this close relationship and garnered belief in their statements is communicated orally. Trastoy highlights the importance of the voice to

communicate affectively in pieces such as this, stating, “El manejo de la voz establece... la seriedad o comicidad de la material narrada, su carácter paródico, los matices afectivos, las intencionalidades encubiertas tras la evidencia exhibida en el nivel de los significantes verbales” (32).

In experiencing affective bridges throughout this piece, we are oriented towards the period being repeatedly pulled out of the past and into the present by each narrating actor, making the history of Argentina that of individual Argentines. This did not happen to someone else, but to these specific individuals and it is likely that every audience member in Argentina could (with fewer or greater degrees of separation) narrate a similar story. This sort of storytelling reactivates the previously stagnant history. The repetition of facts about the dictatorship such as: “more than 30,000 people were disappeared”, or “clandestine detention centers were found throughout the country in the middle of cities”, or even “drugged prisoners were thrown to their death in the Río de la Plata” is information that has become well circulated to the point of losing meaning.⁹⁶ Bare facts can at times stop transmitting meaning about what to *do* with those facts. These personal histories, on the other hand, reactivate history, while cementing the responsibilities to this history, and ownership of this history by all of society. This is an excellent example of what it is to form and maintain a ‘collective memory’, through an approach as unexpected as that provided through the lens of humor. We might say that a sort of ‘imagined community of spectatorship’ is being formed by such plays as Arias’ *Mi vida después*.

⁹⁶ This same phenomenon of the deadening of the senses when faced with an accumulation of exposure to facts about violence has been noted in other contexts. For example, in Roberto Bolaño’s work *2666* in “The Part about the Crimes”, one critic observes, “the deadened effect of its relentless cataloging of deaths” Kirsch, Adam. “Slouching Towards Santa Teresa: Roberto Bolaño’s Utterly Strange Masterpiece.” *Slate*, Nov. 3, 2008. http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/books/2008/11/slouching_towards_santa_teresa.html

In this project, spectatorship and the spectators will comprise as much of a protagonist as those actors on stage. Audience reactions to moments and presences on stage will be considered like a punch line to a joke. Without the spectator present, humor is left as a potential (akin to that described by Brian Massumi when he identifies affect as potentiality), a possibility, but not a reality. The role of both audience response and of the community (or theatre audience) in the emergence of humor in the theatre are fundamental, and are exemplified in *Mi vida después*. While humor is continually considered as a potential and a process which we experience first affectively and finally, emotionally, affect and emotion are not cut off from the bodily reactions evoked and drawn forth; rather, affect and the body are tightly bound together. Body and mind work collaboratively to receive and transmit affect, a “process that is social in origin but biological and physical in effect” observes Teresa Brennan (3). In this work, a complete picture of the intricate work that humor is able to accomplish necessarily must address the corporal and bodily reactions that come about as humor plays in the theatre space. Physiological responses to humor range from mental stimulation and chemical changes in the brain, to small smiles growing on the lips, to chuckles, guffaws, and hearty, uncontrollable bursts of laughter, or even unending peals of laughter.⁹⁷ While this range of responses is subject to an endless array of factors (both individual and situational), the very bodily nature of these experiences is notable in the presence of the theatre where so much communication takes places through the bodies on stage.

⁹⁷ Simon Critchley dissects the impact on the body in his article “Humour as Practically Enacted Theory, or, Why Critics Should Tell More Jokes”, saying, “Laughter is a muscular phenomenon, consisting of spasmodic contraction and relaxation of the facial muscles with corresponding movements in the diaphragm”. Critchley traces the genealogy of the observances of the physical impacts of humor on the body, quoting René Descartes, who notices the involvement of blood flow, the lungs, and the windpipe. Critchley paraphrases Descartes’ thought that, “laughter is an explosion expressed with the body.” Immanuel Kant described the physicality of the impact of humor on the body by describing, “the oscillation of the organs”. (22-23)

What Nicholas Ridout calls the ‘vibratorium’, a term which posits the affective communication between bodies via physical waves produced by light or sound, is a useful starting point to understand how the intangible and the corporal, or how affect and bodily reactions, are two parts of the same phenomenon: humor.⁹⁸ Much like echolocation, the reverberation of sound waves that are a part of laughter find themselves bouncing from the stage to the audience and back again, growing, waning, and echoing throughout the space and time provided by the unique moment that is the theatre presentation. Shared laughter that takes on a physical and bodily aspect (sound waves, vibrating us and literally moving us) while simultaneously involving the mind, is able to touch others, affect others, and form a conversation of emotion through sound waves. Physicality and corporality that are inseparable and jointly necessary for the reception, perceiving, and transmission of laughter are noteworthy in the theatre space, especially due to the corporality that is wrapped up in the nature of performance. It is no accident that embodiment and bodily considerations on stage beget further bodily emissions (laughter) in response. As affects link or form bridges, human beings (both body and mind interdependently wrapped together) function as control towers or pillars that the cables of affect tie together. This interconnectedness is part and parcel of affective communication as Brennan observes how, “The origin of transmitted affects is social in that these affects do not only arise within a particular person, but also come from without. They come via an interaction with other people and an environment. But they have a physiological impact” (3). The transmission of affects linked to humor passes effortlessly between bodies, necessarily and unavoidably. Humor and the laughter, shaking, smiles, other muscular contractions, quick

⁹⁸ The ‘vibratorium’ is, as Ridout describes it, “the familiar idea of a reciprocal ‘energy exchange’ between performers and audiences”, or “the theater auditorium in those moments when signification and representation have yet to establish their sway: it is where the vibrations get right into you, before you start making sense of them.” (221-222) Ridout, Nicholas. “Welcome to the Vibratorium”, *Senses & Society*, Vol. 3, Issue 2, 2008, pp 221-231.

projections of breath, and other physical manifestations it draws out of the body make the transmission of what we have seen to be very mental and corporal affect, easy to observe as it ricochets between audience and stage in a piece such as *Mi vida después*.

In the performance moment of *Mi vida después*, the interaction of the audience with the work takes the shape of recognition of their own image and that of their fellow Argentines in the presented stories on stage. There is something incredibly personal about this piece that allows for access to the intimate, and through drawing us close, establishes an unspoken common view. A sense of understanding, or recognition is garnered not only between the audience and the actors, but amongst the audience as they form a close, if temporary, small community. The temporary formation of community formed of spectators gathered to observe a performance, or other artistic production has been suggested elsewhere. Florian Nikolas Becker, Paola Hernández and Brenda Werth are of the opinion that,

“Although all representational arts involve such acts [of imagining], there is something quite distinctive about theatrical imagining: The kind of imagining that is intrinsic to theater as a practice of representation is essentially public. It is part of an essentially cooperative activity that takes place in a shared place and time” (3).

A scholar that examines dark laughter in contemporary Spanish film, Juan Egea also notices the formation of community that takes place in the film viewing audience in a similar way as they familiarize themselves with what can be seen as truly Spanish film standards and genres. He establishes that “we are truly dealing here with the potential of cinema as a social and discursive practice that ‘constructs national subjects’” (11) and goes on to suggest the term ‘imagining communities’ in reference to the developing citizen-spectators that form in conjunction with the growth of a very certain Spanish film family. While in Spanish cinema, “film must help in the refashioning (or reimagining) of a community...”, *Mi vida después*, in turn, forms a part of new

Argentine independent theatre which is aiding in the construction of a spectating community in present-day Argentina.⁹⁹ In the case of *Mi vida después*, though it may not be clear as the piece begins, certainly by the end, the audience has gained a conception of a new generation and they themselves may feel a part of this second generation. This newly identified group reveals itself on stage, a sort of hidden victim of a moment that although recent, begins to feel more like history and less personal with the passing years. Though years pass, wounds do not disappear. There is a danger that this history can start to seem to be the history of others and not belong to the present-day Argentines. This piece reveals the hidden plight of the second generation, who sitting in the audience, may not have realized the role they can take and play as citizens and in Argentine society. Part of this closeness and understanding or sense of belonging is certainly fostered through shared laughter, which can be indicative of underlying emotions that are the basis for developing a feeling of community.

The piece has been met with an incredibly active and interested reception both in Argentina and abroad for its innovative documentary approach and humorous tone. Arias herself hints at the initial apprehensions of the domestic audience to receive such direct references to their recent history. The Argentine audience has grown used to receiving artistic treatments of the era of dictatorship that are solemn, serene, and focus on powerful denouncement of the military dictatorship. When asked in an interview about the reception of the piece in Argentina and abroad, Arias observed that,

“La diferencia entre mostrarla en Europa y en Argentina es que en Argentina el público conoce las historias pero se sorprende por la forma de contar las historias, por el humor y la intimidad, por los procedimientos de reconstrucción a partir de documentos y ficción, por el cruce de lo personal y la historia del país. En Europa

⁹⁹ Egea, Juan F. *Dark Laughter: Spanish Film, Comedy, and the Nation*. The University of Wisconsin Press, 2013.

... Les parece irreal, como una película siniestra y absurda... Y a la vez estaban muy conmovidos...”¹⁰⁰

Both observations seem to point to the surprise of the audience at the treatment of such real-life horror and trauma through a ludic, playfulness. While the Argentine audience may have initially been hesitant about the telling of stories related to dictatorship so playfully, and the international audiences could hardly believe these stories were real, feeling them more akin to a surreal or absurd movie, both receptions are linked to a non-traditional treatment of violence and trauma on stage. Cecilia Sosa agrees that this work “challenges the monopoly of power, pain, and memory that framed the aftermath of Argentina’s dictatorship (1976-1983).”¹⁰¹ Arias’ piece, by proposing to approach this topic via humor and play, seems to be appropriately positioned to achieve more powerful results by means of creating a more active and engaged audience than the traditionally propagandistic political theatre of the late 80s and 90s.

In addition to initiating moments ripe for the response of laughter on stage which begin to facilitate the creation of a sense of community, other techniques used by the actors on stage assist in drawing the audience together into a group. Towards the end, each actor takes a turn shouting into a megaphone in a distinctly militant, potentially aggressive, propagandistic, protest-style voice. Though the tone, and method or instrument of voice projection are all highly reminiscent of militancy, the words uttered through the megaphone are anything but combative. Rather, the words uttered through the megaphone and directed at the audience fill in the time line of the years after dictatorship and into the present. The content of their messages is rather

¹⁰⁰ Trombetta, Jimena. “Entrevista a Lola Arias: *Mi vida después*”
<http://www.imaginacionatrapada.com.ar/Teatro/2010/07/05/entrevista-a-lola-arias-mi-vida-despues/print/>. *Artes Escénicas- Imaginación Atrapada*. Julio 2010.

¹⁰¹ Sosa, Cecilia. “Mi vida después: Non-Kin Affects in Post-Dictatorial Argentina”.
<http://hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/e-misferica-72/sosa>. Issue 7.2 *E-misférica: After Truth*. Winter 2010.

innocuous and again carries on a line of conversation with their audience that is playful and here even ironically funny. For example, Pablo takes a turn and shouts, “2001. El presidente se escapa en helicóptero. Yo me caigo de un caballo y me rompo una pierna.” Later down the timeline, Mariano takes vocal control and declares, “2009. Crisis económica mundial. A mi segundo hijo le sale su primer diente.” Carla shouts in a voice as if commanding the other actors who run around the stage in a chaos, “2010 se aprueba la ley del matrimonio gay ¡y yo me separo de mi novio!” The surprise facilitated by the stark contrast of the delivery of the message when compared to the content of the message provides an ironically humorous twist to the gathered crowd (or audience) that listens. While half of the information offered through the megaphone is historical and factual in nature, the other portion is quite personal and mundane. This sharp contrast between the ‘official story’ and the politically big picture when set next to the details of an individual’s everyday life have been highlighted previously in this study. A very dry, matter of fact tone, and utter seriousness on stage make these bizarrely entangled pieces of information produce even more laughter off-stage. So this moment is not so much an example of affective entrainment (“transmission by which people become alike”), but rather projective identification (“what [the actors] succeed in having [the audience] experience in [themselves], although it comes from [the actors] in the first place”).¹⁰² That is to say, the actors do not model the humor we are to feel, but instead compel us to feel humor by way of their mode of presentation. The overall goal of this scene is to connect the very personal with the national, linking individuals to nation, contextualizing the official and authoritative version of history with the hidden underside of citizens’ everyday reality. This humorous moment invites personal reflection, constructing the natural question for the observing audience: What was I doing during the World Cup of 1978?

¹⁰² Brennan, Teresa. *The Transmission of Affect*. Quotes from pages 9 and 29, respectively.

When the Guerra de Malvinas broke out? When the economic crisis hit? Here is another moment when the humorous moment gathers the audience together, as they are addressed directly as the mock crowd towards which the megaphone points, joining together in laughter, but also situating themselves individually within the timeline of Argentine history, a collectively owned history, one of all individual Argentines, promoted and illuminated by this mode of presentation.

The audience is drawn into a captive and attentive crowd in other moments which reinforce this formation of an ‘imagining community’ during the performance moment.¹⁰³ Many of these other scenes that create a community of the theatre audience in some way revolve around or utilize techniques of humor. We identify with the actors’ stories because of the very every-day nature of the moments they choose to narrate. Not only do we as audience members find ourselves laughing together, but laughing together in mutual understanding of the small daily perils and joys of being human. In the scene, “Sueños con mi padre”, the actors relate bizarre and unreal dreamscapes that they have re-lived in a different consciousness. While the baffling, ridiculous, mundane, and sad mix, we all have experienced such bizarre mental tricks and laugh as they narrate these dreams, recognizing ourselves. However, we also are aware that most dreams have a base in elements of our real life and reality and although we may not want to validate psychoanalytical interpretation of these dreams, the sad parts mixed with the ridiculous give us cause to pause and consider the real-life origins of these troubling dreams that feature the actors’ fathers. In many of the dream segments, fathers are recounted as leaving, disappearing, growing more distant or smaller, in a variety of unearthly manners. Carla’s father walks in the

¹⁰³ This term has been played with, a twist on Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* of course and as previously mentioned, Juan Egea develops the idea of an ‘imagining community’ in his work on dark laughter in contemporary Spanish film. Another useful reference is the work *Imagining Human Rights in Twenty-First Century Theater: Global Perspectives*, edited by Florian Nikolas Becker, Paola Hernández, and Brenda Werth. In particular on page 3 they develop the concept of the “theater as public imagining.”

street past her without noticing her, Liza recounts a dream in which her mother and father are swimming out to sea, growing smaller and more distant, and Blas' father proclaims he must leave and grabs a bunch of balloons, tying them to himself and floating off as he orders his son not to follow. To aid in this collective feeling of belonging and participating as a community as we are drawn in with the humorous and laughter, the actors often expose the behind-the-scenes workings of a theatre piece, break the fourth wall, and reveal the theatre as such, exposing all to be examined and evaluated by the audience. One example of the exposure of the theatre as such can be witnessed again, when the actors dress and undress while out on stage instead of while hidden off stage. Props are not hidden in off-stage wings but are stored on the stage space for us to see and contemplate during the work, until they are dragged out to center stage for focused use in particular scenes. Actors will also sit or stand on the stage even when they do not have a part to play in a given scene. Their quiet, still bodies stay with us, creating a close audience-actor temporary community as we experience this piece and moment of time as a group, together. Moreover, we do not comfortably watch in our chairs while a show happens on stage simply to be watched and that does not involve us. Rather, we are faced with a conversation. The actors speak at us, facing the audience and directing their speech at us. They show to us, their gathered group of attentive listeners, the documents, pieces of clothing, and artefacts they have gathered to re-stitch together the past.

During the scene with the megaphone, the audience gains a sensation of being a group gathered with a similar plight to protest, however, in other moments, we feel as if we are a classroom of students. The actors spend time drawing on photos that are projected on a screen for all to see, giving a sort of informational lecture on their families. Other actors not involved in the particular story being told stay on stage listening as an extension of the audience, instead of

exiting the stage and remaining hidden in another space. This too aids in opening up and revealing all of the theatre production. While they recall their childhoods, the actors that play themselves look directly at audience, breaking the fourth wall, treating us more like a gathering of people that share a common struggle, or like the therapist who listens to intimate admissions. Gail Bulman feels this simulation of a therapist-patient relationship helps to bring the past to the present and establishes a meaningful role for the audience. She perceives this interaction, asserting, “As the audience listens to the stories of each character, narrated in the first person, spectators are transformed into therapists, witnesses of the undeniable trauma that weighs on present and future generations in the aftermath of the Dirty War” (107).¹⁰⁴ We take part in a constant game of revealing the theatricality instead of hiding it from the audience as the audience finds itself ‘in’ on the secret or the ‘behind the scenes’ working of the theatre piece. We discover as we view, and we engage with the stories. Every presentation of a work is different. The perceived uniqueness of the moment of production is fundamental to our perception of the narrations of memory that take place. The audience takes part in forming the work by spectating and it can occur in different ways in different places and with different audiences (an Argentine audience versus a foreign audience, for example). Arias gives the audience the sensation that they are participating in something unique. The audience feels a sense of responsibility because they’ve been listening to something very personal— it’s as if they were being entrusted with a deeply personal secret that they now hold a responsibility towards. Other critics have taken note of the audience involvement with this piece as well. The focus on the circulation of a feeling of togetherness and the creation of a spectating body is paramount to figuring out how to deal with

¹⁰⁴ Bulman, Gail A. “Catharsis, Spectacle, and the Post-postmodern Theatre of Lola Arias”, *Letras Femeninas* Volumen XXXVII- Número 1, 2011, Vol. 37, pp. 101-112.

trauma afterwards. Cecilia Sosa observes, “This structure of transmission also involves the bodies of the audience: it circulates on and off the stage, proposing a new sense of being-together in the aftermath of violence.”¹⁰⁵ From my perspective, one of the primary ways in which this circulation takes places and involves the bodies of those on stage as well as those seated in the audience, is through the multidimensional, corporal and mental, qualities of humor.

Humor circulates through and affects the audience as it provides a mirror for the audience, allowing a new perspective on the tragic. It is not meant to distract from, to lighten the pain, nor is it meant to cause catharsis for audience. Humor here is a social product and reveals itself as a tool that can inspire agency with social functions. Despite the ‘realness’ and frankness with which we are addressed, regardless of the extremely non-fiction, documentary feel to this piece, realness is not synonymous with solemnity— not here at least. Authentic emotions in fact play a crucial role here. Lorena Verzero notices how Arias has permitted real emotions to play a prominent part, stating,

“En *Mi vida después* la autora da un tratamiento de la autenticidad de las emociones diferente a lo que ocurre en otras de sus obras. Y la relación entre lo emocional y el distanciamiento respecto del pasado autobiográfico, de la propia historia o de la historia colectiva, es un punto importante en esta obra” (23).

And while fiction and non-fiction may blend through the work, the authenticity of the elicited emotions is not in question. Specifically, in moments like the re-makes in which the actors make blatantly obvious that their imaginations and pieces of evidence they have gathered are assisting them in re-creating a possible past, these skits that playfully reanimate the past bring about real feelings that circulate, often in conjunction with some element of humor. María Fernanda Pinta describes these moments of obvious falsity that bring about real emotional reactions, describing

¹⁰⁵ Sosa, Cecilia. “*Mi vida después*: Non-Kin Affects in Post-Dictatorial Argentina”. <http://hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/e-misferica-72/sosa>. *E-misférica: After Truth*, Issue 7.2, Winter 2010.

them as, "...la producción artificial y gratuita de una acción que resulta verdadera no solo porque efectivamente los actores lloran o se besan, sino porque puede producir una emoción verdadera en el espectador" (712).¹⁰⁶ While each re-make is obviously full of imagination and inventiveness, our affective response, often involving humor, helps in re-examining the past and re-building a community, whether a small group of spectators, or later a larger one as those spectators involve themselves as citizens in a larger society. Humor is a very real coping mechanism and the pervasiveness of these moments of humor I believe help to highlight the realness of the people involved in telling their painful tales here. The continuity of episodes that provoke laughter help us to see these actors as themselves, and as real people, coping and dealing with real life hardships, not merely playing at pain and playing a role, but truly working through trauma out loud and on stage.

Not only is laughter a catalyst in moments that are ripe for the creation of a collective or communal feeling, I also suggest that the repeated humor and resulting laughter give *Mi vida después* the unique opportunity to take the healing outside of the theatre context and is the beginning of very real recovery. Laughter by its nature allows us to drop barriers, shift our perspective, and be more receptive to a new idea or experience. It alleviates stress, which has been historically supported by different proponents of the Relief Theory of laughter (expressed by John Dewey, Sigmund Freud, or Herbert Spencer), and is medically supported too.¹⁰⁷ As we consider a new perspective and release the urge to protect ourselves emotionally, we reflect on our emotional reaction to various scenes that provoked laughter, more precisely, a laughter

¹⁰⁶ Fernanda Pinta, María. "Efectos de Presencia y Performance en el Teatro de Lola Arias" *Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença*, Porto Alegre, v. 3, n. 3., 706-726, set./dez. 2013. <http://www.seer.ufrgs.br/presenca>.

¹⁰⁷ For example, in this Mayo Clinic article "Stress Relief from Laughter? It's No Joke. When it Comes to Relieving Stress, More Giggles and Guffaws are Just What the Doctor Ordered." <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-relief/art-20044456>

surrounded by violent or traumatic contexts, and we begin to question and examine our relationship to the violence. Diana Taylor argues that, “The performance model also helps spectators define their position vis-à-vis spectacles of violence. Are we complicit? Can we work to end violence, or will we go on ‘just looking’?” (*Disappearing Acts*, xi). Though provoking discomfort, we are not so uncomfortable as to reject these scenes. This mixture of pleasure and pain, laughter and serious contemplation, work together in a decisive way to reexamine trauma more productively or intricately. What takes place in the theatre as a sort of ‘laughter therapy and preparation’ frames some of the circulated information about the suffering in the years of dictatorship in a new way— one less black and white, less closed and bitter, a perspective that is more nuanced and faceted, a frame which considers individuals from many social and political backgrounds and which focuses on the health of a community of Argentines. For her part, Cecilia Sosa notices the emotional component that actively works on the spectator community in this work and describes *Mi vida después* as, “an encounter that stages the uncanny pleasures of being plural in grief.” in her 2010 e-article, and goes on to suggest that, “*Mi vida después* proposes not only a vehicle for addressing trauma but also a way to transform it.” Sosa suggests that this piece is novel as it considers a more complex way of emotionally processing trauma than simply melancholy. I contend that endless sadness, or persistent gloominess, (melancholia) are emotions not nearly as useful to recovery as the vacillating and complex picture of emotions depicted in *Mi vida después*.

The humor implicated in telling the interconnected memories of the actors in *Mi vida después* lightens a tenuous and serious past moment in order to connect with the audience. Laughter here creates an emotional state with which we can relate to one another and create a sense of community, sharing a past history instead of looking back at what may have separated

and distanced various factions. The humor employed in *Mi vida después* does not shock, it does not assert superiority of one party over another, it does not evade truth-telling or facing difficult situations, it does not provide escapism from reality, nor does it rebel against authority or resist a higher power; it resituates.

Chapter Conclusions

The plays presented in this section examine how two thematically related but different theatre works can alter or form our conception of the horror that was inflicted on individuals and a nation during the most recent Argentine dictatorship. Humor becomes more than a joyful emotional tone, but begins to be seen as a new way of knowing, through a very specific emotional lens. By selecting one piece from the time period immediately after the end of the dictatorship and another from approximately 25 years after the return to democracy, we are able to see how this healing process has run a course from 1983 until the present day. As some might erroneously believe, the military dictatorship is not a closed moment in the past for Argentina, but rather lives on in collective memory and must necessarily continue to do so for healing to continue to take shape and the time period is continuously reworked in collective memory. We can easily see that the trauma of dictatorship was approached in a vastly different way in 1986 compared to 2009. As Antinoo and Corifeo's cruel trickery and violent passivity has shown us, the laughter in 1986 was tense, uneasy, painful, and yet raw. This specific implementation of humor by Gambaro was necessary to dispel passivity and disbelief from which some of the population still suffered immediately after the end of the years of horror. The laughter in 2009 is more distanced from direct violence and helps us, the audience, to understand and draw closer to something that begins to become distant history for the newest generation. Arias gives a prime example of the ways in which the newest generation is able to approach the dictatorship,

connecting it to their personal life stories, and updating the way we ponder knowledge about events from decades ago. She draws the 1970s and 1980s forward in time, stretching memories and timelines towards the present until we finally come to realize our interconnectedness with this scar in the Argentine story. Humor here develops togetherness, and creates a sense of belonging— the idea takes shape that this history belongs to us and that we in turn belong to this history.

The web that connects us all is strewn over the audience, often times in the guise of humor. In both works, the experience of a collective creation that forms through a circulation and communication between stage and spectators is crucial to the success of the affectively charged environment. In this process of collective creation, it is important to both playwrights that the audience does active work in completing their evaluation and interpretation of the piece and not be lead didactically to any one conclusion. In *Antígona furiosa*, through the parodic, dark, dismissive use of humor (often of superiority) in Griselda Gambaro's retelling of a Greek classic tragedy by Socrates, the tool of humor brings about a much more ruminative and evaluative emotional state. The audience is not allowed to be passive nor complacent, and instead is brought to face a harrowing tragedy that is not only universal and timeless, but is also very uniquely their own. Humor here troubles us into a new state of awareness. Humor is also a major part of the connecting technique that allows *Mi vida después* to carry out affective transformations on the captive audience. It uses both closening and distancing techniques as well as relying on the humor of incongruity, personalizing this story for each one of us and for a collective 'all of us'.

Chapter II. Argentine Theatre of the Guerra de Malvinas: Didactic and Grotesque Laughter Confront National Identity.

The military dictatorship in Argentina came to an end in the year 1983, prompted in part by an outcry of Argentine society after a military defeat suffered by the Argentine armed forces at the hands of the English in the Islas Malvinas, also known as the Falkland Islands. Closely entwined with a national sense of identity, the Malvinas have long represented a point of identity, pride, and belonging for the country of Argentina. The country's defeat in June of 1982 in the Malvinas is often cited as one of the antecedents for the end of the dictatorship, and constitutes another moment of national crisis. This crisis exposed and exacerbated a wound in both communal psychological and political national sovereignty. Undoubtedly, for the Argentine populace the Guerra de Malvinas and dictatorship are linked in their mutual defeat both in the social consciousness and in close chronology in Argentine history. Reflected in Argentine theatre throughout the past three decades, the link between these events becomes paramount in questioning and problematizing what it means to be Argentine and what Argentine identity is composed of in the post-dictatorship years.¹⁰⁸ After tremendous disillusionment and defeat, it is necessary to reconsider identity.

¹⁰⁸ The ideological and historical links between the Proceso or Dictatorship and Guerra de Malvinas, as well as the ways in which the two are interwoven in collective memory are innumerable and undeniable. Moreover, this connection can be shown on several levels. The very title of León Rozitchner's book, *Las Malvinas: de la guerra "sucia" a la guerra "limpia"* conspicuously makes this connection. Federico Finchelstein reminds us of the civilian support of the dictatorship in key moments which bolstered nationalistic sentiments such as the 1978 World Cup and Guerra de Malvinas in his work, *The Ideological Origins of the Dirty War: Fascism, Populism, and Dictatorship in Twentieth Century Argentina*. (124-125) However in the aftermath of a horrible defeat in the war and the rapid dissolution of the Junta that ordered this war, popular support pivoted and as Rosana Guber recounts, "The democratic *apertura* (opening) of 1982-1983 decried the Malvinas conflict as an 'absurd war' waged by a 'drunken general' who had sent hundreds of undertrained and insufficiently armed 'boys' to fight a highly professional army". ("The Malvinas Executions: (Im)plausible Memories of a Clean War", 120). Federico Guillermo Lorenz asks and addresses the question, "How do memories of the Malvinas War fit with the memories of the Argentine military dictatorship?", in his chapter, "How Does One Win a Lost War? Oral History and Political Memory" (*The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, 124-141). As recently as 2014, the Buenos Aires Herald reports that Dictatorship era documents had just been released connecting military personnel involved in the fight against subversion to military personnel chosen to take part in the Malvinas war. According to one article, "One of the requirements to be selected

The symbolism of Las Malvinas has been developed, reworked, and maintained in constant relationship with a sense of Argentine nation since the independence of the new nation in the 19th century. Though this space is small and lacks the impressive and expansive geography of mainland Argentina, it is nevertheless a point of access to the vast south Atlantic, a wealth of natural resources, and perhaps most importantly, has so oft been seized and recovered, that the ultimate goal of recovery would signify a coming of age or an arrival as a nation for this South American country. The lingering sense of loss and the distinct moment of loss yet again of Malvinas in 1982 represent a festering sore and its reopening in contemporary contemplations of national identity. I contend that it is especially this distinct quality of lingering hope for unity and then also, incompleteness, often wrapped into feelings of nostalgia that characterize Malvinas and which in turn characterize *Argentinidad* or Argentine-ness.

In describing what I conceive of as *Argentinidad*, I draw together some key features that together form the distinctiveness and character of Argentine identity. At the heart of the feeling of national identity in Argentina is the idea of a nation comprised of both immigrants and locals; it is a hybrid community that pulls together people of many cultural backgrounds. This hybrid citizenry is formed of immigrants from Europe that arrived in late 19th and early 20th centuries especially from Italy and Spain, Spanish ancestors that arrived to Argentina from the conquest onwards, and also more contemporary immigrants such as those from Bolivia or neighboring Latin American countries. Furthermore, central to *Argentinidad* is a sense of belonging to the geographical features, the land, and a feeling of topographical expansiveness. Connected to the land, the importance of agriculture situates Argentine identity in the physicality of Argentina. A lifestyle focused around the agriculture system, as well as the pride in the products the land

to take part in the war was the personnel's participation in the 'war against subversion', (<http://www.buenosairesherald.com/article/156103/archives-show-links-in-repression-malvinas>).

yields, are shared elements of Argentine identity. Thirdly, a feeling of *Argentinidad* unites its citizens through shared language. As in the majority of Latin America, their common Hispanic ancestry brings them together culturally since the conquest era. This sense of unity in *Hispanidad* includes the Castilian language. Unique to Argentina alone however is the evolution of local language into the slang Lunfardo, a mixture of Italian and Spanish that came about during the end of the 19th century as the wave of European immigration entered and altered the nation. Certain figures, heroes, emblems, and symbols delineate *Argentinidad*. Among these are the gaucho, the Argentine flag and anthem, cultural elements such as tango (which has even been analyzed as a metaphor for national identity), and political leaders such as Juan Domingo Perón and José de San Martín. And finally, key to this argument in this chapter, I propose that the Argentine nation and sense of national identity is one that is in a constant state of becoming and is always evolving towards a future point. To this point, Stuart Hall declares of all cultural identity that it is,

“is a matter of “becoming” as well as of “being”. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation.”¹⁰⁹

Perhaps this constant evolution and focus on adaptation and change is due to the innate series of conundrums, or dichotomies that have to be continually navigated in the vast landscape, range of cultures co-mingling, and histories in Argentina. For example: civilization and barbarism, Europeaness and Americanness, rural and urban.¹¹⁰ Consistently in periods of crisis in

¹⁰⁹ “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” by Stuart Hall, in Rutherford (ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. p. 225.

¹¹⁰ For further reading on national identity, and in particular this sense of Argentine identity, see: “The Tango Metaphor: The Essence of Argentina’s National Identity” by Christine S. Nielsen and Juan Gabriel Mariotto, *International Studies of Management & Organization*, Vol. 35, No. 4, Cultural Metaphors Paradoxes, and Cross-Cultural Dimensions (Winter, 2005/2006), pp. 8-36. “National Identity, Nationhood, and Immigration in Argentina: 1810-1930” by Jeane Delaney. *Stanford Electronic Humanities Review*. Volume 5.2, 1997. “‘This Is History’:

Argentina the question of national identity arises anew to be reevaluated, reinterpreted and evolve.¹¹¹

The connection between this geographical place with a sense of national identity and of patriotism makes the ‘Malvinas Cause’ something that large portions of society are able to rally around even in times of other social or political strife or disagreement. The Military Dictatorship in 1982 attempted to take advantage of the unifying power of the dream of Malvinas rejoining the mainland nation, managing if only for 74 days to redirect people, bringing them together at a time when dissent was growing and outcry against the dictatorship’s rule was becoming apparent. The failure by Argentina to reclaim these islands in 1982 was simultaneously a bolster for English nationalism and a devastating loss of the belief in and support of the nation for Argentina. Nevertheless, the islands have remained and never ceased being Argentine emotionally and psychologically.¹¹²

The first moment of Argentine crisis developed in the previous chapter revolved around the dictatorship itself. In contrast, the second moment of crisis studied in this project and which will be the focus of the present chapter is a moment of questioning and instability which centers around the years 1982 and 1983. This crisis is double edged: while struggling with the devastating failure of the Argentine forces to regain Malvinas (and thereby national pride and a

Nation and Experience in Times of Crisis— Argentina 2001” by Victoria Goddard. *History and Anthropology*, Vol. 17, No. 3, September 2006, pp. 267-286.

¹¹¹ Jorge Larraín suggests this in his book *Identity and Modernity in Latin America*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000.

¹¹² See for example Kevin Foster’s 1999 study, *Fighting Fictions: War, Narrative and National Identity* in which he states, “this book approaches and examines the Falklands War as a struggle for ideological rather than physical terrain, as a discursive conflict in which the most sacred myths of British and Argentine national identity were deployed in the battle for moral and cultural sovereignty over the war...as a battle to shape the fighting fictions which framed and formed the conflict.” (6), or León Rozitchner’s 1985 study *Las Malvinas: de la guerra “sucias” a la guerra “limpia”* in which he states, “No cabe ninguna duda que ambos gobiernos, el argentino y el británico encontraron en la cuestión de Malvinas un magnifico pretexto para cubrir con el nacionalismo sus respectivas crisis internas” (8).

sense of identity), the whole of Argentine society began to realize the misguided nature of the military regime in power and a short year and a half after the defeat in Malvinas, society would be thrown into a new crisis of identity as power shifted from military junta to democratically elected government.

Beyond the political weight of this conflict, the cultural weight of Malvinas as a place has been translated into a myriad of movies, novels, and theatrical representations.¹¹³ A decidedly more psychological and conceptual moment of crisis from that described in the first chapter of this project, the Malvinas' ubiquitous and lingering qualities have a curious and an almost mythical power to remain and withstand, ever-present and eternally unresolved. Therefore both this physical and psychological space, and the moment of the war itself, merit a closer analysis. Yet again, a moment of crisis is dealt with in the theatre under humorous tones often— an emotional tone which is able to elicit and encourage laughter, a sense of playfulness, and affective interaction with the gathered audience as a part of the tactic of communication, dialogue-opening, and involvement with a painful moment of national crisis. The topic of the 'Malvinas fissure' which necessarily asks the Argentine community to consider their collectiveness and belonging to the nation of Argentina is aided by the theatrical medium that naturally draws together a temporary community of audience members, to reconsider their togetherness as a nation. They are able to look towards a possible future, imagining together ways to fill in this vacancy that incompleteness has left them with. Jill Dolan explains how theatre might approach collective affective desires saying, "This sense of partiality and process

¹¹³ Some of the more well-known cultural representations of Malvinas include but are not limited to: novels such as *Los pichiciegos* by Rodolfo Fogwill and *Las islas* by Carlos Gamerro (a science fiction novel which was transformed into a large scale theatrical production in 2011), theatre works such as *Piedras dentro de la piedra* by Mariana Mazover, *Los Tururú* by Diego Quiróz, *1982 Obertura solemne* by Lisandro Fiks, among others, and movies such as *La Campana* by Fredy Torres, *Los chicos de la guerra* by Bebe Kamin, *Fuckland* by José Luis Márques, and *Iluminados por el fuego* by Tristán Bauer (based on the homonymous book by Esteban Edgardo), and innumerable documentary films.

informs the utopian performative, in which the various embodied, visual, and affective languages of the stage ‘approach toward’ that which...is ‘not-yet-set’ but can be felt as desire, or as concrete fantasy, in the space of performance” (7). The emotional void left by this crisis moment is precisely that: filled with emptiness but also a space for hope. This two-faced nature is a perfect breeding ground for complex reflections to take shape through double-edged humor that we can begin to see as an Argentine epistemology in theatre.

In part, the tendency to treat serious issues with a tone of jest is a natural human coping technique, and many cultures, countries, or groups use humor to deal with trauma.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, particular kinds of humor (that influenced by the *grotesco criollo*, *sainete criollo*, and clowning and circus traditions in particular) frequent the Argentine stage and pervade all three moments of crisis treated throughout this project (the dictatorship years, Malvinas defeat, and economic crisis) which I believe points to a uniquely Argentine mode of humor. The humor working on stage in pieces that treat the Malvinas Cause tends to be a troubling, questioning humor, ripe with darkness, discontent, and an ability to stir up the moment of crisis *instead of* bringing about resolution, relief, healing, or catharsis. That is to say, the humor itself mirrors the incompleteness of the situation. This troubling humor can be linked strongly to traditional national Argentine theatrical styles, a ‘neo-grotesco’, which, subconsciously or not for the Argentine audience, bolsters the imperative to engage with a questioning or reworking of nationalism today. The humor of both plays in this chapter is based unmistakably in the

¹¹⁴ Herbert Spencer is credited with establishing the “relief theory” of laughter that posits laughter as a manner of releasing energies and Sigmund Freud expanded further this notion of humor as a useful catharsis. In a more contemporary study, psychologist Alex Lickerman states, “Being able to face an old trauma with humor may very well then be considered a reliable signal of psychological recovery. Perhaps also, by extension, being able to laugh at a trauma at the moment it occurs, or soon after, signals both to ourselves and others that we believe in our ability to endure it.” <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/happiness-in-world/201101/why-we-laugh>

grotesque, but one which has evolved to fit contemporary crises (such as Malvinas) in the contemporary world.

Humor used in connection with the story of Malvinas also takes a decidedly satiric and farcical twist in particular. As Priscilla Meléndez describes, farce is characterized by an, “Absence of solutions, unwillingness to propose authoritative and coherent alternatives to the problems of oppression that they present” (33). Beyond critiquing the situation then, the use of farce in particular indicates an unfinished dialogue, a still-lingering uneasiness about the place of this moment in Argentine memory, and perhaps some distaste for the way this question persists in contemporary nationalism. As humor and resulting laughter imbue the environment with a sense of unease and unrest we are bothered into a realization that it is this unfinished business which defines Argentina’s post-Malvinas identity.

While the *crisis* surrounding the failure of the Guerra de Malvinas and closely linked downfall of the dictatorship deals with national identity and was experienced on a national level, *trauma* is also experienced by individuals and families of soldiers who were involved in or died on Malvinas. In this context, I conceive of the ‘crisis’ to be ideological and psychological on a *national* level, equated to a destruction of national morale and a confusion surrounding the idea of and future of Argentina as a nation.¹¹⁵ ‘Trauma’ bears a more individual psychological weight in the Malvinas context, and I will use this term on an individual level to describe the suffering mentally experienced by soldiers during the war, veterans after the war, family members of the aforementioned, but also by other tangentially connected individuals.¹¹⁶ Ann Kaplan terms this

¹¹⁵ In this study, “crisis” is used to conceive of a drastic, unforeseen, difficult, threatening situation on a national, economic, political, personal, or emotional levels, among other possible nuances. The etymology of the word itself points to a decisive turning point. See the introduction for further theorization of the term.

¹¹⁶ I understand “trauma” as experienced by the subject due to crisis or as an after-effect of crisis, and often implies an emotional or physical pain that has been suffered and which must be dealt with or resolved in order to move

second-degree or tangential suffering of trauma as “family trauma” or “quiet trauma”.¹¹⁷

However, we must always keep in mind, as Kaplan reminds us also, that, “it is hard to separate individual and collective trauma” (1): they are interwoven. Trauma was felt physically as well (this is after all the origin of the word from the Greek for ‘wound’), as the bodies of soldiers stationed on the island suffered (from hunger, cold, or even death). Both this collective moment of crisis experienced and the individual traumas felt are disconcertingly unfinished and boundless. Many soldiers who were on active duty during the war but not geographically present in the islands themselves have been fighting for years to be recognized as war veterans for symbolic purposes and to receive due benefits from the government– this fight continues on until this day.¹¹⁸ The two works that will comprise this second chapter on the theatre which reacts to the crisis and trauma surrounding Malvinas incorporate humor to expose in part an ongoing and unresolved geopolitical stance towards Malvinas as a part of Argentina, and departing from that which is specifically linked to Malvinas, these works also begin to explore a post-dictatorship, post-Malvinas War sense of Argentine identity or the questioning thereof. As unresolved as justice for *los desaparecidos* throughout much of the post-dictatorship, the situation of Malvinas continues to frequent stages in Argentina because every stratum of society– from the generation

forward with normalized life. Cathy Caruth provides the foundational framework used to make sense of this term. See the introduction for further theorization of this term.

¹¹⁷ See the introduction to her work, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*.

¹¹⁸ A group called Veteranos de Malvinas No Reconocidos continues to fight for these rights and has held a permanent protest space in the Plaza de Mayo in central Buenos Aires directly in front of the government house, La Casa Rosada, since 2008.

that fought in 1982, to the political leaders of the nation, and even the youth of today's Argentina— view Malvinas as an active and unsettled matter nationally.¹¹⁹

The two theatre pieces treated here do not seek political restitution for the past wrongs committed, but rather, the works examined, *Islas de la memoria* (2011) by Julio Cardoso and *Continente viril* (2000) by Alejandro Acobino, show through a persistent humor which pokes fun, ridicules, and exposes irrationality of accepted truths, that nation no longer remains the same in meaning or composition as it was during the initial process of nation building in the 19th century. They also expose through especially farcical humor the ills of the 'Malvinas Matter' without prescribing solutions: that is left up to audiences to determine.¹²⁰ I have chosen to treat the more recent work first because the 2011 piece *Islas* historically tells the tale of the meaning of Malvinas from the colonial period to the present day, while *Continente* from 2000 looks to a hypothetical future. We see through the troubling and questioning humor in these theatre pieces that the Argentine nation, and a sense of being Argentine in the contemporary era is unresolved, and moreover, it is open to new influences and interpretations. The two plays suggest that the lack of resolution and lingering quality of Malvinas is a part of this nation.¹²¹ An unresolved

¹¹⁹ I will refer to "Malvinas" or "the Malvinas Matter" generally to encompass the entire unresolved knot which encircles the territory, from the war in 1982 itself, to the lingering status of the islands, and the long pre-history dating from the sovereignty issues between Argentina and England since 1833.

¹²⁰ This is my translation of Vicente Palermo's phrases "la cuestión de Malvinas" or "la causa Malvinas" that he uses to describe the complex knot in understanding around which Argentine identity is caught up and snagged, not just in relation to the 1982 war, but the entire history of the nation's relationship to this geographic space from the colonial period until the present day.

¹²¹ The idea that Argentine national identity, while difficult to define with positive statements, might in fact be definable by its clearly unresolved and unfinished state is implied by many critics and theorists, though perhaps not blatantly stated. Federico Lorenz repeats a well known dictum in *Malvinas: Una guerra argentina*, that the Malvinas cause, "se inscribía en un relato histórico en el que para ser completa, entre otras cosas, la grandeza nacional requería de la recuperación de ese territorio" (21-22). All of Vicente Palermo's 2006 book *Sal en las heridas* documents this troublesome idea of contemporary nationalism, the uncertainty about what in fact national identity of Argentina entails in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, and the manner in which what he deems "la causa Malvinas" fits or does not fit into this sense of national identity. Without concluding definitively what Argentina's identity is, Palermo seems to conclude that the concept of Malvinas certainly bothers and festers within the concept of "identidad", leaving this wound perpetually open and unresolved for the nation. In an interview with Mario

aspect of Argentine identity is exposed through humor which unsettles more than resolves the meaning of Malvinas in Argentina today.

The first piece, *Islas de la memoria*, takes a historic and pedagogical approach, is specifically written with instructional purposes and is directed towards an audience of Argentine school children, thereby adjusting the tone of humor and objective for telling this story for the intended audience. I analyze a specific performance of this work during which the piece was performed for Argentine school students within the walls of the former detention center, the Ex-ESMA in June 2013. During this performance, multiple layers of the Malvinas matter (historical and contemporary, subjective and objective information, etc.) are depicted in close succession, even overlapping. These coexisting layers are constantly in conversation and allow for a multifaceted narrative to be formed onstage and to be received by audience members. Therefore, aided by these layers, while pedagogical in nature, the piece resists being one-sided or dogmatic. The second work, *Continente viril*, looks chronologically in the extreme opposite direction, experimenting with a fictitious and futuristic, post-Malvinas time and characters located in Antarctica, nodding to the declining dictatorship and la Guerra de Malvinas. This piece recycles the Argentine grotesque, and uses caricature to reveal absurdities that linger around the Malvinas mental block and concurrently, the failed military dictatorship. One famous production of *Continente viril* by the well-known Argentine theatre group Los Macocos which took place in 2003 will be referenced in particular to reveal and analyze staging techniques and to focus on the unique brand of humor created by this troupe.

Wainfeld of *Página 12*, Palermo explains that, “La causa Malvinas y la propuesta identitaria del nacionalismo argentino son un conjunto de heridas: guerra, frustración, despojo, incompletitud del territorio.”, attesting to the incomplete geographical as well as ideological foundation of the contemporary sense of the Argentine nation, largely connected to Malvinas. (<http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/dialogos/21-82329-2007-03-26.html>)

By highlighting two different theatrical representations of the Malvinas moment of crisis, I establish the wide perimeters for the vast body of theatre works that treat the Malvinas as a crisis but with humor. Both pieces explore the possibilities for humor to reveal other truths and perspectives by unsettling and disturbing the master narrative, while actively relating with the audience, asking us to be involved in the continued processing and pondering of the Malvinas matter. As Simon Critchley reminds us, “laughter lets us see the folly of the world in order to imagine a better world in its place, and to change the situation in which we find ourselves” (17). *Islas de la memoria* suggests the repetition and cyclical nature of defeat and failure which in turn informs the idea of the Argentine nation, a cycle that inevitably bolsters the evolution of Argentine nationalism, and in turn *Continente viril* poses an alternate version of history, left open-ended and therefore purposefully curious. In this section, I conclude that humor is effective in creating and engaging with active audiences, through corporal and emotional participation in the piece, and through a lingering post-performance psychological connection. As each piece highlights anew the moment in 1982-1983 which enduringly tied Malvinas and the dictatorship together, (in historical time period and in the Argentine consciousness) they also reinforce the *lingering* of this crisis, which urges us to rethink *Argentinidad* in the contemporary era in which geographic boundaries, sovereignty, and patriotism can no longer mean what they once did in years prior to the Guerra de Malvinas.

Unraveling Palimpsests of National Trauma through Humor: El ECuNH*i*, and *Islas de la Memoria* in the Ex-ESMA.

In the first part of this chapter I explore some of the outcomes of fostering a fertile ground for humor in a trauma-burdened setting and space. In this instance, a secondary level of analysis asks how the nesting effect produced by a play staged within a specific trauma-laden physical setting can unravel the very serious work of humor. In 2013 Julio Cardoso’s play *Islas*

de la memoria, historias de Guerra en la posguerra was performed within one of the buildings of the Ex-ESMA, a former Navy Officers School, and an infamous former torture and detention center. This place represents for many Argentines a remnant of violence and trauma suffered during the last military dictatorship. Here I look at how nesting a traumatic story in a trauma-laden space, as part of a school experience, within a former naval school, allows spectators to read many overlapping and conjoining histories at once. Moreover, I suggest that humor when analyzed in conjunction with such a nuanced and multi-leveled moment opens up new channels to emotional readings when in other settings, topics may seem too charged, difficult, or untouchable.

Fostering playful inquiry surrounding difficult topics inside the Ex-ESMA already has a lineage and the production of this piece in this place fits into this new, ludic, creative, pedagogical approach. Since 2007, the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo have been working on the creation of The *Espacio Cultural Nuestros Hijos*, or, ECuNH*i*— a constantly evolving educational and creative space that invites school children from all around Argentina to come experience and participate in a part of their collective history. While the school group activities vary from serious themes to the production of music, art, and theatre, all of these interactive experiences are embedded within the context of the Ex-ESMA. The Escuela de Mécanica de la Armada detention center alone is a place where more than 5,000 Argentines are thought to have disappeared between 1976 and 1983.¹²² Beyond fomenting merely artistic creativity in Argentine youth, all activities carried out in the ECuNH*i* purposefully share a productive quality that focuses on reinserting life into a space that had previously erased and negated so many lives. Some activities search out new ways of telling the history of what came to pass during the

¹²² See for example, the following work for further statistics on the disappearances within the ESMA alone: Méndez, Juan E. *Truth and Partial Justice in Argentina: An Update*. Human Rights Watch, 1991, p. 34.

dictatorship: puppet shows focus on topics like identity and resistance, music workshops encourage individual expression and also working together, and clowns lead children through the space conversing with them by way of allegorical story-telling mixed with typical clowning techniques. The decision to distance the ECUÑHi activities from the direct violence and trauma is necessary in large part because the audience for the workshops and tours is Argentine school children. The Madres' mission is to bring about understanding, and pass on a collective Argentine memory of this marked period of time to the youngest generation. As the madres describe the ECUÑHi on their webpage, the space is, "un lugar para que una comunidad reavive su capacidad identitaria. Para que una comunidad se repiense desde su quehacer, desde su querer, desde su soñar, haciendo que interactúen pasado, presente y futuro en una constante búsqueda creativa."¹²³ It is a lofty goal to try to combat death and pain with life and joy, and many community members and organizations are doubtful of the methods employed.¹²⁴ Taking into consideration this site's development, I suggest that there is no single route to individual or collective recovery from trauma. While other organizations may choose a more somber, commemorative, museum-style route to remembering, conversely, for the ECUÑHi, "Las puertas están abiertas y en su interior ya hay gente trabajando con alegría", proclaim the Madres.¹²⁵

¹²³ <http://nuestroshijos.org.ar/presentacion-institucional/>

¹²⁴ For example, there have been other 'scandals' in the ex-ESMA space wherein parties were given inside the compound and various organizations publically debated the ethics of such 'celebration' in a place of such somber history. See the following *Clarín* article "Alak hizo un festejo en la ESMA y piden su renuncia" from January 2013 for example: https://www.clarin.com/politica/alak-festejo-esma-piden-renuncia_0_B1zxXVnsvme.html

¹²⁵ Other critics have examined former sites of torture and detention as performance spaces, both with the capacity to perform the memory of those atrocities, but also as potential theatre spaces that lend a unique backdrop to plays in a more classic theatrical tradition. See for example, Diana Taylor's chapter, "Trauma as Durational Performance", Paola Hernández's chapter "The ESMA: From Torture Chambers into New Sites of Memory", Hernández's article, "Remapping Memory Discourses: Villa + Discurso by Guillermo Calderón" or Jens Andermann's two articles, "Placing Latin American memory: Sites and the politics of mourning", or "Returning to the Site of Horror: On the Reclaiming of Clandestine Concentration Camps in Argentina".

To dissect the importance of this very intimate and affective engagement with *Islas*, I describe here my personal experience as that of the audience member. Joining the ECuNH on a morning tour in June 2013, I accompanied a high school group from the suburbs of Buenos Aires. The student groups come nearly every day, meaning that thousands of young Argentines have been experiencing the cultural space of remembrance and transference of collective memory that the Madres organize. Each day is different. The day began with a discussion on what it means to have an identity or to lose one as we gathered outside along one of the avenues in the Ex-ESMA compound. While dialoguing, we appreciated the conflicting natural beauty of the tree-lined paths and the horrific immensity of these buildings that like lingering ghosts, remind us of what happened inside them from 1976-1983. The conversations that developed were interactive and communicative as the teens were encouraged to speak, react, and think openly. Later, students walked through, and were literally surrounded by the faces of the disappeared in the 'Hall of Revolutionary Faces' where hundreds of photos of young disappeared people from the 1970s and 80s hang, suspended in time and memory. The concepts of individual and national identity were therefore a context for the culminating activity in which students took part. Their active participation had already been established as a mode of learning and engaging with the experience in the Ex-ESMA which continued during the presentation of *Islas*.

However, in contrast to the initial serious and contemplative conversations, from the very onset of the theatre performance of *Islas de la memoria*, the emotional atmosphere, co-created by the audience members and actors, shifts from serious to light-hearted and comical. A playful, jovial environment greets the crowd of students as they are led into a central hall in the former *Liceo Naval*, or school for naval officials. As the play unfolds, satire, caricature, and farce abound and begin to connect the audience with the performance through this humor-enhanced

climate. The existence of laughter may seem odd or out of place inside a former detention and torture center, a place that represents an unofficial cenotaph. I focus on the importance of the concept of the palimpsest in the layers that surround this performance, layers which permit complex reflection through humor as an approach to the treatment of traumatic memories.

Regardless of how we experience the Ex-ESMA and how it is preserved, inevitably it is the presence of human bodies inside its confines, historically and today, that defines, complicates, and makes worthy of our attention this space. It is oddly fitting, or perhaps just ironic, that this place which was once home to a school that trained thousands of military personnel from 1928-1998, is now again a school. The physical and geographical space of the Ex-ESMA is obviously charged with significance, past and present, which influences how the activities in the ECUÑHi are experienced. While the historical significance of what occurred here cannot ever be erased, in the contemporary era, Argentine human rights organizations continue to curate the space, establishing how the present will interact with the past. Local and international scholars, journalists, politicians, human rights organizations, and a myriad of other thinkers have weighed in on the topic of the recuperation and reworking of the space of the ESMA. Modern-day decisions have been shaping the space since its official recuperation from the Argentine Navy in 2007 and the space continues to evolve. Argentines must decide whether to maintain the space untouched, or to curate it in museum-fashion, or to allow for tangential human rights activities of all sorts to permeate the space, to limit entrance and participation to certain groups or not. The unique collective ownership and collaboration provides an excellent opportunity for the whole of society to take part in reclaiming memory here, but also offers plenty of difficulties in coming to consensus and clashing over differing ideologies on memory preservation (Memories of whom? Which stories take precedence?). No matter how difficult this

space is to grapple with and how it continues to trouble the present, as Jens Andermann concludes, “the difficulty to agree on...an adequate form of display, museal or otherwise, indicates...that we are not at all at bay from an ‘atrociousness’ safely confined to the opposite end of the museal viewing relation” (93). That is to say, the past is not past. Ongoing troubles to ‘finish’ preserving the ESMA, to conclude memory work there, or to agree upon what to do with the space are merely further testimony that trauma is unending and boundless, as uncomfortable and contentious as it is. Debate surrounding the ESMA is a supplication to actively engage with the space, especially the youngest generations, and an opportunity to further develop our understanding of it in the present day. Active engagement sought by the contentious site calls us to come to the Ex-ESMA, to continue experiencing it in a live, personal, embodied way.¹²⁶

Palimpsests of Memory

In order to approach an understanding of how the play *Islas* is framed, we must be conscious of all of these layers of history, social, and cultural significance simultaneously. This nesting effect that places a theatre work about the *Guerra de las Malvinas* inside of the ECuNH space, within the new Museum of Memory and Human Rights, yet again inside the walls of the EX- ESMA presents a palimpsest of meanings that accompany taking over, reclaiming, and re-defining spaces— both physical spaces and those within collective memory. A typical definition of palimpsest reads, “a parchment or other writing surface on which the original text has been effaced or partially erased, and then overwritten by another”.¹²⁷ Andreas Huyssen suggests a new

¹²⁶ For further reading on the recuperation of the Ex-ESMA space and the efforts to curate and preserve it by different governmental and human rights groups, see: Marcelo Brodsky’s book *Memoria en construcción: el debate sobre la ESMA*, Paola Hernández’s chapter, “The ESMA: from Torture Chambers into New Sites of Memory”, Emily Parson’s “The Space of Remembering: Collective Memory and the Reconfiguration of Contested Space in Argentina’s ESMA”, or Jens Andermann’s “Returning to the Site of Horror: On the Reclaiming of Clandestine Concentration Camps in Argentina”

¹²⁷ *Oxford English Dictionary*

consideration of palimpsests in physical spaces, affirming that, “literary techniques of reading historically, intertextually, constructively, and deconstructively at the same time can be woven into our understanding of urban spaces as lived spaces that shape collective imaginaries” (7). Daniel Cooper Alarcón culturally reexamines the term and specifies that “the palimpsest’s structure of interlocking, competing narratives has the advantage of preventing the dominant voice from completely silencing the others”.¹²⁸ Each new re-writing of this space then does not entirely un-do itself of the previous identity and we maintain a constant, even if subtle awareness of all histories simultaneously. School and detention center co-existed during the late seventies and early eighties, and now a new life for the compound does not allow for the forgetting of those previous spaces’ histories, but rather carries them with it and works to establish a more collective ownership of a space instead of permitting the former hierarchies of power to persist. Palimpsests, like humor, resist and reverse hierarchies.

For *Islas de la memoria*, La Guerra de Malvinas, is both the historical context of the play performed in the Ex-ESMA on this day and is also one of the many layers that together form a historical palimpsest in this physical space. The Malvinas War is a strong referent for the social injustices and abuses of power that resulted in violence against individuals and the disintegration of a unified national identity. Similarly to how the *madres*, *abuelas*, *hijos*, and other family members have fought for nearly forty years to restore the stories, lives, and physical bodies of their disappeared family members, the family and survivors of the Argentine soldiers sent to Malvinas also have struggled to regain the remains of their fallen soldiers, and have also fought for their dignity and right to be remembered.

¹²⁸ *The Aztec Palimpsest: Mexico in the Modern Imagination*, p. 7.

Just as the war to reclaim the Islas Malvinas was embedded within the context of the dictatorship, likewise, the play *Islas de la memoria* is performed on this day within the context of the space of the Ex-ESMA. As then-president Cristina Kirchner declared in her inauguration of the new Museo de las Malvinas in June 2014, situated also, interestingly, within the Ex-ESMA, “la historia argentina es una sola y no se puede fragmentar ni separar.”¹²⁹ The political and ‘official’ narrative being constructed and scaffolded by the era of Kirchnerismo (2003-2015) is quite conspicuously connecting both the Malvinas and the Dictatorship era national traumas for the Argentine public. Both through choosing the ex-ESMA compound as a construction site for the new Malvinas Museum, and through her performance of inauguration that blatantly links the two, the inseparable and interwoven narratives of these two crisis moments of the late 20th century become powerfully connected symbols in the national eye.¹³⁰

While initially researched for a documentary film, the play manipulates and drastically alters the tone of that more objective material for the new audience. *Islas de la Memoria: historias de guerra en la posguerra* by Julio Cardoso, is the end result of archival research undertaken by the Observatorio Malvinas de la Universidad Nacional de Lanus originally done for documentary film, *Locos de la bandera*. After gathering research, testimony, letters from and to soldiers, photos, other documents, and conducting interviews with families of fallen soldiers, *Islas de la memoria* was born in 2011 with a goal of connecting the youngest of Argentines to a key moment of their recent history. The Teatro Nacional Cervantes was commissioned to

¹²⁹ See *La Nación* article from June 2014, “Tenemos la razón y la voluntad histórica y otras frases de Cristina Kirchner sobre Malvinas.” <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1700152-tenemos-la-razon-y-la-voluntad-historica-y-otras-frases-de-cristina-kirchner-sobre-malvinas>

¹³⁰ For further information on this new museum space, see the government website here: <http://www.cultura.gob.ar/museos/museo-malvinas-e-islas-del-atlantico-sur/>, or for the text of Presidenta Kirchner’s inauguration of the space, <http://www.cfkargentina.com/cfk-inauguro-el-museo-de-malvinas-argentinas-en-el-espacio-de-la-memoria-ex-esma/>

produce this piece in conjunction with the Observatorio Malvinas de la Universidad Nacional de Lanús as an educational work that teaches while entertaining. Though the documentary follows a more solemn tone, the play bursts to life, shattering silence with laughter. By infusing humor into a serious matter, this piece finds a captivating, and lively way to teach about the Guerra de las Malvinas: drawing the audience close emotionally.

The performance ebbs and flows between the narration of the suffering of individual soldiers deployed there and historical information which is delivered in an engaging, exaggerated fashion. Presented by a group of six performers who continually interact with their audience, sharing and passing around real photos, and letters, the actors dip into strategies common to documentary theatre and also those of popular corral theatre, clowning, and puppeteering. Not meant to rely on primary actors, the piece is truly a shared effort, a true *corral de comedias* inspired work.¹³¹ I believe this collective creation by the actors establishes a model for collective resolution and engagement as a community with the dilemmas presented.¹³²

Masterful storytellers, each one of the six leans in close to smaller segments of the audience throughout, addressing them directly with Artaudian technique, telling stories in a personal tone, conversing with a few audience members at a time, and passing from hand to hand (and from actors' hands to audience hands) real letters and photographs from Malvinas soldiers. As the play is about to begin, each actor introduces one of the fallen Malvinas soldiers individually whose photo they wear hanging around their neck on a string as they take groups of 10 or so audience members and lead their small group to their seats. We walk through the aisles

¹³¹ The *corral de comedias* was open-air Golden Age Spanish theatre, presented in the spaces between buildings for public audiences. Audiences gathered around the space instead of sitting formally facing a stage as in more traditional modern theatre.

¹³² A *corral* creation, in the style of 'teatro del pueblo' prepares us to feel a togetherness akin to Jill Dolan's ideas of the creation of temporary audience community, or of Victor Turner's concept of *communitas*.

and chairs arranged around a central performing space, hearing as we walk, for example, “Este es Andrés. Y este es Nacho. Los dos tenían 19 años. Combatieron en la Guerra de Malvinas. Te vamos a contar la historia de ellos y de otros como ellos. No te pierdas. Seguime.” We are carefully shown their photo, which is passed around from audience member to audience member. The first of many moments in which the bodies of the audience members are required to actively *receive* from the presentation, we are required to take a step *towards* the performance as it asks something of us. This initial guiding ritual repurposes New Theatre techniques of the 1960s such as those employed by Richard Schechner in his Environmental Theatre which sought to dissolve space between the actors and audience.¹³³ This entire pre-play scenario breaks with the impersonal, distanced way in which we would usually seat ourselves in the auditorium, while also blending pre-performance and performance time, merging audience and performance space.

Teatro Popular: Corral Theatre Techniques

Drawing further on *corral* traditions and imitating the sensation of storytelling rituals, *Islas* does not follow one singular linear plot line, but rather is fragmented, jumping between story lines, and characters, and re-tellings of the distant past and more recent past from varying perspectives, repeating phrases, key words, and songs at times, constantly emphasizing a cyclical characteristic. The piece is primarily formed of 18 short snapshot segments, or mini-scenes. The six actors do not portray a single character each, but instead continuously rotate and change roles for each scene. They are indicated by numbers in the script, from 1-6. One actor for example portrays Margaret Thatcher, an English pirate in the 19th century, and a 19-year old Argentine

¹³³ See his 1973 book *Environment Theatre* for further information. We might also be reminded of the Argentine theatre work *Información para extranjeros* by Griselda Gambaro which utilized actor guides to accompany spectators throughout their viewing of the play.

soldier fighting in Malvinas in 1982. She easily makes these character changes through donning simple masks, a hat, or picking up a lone prop alongside using corporal and gestural changes.

Through *corral* techniques we are drawn close to not only the piece and characters, but the actors themselves are humanized, relatable, and openly reveal their identity as *actors* instead of hiding this identity ‘behind the scenes’. While all actors portray some variety of characters throughout the 18 mini-scenes, they additionally all play the role of ‘an actor’, or ‘guide’ that does not attempt to hide their face or distort their voice.¹³⁴ Wearing street clothing, they are the story-teller guides that address small portions of the audience, isolating segments of the audience in a more personalized way. As an audience member, you are directly addressed; an actor looks into your eyes, and passes you a real letter from a Malvinas soldier. These photocopies of real letters from the archives are taken home by audience members. Beyond breaking a fourth wall, there simply are no walls separating theatre space from audience. These tactics are reminiscent of the popular theatre practices used by Augusto Boal and expounded upon in his *Theatre of the Oppressed*, in which non-professional theatre practitioners become able to relate with the presented piece, and theatre evolves from play. Through these strategies, the audience is encouraged to become active “spect-actors”.¹³⁵

Due to the fragmented nature of the piece, it is hard to summarize the plot. This format that leans on traditional storytelling techniques and oral traditions creates a sense of authenticity and spontaneity as if being told for the first time. The imitated authenticity, spontaneity, and fragmentation of the storytelling heightens our engagement and requires an active audience, able

¹³⁴ The guide/actors role is similar to that of the chorus in ancient Greek theatre, in which the chorus member acted as narrator, story teller, but might also occupy a role as actor. This allowed for multiple perspectives to be present and a more nuanced telling of a tale.

¹³⁵ Augusto Boal described spect-actors as, “the public as participants in the action without their knowing it. They are the ‘spect-actors’, the active spectators, of a piece of theatre” (p. xxiii, *Games for Actors and Non-actors*).

to connect the scenes ourselves, maintaining separate the many different players and historical moments all being woven for us in rapid succession. According to Cardoso this broken, disjointed telling of the ‘story’ of Malvinas is a purposeful aesthetic choice. He declares, “Si uno quiere mostrar en un espectáculo esa complejidad [de la historia de Malvinas y su contexto], tiene que tener en cuenta la confusión y la incomodidad de no poder comprenderlo todo de una vez.” implying that one viewing may not be enough to capture the nuances, multiple perspectives, and multiple stories intertwined here ¹³⁶ The Matter of Malvinas is itself precisely this: multifaceted, layered, broken, cyclical, unending. It brings together many players, involves many countries, and spans many decades. These techniques of popular theatre and storytelling all inspire interaction with the audience affectively, and most often the affective communication works through inspiring or leaving space for humor.

The performance staging is influenced by the Spanish *teatro de corral* in which spaces such as courtyards or alleys were turned into impromptu stages as the audience gathered around on all sides.¹³⁷ Every performance of *Islas* takes place in a new non-traditional theatre space— a school auditorium, an open air patio, or here, in a hall of the Ex-ESMA. With the audience wrapped around all sides of a long central performance space (not elevated, but at the same level as the actors) no spectator is allowed to remain distant and passive; we cannot escape direct eye contact nor avoid attentive listening and responsiveness when confronted with the performers. Vivian Martínez Tabares explains the staging by observing that, “[la obra] se ha confrontado con los espectadores en más de dos centenares de funciones en espacios alternativos—

¹³⁶ Interview with Cabrera, Hilda. “Los argentinos tenemos héroes, pero los gambeteamos”. <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/espectaculos/10-25269-2012-05-20.html>

¹³⁷ In the more contemporary era we might think of Julian Beck’s Living Theatre which made use of non-traditional venues to subconsciously transform hierarchies of power and create more cooperative, communal productions.

conscientemente los prefieren a las salas tradicionales—, plazas y escuelas.”¹³⁸ This closeness between audience and staged piece fosters affective dialogue between on and off stage, spaces that nearly blend seamlessly together. As a connection takes shape between the audience and the stage, the affective bridges built in this space especially through deploying humor, are not openings for complacency but rather invite curiosity and extension of these personal stories beyond the realm of the theatre space and time.

This popular-style inspired piece not only addresses people from all stratum of society, and it also actively seeks them out. Just like older forms of popular and community theatre, *Islas* is also intended to reach beyond the typical theatre-literate Buenos Aires crowd. To achieve this, the piece itself is designed to be transient and mobile allowing more often than not for the work of theatre to come to the audience instead of the reverse. A new audience is born, a new generation is addressed, and theatre practices reach outside of the capital of Buenos Aires into the suburbs, exposing children to theatre that might have no previous familiarity with the performative art form.¹³⁹ New witnesses, that is to say, involved spectators, are created not only for the theatre moment, but for greater society through exposure to and connection with pieces such as this.

¹³⁸ Play review, “*Islas de la memoria: Historia y política a la luz del verdadero teatro*”, <http://archivo.cubarte.cult.cu/periodico/criticas/islas-de-la-memoria-historia-y-politica-a-la-luz-del-verdadero-teatro/15043.html>

¹³⁹ This piece was also presented 14 times in five other Latin American countries on a tour in 2013, exposing an even more varied and broader public in Latin America and allowing for the messages to begin to become universalized and also understood in their larger context and political fabric which would include other neocolonial power struggles and forms of oppression that come from ‘outside’ to impact Latin American communities.

Documentary Theatre's Influences

When bringing this history to stage, the performers are aided by documents. The documents help to foment transparency, authenticity, and garner closeness and relatability emotionally. Cardoso explains that,

“los documentos han sido puntos de partida para la organización de un discurso escénico que se reconoce en las tradiciones del teatro popular rioplatense, en el que el actor entra y sale de la ficción sin transiciones, pasa del drama al humor vertiginosamente y se relaciona directa y francamente con el espectador, sin ocultar ni los trucos escénicos ni sus opiniones sobre la historia que se está contando en escena”.¹⁴⁰

Bare, unaccompanied documents rarely evoke humor (for example in a museum setting).

However, in contemporary ‘theatre of the real’, emotions are often imbued into documents accompanied by bodies on stage, as “documentary theatre takes the archive and turns it into repertory.”¹⁴¹ In the contemporary trend of documentary theatre, contrast is built and exposed between fiction and truth, playfulness and sobriety. This more nuanced tone that is being explored in the realm of ‘the real’ is produced from the raw materials of evidence, documents, archives, and all that is ‘real’, and is then put into action by human bodies and voices, creating critical spaces to question the very essence of what is knowable about ‘realness’.¹⁴² This move which places emotions in dialogue with ‘hard evidence’ may lead us to the productive end of considering the possibility of legitimizing what I deem ‘emotional knowledge’ or ‘emotional truth’. What lies outside the archive, such as, “glances, gestures, body language, the felt experience of space, and the proximity of bodies”, is reinserted into the narrative by

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Martin, Carol. “Bodies of Evidence”, *The Drama Review*, Vol. 50, No. 3, Fall 2006, p. 10.

¹⁴² Both Carol Martin and Paola Hernández have noticed this tendency of new documentary theatre by which, “espacios críticos desvanecen y desestabilizan el sentido de lo real hasta muchas veces llegar a la parodia.”, signaling the playfulness and humor that we may experience in today’s theatre of the real. Hernández, Paola. “Biografías escénicas: *Mi vida después de Lola Arias*”. *Latin American Theatre Review*. Fall 2011, pp. 115-128.

embodiments, and as printed photographs on glossy paper or letters handwritten on pieces of paper are animated by the human body and voice as actors pass these out, all while in the presence of others (the audience).¹⁴³

In *Islas*, documents serve to legitimize and exemplify a kind of truth, realness, and the history of Malvinas which does not have an official place in the history of this moment. Incorporated documents do not participate directly in the farcical and playful tones of the fiction on stage; however they do connect with the affective story being woven for the audience and highlight while giving legitimacy to this often elided part of the history of Malvinas. A playful and merry tone persists throughout the work, but *Islas* does not want us to forget that this story is founded in the emotional truth of a group of individuals which cannot be present and therefore our gathered bodies together honor their stories through affective and embodied practices in the theatre, joining archival and embodied emotional knowledge in the performance moment.

Affective bridging between stage and spectators engages us emotionally, priming the cracks between our separate human bodies for the humorous moments that are to come. The challenge this play undertakes is precisely this: bringing what seems like a distant moment of history close to the youngsters of today. In another moment of corporal transfer of affect, the actor/guides, “Leen cartas escritas por los soldados durante la Guerra de Malvinas y esos testimonios hasta son entregados para que uno pueda llevárselos a su casa.”¹⁴⁴ The action of handing off the letters, passing the material from their hands and bodies to those of the school children transfers a signaling of importance of the contents of these letters, as affect is transferred

¹⁴³ Martin, Carol, Ed. *Dramaturgy of the Real on the World Stage*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 19.

¹⁴⁴ From the review in Lanacion.com, “*Islas de la memoria*: De una investigación a un trabajo creativo y muy riguroso” by Carlos Pacheco, 6 de junio, 2012.

too. Affects stick and move, modifying the bodies they come in contact with, as Sara Ahmed explains in her work *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. The body and affect are intrinsically connected, and in this moment in which bodies pass letters between them, our affects are adapted and therefore our emotional knowledge of the Guerra de Malvinas evolves complexity. Cardoso explains this tactic, stating, “Las fronteras desaparecen cuando leemos las cartas de los soldados mirando a los ojos del espectador”.¹⁴⁵ While artefacts by themselves, unaccompanied by the human body, can be static, immobilizing, and still, even when they hold key information about the past, here the objects are recovered and reinserted into the narrative.

Farce, the Ridiculous, and Playfulness

Humor surges upon the scene primarily through the language of farce. Historically farce has often been seen as a ‘light genre’, or a mode of humor that merely creates a vacant laugh, allowing for a temporary escape from reality instead of confrontation. However, the humor does not seem one-dimensional nor flat in this piece. Priscilla Meleléndez has helped to reinsert this genre into the cannon in Latin American theatre.¹⁴⁶ In *Islas* in particular, as Meléndez says, farce forges, “connection[s] with the audience through humor, physical movement, and its emphasis on popular culture” and “the serious and the comic [are] playfully juxtaposed and transgressed” (21-23), reminiscent of the grotesco criollo’s modus operandi, another Argentine humorous mode.

Ultimately, farce is able to unmask social ills, albeit an enjoyable one to take in. Moreover, what is painful or unpleasant is never a danger to the audience in true farce, therefore audience connection is maintained. The “safe” humor of farce is able to teach and engage the

¹⁴⁵ Cabrera, Hilda. “Hay que apostar a una cultura que nos une” *Página 12*, Dec. 5, 2013. <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/espectaculos/10-30739-2013-12-05.html>

¹⁴⁶ See her work, *The Politics of Farce in Contemporary Spanish American Theatre*.

audience instead of shocking with overly black humor or purely traumatic and somber imagery. This avoidance of shock is especially important considering the youthful audience.

Complicating the mere relay of historical information, farce simultaneously presents history while suggesting it cannot be taken at face value. Farce, as Meléndez has pointed out, constantly resists categorization, especially in the Latin American context. The group manages to convey some profound ideas to their audience (for example that war is a political and strategic ‘game’ to some, while on the other hand, it seriously affects the lives of others) about the knot in national ideology that is Malvinas while resisting the genre limitations, and resisting a one-dimensional telling of a nuanced history which requires the layers provided by farce. Farce teaches students to question the official narrative present in text books and to see that different versions of history are possible, and that they *should* question ‘facts’ and historical ‘truths’.

Taking in the humor, the school group audience reacts with continual bursts of laughter that hold their attention on the stage. The ridiculous abounds in farce: Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Regan speak in short exclamations in English (which is audibly salient in the Spanish language play) and in highly exaggerated terms. Both Regan and Thatcher are represented farcically by actors who don half-masks, allowing their mouths to remain expressive and creating a curious caricaturesque look. Pirates (a representation of the English) appear in hooded masks several times as the story takes the audience back to the initial English occupation of the islands in 1833. Puppets or small models are used as Thatcher and Reagan appear to ‘play war’ with their ‘toys’ against the Argentines. Thatcher simply thrusts a finger out, pointing at a tiny Belgrano Navy Cruiser and exclaims “SINK THE BELGRANO NOW!”, and the toy ship is thrown from stage, destroyed. The dynamic of play further connects with the young audience.

Heightening the lightened tone, the interspersed *cumbia* music, a light-hearted music associated with a festive environment, provides the necessary ambient support to foster merriment and soften moments to allow humor to develop. *Cumbia criolla* used in the play is specific to Argentina and the musical piece used was written to accompany this play in particular. Cardoso consciously incorporates the sonorous accompaniment into his piece, explaining, “La nuestra es una cumbia al estilo santafesino. La cumbia es popular en las provincias y en el conurbano, inseparable del fin de semana...Es la alegría y la bacanal colectiva. Aspiramos con esta obra a encontrarnos con los espectadores.”¹⁴⁷ This music also brings out the popular connection that this theatre piece champions and which it uses to connect with less traditional theatre audiences all around the country. We see yet again, another tactic that this piece deploys to foster a connection with the audience using a musical ‘language’ known to be popular and an exaggeratedly festive tone, an ideal and comfortable environment to then bring about humor, even when in conjunction with a dark and difficult to deal with past.

To explain why all of these moments create laughter, even in the surrounding context of a devastating defeat and an embarrassing blow to Argentine identity and the dictatorship, we can again access the theory described by Peter McGraw, who describes humor as an emotional response springing from situations that violate expectations while remaining safe, or benign.¹⁴⁸

In many ways, *Islas* has managed to make a horrific memory safe to interact with through the

¹⁴⁷ Cabrera, Hilda. “Los argentinos tenemos héroes, pero los gambeteamos”
<https://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/espectaculos/10-25269-2012-05-20.html>

¹⁴⁸ According to McGraw, humor starts with a violation. A violation breaks with our natural assumptions about the world. Violations range from physical threats or threats to social norms, to cultural norms, or even linguistic norms. Normally mere violations produce negative emotional responses. However, humans may laugh when faced with violations if they are deemed benign. McGraw explores this experience of a mixture of positive and negative emotions in his Benign Violation Theory. Frequently, for a violation to be perceived as benign, some distance must be created between the perceiver and the violation. See *The Humor Code: A Global Search for What Makes Things Funny* by Peter McGraw and Joel Warner, 2014, for further reading.

emotional distancing of humor. The three decades that have passed help to approach this theme in a humorous light, and additionally the art of theatre removes the immediate threat of the antagonists. Additionally, Cardoso supplies a hefty dose of the incongruous in each humorous situation (by having the British Prime Minister make ridiculously crude statements, or by the introduction of *cumbia* music in a play about a war, for example). The perfect combination of the benign (temporally, physically, etc.) along with the unanticipated breeds humor.

Communicating about dark and difficult to access topics by way of humor is successful in this piece. This approach of mingling humor with violence and darkness has long formed a part of the Argentine theatre genre, the *grotesco criollo*, and is therefore a comfortable and known mode of expression in *porteño* theatre. Cardoso seems to suggest that the treatment of such horror with humor might allow for even more complex, less binary reflection than pain does. Similarly, another Argentine director, Claudia Marrochi has also directed a humorous piece on the Guerra de Malvinas (*¡Hundan el Belgrano!*) and explains the logic behind this risible tone, saying, “La farsa es el lugar más interesante para trabajar Malvinas. Es muy doloroso hablar de la guerra desde un lugar realista; yo necesitaba exponer algo de lo falso que me permite el teatro y generar así cierto distanciamiento.”¹⁴⁹ Easier to deal with, process, and examine tangentially for some, or perhaps exceeding naturalistic portrayals’ ability to conceive of such a complex and nuanced history, emotional approaches that include expressionistic techniques, play, dreamlike imagery, and other mediated presentations allow us to deal with seemingly untouchable topics.

Most importantly, I suggest that humor may be the mode of communication about tragedy that most suits the newest generation, such as the young school children gathered in the

¹⁴⁹ Soto, Ivanna. “Retóricas sobre Malvinas: parodias, realismo e ideología”
http://www.revistaenie.clarin.com/escenarios/teatro/Guerra-Malvinas-Teatro_0_718728356.html

ESMA trying to comprehend a dark, distant-feeling history.¹⁵⁰ The audiences that interact with *Islas* have more in common with the story than one might think at first glance. Many soldiers sent to fight in the Malvinas war were young teenagers, drafted and yet-novice soldiers. Cardoso notes in an interview that,

“era muy difícil para el equipo de actores y directores que lo llevaba adelante no tener presente que los jóvenes destinatarios de este trabajo iban a tener apenas unos pocos años de diferencia con los soldados que pelearon en las Islas. La mayoría de los caídos argentinos durante la Guerra de Malvinas tenía entre 18 y 25 años.”¹⁵¹

Additionally, school children in 1982 were involved in the Malvinas cause in the letter-writing campaign to the soldiers on the island to raise their spirits.¹⁵² Today’s children directly receive the words of Argentine youth of the 1980s through the incorporated letters. While high schoolers may identify more with the young teenage soldiers, middle school audiences may identify with the letter writers at home. The school audiences become connected due to the interrelatedness of children with this story.

Clearly this play’s success hinges on an overtly pedagogical passing of historical information. Humor often plays a part in education and in this case directly aims to instruct and inform a very particular audience about a very fragile and charged subject matter. Publicity for the play states the purpose with which this play was created:

¹⁵⁰ Quoted in the previous chapter. Lola Arias opines that, “Era muy importante que no fuera una obra sobre la dictadura oscura, panfletaria, sino que tuviera el humor y el desparpajo con la que nuestra generación toca el tema. El humor me parece un elemento súper corrosivo para enfrentar el horror y la tragedia, un elemento que a veces te hace reflexionar mucho más que el dolor”. Etcheverría, Estefanía. “Debuta *El año en que nació*, la obra sobre la historia personal de Chile bajo Pinochet”, <http://diario.latercera.com/2012/01/20/01/contenido/cultura-entretencion/30-97832-9-debute-el-ano-en-que-naci-la-obra-sobre-la-historia-personal-de-chile-bajo.shtml>

¹⁵¹ <http://nomeolvidesorg.com.ar/wpress/?p=1526>

¹⁵² For more on the letters that school children wrote to the soldiers deployed to Malvinas, see Jack Child’s section in his book *Miniature Messages: The Semiotics and Politics of Latin American Postage Stamps*, p. 136.

“está pensada para estudiantes y dirigida al público en general y fue presentada en escuelas del conurbano bonaerense, en otras localidades del interior, en la Universidad de La Matanza, con ex-combatientes y en la Ex-Esma, actual Museo de la Memoria, permitiendo a más de 35.000 estudiantes presenciar[la].”¹⁵³

The objectives with which this play was conceived are of special importance to the educative goals of the Argentine government because, as we are reminded by the organization *No me olvidés*, “Por disposición de nuestra Constitución Nacional y de la Ley Nacional de Educación [...] la Causa de la soberanía argentina sobre las Islas Malvinas, Georgias y Sándwich del Sur es un tema obligatorio para todas las instituciones escolares.”¹⁵⁴ The theme is hard to teach about, especially as time passes and the war grows more distant in our imagination. A theatre work delivered with various tones of humor allows for a nuanced, multi-faceted approach to the ‘Malvinas Matter’.

There appear to be two key reasons to explain why a pedagogical approach intertwined with a humorous tone successfully transmits material from ‘instructors’ to ‘students’ (actors to audience) in the case of *Islas de la memoria*. In their 1995 article on humor in education, psychologists Reece Peterson and Patricia Carlson defend humor used in an educational setting, citing a study that showed that, “laughter is necessary in a classroom, as it helps relieve tension...humor and laughter help us cope successfully with adversity and stressful situations.”¹⁵⁵ The possible baggage that audience members might bring in the form of stress, fear, confusion, or other sorts of tension would be unknown to the actors. However, they can be certain that nationally and culturally, their theme is charged with heated debate, emotional

¹⁵³ One such general summary can be found here, for example: <http://www.ladulcedigital.com/2011/11/presentacion-de-la-obra-de-teatro-islas-de-la-memoria/>

¹⁵⁴This is an organization dedicated to the memory of the Malvinas war and the Argentine perspective on the Malvinas situation in general. <http://nomeolvidesorg.com.ar/wpress/?p=1526>

¹⁵⁵ In “What is Humor and Why is it Important?”, a study is cited which was published in 1984 by Vincent Rogers.

feelings, and it is likely that the adults in the lives of the gathered students have impacted the way in which they perceive ‘The Malvinas Situation’. Knowing the barrier this could present them in communicating with their audience, humor is integrated into their story.

The second reason for a humorous approach to the topic of social crisis that revolves around Malvinas, is that humor incorporated in educative settings can capture attention and maximize our ability to remember what we are being presented with or taught. According to research gathered by Peterson and Carlson, “humor can capture students’ attention, can free their attention from distractions, and can hold their attention for learning.”¹⁵⁶ They go on to claim that, “elementary school children recalled humorous associations better than non-humorous ones under incidental learning conditions.”¹⁵⁷ This research highlights the necessity for learning to not be conspicuously administered, or traditionally pedagogical in order for humor to be effective. That is to say, students should not be alerted to the educational purposes of the situation for it to be successful in transferring knowledge. In *Islas*, educational strategies are at work, disguised as entertainment. The fact that, “humor can maximize memory” justifies humor-enhanced portrayals of something that we do not want lost or forgotten.¹⁵⁸ Passing on the memory of national crisis to the youngest generations is an important goal that we have seen blatantly stated and set out by the creators of *Islas* and by the Argentine governments’ curriculum requirement.

¹⁵⁶ Peterson and Carlson cite the following study: Goodman, J. “How to get more smileage out of your life: Making sense of humor, then serving it.” P.E. McGhee & J.H. Goldstein (eds.), *Handbook of humor research: Volume II applied studies*, Springer-Verlag, 1983, pp. 1-21.

¹⁵⁷ Peterson and Carlson cite the following study: Hauck, W.E., and Thomas, J.W. “The relationship of humor to intelligence, creativity, and intentional and incidental learning”. *Journal of Experimental Education*, vol. 40, issue 4, 1972, pp. 52-55.

¹⁵⁸ From Joel Goodman’s study, cited above.

At times, an actor/instructor may create humor directed back at themselves on stage, with some actors playing the role of gathered spectators or “spect-actors” on stage, as others perform the ridiculous tasks at which both the audience of children and the spect-actors both laugh.¹⁵⁹ By telling the dark and somber history with a lighter affective lens, this mirroring or modeling of jovial spectatorship onstage makes the laughter surrounding these difficult scenarios acceptable and comfortable. Peterson and Carlson describe how establishing an atmosphere conducive to humor can begin by, “modeling by the teacher” (8). This piece also establishes a fun atmosphere allowing for the experience of humor without withdrawing from the theme. The entire environment is established as a humorous one from before the beginning of the piece and stretching beyond the end of the work. We see this in the very stage notes which indicate how the actors lead groups to their seats, playfully, as cumbia music plays, and this process is reversed as the play closes and actors integrate themselves into the crowd, as the cumbia picks up again and actors guide the audience out of the space dancing. This all-encompassing, festive, humorous atmosphere establishes clearly the emotional and tonal lens that will be used, allowing full participation from the audience instead of hesitancy or doubt.

Communicating serious information, or the purely joyful, through affective communication is paramount to the functioning of this play. Moreover, in spite of the weight of the space of presentation (a former torture and detention center), we are often able to laugh with *Islas de la memoria*. While such a charged space might have given way to incomprehensibility, or even paralysis, humor diffuses *while* exposing this knot of layers. The ECuNH*i* project as a whole and the specific example of *Islas* show how humorous and emotive performing can forge a new way through a traumatic event, re-presenting, reinforcing, and communicating collective

¹⁵⁹ I borrow the term “spect-actor” from Augusto Boal.

memory to the youngest generation. These are moments and sites of trauma that will require constant re-working and remembering as part of the national narrative, in order to truly never forget.

Continente Viril: Failures of Dictatorship and new Concepts of Argentine Identity through Grotesquely Corrosive Humor presented by Los Macocos

Playful tones may lead children to learn deeper lessons, and as the Roman poet Horace long ago explained in his *Ars Poetica*, many difficult to access topics can be taught effectively while entertaining. Humor is often successful with adult audience members too, eliciting psychological interaction with themes on stage, however, the adult audience can benefit from a more troubling or unsettling humor which shakes their pre-established beliefs. By exposing fissures and cracks while evoking laughter during a performance, contemplation may follow that is carried beyond the theatre space and time. *Continente viril* takes on the topic of the Guerra de las Malvinas through grotesque and satiric poetics, using questioning and hypothetical possibilities to examine both the war and the failure of the dictatorship and how these have resonated throughout the country ever since and have questioned the Argentine national identity.

Together, elements hinged historically to the conflict of Malvinas, and the connections to the failed dictatorship throughout this piece reconsider national identity, a sense of being Argentine, and the transition out of dictatorship and into democracy as Argentina begins to participate in a global community. Between the text, written by Alejandro Acobino in 2000, and the distinctly *grotesco*, clown and sainete inspired interpretation of the work debuted by the theatre troupe Los Macocos in 2003 of *Continente viril*, national identity and a playful sense of what it means to be Argentine in the post-dictatorship, post-Malvinas era are brought to our attention, troubled, dismantled, and left incomplete for the audience to consider and reevaluate, facilitating an active audience.

The piece is not a conspicuously referential piece on the Guerra de las Malvinas. It is rather through many fragmented references that the conflict will be recognizable to the Argentine audience, and through metaphors often exposed in a light of satire and parody that the underlying historical commentaries present themselves. Antarctica is the setting for this otherwise fictional or futuristic piece as the snowy southern continent becomes a representation of controversy and debate for physical territories that define ideologically and geographically national space. Antarctica also functions here as a metonym for Malvinas which allows for a continuation of the dispute of what territory may belong to the new conception of the nation. The antics, missteps, and many failures of the characters depicted by Los Macocos often through a revival of techniques of the humor of the *grotesco criollo* connect with the audience through a recognizable and familiar national theatre and humor genre.¹⁶⁰ It is through an established and recognizable ‘national sense of humor’ (the *grotesco criollo*) that ideas of *nation* are turned on their head and questioned. Such a tongue-in-cheek method of incorporating a national humor mode into this piece allows for a playful criticism of the very idea of what the Argentine nation has become or will become in the post-Malvinas era. Relying on previous spectator experience of the *grotesco criollo* tradition allows for the conversation that ensues to be firmly seated among Argentines themselves, as a community. Ironically, as national humor exposes national worries and unrest, it also leads us to see that the very trait that firmly identifies the essence of this nation is a sense of incompleteness, progress, evolution, and ‘unfinishedness’, somewhat fitting for a humor form

¹⁶⁰ The precise inspirations from and innovations to the *grotesco criollo* on which Los Macocos rely will be discussed later on in this section in detail. No previous study on the use of *grotesco criollo* traditional techniques in *Continente viril* has been undertaken before. Frequently scholars and critics have recognized and signaled the reliance of the work of Los Macocos on the *grotesco criollo*. See Jorge Dubatti’s multiple studies on the group such as *Cien años de teatro argentino. Desde 1910 a nuestros días*, or *Los Macocos Banda de Teatro: Teatro Deshecho I: Flora y Fauna de la Creación Macocal*, or Brenda Werth’s analysis of the group’s reliance on the sainete, contrasting the sainete and grotesco’s qualities in “Immigration and the revival of the sainete in post-2001 Argentine theater: El super crisol by Los Macocos.”

which itself is a hybrid and has undergone various evolutions (from Italian *grottesco* to *grotesco criollo* to *neo-grotesco criollo*) and which I argue is currently in the phases of a contemporary evolution (perhaps a *neo-neo grotesco criollo*?) as it is re-developed in plays such as *Continente viril*.

In addressing this theatre piece, it is important to separate the *text* and the *performance*. Though Los Macocos are fairly faithful to Acobino's text, they do carry out notable plot and scene alterations, and of course the troupe also makes choices on how to bring the characters to life in their production which is inevitably in a neo-grotesque, playful, 'macocal' fashion.¹⁶¹ Notably, scenes are added to the very beginning and very end, bookending the interior plot, and the final scene of the text is altered in outcome: Acobino's text ends relatively neatly (with most plot points tied up, and the menacing character of the Coronel sent to face justice while the other characters pack up to head home to continental Argentina), however on the other hand, Los Macocos turn to a more sinister, hopeless, bothersome closing scene in which the scientist dies, frozen to the Antarctic ground, destined to become a part of the equally frozen continent. They additionally leave the Coronel liberated, among common citizens.¹⁶²

The troubling and worrisome nature of the piece, treated humorously, is established from the first moment. The performance begins with the first added scene in which men dressed in tuxedos as penguins climb up frozen cliffs, playing off-beat circus music, and then jump to their deaths. As the performance continues and the text begins, an Argentine scientist (aptly named Sosnowsky) travels from the mainland to an Argentine Antarctic outpost to conduct research to

¹⁶¹ An adjective coined uniquely to capture those peculiarities and individualities of the troupe. It is used for example, in the title of Dubatti's 2002 book (*Los Macocos Banda de Teatro: Teatro deshecho I: Flora y fauna de la creación macocal*) which introduces the group and compiles several key works as texts.

¹⁶² This is certainly a terrifying thought, yet one which mimics the Argentine reality. For, many ex-commanders and officials involved in the human rights abuses during the dictatorship are still free and among citizens today.

solve the mystery of why the penguins are committing suicide. A harsh and commanding retired army Coronel, a Sargent who acts as the former's obedient yes-man, and a very passive civil servant who makes every attempt to melt into the background and avoid confrontation (named Perrupatu) reside at this base. The men stationed here simply pass the time waiting out their years of service, drinking, playing games, watching old TV shows, and recording useless radio transmissions. They are nearly obsolete and entirely hidden from the public eye at this frozen Antarctic base. Sosnowsky, the scientist, is the decided outsider and quickly realizes that laws and rules followed on continental Argentina do not hold power here.

A global community is referenced and stressful inter-national relations characterized by incomprehension are navigated throughout the play. Eventually Sosnowsky discovers a scientific breakthrough that explains the mass suicide of only the Argentine penguins (a discovery that in scientific terms is completely ridiculous), but, as the Coronel is afraid that this new information will lead to an extended service at the base for the military men, the Coronel puts the scientist under house arrest, refusing to let him reveal the secret to the rest of the world. In a final climactic chase scene, the Coronel accidentally stumbles over a territorial boundary into the Australian base, where he is captured and extradited for war crimes.

Cyclical and mirroring the troubling onset, the end of the plot is left open, unresolved, bothersome, and darkly pessimistic in Los Macocos' version. In Los Macocos' more macabre version, after the scientist dies, frozen to the white continent, two final added scenes occur. First, the extradited Coronel appears off stage within the audience, talking on his cell phone, and finally, the same penguins of the opening scene reappear, only to once again scale the cliffs and jump to their deaths, completing the play as it began: hopeless and fraught with failure.

“Los Macocos: la risa que esconde una mueca”¹⁶³

Los Macocos performed this piece during the years 2003 and 2004 for audiences all around Argentina. Their poetic as a performing group is applied to the original work by Alejandro Acobino with a humor that is emblematic of new Argentine theatre and the post-dictatorship era of its presentation.¹⁶⁴ The group belongs to what Jorge Dubatti deems, “el nuevo teatro argentino”, meaning their work has developed in the post dictatorship and is a departure from the previous theatre of the 1960s and 1970s, however, it does overlap, and coexist with some previous theatre.¹⁶⁵ Throughout their long tenure as a troupe (formed in 1985 and still performing works together 25 years later), Los Macocos have consistently recycled, adapted, and updated Argentine theatrical techniques that connect them with national traditions, while also forging new trends. Humor can said to be a constant factor in their work. Regarding how their aesthetic connects with previous tradition, Osvaldo Pellettieri notes that, “La búsqueda del efecto cómico está anclada en las técnicas del actor finisecular, heredadas del cómico italiano y muy especialmente en las del actor de revista, de varieté...”, adding that their use of, “la exageración gestual”, “el disparate”, and “la dislocación total de lo verbal que llega al despropósito” add to the caricaturesque and the use of exaggeration which are linked to the costumbrista style which Los Macocos have honed (165-167).¹⁶⁶ Dubatti adds to their influences that of clowning, a

¹⁶³ Title of interview conducted with *Los Andes* newspaper. <http://archivo.losandes.com.ar/notas/2004/4/15/estilo-105938.asp>, published June 15, 2004.

¹⁶⁴ Complete video of *Continente viril*, performed by Los Macocos: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hcf033HIpyA>

¹⁶⁵ Jorge Dubatti highlights what he calls ‘el nuevo teatro argentino’ in his introduction to Los Macocos’ work in his 2002 book, *Los Macocos Banda de Teatro: Teatro deshecho 1: Flora y fauna de la creación macocal* (5-6).

¹⁶⁶ In his work, *Teatro argentino contemporáneo (1980-1990): crisis, transición y cambio*, Pellettieri highlights the contributions of the troupe Los Macocos to post-dictatorship theatre in Argentina in a short chapter entitled, “Los Macocos y el teatro nacional.”

tradition long a part of Argentine theatre and known as having developed from the circo criollo (23).¹⁶⁷ The clowning techniques that infiltrate this work particularly are defined by the extreme corporality and a gesturally based poetic.

A lively interaction with the gathered audience is a fundamental part of the ultimate macocal presentation. Troupe member Daniel Casablanca explains that feigned improvisation, caricature and general costumbrist style, “producen en el espectador sorpresa, fascinación, la seguridad de una relación no garantida no determinada con la escena, la sensación de riesgo que experimenta el ‘courieux’”.¹⁶⁸ Interactive and communal, Los Macocos, “Les divierte hacer teatro y trabajar juntos. Macocos es una forma de relacionarse entre sí, con el público, el texto y las circunstancias.”¹⁶⁹ *Continente Viril* communicates by way of the macocal poetic imbued with humor and playfulness, insisting on a response. An audience following of Los Macocos is built continually through their various performances. I contend that laughing together is a key part of feeling together in the theatre, something scholar Jill Dolan notices as she describes the affective role in the creation of *communitas*.¹⁷⁰ The audience recognizes the ‘language’ of local Argentine theatre techniques and responds to this familiar yet modernized form. The hybridization of a multiplicity of comic national theatre techniques chaotically forms one new macocal aesthetic.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ *Los Macocos Banda de Teatro: Teatro deshecho 1: Flora y fauna de la creación macocal*.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. “Courieux” describes the people who Los Macocos hope to draw and develop as an audience, literally, those with curiosity, the curious.

¹⁶⁹ “Los Macocos, tributo a la risa”. María Ana Rago. <http://edant.clarin.com/diario/2002/06/04/c-00401.htm>

¹⁷⁰ See Jill Dolan’s work *Utopia in Performance* and also Victor Turner’s “Liminality and Communitas” in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* for more on his concept of communitas.

¹⁷¹ Mainly, the *grotesco criollo*, but also elements of *sainete*, *circo criollo*, *costumbrismo*, and *teatro rioplatense*. Lauricella, Virginia. “Los Macocos: 25 años jugando”, <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1264657-los-macocos-25-anos-jugando>, 5/17/2010.

Their humorous aesthetic contains layers that allow for either deeper or more superficial readings. Easily accessible and deeply tied to instinctual human affects, macocal humor uses, “una comicidad directa, simple (que lo conecta con sus orígenes), e incluye una mirada cariñosa sobre el pasado teatral en el que Macocos se involucra, consciente de la novedad que introduce en dicho proceso”, according to Dubatti.¹⁷² Interacting with humor on various levels of serious and play, popular and erudite culture, and through multiple genre and poetic connections allows for numerous entrance points and a more complex humor than a traditional grotesque.

But beyond playful and a nod to the theatrical history of Argentina, humor is, as troupe member Gabriel Wolf points out, a foundational element of the poetics from which the group operates. When asked about the use of humor in a play which speaks about a subject as sensitive and seemingly untouchable as the last dictatorship, Wolf responded, “Hay algo importante: nosotros no estamos haciendo humor con eso. Sino que desde el humor, que es nuestra poética, contamos esa historia.”¹⁷³ By employing the term ‘poetic’, to mean a philosophy in which the group grounds all of its work, humor is elevated to serve an intentional epistemological function. Los Macocos transmit their works through this lens, thereby interacting with their audience and transmitting and re-enforcing non-traditional, emotional knowledge.

According to Los Macocos’, their work does not construct or do/make (*hacer*) theatre, but rather to *undo* it, take it apart (*deshacer*), exposing cracks and fissures, and reveal from the inside out the inner workings of their art and themes it touches, often through humor.¹⁷⁴ This

¹⁷² Ibid. (40-41)

¹⁷³ “Macocos: La risa que esconde una mueca”, <http://archivo.losandes.com.ar/notas/2004/4/15/estilo-105938.asp>, published June 15, 2004.

¹⁷⁴ In a *Página 12* article by Silvina Frieria, “Textos para deshacer teatro”, she explains that, “Después de 17 años de trayectoria, Los Macocos articularon un idioma propio de la comicidad dramática, sintetizado en un slogan fundacional, que marcó un camino: Los Macocos no hacen teatro, lo deshacen.”, <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/espectaculos/6-5399-2002-05-22.html>

resistance to a classical or orthodox approach to theatre-making, exposing the inside of theatre, and re-thinking how to present and (un) make theatre is part of what allows them stand out as a troupe of “el nuevo teatro argentino”. ‘Deshacer’ implies leaving loose ends purposefully exposed; it is not neatly presented nor can one passively digest it.

This undoing, pulling apart and re-assembly can be seen as they adapt and trouble the written script of *Continente viril*. Though for their presentation of the play they worked from a text by playwright Alejandro Acobino, it is uncommon in the troupe’s practice to perform work written by others. Most works are written in a collective style by the group, as a collaborative process that rehearses, tries out spontaneous ideas, and eventually creates a text that is still open to much improvisation and adjustment throughout the life of the piece. In the case of this piece, they relied on a work written by another, simply due to the difficult task of treating the theme of the dictatorship and Malvinas War years. As suggested by Noe Wesley Montez, writing a piece with the typical humor of Los Macocos would have been difficult for people of their generation that had lived through the very horrors they were grappling with portraying. On the other hand, Acobino, “who was only seven years old at the time of the Proceso, is not burdened by the [...] traumatic memories of the dictatorship. Instead Acobino uses his lack of an emotional connection with the horrors of the dictatorship to skewer the belief system that lead to such a violent era in Argentine history.”¹⁷⁵ Though presenting a non-original work, the many adaptations to the piece allow their aesthetic, improvisation, group creation, and humorous Macocal aesthetic to stand out, most notably leaving it unfinished and more open to interpretation.

¹⁷⁵ Quote from Noe Wesley Montez’s dissertation, *Staging Post-Memories: Commemorative Argentine Theatre 1989-2003*. p. 80.

An entire opening scene is added by Los Macocos to establishing the piece in their style, setting the stage for the humorous tone that will continue to define the work throughout. Los Macocos frequently incorporate music into their work, and here the penguins, in a nonsensical and absurd way, begin playing in a minor key, grotesque, out of tune and disturbing circus music. In this music, there is something reminiscent of a robotic and rehearsed presentation of anthems or patriotic songs in a military band's repertoire. While absurd, this approach immediately allows for a mental connection between the military and a warped, dysfunctional musicality. The curiously amusing and awkward musical penguins are quickly interrupted by a pervasive, loud voice, emitting its message in a grainy (indicative of a timeworn and also perhaps a military quality) tone from the theatre's loudspeaker system.

The militaristic voice is simultaneously part of the exterior and interior of the play, and therefore confuses our real world and the theatrical one. The humorously exaggerated and yet ominous and militaristic voice addresses the audience, telling them the rules for the observation of this performance. With this intrusion of the soundscape in a time that usually belongs to the pre-performance, this voice threateningly extends the performance moment. It is reminiscent of dictatorship radio proclamations (known as *comunicados*) that were broadcasted to Argentine citizens by radio and TV from 1976-1983.¹⁷⁶ While funny, the voice also creates an uneasy and militaristic atmosphere that permeates the entire play. We feel surrounded by the omnipresent voice echoing throughout the entire theatre space, trapped suddenly by this vocalization. The voice begins,

¹⁷⁶ The real 'Comunicado número uno' was read on air at 2:30am on Wednesday, March 24, 1976 and read as follows: "Se comunica a la población que, a partir de la fecha, el país se encuentra bajo el control operacional de la Junta de Comandantes Generales de las Fuerzas Armadas. Se recomienda a todos los habitantes el estricto acatamiento a las disposiciones y directivas que emanen de autoridad militar, de seguridad o policial, así como extremar el cuidado en evitar acciones y actitudes individuales o de grupo que puedan exigir la intervención drástica del personal en operaciones.", according to the following online article: <http://www.elintransigente.com/argentina/2010/3/24/argentina-39661.html>

“Comunicado número uno: Se informa al público presente, que estamos en instante del comienzo del proceso de este espectáculo, a tal efecto, informamos que a partir de este momento, queda terminantemente prohibidos ...[los] celulares, ...[y] cualquier aparato fotográfico, ... a sí mismo se informa de que está prohibidamente prohibido el encendido y consume de cigarros...conducta sospechosa será tomada como una provocación y el centinela responderá con consecuencias!”

In this aural moment, a set of necessary reminders to any theatre audience is transformed into a part of the performance, transporting us immediately to the years of dictatorship which is a contextualization that no audience could mistake. For an Argentine audience of a middle aged or older generation, the affective response to this unexpected opening must be instinctually uncomfortable and yet they would struggle with the palpable humor in this situation too. The clash between the tone and message (an authoritarian voice ordering us to not eat candy nosily, for example) establish this humor. Immediately, Los Macocos start to interact with their audience very directly, waning between humor and darkness, building and extinguishing comfort through possible moments for laughter and reflection.

The fourth wall is yet again broken as the piece performed by Los Macocos closes, infiltrating the audience, but this time spatially. As the scientist, Perrupato and the Sargento pack their bags to leave the base, suddenly a cell phone rings loudly among the audience in the off-stage space. At first it might not be obvious that this is part of the performance, but as the ringing continues, spectators begin to shift their gaze and attention. The lights on stage dim and we are left in total darkness as a single spotlight hits the actor who was formerly on stage portraying the Coronel, now dressed in civilian clothing sitting among the audience. In the light, he answers his phone, loudly conversing with someone, laughing and joking. Humor in this moment is observed by the stunned audience, fulfilling a different goal of highlighting the immorality or unacceptability of this situation. *Unlaughter*, or the decided and noticeable absence of laughter in

response to the joking ex-Coronel by the audience here communicates with the actors differently than approving and assenting laughter would.¹⁷⁷ We are doubly aware of both the way in which the coronel has broken with the ‘rules’ or decorum of the theatre and also, the ways in which those accused of crimes during the dictatorship ‘broke rules’ and continue to defy the cries for these perpetrators of violence to be brought to trial. Los Macocos give us a sudden and shocking realization that other audience members seated among us could in fact be these very perpetrators, making the potential post-performance impact deepen. In both this final moment and the opening, the intrusion into ‘our’ audience space (physical at the end, or auditory at the onset) unsettles us, purposefully discomforting the entire space and to blur the boundaries between ‘real’ and ‘fictional’ space. Caught off guard in pivotal moments, we carry this unsettled feeling beyond the theatre moment.

Beyond adding scenes, Los Macocos bring the characters to life on their terms. Developing and portraying unique characters that are nearly self-contained performatic creations each in their own right and which exude the humorous poetic of Los Macocos helps to anchor the tone of the pieces in the strong cast of characters on stage. Though the characters of *Continente viril* belong to one specific piece, they could just as well belong to the macocal family. The characters inhabiting all of their pieces share familial resembles and are eccentric, exaggerated, caricaturesque beings. This genealogy ties together their ouvre, nearly extending the fictional Macocal world beyond distinct performance moments and fleshing out a distinct Macocal universe that continues to exist in our imaginaries between performance viewings. Elements of the *grotesco criollo* and clowning techniques help to inform the character

¹⁷⁷ “Unlaughter” is a term coined by Michael Billig and is described as the specific and noticeable absence of laughter. It is the choice of the observer or receptor to not laugh. See his work *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour*. SAGE Publications, 2005.

creation.¹⁷⁸ While all characters in *Continente viril* exhibit aspects of their *grotesco criollo* style, two in particular emphasize these characteristics: the scientist, and the Coronel. Los Macocos also turn these characters into modern manifestations of the grotesque through costuming and rehearsed corporality, forming a hybrid between the clown and the mad scientist, or between the grotesque villain and the ill-intending military Coronel, observable only in a live performance.

El grotesco criollo at work in *Continente viril*

By the nature of the *grotesco criollo*, humor and tragedy are simultaneously present, and as an audience we are often uncertain whether to laugh or cry. In the introduction to the work *Antología el grotesco criollo: Discépolo-Cossa*, Irene Pérez defines the *grotesco* as originating in the Italian: “Grotesco: del italiano: grottesco: de grotta, gruta. Ridículo, extravagante. Irregular, chocante, grosero y de mal gusto” (30). In Argentine theatre specifically, “La realidad que el teatro refleja conlleva una carga suficiente de dolor y desesperanza como para que la risa sea quebrada a menudo por la nota trágica” (33). Moreover, the *grotesco criollo* makes use of the unique Argentine environment and uniquely local situations and crises (immigrant families, starving lower classes, unemployment, etc.), closely mimics speech patterns of *porteños* (highlighting local dialects (*lunfardo*, *cocoliche*), sayings, and also vulgar terms), incorporates deformed but recognizable local musical traditions, and warps characters, context, language, aesthetic, and gestures, to exacerbate and highlight the twisted reality that the audience painfully recognizes. Laughter which is undercut by the very tragic is paramount to the *grotesco* tradition.

¹⁷⁸ For example, these various theatrical styles are mentioned in a Lanacion.com article by Virginia Lauricella. “Los Macocos: 25 años jugando” <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1264657-los-macocos-25-anos-jugando> (5/17/2010). They are also referenced by Jorge Dubatti in *Los Macocos Banda de Teatro. Teatro deshecho I. Flora y fauna de la creación macocal*, as he describes their aesthetic as one in which “se integran a la vez la tradición teatral argentina y las novedades de los ochenta y los noventa, la apropiación de clown con inflexiones actorales inéditas” (23).

Los Macocos have imbued *grotesco criollo* tone and especially comedy into the text for its recognizability and proven effectiveness in communicating. To adapt the text, the group sought, “el efecto cómico para apuntalar una visión crítica de lo real. Nada de teatro solemne y apolillado.” making their production uniquely Macocal and at the same time, tightly linked to the Argentine theatre tradition of the *grotesco criollo*.¹⁷⁹ They maintain a delicate balance between tragedy and humor, unsettling and bringing to light useful disquiet. As troupe member Martín Salazar points out, “Esta obra es una respuesta estética a algo que no tiene ética.” uniting the *aesthetic* with the *ethics* in a piece that probes delicate topics through humor, to expose social fissures for audience consideration.¹⁸⁰ Another troupe member, Daniel Casablanca, speaks specifically about Los Macocos’ view of eliciting laughter in this piece, stating, “Aunque la risa surja de escenas terribles, funciona como sanadora y liberadora. Pero, además, debe servir para repensar la dictadura militar.”¹⁸¹ Humor in this contemporary *grotesco* adds affective nuance and a new emotional framing of a historic event. For Claudia Kaiser Lenoir, the laughter of the *grotesco criollo*, “No se trata de una risa que *luego* se convierte en llanto sino [...] de similitud o yuxtaposición, están presentadas en conflicto” (178-179).¹⁸² The inseparable nature of this fusion between pleasure and horror is what works to trouble and delight us simultaneously, leaving us emotionally disquieted and with a distinct lack of resolution. We exit the theatre with emotional work to do and a dilemma to process.

¹⁷⁹ Frieria, Silvina. “Los represores fríos”. <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/espectaculos/6-24360-2003-08-21.html>. 8.21.2003

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² See Claudia Kaiser Lenoir’s work *El grotesco criollo: Estilo teatral de una época*.

In *Continente viril*, as performed by Los Macocos, *lo grotesco* can be perceived in the penguins which occupying a blurred identity between the animal and the human, a characteristic of the grotesque. Men in tuxedos move, bray and clack like penguins, play music, and happen to be inexplicably suicidal. We see them as both men and simultaneously as animals. The human characters at the base also behave at times as animals, instinctually attacking one another or protecting themselves with no concern for the well-being of their fellow man, acting on primal instincts instead of logic or reason. In one scene, the Sargento and Sosnowsky accidentally explode a penguin egg with a *picana* or electric prod. This is a blatant reference to the use of the *picana* as a device of torture in clandestine detention centers during the dictatorship which therefore confuses on stage the torture of animals and humans and denouncing the lack of humanity in those who torture. The animalesque is a trait of those who are pawns to the tragedies imposed upon them by the larger system. In this case, the political boundaries of the Argentine Antarctic cause the penguins to jump to their deaths, as their habitat is disappearing. In the Malvinas war, and in the years of dictatorship, citizens were also pawns to the larger political picture of the government in charge. The word '*Viril*' in the title adds an animalesque quality to all of the men at the base too. This icy continent is ruled by animals distanced from civilization.

The entire disastrous scene with the *picana* is marked clearly with a tone of tragic laughter that the audience perceives in a twisted light. In an interview with troupe member Martín Salazar, the actor comments on this particular scene, noticing,

“Y es muy loco lo que les pasa a las diferentes generaciones que lo ven. Por ejemplo con el tema de la picana, a los adolescentes les parece superdivertido, graciosísimo. Y a la gente grande, como que le cuesta hasta reírse en ese momento.”¹⁸³

¹⁸³ “Macocos: La risa que esconde una mueca”, <http://archivo.losandes.com.ar/notas/2004/4/15/estilo-105938.asp>, published June 15, 2004.

While the difference between laughter of the younger generation versus of the older generation upon experiencing this scene is noteworthy again, what I would like to highlight here is the ability for this scene to elicit laughter from the entire audience, be it a laughter tinged with more or less tragedy and pain. Protest and resistance through laughter is characteristic of the grotesque.¹⁸⁴ As Eva Claudia Kaiser Lenoir says the *grotesco criollo*, “acusa a través de lo cómico la falsedad de todo un sistema ético, de los hábitos e ideales de una sociedad y revela en esta acusación la precariedad del hombre como víctima inerme frente al poder del orden institucionalizado” (31). Clearly, the painful laughter here aims to expose injustices experienced by a segment of society made to live submissively, in fear during the dictatorship.

The grotesque is palpable in the gestures and physical actions of the characters which move and position themselves in highly exaggerated ways. Beyond their animalesque nature, the penguins also provide grotesque movements to the stage that are carried on by the human characters later. The scientist exhibits clumsy movements, and other eccentric movements that highlight his lack of self-awareness as he plays the stock character of the crazy scientist. The Sargento is a hunched, twisted-back short man, with his hands often tucked in a way which make his arms resemble claws more than human arms. He lurks around the scenes, obeying all of the orders of the Coronel as he plays the part of the buffoon and yes-man. The Coronel exhibits choppy, strongly military-like movements, commanding attention and creating fear with his presence. The civilian Perrupato is a slight, weak man, who appears to be less than human and more an extension of the typewriter in the scenes more often than a human character, furiously

¹⁸⁴ The aesthetic is recognizably connected to the *grotesco criollo*. A review of the piece from a production in Mendoza for example stated, “Por otra parte, la propuesta que el grupo trajo levantó las carcajadas del público que, además de las risas, tuvo la posibilidad de reflexionar gracias a una muy buena mezcla de humor negro, grotesco y sarcasmo sobre lo más negro de los últimos 30 años de la historia argentina.” <http://www.diariouno.com.ar/edimpresa/2004/04/20/nota54420.html>. “Mendoza rió con Los Macocos”, 4/20/2004.

typing away during many scenes. Irene Pérez points out that *grotesco criollo* characters move by, “andares bamboleantes, movimientos torpes, porrazos” (38), which are movements that exaggerate the overly mechanical, doll-like, affected movements of the grotesque. Many of these bodily positions seem influenced by the Argentine school of clowning which also incorporates exaggerated movements in pathetically laughable ways.¹⁸⁵

The characters are exaggerated, offering a parody of their ‘*tipo*’ or representative stock character. Their costuming, voice intonation, and movements all contribute to the creation of character types. Irene Pérez describes the appearance of characters of the *grotesco criollo* as, “fantoques, un poco bestias, un poco muñecos, un poco hombres” (45). These exaggerated character types are not written into the script, but again are developed by Los Macocos. Sosnowsky is shown to be a pure parody of a scientist, depicted with unruly disheveled hair, large clumsy glasses, an oversized, unfashionable sweater, and a gigantic scarf which has been treated in such a way as to make the fabric very stiff and is therefore positioned permanently as if being blown in the wind dramatically. This costuming technique is one often used by street performers whose art is also a legacy of the clowning tradition in the city and which has been adopted by Los Macocos. Pérez further describes the visual appearance of *grotesco criollo* characters, saying, “Los personajes parecen monigotes ridículos.”, and continuing, “La parodia...sirve para provocar también un efecto grotesco” (48). In this case, the parody offered is that of the mad scientist, portrayed in a Macocal style, lightening the mood, exposing his most extreme characteristics, and also creating connection to a recognized character type.

¹⁸⁵ See Pelletieri *Historia del teatro argentino en Buenos Aires: La emancipación cultural (1884-1930)*. Ever since the establishment of a *criollo* version of clowning in Argentina in the last 19th century, principally founded by the brothers Podesta and Pepino 88, along with the pantomimed presentation of Juan Moreira, the Argentina school of clowning adopted the extreme gestures and corporality of the European clown to the Argentine context, inserting current political commentary into jokes, stories, and songs.

The primacy of music further links this work for the *grotesco criollo* aesthetic, in this case, the auditory aesthetic. Osvaldo Pelletieri describes the elements of the *grotesco criollo*, and among them figures “la primacia de la música” (261), especially marked by popular musical forms and meta-theatrical moments or performance within the performance, which is often tied to the insertion of music played within the *grotesco criollo* piece.¹⁸⁶ Here, the penguins double as a band of grotesque musicians as well. They play drums, cymbals, and a violin, shakily, robotically, and slowly begin to beat out a cacophonous tune in an ominous minor key, resembling something in between twisted circus music and a ceremonial military march (both appropriate references for the piece). Immediately after playing, they jump to their deaths. A similar short scene is added at the end: the penguins climb up cliffs, play a brief and jarringly tuneless musical piece, and then jump off the cliffs behind them, into the offstage space. This music frames the piece within the aesthetic of the *grotesco criollo* for the audience while it also entertains and disturbs. Finally, the music reminiscent of a bad circus tune juxtaposes with the suicidal jumps of the penguins in such a manner that humor here lightens the truly horrific fate of these birds. The music here lightens an otherwise tragic scenario, informing the audience that although the suicides appear ridiculous or comic, something hopeless lurks beneath the surface.¹⁸⁷

The ending of the work leaves us with an unsettling feeling, instead of wrapping up the plot nicely into a neatly concluded piece: yet another recognizable trait of the *grotesco criollo* at work. As Kaiser Lenoir describes the endings of historical works of *grotesco criollo*, she states,

¹⁸⁶ Pelletieri, Osvaldo. *El Sainete Y El Grotesco Criollo: Del Autor Al Actor*. Galerna, 2008.

¹⁸⁷ For more on the primacy of the link between music and sound and our emotional reception, see for example: “Fundamental Link Between Emotions And Sound Perception Identified In New Study” <http://www.medicaldaily.com/fundamental-link-between-emotions-and-sound-perception-identified-new-study-247281>, or “Why Does Music Make Us Feel?” <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/why-does-music-make-us-fe/>

“Las ‘salidas’ planteadas en estas obras...son caídas completas y definitivas. No son ‘salvaciones’ sino ‘pérdidas’” (31). That is to say, solutions to the desperation and devastation are not offered, and the chaos is unresolved. Twisting the ending grotesquely, Los Macocos have the Coronel appear within the audience, dressed in street clothing. This reveals the harrowing truth: the perpetrators of violence during dictatorship, commanders of the soldiers in Malvinas who led their young troops into an already failed battle, may in fact yet be among us. Moreover, the fact that they may be among us highlights the question of unaccountability: they are free to lead normal lives like the rest of us. Already uneasy in our seats, finally, Los Macocos end the piece on a truly disturbing and hopeless note, leaving the beaten scientist inert, as he dies, frozen. In this ending, not only is the scientist (the truth seeker) left for dead, but furthermore, the penguins will keep dying and his research will never see the light of day, so the Argentine Antarctic will melt into oblivion. This is a hugely dark contrast to the hopeful and more idealistic ending offered by Acobino and this feeling of discomfort is carried with us out of the theatre space. Macoco Marcelo Xicarts summarizes this unsettling conclusion expressing, “Prefiero a la gente inquieta y molesta, antes que ver a alguien sentado, cómodamente esperando a que pase algo.”¹⁸⁸

Mapping, Space, Affect, and National Identity

Throughout the play, the audience is asked to question their understanding of Argentina as a nation and what it means today in the post-dictatorship to be Argentine. This is achieved through a playful tone which exposes through hyperbole darkness and problems that underlie the surface. We are asked to question and reconsider Malvinas’ and Antarctica’s role in the nation, how national and international boundaries inform or problematize the contemporary nation, how

¹⁸⁸ Frieria, Silvina. “Los represores fríos”. <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/espectaculos/6-24360-2003-08-21.html>. 8.21.2003.

feelings and nostalgia engage with the nation, the role of language and cultural inheritance in nation, how the past and present interact and the role of legacy and history, among other issues that inform the concept of nation more broadly. Most importantly, we must consider that lingering, ‘unfinishedness’, may well form a part of the Argentine sense of nation. This is not a new idea in identity studies more widely. Identity as a concept may be considered ever-evolving, never fixed, complete, or finished.¹⁸⁹ A lingering quality in Argentine identity in particular can be observed in three important ways in this play: major plot elements of the play are left unfinished, the contemporary and historical situation with both the end of dictatorship and Malvinas exhibit incompleteness, and the humor that is most accessed (*grotesco criollo* inspired) is defined by creating critique and problematizing without resolving.

As the geographical setting of the play connects meaningfully and recognizably with the Islas Malvinas, affect and space become linked; Malvinas is conjured up instinctually through references to the space as accessed through emotion. Emotions surround the very essence of nation, or as Dieter Langewiesche puts it, “No feelings, no nation.”¹⁹⁰ Though not set in the islands themselves, this space of the play (Antarctica) is likewise, not a part of continental Argentina. Set on another land mass, across the waters of the South Atlantic, it is comparable geographically to the islands. Just as Julieta Vitullo claims of the Malvinas, “...su natural propensión a ser lejanas o remotas, invitan a ser imaginadas.” (185), pointing out the romanticized mental space they claim in a nearly mythic sense upon being distant. The physical

¹⁸⁹ This is suggested for example by Irvin Cemil Schick in his work *The Erotic Margin: Sexuality and Spatiality in Alterist Discourse*. Verso, 1999. Schick relates, “identity is never ‘complete’; rather, it is always under construction. To put it more explicitly, identity is not an object but a process. Furthermore, this process is not even: times of crisis or transition are often periods of particularly intensive identity construction” (19).

¹⁹⁰ This is from the abstract to his article written in German. Langewiesche, Dieter. “Gefühlsraum Nation”, *Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft*, Oct 2012, Vol 15, Issue 1, pp. 195-215.

separation from mainland Argentina in the play is highlighted as the scientist Sosnowky arrives by boat to the outpost and disembarks on the Antarctic continent.

Right before his arrival to the base, while still en route to the white continent, Sosnowsky records his field notes and diary entries in a recording device, articulating his observations lyrically,

“Tal vez esta extraña calma sea un buen presagio, un guiño en el que Fortuna, conmovida, me da el visto Bueno. Y aunque disto de ser supersticioso nada cuesta creer que el estrecho de Drake me está dando la bienvenida. Si hasta el sol en el poniente parece alegrar los grises perpetuos con su caricia cromática.”

Sosnowsky delivers these lines in an exaggerated, fervent way which as an audience we take humorously, perceiving an eccentric scientist delivering a poetry reading, reminiscent of romanticism or other 19th century nation building era discourse which elevated and exalted the land comprising the space of the nation. Exaggeration in this piece is a primary rhetorical tool that allows for a critical laughter. The scientist’s words work to imagine as Vitullo describes in reference to the Islas Malvinas, and yet we are simultaneously aware of the exaggeration which pokes fun at such idealistic praise of a place which is often also described as isolated, cold, barren, and uninviting. We do laugh, but we also come to see that this is not a pristine white paradise, but rather a failed outpost in the midst of a mighty and destructive natural setting that will ultimately conquer man’s attempts to restrain, organize, or own it.

Boundaries are formed and humorously questioned or dissolved as the transition to the next scene takes place, indicating the possible fluidity of boundaries which seem hermetic and solid. As the scientist disembarks from the research vessel at the base camp, he carries the handrail from the ship with him, as if a piece of luggage. The stage directions note, “(ENTRA EL SARGENTO CARGADO DE BARTULOS. PERRUPATO LE AYUDA A ACOMODARLOS. EL CIENTIFICO TODAVIA TIENE LA BARANDA DEL TIJUCA EN LA MANO.)” This action is

mirrored at the end of the text, as he packs his bags to return to continental Argentina and carries the handrail of the ship with him again. Comical, and a bit nonsensical, this action bridges the gap between the sea and the icy landscape and offering a connection between the mainland of the South American continent, the water of the South Atlantic, and the icy surface of Antarctica for the audience. Our attention is called to this detail humorously, as it illustrates a rupture of a rule we believed to be in place which has now been revealed to be fallible. This broken boundary also shows the ease with which one can pass between these spaces, breaking through the invisible boundaries dividing spaces and suggesting that they are not as permanent and solid as imagined. Fluid new boundaries shift and evolve under our feet as we navigate the post-dictatorship.

Malvinas can be read as represented through metonymy, but moreover, Acobino is also suggesting that Antarctica can be compared alongside Malvinas as the contemporary territory that breeds a similar debate over national boundaries, territories, and the interminable development of the idea of nation. These two spaces which float in the middle of the bright blue Atlantic on a map are connected in the imagination of the nation of Argentina, which has tried to not only legally and officially, but also symbolically incorporate them as extensions of Argentine identity and nationality. The Coronel makes reference to the Antarctic Treaty of 1959, as he informs the newly arrived Sosnowsky that the maintained base and Argentine presence here are key to the homeland, “sobre todo en estos días por el asunto del Tratado Antártico.”¹⁹¹ Argentina first began to occupy an island of the Antarctic in 1904, and since 1906, into the present,

¹⁹¹ Ironically, as stated in the treaty, military bases are not to be established in the Antarctic, and research and collaboration are to be the primary goals, something that is not facilitated at the Argentine base depicted in this play, but which is rather restricted and made difficult by the old military regime's presence. “The treaty provides that Antarctica shall be used for peaceful purposes only. It specifically prohibits “any measures of a military nature, such as the establishment of military bases and fortifications, the carrying out of military maneuvers, as well as the testing of any type of weapons.” (The Treaty does not prohibit the use of military personnel or equipment, however, for scientific research or for any other peaceful purpose.)” (<http://www.state.gov/t/avc/trty/193967.htm>)

Argentina and England have had overlapping claims to islands and territory in the Antarctic, a cause for political clashes. This is a direct reflection of the territorial disagreements and conflicts over the Malvinas that also occur between Argentina and England. The current territorial claims in the Antarctic of England and Argentina do in fact overlap. In the early 1900s when these territorial conflicts first began between the two nations, Argentina attempted to secure their claim by erecting markers and flags, to symbolically solidify this space.¹⁹² The Coronel believes that their physical presence is a necessity as the military base functions as a marking on the endless icy surface to legitimize Argentina's claim.¹⁹³ However, the base is abandoned at the end of the play, and therefore the Coronel has failed to maintain Argentina's claim. Nation is often imagined before it is 'officially' recognized. Additionally, the ever-changing, fluid nature of imagined territory in relation to the nation is an integral part of Argentina.

Imagined spaces as depicted on maps are often powerful reflections of a nation's image of itself projected for not only its citizens, but also for the world audience. Maps of course are altered over time too. Sometimes maps are even changed before political boundaries are ratified in order to sway national opinion and consciousness which can later result in real, tangible changes. The new Bi-continental map was officially put into practice in Argentine textbooks, schools, and government organizations in 2010, and though it may be an



1.1 Bi-continental map of Argentina

anachronistic reference to this theatre piece first produced in 2003, this map also extends the

¹⁹² Kieran Mulvaney. *At the Ends of the Earth: A History of the Polar Regions*. Island Press, 2001, pp. 124–130.

¹⁹³ As stated by the Argentine government on their official webpage on their position in the Antarctic, "It is convenient to point out that for 40 years the Argentine was the only permanent occupant of the Antarctic, such a fact that represents the best of our claims of sovereignty in the area.", signaling how physical territorial occupation can come to symbolically translate to a geo-political sense of belonging and identity hinged on this physical space. <http://www.dna.gov.ar/INGLES/DIVULGAC/ARGANT.HTM>

ideological Argentine boundaries on a two dimensional map, which are rehearsed as performed images on the walls of schools and government buildings for children and citizens, and represents a claim for the wider world audience.¹⁹⁴ Noteworthy about this map, is the way in which the Islas Malvinas become sandwiched between the slice of Antarctic territory at the bottom of the map, and the Argentine mainland towards the top. This map creates a strong justification for the belonging of the Islas Malvinas. Argentina has effectively drawn their claim to the islands through geographical reasoning, stating plainly a *desire* before official recognition has arrived.

This geographical connection via mapping created between the South Atlantic, Antarctica, and continental Argentina (that includes naturally the Malvinas), is manifested twice in the play. First Sosnowsky demands, “necesito un mapa de la Argentina y el mapa de la Antártida.” to which Perrupato asks, “¿Político o físico?”, and Sosnowsky replies, “Es igual.” The scientist’s ambivalence about whether he receives a political or physical map ridiculously blurs further the lines between geography or physical space, and politics, natural landscape and man-made delineations including official national boundaries. Moreover, the mysterious phenomenon of the melting continent, a part of the natural world, is ridiculously reasoned out by the scientist via distinctions of political boundaries. Sosnowsky uses the two-dimensional political map to show the others that,

“la Antártida Argentina tiene la misma forma triangular que la república pero invertida, por lo tanto la luz solar al incidir sobre los hielos se refleja sobre sí misma y como el agujero de ozono la amplifica y al mismo tiempo la hace rebotar sobre la república provoca un efecto especular neto aumentando así el derretimiento continental.”

¹⁹⁴ <http://www.ign.gob.ar/AreaInstitucional/Normativa/Leyes/LeyBicontinental>

This is an explanation that is scientifically ridiculous but is allowed in the fictitious world of the play. While we may guffaw, this nonsensical approach reveals some similar insanity that does exist in the real world: that of drawing imaginary lines on the face of the earth to claim ownership. It is of course much easier to see and ridicule the scientist in the play who blames the melting continent on political boundaries than it is to see the hilarity in our own tendency to politically divide and partition the natural world.

In a final instance in which we see the simultaneous real-world importance yet sometimes ridiculousness of maps, we return to the lyrical scientist. In the very last line, Sosnowsky leaves the base on the research vessel, proclaiming the beauty of the Antarctic by describing the beautiful blue waters into which the ice will eventually all melt as, “tan celeste como en los mapas escolares.” It is ironic that the scientist is able to leave this tragic situation (having realized that the Argentine Antarctic and its penguins are doomed) cheerfully and poetically waxing about the environment. In this work, as well as in *Las islas de la memoria*, mapping, and the political and imaginative work of mapping represents the connecting of continental Argentina with other spaces across the South Atlantic. The inclusion of mapping rhetoric functions to disrupt and question imaginary boundaries that supposedly divide spaces referred to on political maps and also juxtaposes the physical and political map in a humorous critique.

Presented in 2003 and 2004 by Los Macocos, *Continente viril* coincides with the “year of the Argentine Antarctic”, celebrating 100 years of Argentine scientific work in the Antarctic. Towards the end of the play, the men at the base celebrate *El Día de la Antártida*, a day celebrated on February 22 annually in Argentina to remember the first human presence in the Argentine Antarctic and also to remember the uninterrupted occupation of the Antarctic by

Argentina.¹⁹⁵ Ironically, this day that celebrates the scientific exploration and discoveries initiated by Argentina is marked in the play by the house arrest of the scientist who is prohibited by his captors from revealing his discovery that relates to global warming that is destroying the Argentine Antarctic. Antarctica Day turns out to be the climactic day in the progression of the play: a day when the scientist escapes captivity, whereafter the Coronel is captured by the Australians allowing Perrupato and the Sargento to snap out of their subservient roles to the Coronel, and finally all of the men pack to go home to mainland Argentina. Marked by a series of failures in the dominant system and accepted rules, these final scenes move through the plot rapidly, bringing disenchantment upon disillusionment to the audience, bursting the bubbles previously set up via exaggeration initially. The many downfalls of these laughable characters are watched nearly as a series of slapstick routines in which we take pleasure in the repeated defeats of the fools on stage. Failure as a conduit to questioning, consideration, and reformulation, and the openness to fluidity and change brings in a grotesque element. Also, as a theme, failure establishes the idea of the incompleteness which accompanies the nation of Argentina, ever yearning for future completion.

Neighboring countries' territories play roles in determining Argentine identity too. An element of that which is 'the nation' must always define itself in relation to that which is outside its bounds and that which it is not. As Jorge Larraín Ibañez explains, the "process of differentiation has always existed in all processes of identity construction" (11), adding, "Cultural identity is defined as against these other groups: thus the idea of 'us' as opposed to 'them'. Differences are exaggerated in order to highlight the profile of one's own identity" (17),

¹⁹⁵ http://www.buenosaires.gob.ar/areas/ciudad/historico/calendario/destacado.php?menu_id=23203&ide=308

an exaggeration tactic linked to the aesthetic of the *grotesco criollo* in this piece.¹⁹⁶ From the very onset of the play, the problem that instigates the development of the plot is stated to be the need to investigate the suicide of the Argentine penguins. Sosnowsky becomes aware of the geopolitical nature of this phenomenon occurring in the Antarctic wilds when he discovers that the English penguins live normal lives while the Argentine side has only ghost colonies. Arbitrary ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ delineations have exaggeratedly laughable yet horrendous results.

The dark humor present in this tragic tale suggests that in a contemporary idea of nationalism, it may not be wise to demarcate so rigidly territory and the occupants therein. Acobino offers a rethinking of exclusion and inclusion that may in fact mirror the encroaching era of globalization and more interconnectedness among nations instead of the more antiquated idea of closed and bound nations. In one moment, Sosnowsky breaks the fourth wall and confesses, “Estoy anonadado... Por alguna incomprendible razón la Madre Naturaleza está acatando las fronteras geográficas marcadas por el hombre.” The humor resulting from this plot point opens a questioning feeling, dismantling accepted truths, and makes us more able to critique new ideas and not simply accept the way we know things to be. And why don’t the penguins simply cross over to other territory? Surprisingly similarly to their human counterparts, as the scientist explains, “los pingüinos presentan rasgos xenofobos en su conducta y no aceptan pingüinos provenientes de otras pinguineras...Pingüinología básica, mi coronel. Pingüinología básica.” While we may laugh merrily at the nonsensical nature of these penguins that could so easily save themselves by crossing border and disregarding the national constraints placed on them artificially, and at the humanized penguins, we have a harder time in accepting this same idea in the human world and recognizing the animal qualities we possess. This is yet another

¹⁹⁶ Larraín Ibañex, Jorge. “The Concept of Identity.” *National Identities and Sociopolitical Changes in Latin America*. Eds. Mercedes F Durán Cogan and Antonio Gómez-Moriana, Routledge, 2001, pp. 1-29.

example of failure: this species will ultimately fail to be successful due to the rigid and inflexible constraints of antiquated nationalism imposed upon them.

Another moment which both addresses and questions borders happens as the Coronel accidentally crosses the Argentine-Australian border in the snow while looking for the runaway Sosnowky. As the Australian base radios back to the Argentines to let them know of this development, the language barrier between Spanish and English proves too complicated to overcome and the Australians give up as the irate Coronel exclaims, “¡QUE ME QUIEREN EXTRADITAR! ¡LOS AUSTRALIANOS ME QUIEREN EXTRADITAR!” The English-speaking Australians stand in for the other English speakers in Malvinas. Geographically opposed to the Argentines, the Australians have used the imaginary lines in the ice to capture and retain the Coronel as prisoner to be extradited to Australia and tried for his wartime crimes from which he had long hidden. Humor in this scene comes about through language barriers, frustrating communication, creating separation, and showing the audience again that this failed communication is stagnant, inadequate, and troubles understanding and progress in the contemporary globalized world. The Sargento attempts to speak with the Coronel’s captors, speaking into the radio, “Hello, Ay am Benítez... Whisky mantecol, cambio.” His few words manage no effective communication. For an Argentine audience, this extremely broken English is executed in such an overt fashion as to signal clearly the language incompetence. Again, the boundaries that separate Argentina from and bring it into contact with neighboring countries are played with in humorous lights which result in very serious and troubling consequences, for the natural world (in the case of the penguin suicides) or in the case of a perpetrator of crimes against humanity (for the Coronel), and ultimately failure for the Argentines.

Breaking Codes: Uniquely Argentine References to Malvinas

The theme and humorous poetic of this piece are completely Argentine; on the other hand, it is a hard and painful theme to approach for Argentine artists and audience alike. As Javier Rama explained in an interview,

“A uno le va madurando el tema, ya cercano a los 40 años, y tiene como ganas de exorcizarlo desde el oficio. Nos pareció un buen desafío el hecho de meternos con humor en un tema que es, entre comillas, delicado. Porque no hay temas delicados, hemos hecho humor con temas igual de difíciles.”¹⁹⁷

The ‘difficult themes’ he speaks of are both the failure of the dictatorship in 1983 and the Guerra de Malvinas in 1982. The audience community has the relevant experiences and knowledge to decipher references to Malvinas alluded to in order to then evaluate and critique the national issues presented. This code of *Argentinidad* is necessary to approach the work and partake in the humor that is nascent and to interpret the humorous experience of the underlying serious themes.

In part, the lack of temporal contextualization in the play allows for many possible readings. It is equally possible that the piece is an allegory for the dictatorship, or that it is a fictitious continuation after dictatorship (sometime in the 1980s), or even that it occurs in the present day of the audience (early 2000s). Left vague and to our own reading as an audience on purpose, we can easily see this base in the Antarctic as ‘frozen in time and space’, applying the conversations and conflicts that arise to other spaces and moments that are suspended in the Argentine psyche, existing yet today as problematic discussions. Explaining the physical space, one actor said, “imaginamos que esa base sigue estando en algún lugar, como un pasado continuo.”¹⁹⁸ Acobino certainly wrote this frozen timelessness of the post-dictatorship into the

¹⁹⁷ “Los Macocos: la risa que esconde una mueca”, <http://archivo.losandes.com.ar/notas/2004/4/15/estilo-105938.asp> published June 15, 2004.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

work, as many reviews of the play and publicity also highlight the atemporality as, “congelada en los tiempos de posdictadura y Guerra de Malvinas”¹⁹⁹ The lingering conversations about dictatorship in Argentine society and the unresolved nature of the crimes of the dictatorship that seep into the post-dictatorship era are similar in uncompleted nature to the conflict of the Malvinas.

The space of Antarctica is a geographic twin for the Malvinas too of course. Both places are written into the new bi-continental mapping of the Argentine nation to thereby eventually acquire legitimacy. The two have continuously been sites of dispute between the Argentines and various other countries, in particular with the British. Both spaces are not a part of the mainland but require travel across the South Atlantic to arrive to these outposts of the nation. The climate can be described in both places as cold and inhospitable and penguins are some of the only mammal life forms besides humans to reside on both the Malvinas and Antarctic. Perhaps most importantly, neither space is particularly populated, easy to reach or maintain, nor at first glance should either be essential to the nation. Both therefore are connected to a sense of national honor and symbolic legitimacy much more than physical necessity.

The penguin characters offer insight into the triangular link between Antarctica-Malvinas-Argentina. The central plot issues hinge on the suicidal penguins' plight, making them the identifiable victims, and therefore they can be interpreted as both representations of victims of the violence of the dictatorship, but also as the innocent victims of the Malvinas war (soldiers sent to war and veterans today). The scientist Sosnowsky directs an apostrophe to the penguins as he approaches the military base, asking them, “¿Será acaso la tragedia de tu raza, aquella

¹⁹⁹ Frieria, Silvina. “Los represores fríos”. <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/espectaculos/6-24360-2003-08-21.html>

tragedia por la que yo estoy aquí en la cubierta del Tijuca? ¿Será la tuya una huída de aquella extraña locura que impera entre tus gentes? Oh solitario pingüino, si tan solo pudieras prestarme tu testimonio.” while preposterously speaking to the flightless birds to peak our attention, we recall the impossibility of the victims of the dictatorship (the disappeared and the fallen Malvinas soldiers too) to offer their testimony. An opening scene, this may be the first time the audience begins to recognize the significance of the penguins and their representation of victimhood, hopelessness, lack of control, and innocence. It is also possible that the audience recognizes the tragically suicidal penguins as representations of the Malvinas veterans who have an alarmingly high suicide rate, a nationally known, discussed and unsettled issue that lingers on yet into the very present.²⁰⁰ This is another example of the inability to resolve the ‘Malvinas Issue’.

Finally, the Guerra de las Malvinas is referenced directly in two key moments within the play, making obvious the connections between the piece and that space. Humor elicited from these moments draws us in and maintains our attention on the presence of Malvinas hidden throughout the text. The first time Malvinas is referenced, the Sargento and Perrupato erase expiration dates on provisions to trade with neighboring bases, re-writing them before the naïve scientist’s eyes, explaining that expiration dates mean little in the Antarctic cold anyway. Surprised, the scientist exclaims that the chocolate was due to expire in 1982, and Perrupato explains that many of their provisions were remainders from the war cut short, and sent to this forgotten frozen base, which receives both left-over food and military men who need to be kept out of the public eye. This scene demonstrates the naivety of the scientist who still does not understand the liminality, rules and laws of this base. The audience laughs light-heartedly at this scene, identifying with the scientist’s disbelief and confusion, as we too, are being inducted into

²⁰⁰ The number of veterans to commit suicide in the post-war years was estimated in 2013 to have exceeded 400. http://www.clarin.com/malvinas/Malvinas-reclamo-combatientes-suicidio-conscripto_0_958104437.html

this strange world that plays by its own rules and logic. In this moment, while the erasure of expiration dates may trick those stationed at other bases, and of other nationalities with whom they trade, there is no imminent danger or dark malice intended, and therefore a lightness or safety is maintained, and we are allowed to feel humor and laugh.

A darker moment drawing on Malvinas occurs towards the end and climax of the piece when Sosnowsky is under house arrest, but the others celebrate El Día de la Antártida gleefully. Another chocolate bar from 1982 is opened, this one containing a letter from a young student originally destined to the soldiers fighting on the islands. They open the letter, reading it out loud, mockingly, while eating the chocolate,

“‘Soldadito de la Patria...’ RISAS. Coronel: Eh, jeje...Más respeto, che...Siga...jejeje...Empleado: ‘...te escribe esta carta a vos que estás muy lejos defendiendo nuestras Malvinas. Aquí en Rosario pensamos en ustedes todos los días y también rezamos por ustedes. Todos estamos juntando cosas para mandarles. Por eso con esta carta te mando este mantecol y este dibujito, para que no te sientas tan lejos.’ Firma Julián... CESAN LAS RISAS. SILENCIO. Empleado: Uy, miren lo que le mandó... ¡Un dibujo del Pato Carret! TODOS ESTALLAN EN CARCAJADAS.”

Suddenly, compared to the first scene referencing Malvinas chocolates, this scene becomes more tragic than humorous, and there is greater malice and cruelty in this moment. In part, this new sense of callousness is created as the chocolate becomes connected more personally and intimately to an individual soldier (soldadito de la Patria), and is sent earnestly from the hand of a particular child (Julián). It is ironic that this chocolate and personalized note made its way, not to the fated young soldiers of Malvinas in 1982, but rather to this lot of outcast soldiers, merrily over-eating chocolates and drinking whisky around the year 2000. How ironic that the reception of the child’s letter does not keep up spirits and create a feeling of hopefulness, but rather provokes merciless laughter as it is ridiculed as naïve. It is doubtful that the audience observing this gluttony laughs here, rather, the laughter is most likely restrained to the space of the stage,

creating an emotional tone that the audience draws back from and distances themselves from, reflecting on, but not in merriment. The laughter occurring on stage is that of superiority and thus this is another moment where the audience partakes actively in unlaughter.²⁰¹ Some laughter which occurs on stage serves a reflective point for the audience but is in fact not funny for the gathered public to experience.²⁰² Humor on the Argentine stage frequently urges the audience to laugh through pain, but also at times calls us to *reflect* upon the *perception* of a yet darker vein of laughter. Both approaches aid in tracing the contours of Argentine humor and *Argentinidad*.

Argentine Humor and Contemporary National Identity

Argentine humor stems in great part from those earlier performance traditions developed especially in the 19th and early 20th centuries mentioned before: most notably the *grotesco criollo*, *sainete criollo*, and *circo criollo*. ‘*Criollo*’ in the description of each is a word which first described those locally born in the new world of Spanish descent. These ‘locally born’ traditions that exhibit forms of corporeal and verbal performance expression have been twisted, altered, made proper of Argentina, evolved and departed from the European inheritance. This process of adapting European legacies to make them into recognizably local and unique ones allows these art forms and genres to assume an identity of self and establish the new nation. Therefore, these humor modes are not only important in questioning and creating an opening in the understanding of the contemporary nation post-Malvinas, but is also intrinsically linked to the establishment of nation. Argentine humor is sometimes jaded and pessimistic, can be found linked to the very darkest topics (the painful, depressing, or traumatic), and few themes are off-limits. Humor of

²⁰¹ See previous footnote (28) on Michael Billig’s term “unlaughter”.

²⁰² See John Morreall’s work, *Taking Laughter Seriously* for further explanation of how not all laughter results from that which we find humorous, and not all that is humorous produces laughter. While laughter is frequently a response to experiencing the comic, an exclusive relationship does not exist between humor and laughter.

the *grotesco criollo* which influences Los Macocos' work exemplifies humor that twists and deforms, causing laughter while we observe pain, eliciting smiles from the downfall and failure of those on stage, in an ultimately profound critique of social issues.

The *circo criollo*, or Argentine circus and the national tradition of the *payaso* or clown is also at the very root and foundation of this unique national humor as it manifests on stage. *Circo criollo* is also considered one of the first performance art forms to gain the status of a truly Latin American performance genre, leaving imitation of the European form behind and beginning to create an identity unique to the geographic space and culture therein. In fact, the *circo criollo* which performed not only traditional circus acts and stunts but also short locally inspired theatre pieces, is also recognized as the origin of the Argentine theatre tradition as a corpus.²⁰³ The Argentine tradition of stand-up comedy is another point of reference for national humor. This popular contemporary Argentine performance art and can be found along Avenida Corrientes in Buenos Aires on a nightly basis, inspired by the North American and British stand-up comedian, but also made '*criollo*'.²⁰⁴

Graphic and visual humor have long held an important place in Argentine culture too, expanding artistic notions of local humor beyond the performance frame. In 2012, a museum devoted entirely to the graphic tradition of humor opened, El Museo del Humor, declaring the

²⁰³As described by Héctor García Martínez in his article "El viejo circo criollo, escuela de arte y cuna del teatro". <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/880192-el-viejo-circo-criollo-escuela-de-arte-y-cuna-del-teatro>

²⁰⁴During a night of "Humor Negro Stand Up" in 2013 in Buenos Aires, the comedian on stage began his set by interacting with his audience, asking them to test the limits of their ability to feel humor. After asking for suggestions about what could certainly not be material for humor, the audience replied with various off-color ideas, one suggesting the recent military dictatorship and the disappeared. Following this suggestion, the comedian proceeded to comment that in a country with 30,000 disappeared, it was amazing that any audience was left to attend his show. This example illuminates the kind of humor that is permissible, produced, and understood on site and in context. A show summary on Alternativateatral.com reads, "En Humor Negro Stand Up Club todas las semanas hay un show distinto en el cual el dolor y el sufrimiento se transforma en catarsis y risas. Animate a reirte sobre temas sensibles como la muerte, la pobreza, discapacidades, adicciones, enfermedades y otras miserias."

long history of cartooning, comics, caricature, video cartoons, journals and magazines devoted to humor, and other forms of visual humor. One magazine well known nationally and highlighted in the museum space, the magazine HUMO® played a key role in carrying on the tradition of dissident graphic humor during the dictatorship years, running from 1978-1999. Its initial success immediately after its founding in 1978 could be attributed to the bold way in which it used humor and especially satire to denounce the dictatorship. The acceptance and approval of this criticism by the public, proof of which are found in the sales and continued production of the journal, shows us that this humor is truly Argentine, recognized, understood, and appreciated by the Argentine people as a way of approaching times of crisis.

Failures and Crises of Identity

The particular trauma of Malvinas is of an especially exaggerated lingering sort for veterans and those connected to them. The lack of resolution available to veterans runs parallel to that of the disappeared during the dictatorship, furthering the connection in *Continente viril* between Malvinas and the dictatorship. Many veterans never had adequate health benefits given to them in return for their service, and honors and recognition were not given to those deserving of such symbolic forms of appreciation. Some of those who died at sea or on the islands of Malvinas may not have been recovered and their families could not bury them. The embarrassment of the episode caused many fellow Argentines to turn their backs on these veterans, many of which continue to protest and fight for recognition yet today.²⁰⁵

The painful theme of veteran suicide is addressed through humorously lightened channels in *Continente viril*. Like U.S. Vietnam War veterans, there is a very high rate of suicide among

²⁰⁵ For example, since 2008, a semi-permanent protest has been set up by these veterans in the public space of the Plaza de Mayo.

veterans of the Guerra de Malvinas. According to *La Nación* newspaper, "...la cantidad de suicidios de ex combatientes argentinos de la Guerra de las Malvinas ya es superior al número de los que cayeron durante el combate en las islas."²⁰⁶ An astounding statistic, this suicide rate that is 14 times higher than the overall population, points to a segment of the Argentine population (it is estimated that around 14,000 Malvinas veterans are yet alive today) that have been traumatized. In the same *La Nación* article, Doctor Daniel Mosca stated that, "Las consecuencias psíquicas del trauma, lejos de disminuir, con el tiempo aumentan." Like this theatre piece which returns to treat the issue of the crisis of the moment of Malvinas and the decadence of the dictatorship in 1982 and 1983 from the perspective of 2000, trauma, far from being a worn-out topic belonging to another era, is still pertinent in the present. The traumas caused by the moments of crisis examined in this project do not disappear, but rather, stay active and these moments form points of reference for contemporary Argentines. The veterans' experience informs contemporary Argentine understanding of Malvinas today. Their lingering trauma that walks among fellow citizens is easy to forget on a daily basis, but humor draws our attention back to this issue, framing unavoidably a problem that is *not* of the animal world at all, but rather complexly human.

Throughout *Continente viril*, it is apparent that, the involvement between the theatre piece and audience is intrinsic to the methodology and successful communication on part of the troupe Los Macocos. By outlining the various adaptations undertaken by the troupe, I have shown how much of their unique poetic became a part of the presented work, altering the written text by Alejandro Acobino drastically, enough to say that their interpretation is itself an individual work. The audience is left intrigued and implicated, and with a lingering, while also

²⁰⁶ Galak, Oliver. "No cesan los suicidios de ex combatientes de Malvinas." <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/784519-no-cesan-los-suicidios-de-ex-combatientes-de-malvinas>

troubling ending. We are troubled into contemplation of the role of the geographic spaces implied and depicted (Malvinas, Antarctica, and continental Argentina). Questions of nationalism, how the audience relates to their country, how they perceive themselves as members of a nation and the nation itself, bring nationalistic and geopolitical issues into focus. The piece is saturated with many references that make this piece not just about the Argentine Antarctic, but about being Argentine, the Malvinas, the place of the failure of dictatorship in their identity. With numerous references to important figures and tendencies of national pop culture significance, historic moments, and through a very local dialect, the piece never fails to question and suggest all that can be considered Argentine, maintaining a troublesomely humorous tone.

Adding another layer to the thematic of the nation, the nationally recognized theatre genre (the *grotesco criollo*), adapts the piece in order to communicate in a way recognizable to this audience, having influenced the ways in which theatre has been written and performed in Argentina since the early 1900s when the aesthetic first distinctly took shape. A delicate balance of the tragic and the humorous that define the utterly national theatre genre is discernible throughout the piece. We could say that the *grotesco criollo* exemplifies a way of feeling Argentine together: laughing through and in spite of pain. The *grotesco criollo* lacks solutions, and yet continues to bother and hound the lingering memory of crisis and trauma that pervades Argentine society. As Claudia Kaiser Lenoir proposes, the *grotesco criollo*, “No plantea salidas ni señala nuevos rumbos. Es un reflejo, tal vez, del caos histórico del que surge” (31). The audience faces their residual traumas and national crisis decades later which refuse to be quieted, but can still be laughed at. *Argentinidad* is constantly being considered and constructed (shown in the cyclical nature of the piece), always implicating the past, present, and imagined future.

Chapter Conclusions

Throughout *Continente viril*, though packed with humor both textually and in the performance, there is an overwhelming sense of hopelessness, pointlessness, pessimism, and failure that radiates throughout the piece. As described by Vicente Palermo, moments of doubt and failure often coincide with moments when national identity is being formulated or re-formulated. He explains, “La interpelación nacionalista es...al postular la ausencia, la falta, la pérdida, la carencia, más eficaz que otras” (45). The two theatre works dealt with in this chapter, *Islas de la memoria* and *Continente viril*, help segments of society to re-evaluate identity as a collective, gathered audience. *Islas de la memoria* employs a lighter more pedagogical approach in humor to bridge a generational gap. Though the humor that marks each work is very tonally distinct, both pieces do appeal to modes of humorous emotionality and call attention to the individual as a member of a collective. Both works are also influenced by and adapt the local *grotesco criollo*, *sainete criollo*, and *circo criollo* techniques to their advantage, further signaling the very national issues under consideration. Through either humorous approach, the audience members come to reposition themselves as individuals among the collective and consider the nature of Argentine identity in the post-dictatorship years. This identity is ever-changing, but that very characteristic of fluidity may be necessary to dissolve older nationalistic ideas and rigid boundaries, helping to adjust to the new global age of the early 2000s.

Chapter III. Parody: The Humor of Recycling and the Aesthetics of Resilience in the Theatre of Economic Crisis.

Throughout the decade of the 1990s in Argentina (a period also referred to as the time of *menemismo*, or the years during which Carlos Menem was president), a cultural and social shift began to take place as the nation exited the dictatorship years and was ushered into an era marked by capitalism, unbridled neoliberalist ideologies, globalization, and new democracy.²⁰⁷ This chapter examines some of the disastrous economic ideologies that grew throughout this decade and which are marked by a culminating moment in December of the year 2001, and ultimately how this crisis is portrayed on stage. I argue that humorous recycling, or parody, is the affective mode of this devastating moment able to uniquely capture and critique the economic crisis in Argentine theatre. Parody, which references the already known and yet forges new space by creating difference from the parodied reference, I believe to be uniquely situated to suggest paths out of hopelessness and disaster and towards the future.²⁰⁸ In what follows in this chapter, parody will be highlighted as a humorous form which is able to simultaneously mirror, critique, and innovate regarding the decade of the 1990s (characterized by abuses of globalization and mounting neoliberalism in particular), culminating in 2001. Humor, especially that which is established and diffused through parody, remains a key component of my analysis in this section. However, this chapter will focus significantly on the theme and theoretical approach of recycling

²⁰⁷ Carlos Menem was president of Argentina from 1989-1999 and is well known for continuing neoliberal ideologies initially adopted by the military junta and also for establishing many neoliberal reforms, privatizing State-owned companies, establishing the convertibility plan equalizing the peso and dollar, heightening external debt and encouraging foreign investments in-country. Many of these measures helped to stabilize inflation initially and resulted in a short period in which the Argentine population experienced the illusion of wealth and could take part in an extremely consumerist society, but this came to a head in the late 90s and especially 2001 when these various economic measures became obviously unstable and unmaintainable. Menem's policies seemed to put a bandage on a disastrous situation that was growing throughout the nineties, delaying the inevitable descent into crisis for his successors.

²⁰⁸ Parody is succinctly described by Linda Hutcheon as "repetition with difference" (101) and this will be the foundational definition of parody that I work from in this study. *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-century Art Forms*.

(understood through pastiche, collage, intertextuality, the postmodern artistic aesthetic, and in other forms) in the face of destruction that contextualize this time period.

The decade of the 1990s played a part in the culminating moment of the economic collapse of Argentina. It was a decade of a sort of slow trauma that was unraveling in the nation, however the year 2001 will be used as the most heightened moment. Similar to previous moments of crisis, this period entered into the realm of cultural production and was echoed on stage by playwrights throughout the years of the post-dictatorship. It continues to resurge in the present as a way of calling the public's attention to the issues which led to such a destructive situation, and also as a method of dealing with the issue by planting the seeds for change in thought.

What exactly makes this moment worthy of being designated as a crisis? How can we compare the terror imposed upon society by the dictatorship or the traumatic wound inflicted upon the nation by the downfall of the government during the Guerra de Malvinas to an economic depression? Describing in brief how the political ideologies and motivations of the 1990s impacted the nation, Marta Mariasole Raimondi explains that,

“durante las presidencias de Carlos S. Menem (1989-1999), se instaló un modelo económico neoliberal conservador. El mismo llevará al país a un verdadero *genocidio social*, pues generó *una crisis económica* sin precedentes y también un empobrecimiento progresivo de la población, desestructurando a la importante clase media y llevando a la indigencia a los sectores más pobres. Bajo este gobierno, la rápida imposición del modelo neoliberal contribuyó al surgimiento de un mundo más individualista, fundado en el consumismo y en la búsqueda de un bienestar personal.”²⁰⁹ (my emphasis)

The very language that is used to fix this moment in history and memory is indicative of a deep catastrophic situation, especially notable in the use of the precise terms, “crisis” and

²⁰⁹ Marta Mariasole Raimondi, “El teatro como espacio de resistencia en la Argentina de la postdictadura”, *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos* [online], Questions du temps présent, published online 14 July 2008. <http://nuevomundo.revues.org/37982>

“social genocide”.²¹⁰ The 2004 documentary film titled *Memoria del saqueo* traces many of the political decisions made under Menem through to their social implications, and throughout the documentary the situation is similarly framed as profound and devastating socially, or as the English translation of the title suggests, a *Social Genocide*. The film poses the following questions and response to the viewing audience at the onset,

“¿Qué había pasado en la Argentina? ¿Cómo era posible que en una tierra tan rica, se sufriera tanta hambre? El país había sido devastado por un nuevo tipo de agresión, ejecutada en paz y en democracia, una violencia cotidiana y silenciosa. Dejaba *más víctimas sociales, más emigrados y muertos que el terrorismo de Estado y la guerra de Malvinas.*”²¹¹ (my emphasis)

By putting the economic turmoil in conversation with the Military Dictatorship and the Guerra de Malvinas, it becomes clear that although these three moments all differ drastically (in kinds of violence, aggressors, victims, and breadth and depth of social impact), they all constitute crises that the nation has suffered, in close chronological proximity and which additionally are all interrelated. Moreover, these three moments all continue to affect the present national reality; all three extreme experiences escape delimitations and continue to impact society today, evidenced by the continued theatrical production which is still working through and processing them. In this third moment however, some of the forms of suffering that are most prominent as consequences of neoliberal and economic crisis and that will appear as themes in the theatre works which follow are: the extreme separation of social classes, loss of much of the middle class,

²¹⁰ In fact, a dictionary of the crisis (*Diccionario de la crisis* by Marcelo Oliveri and José Gobello) was published in 2002 to contain terminology and even lyrics from tangos and rock songs related to the economic crisis. These words began to accumulate at this time in the media and as popular slang to describe the phenomena that accompanied the moment of crisis, such as: cacerolazo, corralito, patacón, etc. This shows the need to adapt that accompanies any moment of crisis, and language along with other cultural forms are some of the first modes of response humans have when confronted with crisis.

²¹¹ Solanas, Fernando E, Mouján A. Fernández, and Gerardo Gandini. *Memoria Del Saqueo: A Social Genocide*. 2004.

destitution of the lower class, job loss and unemployment, poverty, hunger, loss of money and savings, devaluation of currency, political corruption, destruction of family dynamics, unbridled consumerism, heightened individualism, and the loss of cultural and national identity as Argentine culture and global culture coalesced through the deepening penetration of neoliberal ideals and heightened tendencies of globalization.²¹²

As this particular moment is unraveled, it becomes clear that the national level destruction which was experienced throughout the 1990s and detonated in 2001 touches on questions of political, neoliberal, and ultimately, economic crisis. Some of the *psychological* and *emotional* outcomes of existing in a society experiencing such vast and all-encompassing, permeating crisis are: feelings of chaos and destruction, renewed questioning of national identity, pessimism, disillusionment with political leadership, dissent, revolution, the need for renovation, and a desire to return to familiar pasts by recycling former traditions and knowledges to cope with the present. As Paul Cooney points out, this moment was characterized by, “a generalized lack of confidence” (27) and “a general dissatisfaction with almost all established political parties” (32). Due to this atmosphere of distrust and universal feeling of national failure, Cooney describes a turn to increased economic autonomy in the form of occupied factories and the growth of barter clubs for example (33).²¹³ According to Cooney, the most succinct way to describe the cause of this crisis is to look to Argentina’s pursuit of neoliberal economic policies and the impact of globalization (31). A pervasive disintegration became especially conspicuous during the most climactic years of 1998-2002. For instance, people took to the streets in massive

²¹² For a concise and pointed discussion of the 2001 economic crisis and the various players, influences, and outcomes, see the following article: Goddard, Victoria. “‘This Is History’”: Nation and Experience in Times of Crisis—Argentina 2001.” *History and Anthropology*, Vol. 17, No. 3, September 2006, pp. 267–286.

²¹³ Cooney, Paul. “Argentina’s Quarter Century Experiment with Neoliberalism: From Dictatorship to Depression” *Revista De Economia Contemporânea* (Online) Vol. 11.1, 2007, p. 7.

protests that involved all strata of society and which led to multiple fatalities in clashes between the police and protestors. Roads were blocked by residents demanding employment and food, a general strike was declared, stores were looted, people beat on pots and pans in *cacerolazos*, daily manifestations of picketers filled the *Plaza de Mayo*.²¹⁴ This violent upheaval forced five presidents out of power in the span of two weeks in 2001.²¹⁵

Cultural Creation from Crisis

As negative a connotation as the word ‘crisis’ may have, positive and unexpected outcomes sprang from this period. Cooperative and more localized community efforts were born to cope with that which the government could not help with resolving immediately. In the theatrical arts, this meant a revival of street performance, and heightened communal theatre initiatives. Community theatre grew and expanded its reach and was performed in venues based in peoples’ houses or garages, or through neighborhood associations. Clarisa Fernández explains that,

“El teatro comunitario tiene un funcionamiento multiplicador de la experiencia, pero fue en el 2001 cuando ese mecanismo adquirió mayor visibilidad, y el número de grupos comenzó a subir rápidamente. La crisis abrió un resquicio en la percepción que las personas tenían sobre ellas mismas, sobre la participación, las posibilidades de construir un proyecto colectivo.”²¹⁶

²¹⁴ The article “Argentina: crisis y lucha social de mayo de 2003” by Paula Klachko gives a good overview of the popular responses to the growing crisis from the mid-1990s through 2001. <http://www.cadtm.org/Argentina-crisis-y-lucha-social>

²¹⁵ Many other researchers have observed this “feeling of crisis and disillusionment” that Kim England and Kevin Ward describe in *Neoliberalization: States, Networks, Peoples*. Also see the following works explaining the impact of the crisis on society and on individuals within: “‘This Is History’: Nation and Experience in Times of Crisis—Argentina 2001” by Victoria Goddard, *Argentina Since the 2001 Crisis: Recovering the Past, Reclaiming the Future* edited by Cara Levey, Daniel Ozarow, and Christopher Wylde, or the chapter “Varieties of Nostalgia” in *Argentinean and Chilean Generations* by Raimundo Frei.

²¹⁶ Fernández, Clarisa. "Procesos de memoria en el teatro comunitario argentino". *La revista del CCC* [online]. Enero / Abril 2011, n° 11. <http://www.centrocultural.coop/revista/articulo/230/>

An imperative surged to find new solutions to theatre spaces and traditional ways of presenting and gathering spectatorship for theatre. The entire process of theatre-going had to adapt, as some performances embraced ‘*pasar la gorra*’ ticket pricing (literally collecting whatever spectators could afford to pay instead of setting ticket prices).²¹⁷ Amazingly, spectatorship and community support of the arts and theatre in particular did not dwindle and in fact maintained a strong audience throughout this time.²¹⁸ Moreover, it would seem that the closeness of community and the creation of new communities of support especially in the cultural realm are reinforced in times of emergency. For example, playwright, director, and actor Claudio Tolcachir connects the desperation of that time to the birth and success of his theatre space *Timbre 4*, which,

“Nació en el 2001, un poco de la desesperación, como un manotazo no consciente en medio de aquella crisis. Me había mudado al barrio de Boedo con la idea de tener un espacio de investigación, no un teatro porque me parecía complicado. Era dedicarse mucho tiempo a la administración y poco a hacer teatro. Nos juntamos con unos amigos –compañeros del colegio Mariano Moreno– y empezamos a construir un proyecto. Afuera pasaba de todo y nosotros, metidos adentro, armando la sala, pintando las luces... Nos inventamos un sueño para poder seguir. Y fue nuestra salvación.”²¹⁹

Emotions are often what knit together these communities, sharing more than opinions or views, but also sentiments. Explaining how emotions and crisis are intertwined, the contemporary Argentine playwright Daniel Veronese observes, “Creo también que los momentos de comunión emocional aparecen en los tiempos de crisis... porque me parece que en esos momentos

²¹⁷ This is affirmed in Stefan Eiter’s article, “Resistiendo la crisis: el teatro porteño” from 2003 which reveals the vitality of the theatre community throughout the worst of the economic crisis in Argentina.

²¹⁸ In her article “En Argentina, la crisis de 2001 no ha refrenado la creatividad”, Eloïse Cohen-de Timary claims, “En efecto, en 2001 el público estuvo presente. El director de teatro Daniel Veronese cuenta que durante la crisis de 2001 aunque la gente no podía sacar más de 250 pesos por semana seguían yendo al teatro, pagando su entrada.”

²¹⁹ “La vida fue muy generosa conmigo”. *Noticias de la Semana*. Sept. 5, 2013. <http://noticias.perfil.com/2013/09/05/claudio-tolcachir-la-vida-fue-muy-generosa-conmigo/>

necesitamos alimentar el espíritu y expresar las cosas”.²²⁰ As the shared experience of the theatre piece occurs and the particularly communicative emotional state of humor (marked often by shared laughter) is present, a closeness, and a sense of belonging or togetherness develop.

Plays that directly addressed the culmination of the crisis and which were written during or after the detonation of the situation in 2001 found that older language and traditional realism would no longer suffice to address this new situation adequately.²²¹ A moment of catastrophe often calls for a new method of expression, and when we are at a loss for words, renovation is needed. Nevertheless, renovation implies a making of something new *again*, or bringing back to life of something formerly existing but now with a new twist. Most innovation takes place firmly supported by a scaffolding of former ideas and forms. In this light, the concept of recycling (of former genres, traditions, specific pieces, or of non-theatrical cultural forms in the theatre) is paramount. Though the poetic of realism was not appropriate nor adequate for the moment of turmoil, plays were instead developed with poetics which spoke through some of the following characteristics and strategies of dialoging with the new moment of catastrophe: absurdity, fragmentation, blending and confusion of reality and fantasy, further spectator-actor interaction, improvisation within performances, and stand up or uni-personal performances.²²² The work *Los Albornoz (Delicias de una familia argentina)* by the group *Los Macocos* in 2001 offers a good example of theatre which directly responds to the lived moment. This piece demonstrates social crisis, highlighting the absurdity in the current reality, focusing on a fragmented and self-

²²⁰ Quoted in an interview with Eloïse Cohen-de Timary, “En Argentina, la crisis de 2001 no ha refrenado la creatividad”, *Otro Lunes Revista Hispanoamericana de Cultura*. Oct. 2009. N. 10. <http://otrolunes.com/archivos/10/html/este-lunes/este-lunes-n10-a01-p01-2009.html>

²²¹ In *Teatro argentino y crisis (2001-2003)*, a collection of essays organized by Osvaldo Pellettieri to address the question of how theatre and the economic crisis interacted, many playwrights interviewed substantiate this position, declaring that realism does not see a renewal or renovation in the post-crisis of 2001.

destructive family, and uses the invasion of media into their everyday lives and the involvement of the audience through live televised ‘zapping’ or channel surfing, placing the audience in the position of the TV spectator). Enrique Pinti’s *Salsa criolla* which is, “una saga histórico-musical que recorre la historia argentina desde el descubrimiento de América hasta nuestros días” is a well-known referent for the unipersonal show of this time, deftly using humor to directly address the currently socio-political situation of crisis in Argentina, and moreover, using a humor linked to popular and porteño vernacular which led to the long-running success of this show.²²³ Jorge Dubatti describes the theatre of the period of Menem onward as, “el teatro en el canon de multiplicidad, donde paradójicamente lo común es la voluntad de construcción de micropoéticas y micropolíticas”.²²⁴ In other words, theatre of the 90s through the crux of disaster evolved in myriad ways and did not follow one single trend or movement. Armida María Córdoba, Susana Llahí and María de los Ángeles Sanz contend, “No sólo promueve la comunicación del arte, sino la participación de la sociedad a través de sus áreas culturales” (214-215). They go on to describe how independent theatres of the 90s, “desarrollan estéticas que implican nuevos códigos teatrales con un singular manejo del lenguaje verbal, poniendo especial énfasis en el lenguaje corporal”, clearly seen in Ricardo Bartís’ *Postales argentinas* (211). That which unites the theatre of this moment is, “el mayor grado de autonomía estética que presentan” (213).²²⁵ I additionally contend that the characteristics of variety, multiplicity, creativity, and new alternatives in the

²²³ “Pinti analiza con humor el escenario político actual” <http://www.elchubut.com.ar/nota/99769/>

²²⁴ Dubatti, Jorge. “El teatro argentino en la Postdictadura (1983-2010): época de oro, destotalización y subjetividad” *Stichomythia*, Vol. 11-12, 2011, pp. 71-80.

²²⁵ Córdoba, Armida María, Susana Llahí y María de los Ángeles Sanz. “La producción teatral en la década del ’90: De la euforia al desencanto” *Teatro: Revista de Estudios Culturales / A Journal of Cultural Studies*: Número 16, 2002, pp. 205-225.

theatre, all point to the drive to innovate and the need to adapt when faced with a devastating socio-political climate.²²⁶

The two plays treated in this chapter (*Postales argentinas* and *La tempestad reciclada*) offer cultural evidence of the public response to confront the crisis from the 1990s through 2001. The first play which I address here, *Postales argentinas* by Ricardo Bartís, was in fact written well before the culmination of crisis in 2001, in 1988 shortly after the end of dictatorship and while Raul Alfonsín was yet in power. Though Bartís cannot have known the depths towards which neoliberalism would sink the country, the foundation upon which neoliberalism would be built was beginning to be established in the late 80s. The tone of despair and desperation looking towards the future, coupled with mounting and suffocating accumulation is apparent in this piece. In this chapter, I analyze the approaches in each piece that center on the ideas of innovation through recycling and renovating (especially as parody) as strategies to overcome and create resilience in the face of destruction and disintegration.

Postales argentinas written by Ricardo Bartís in 1988 and originally performed in the same year, sets the scene for the devastation of Argentina under global opening and neoliberal capitalism which began mounting in the country in the post-dictatorship years. This piece follows the same theme that continued to fester in *Continente viril*: the disintegration and even disappearance of *Argentinidad* or a sense of national identity. An idealized conceptualization of national identity is all but given up for lost in *Postales argentinas*, as the nation is basically claimed to be dead. And again, while the economic crisis of 2001 is not a point of reference for this piece (it would be anachronistic to say so), there is an oddly premonitory feel to the tone and

²²⁶ For more on the failures and ills of globalization and how they have affected Argentina, see: Lehmann, Jean-Pierre, "Argentina Stuck on the Periphery of a Globalized World: A corrupt and selfish elite has squandered the country's chance to shine", *Yale Global Online*, 20 February 2004. <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/argentina-stuck-periphery-globalized-world>

content. The apocalyptic despair, the absence of community or civilization, the fragmentation and incompleteness of the characters, their fractured and nonsensical dialogue, and their surrounding lifeless environment are all telltale signs of this darkness. As Paola Hernández observes, *Postales*, “es una metáfora de un país que no se encuentra a sí mismo dentro de un mundo globalizado.” (80), linking the play to a search for contemporary identity: something continually sought for, though perhaps never found, and perpetually unresolved. When it first appeared upon the scene, *Postales argentinas* could be said to be a very early indication of the beginning of this new social, economic, and political climate in the rebirth into democracy and at the very onset of the decade of the 1990s. Interestingly, the piece is published yet again in an anthology in 2003, taking a textual form so that it might be read and appreciated by a new public, and thereby also bringing it back to the attention of the theatre world in Buenos Aires at a key moment to reconsider how the country arrived at the 2001 depth of crisis.

On the other hand, Idangel Betancourt’s 2013 adaptation of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, aptly named *La tempestad reciclada* more directly confronts the very moment of crisis in 2001. In this piece, intertextuality, recycling, adaptation, and parody allow for a fresh approximation to an internationally well-known textual reference, as the piece in its entirety is a parody of a Shakespearean work. Framed as such, humor is brought about in the constant parallel or juxtaposition between the present staged work and the familiar Shakespeare piece. To understand and find humor in parody, it is imperative that the audience be familiar with not only the parodied work, but also with the new context or adaptation. Much of the way in which both pieces examined in this chapter utilize parody is through ‘Argentinization’ of language, situations, characters, scenery, and references. This Argentine parody narrows the intended audience (these pieces are by and for Argentines), highlighting the important self-reflective work

that the theatre of this time period undertook. The local audience was most adept at deciphering the codes that composed the parody in order to understand and take part in the resulting humor.

Laughing along to very nationally specific modes of humor, is akin to understanding a particular language, and taking part in a community experience. The laughter created in the theatre which relies heavily on Argentinely recognizable parody when confronting this crisis situation thus is a contemporary marker for community and belonging. This experience of culturally created togetherness may be linked to Benedict Anderson's stress on the necessity for literature and print culture in creating belonging and a sense of community among a group of people spread widely geographically but which nonetheless share a national sense.²²⁷ Here, the diverse experiences of this kind of humor in the theatre during repeated performances (various days and locations of presentation), unites the audiences. Additionally, complete strangers that form the randomly assembled audience share in a sense of togetherness as they experience the ebb and flow of humor created as they are together— a humor that, as has been stated before, builds and is an affective conversation, responding naturally to not only the humorous moment on stage, but also to the laughter and sense of enjoyment experienced by one's fellow audience members. Our experience of the art of theatre allows for feeling together and thus establishing ways of feeling togetherness or belonging, a unique intangible product of the creation of affect that Teresa Brennan, for one, has pointed out. In *The Transmission of Affect*, Brennan explains how affect travels and flows between members of a group (ie, a theatre audience) describing,

“If I emit one emotion and you emit another, we may both of us take onboard the effects of this new composite. This should yield the basis for a contribution to group psychology, because we are beginning with an idea of how a gathering is

²²⁷ See Anderson's *Imagined Communities* and specifically his notions of the importance of the development of print culture in creation of a sense of national identity.

constituted, in part, through the transmission of energetic affects (which may add up to something more than the individual affects of the group's members)" (51).

Borrowing from the fields of affect studies and audience response, Jill Dolan writes in *Utopia in*

Performance that,

“live performance provides a place where people come together, embodied and passionate, to share experiences of meaning making and imagination that can describe or capture fleeting intimations of a better world [and] investigates the potential of different kinds of performance to inspire moments in which audiences feel themselves allied with each other, and with a broader, more capacious sense of a public, in which social discourse articulates the possible” (2).

She articulates how the theatre in our contemporary culture can function to bring together feelings of identity throughout a geographically dispersed population. Finally, as Catherine Chaput proposes, “Moving across thresholds and propelling individuals into and out of different situations, affect offers a way to explore how we have come to belong together.” That is to say that in this unique state of experiencing the emotional effects of art in togetherness, we secondarily and inevitably are connected between our individual bodies into a web of belonging that is bound through feelings.²²⁸ In addressing times of crisis, it is more necessary than ever for Argentines to reevaluate what it means to belong to a nation injured by that which comes from the outside: globalization's ills and the impact of neoliberalism.

Recycling: An Aesthetic of the Times

One of the primary ways in which the troubled, fragmented, and heterogeneous foundation for this crisis is aesthetically exhibited in both plays is through the trope of recycling. Intertextuality is one variant of recycling that is woven throughout both performances: ironically, humorously, wittily, delicately. We find recycling and appropriation, or giving new life to left-overs and scraps, to be central tactics. Rubble, debris, trash, detritus, and waste create a post-

²²⁸ In Chaput's article, “Affect and Belonging in Late Capitalism: A Speculative Narrative on Reality TV.”

apocalyptic scenery that depicts a time beyond the existence of a place called ‘Argentina’. This fragmentation and remixure may even be a form of resistance in the face of the contemporary crisis: globalization. As Hernández points out, if globalization champions homogeneity, then heterogeneity is resistance (86). Clutter textually takes the form of mixed-up quotes in nonsensical relation to one another, and the absurdity which results from hearing this dissonance for the audience. At times the clutter, trash, and the inheritance of these leftovers is a burden that suffocates and aggravates. Simultaneously, this seeming ‘trash’ may suggest the need to look back to traditions and roots, reuse, and see things in a new light. This dual mentality connected to the debris on stage is representative of this destructive yet productive moment in Argentina.

More than simply displaying failure and devastation, this aesthetic of recycling also ameliorates the pain of the present for the gathered audience. The debris can be seen as full of potential, suggesting new ways of forging a future with the scraps that remain and what we have yet available to us: in physical and literal forms of recycling, ideologically, and as an intersection point in cultural production. Playwright Mauricio Kartun sees a buildup or layers of dormant potential in that which is old and selected by an artist to be reanimated through recycling. He has said of his use of the recycled in the theatre, “Bueno, lo mismo me pasa al escribir reciclando un viejo género. Siento el extraordinario changüí que te brinda su pátina. Y aprovecho ese plus, esa elocuencia.”²²⁹ Kartun sees that it is the contemporary playwright’s job to actually work at carefully recycling. For the playwright, “su trabajo consiste en ‘reciclar la basura coloquial’ de ese monstruo de la sintáxis y rescatar ‘la belleza construida en el error’ de la cotidianidad.”²³⁰ By

²²⁹ Dubatti, Jorge. “Mauricio Kartun: poética teatral y construcción relacional con el mundo y los otros.” *La revista del CCC* [en línea]. Septiembre / Diciembre 2007, n°1. <http://www.centrocultural.coop/revista/articulo/22/>. ISSN 1851-3263.

²³⁰ Franco, Mariana. “Mauricio Kartún, rescatar la belleza en un error.” *El informador*. December 2014 <http://www.informador.com.mx/fil/2014/562873/6/mauricio-kartun-rescatar-la-belleza-en-un-error.htm>

reframing and representing in a new context, the playwright allows their audience to refocus on what may be overlooked or the everyday.

In the discussion of the role of recycling in Argentine art, one cannot avoid mentioning the *cartonera*, a movement which constitutes one form of cultural recycling emblematic of the early 2000s context in Argentina. *Cartonera* publishing houses were collectives that began buying *cartón* (cardboard) from *cartoneros* (street collectors) which was then used to fabricate book covers. These groups also acquired small printing presses or photocopied literary texts for their books (texts used with permission or donation from local authors), painted the covers, and sold these *cartoneras* (cardboard books) on the streets and from their cooperative's headquarters. This movement was both a product of its time and a response to the current situation that Argentines were forced to contend with. The first of the cartonera associations, Eloísa Cartonera, describes this moment on its webpage:

“Eloísa Cartonera nació en el 2003, por aquellos días furiosos en que el pueblo copaba las calles, protestando, luchando, armando asambleas barriales, asambleas populares, el club del trueque [...] Por aquellos días, hombres y mujeres perdieron sus trabajos, y se volcaron masivamente a las calles en busca del pan para parar la olla, como se dice, y conocimos a los cartoneros.”²³¹

Recycling materials that were at hand was a necessity of this moment in which homelessness, joblessness, insecurity about the future, and the inability to acquire new or precise material objects reigned. Eloísa not only aimed to provide jobs, but also to spread art and literature in a time of emotional and identitary crisis in the country, and to do so, subverted the publishing house system which had become a capitalist industry. The *cartonera* movement managed to achieve all of this, in a new, collective, and progressive manner of creation.

²³¹ <http://www.eloisacartonera.com.ar/historia.html>

Destruction and creation, tragic laughter and absurd pleasure, pain and enjoyment are all bound up in the aesthetic used in the two pieces which we will come to see as a double-edged sword that is the very essence of the aesthetic of refuse and recyclables. Nicolas Bourriaud explains in his book *Postproduction* that, “artists who insert their own work into that of others contribute to the eradication of the traditional distinction between production and consumption, creation and copy, readymade and original work...Notions of originality...and even of creation...are slowly blurred in this new cultural landscape” (13) thereby doing away with the notion of destruction and creation as opposites, but rather showing them to run along a continuum of creativity that is evident in the Argentina under siege by economic crisis.²³²

Postales argentinas

Located between Argentina’s return to democracy in 1983 and mounting economic troubles which came to a head in 2001, *Postales argentinas* by Ricardo Bartís was first presented in 1988 and depicts a place of inbetweenness, a devastated no man’s land in futuristic Argentina. In this piece, a former postal worker and writer, Hector, suffers from tremendous writer’s block, as he searches for inspiration in the past, from his mother, then from his girlfriend (Pamela Watson) and sifting through discarded letters at the old postal office. Evoking destruction, death, and simultaneously creation and innovation, this play both expresses the depths of the ills suffered by the Argentine nation during dictatorship and also is oddly premonitory of the relentless inflation and ultimate destabilization brought about by neoliberalism and an entrance into a globalized economy. This piece uniquely marks a transitional time both in Argentine society and for the cultural and theatrical environment. Osvaldo Pelletieri has deemed this piece a signpost for one tributary of new theatre of the postdictatorship which exemplifies “el teatro de

²³² Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World*. New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2005.

intertexto posmoderno” or “teatro de la parodia y el cuestionamiento” or that theatre which questions Argentina’s transitional phase. In this piece, Bartís poses the futuristic disintegration of *Argentinidad*. By highlighting this in 1988, he poses the need for the nation to reconsider its identity as it redefines itself after the dictatorship and begins to consider how to belong to a globalized new world upon the horizon. In this section, I aim to show how the aesthetic of recycling and the poetic of parody, along with the creative process employed by Bartís and his troupe both reflect the time period of its creation and also suggest a possible route forward and out of the rubble of crisis. Recycling and parody both shared a double-sided quality: both highlight failure and hope concurrently, playfully reconsidering the detritus around us.

Critics who have previously explored the mechanics and message of *Postales* have approached it as an advent of a moment of change in Argentine theatre. Jorge Dubatti and Paola Hernández both affirm that this piece marks a passage from previous theatre which was still very dependent on realism, *Postales* surges into the realm of the postmodern, and is also what Osvaldo Pelletieri calls “teatro de la resistencia” for this reason, which he qualifies as a body of new theatre which,

“lo es contra la cultura oficial y su movimiento irradiador que tendió absorber y neutralizar a la modernidad marginal latinoamericana. Ya no pretende la ruptura del sistema teatral anterior, sino que desde su interior propone una nueva forma de hacer teatro sin desconocer los modelos del pasado” (34).²³³

While still ‘resisting’ that which came before, instead of turning away entirely and pivoting, this new theatre creatively plays with the former body of cultural creation, creatively re-appropriating it. One primary way in which the piece plays with postmodern aesthetics is through the emphasis on fragmentation, collage, parody, intertextuality, in the process of creation. By slowly

²³³ Pelletieri, Osvaldo. “Nuevas tendencias en el teatro argentino” *Assaig De Teatre: Revista De L’Associació D’Investigació I Experimentació Teatral*, Issue 43, 2004, pp. 33-49.

developing his piece during repeated rehearsals, using the bodies of actors as the primary texts and not a pre-determined script, Graciela Rodríguez, as well as Pelletieri, Dubatti, and Hernández point to a new tradition of making theatre from the space of the physical stage instead of page.²³⁴ While I concur with the previous scholarship in all of the aforementioned characteristics of *Postales*, previous critics have interpreted this collection of features to communicate principally despair, failure, death, and disintegration for Argentina entering the 1990s; as Olga Cosentino says, “el futuro no existe: fue aniquilado junto con Buenos Aires”.²³⁵ I however contend that while certainly a devastating darkness is present, this is accompanied by a forward looking, hopeful, and creative vein, observable in the two-sided dark humor employed by Bartís throughout this work. Not only does a spark of hope and feeling of future exist in the piece, but moreover, Bartís shows the audience the way to this future: through creative new mixtures and recycling, and through the creation of community in spaces such as the theatre. While critics such as Hernández and Cosentino have addressed Bartís’ desire to approach the question of what it means to be Argentine and what defines the Argentine nation in the post-dictatorship, their discussion focuses on deconstruction and settles on the inexistence or nostalgic, past-looking identity that no longer is intact. Costentino explains that in *Postales*, Bartís, “intenta revisar algunos rasgos de nuestra identidad”, and Hernández focuses on the use

²³⁴ From an interview with Ricardo Bartís by Graciela E. Rodríguez in *Antología de teatro latinoamericano (1950 - 2007)*. coordinated by Lola Proaño y Gustavo Geirola. Instituto Nacional de Teatro, 2010.

²³⁵ See: Jorge Dubatti and María Fukelman’s article: “‘Postales argentinas’ (1988) de Ricardo Bartís: dramaturgia de dirección, distopía y muerte del país” in *Del Centenario al Bicentenario: Dramaturgia: Metáforas de la Argentina en veinte piezas teatrales 1910-2010*. Also, Olga Cosentino’s article: “Desenmascarar la palabra Nuevas tendencias en el teatro de los ‘80””. <http://www.teatrodelpueblo.org.ar/dramaturgia/cosentino001.htm>. This section will also rely on Paola Hernández’s analysis of the themes of the postmodern, the role of globalization and neoliberalism in approaching *Postales argentinas*, and the theme of fragmentation, miscommunications, and resulting humor as she develops in chapter II “Cuerpos resistentes y residuos memorables: fragmentos teatrales argentinos” in her work *El teatro de Argentina y Chile: Globalización, resistencia y desencanto*.

of the term ‘postales’ in the title, which emphasizes stereotypical Argentine elements, or images prepared for export on tourist postcards, here shown to be warped deformations, revealed to be vacant (the grimacing *bandoneón* player, or all-but-dried-up Río de la Plata, a sickly orange color).²³⁶ However, I additionally suggest that Bartís does also offer an idea for how Argentina’s new sense of self will be re-constructed, re-created, or re-formed in the post-dictatorship. Identity will come out of the same postmodern aesthetic which recycles, and makes anew upon a base of the old, especially by mixing all genres and types of codes, ranging from popular art and well-known comedians, to established and praised authors. For example, written at the beginning of the script, Bartís cleverly dedicates the piece, “A Pepe Arias, Luis Sandrini, Nini Marshall y, especialmente, Alberto Olmedo” (41), openly connecting his piece to the popular Argentine humorists who were at their height in the middle of the 20th century. Notably, these comedians worked between mediums, presenting their work on the radio, on television, in circuses, in movies, and in the theatre, bridging genre divides and constructing their artwork in conversation with the popular viewing audience, instead of with an artistically erudite and more limited segment of the population. Bartís importantly involves them in his inspiration, valuing the contributions of popular culture, mixing notions of high and low art. Especially important to my argument is his nod to humorists in particular. I believe that this dedication provides a strong link to demonstrate the evolution of, and direct connection between forms of humor in Argentina from its inception around the end of the 19th century as a unique place with a locally specific identity. That is to say, Argentine humor has unique characteristics and can be traced through inspirations and evolution in its forms, from the *circo criollo*, *sainete criollo*, and *grotesco criollo*, through popular mid-century humorists such as those acknowledged by Bartís in his

²³⁶ A *bandoneón* is a concertina or small accordion used in most tango music and is another European inheritance which has been adapted and made Argentine.

dedication, and to the present moment of cultural performatic production.²³⁷ Bartís effectively writes himself into this lineage in this simple yet pointed dedication. Therefore, rigid hierarchies, separations, and antiquated categorizations, uniformity, classification, and single-layeredness between genres and artistic inspirations will no longer suffice. While the failures and hopelessness of the present are certainly highlighted and lampooned in *Postales*, I believe that a creative and original posture hinging on recycling and parody suggests what the future will be comprised of in *Postales*.

In many ways, *Postales argentinas* is a dark, somber, apocalyptic work that appears to offer little hope for the future of Argentina. Nevertheless, Bartís mixes his serious critiques and dire aesthetic with elements of the playful, the humorous, and especially the ridiculous and the absurd. From the very title of the work, Bartís begins to establish the frame of this piece which comically posits the futuristic death of the nation. Upon titling his work, “sainete de ciencia-ficción” tagged onto the title which references memories of the Argentine nation, we are not only connected with a genre and mode of cultural production unique to Argentina. But more specifically, the word “sainete” purposefully connects the piece to the comic and the popular. Framed with this subtitle, we might expect to experience some version of the following *sainetesco* elements: exaggerated stock characters, a humorous tone, elements of popular and daily life, a tragic note which breaks up the comedy, and musical incorporation. The

²³⁷ Jorge Dubatti details this lineage of humor forms in his article, “El teatro argentino en la Postdictadura (1983-2010): época de oro, destotalización y subjetividad”, describing, “La risa permite rearmar tradiciones y repensar el pasado argentino en busca de nuevas versiones. Contra la seriedad de la cultura moderna, racionalista, la Postdictadura rescata la risa como un fenómeno cultural en sí mismo, en todas sus formas, del chiste callejero a la comedia intelectual. Se verifica en la Postdictadura una revalorización inédita de fenómenos de la cultura cómica argentina: el sainete y el grotesco, la revista, los cómicos del Balneario, el varieté, el circo criollo, los monologuistas de radio y televisión, los géneros bajos, el carnaval, el humor dialectal de las provincias y especialmente algunas grandes figuras: Niní Marshall, Pepe Arias, Alberto Olmedo, Florencio Parravicini, Luis Sandrini, Dringue Farías, Pepe Biondi, el dúo Buono-Striano, las cancionistas, entre otros. Pero también se reconoce el impacto local de figuras de otros campos teatrales o de otras prácticas artísticas (por ejemplo, los actores cómicos de la televisión y el cine norteamericanos)” (78).

qualification of “de ciencia-ficción” lets us know that this will be an adaptation, a version, a parody of that more familiar genre which Merriam-Webster tells us encompasses, “stories about how people and societies are affected by imaginary scientific developments in the future.”²³⁸ And following this definition, we do in fact see people (Héctor, his mother, and his girlfriend Pamela) and their society affected by the results of a neoliberal economic *experiment* (which could perhaps be the scientific development) in one potential version of the future that Bartís envisions. A pattern begins to form throughout the piece in which Argentine traditions, myths, and characteristics are deformed, mutated, and warped, just as the subtitle indicates will happen with the *sainete*. Tango (through incorporated segments of lyrics and the presence of the *bandoneón* player) is another cultural code which is affected in a similarly way, indicating how the cultural identity of Argentina of the future is manipulated and warped, diluted into a culture of masses. The label “ciencia-ficción” also establishes the temporal context in a futuristic and far-off, indicating that the play is speculating, imagining, and inventing one of many possible futures, similar to Acobino’s suggestions in *Continente viril*. Bartís warns viewers: what you are witnessing could come to pass and form not fiction, but reality.

The term “ciencia-ficción” marks the difference from the traditional *sainete*: this is not mimicry of the *sainete* genre. Another autochthonous and comedic generic influence is noticeable as Julia Elena Sagaseta observes, “En realidad, *Postales argentinas* es un *sainete* grotesco porque detrás de la comicidad del lenguaje se muestra el fracaso individual y

²³⁸ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/science%20fiction>

contextual.”^{239,240} In their study, Jorge Dubatti and María Fukelman situated the affective tone somewhere, “entre el grotesco y el absurdo” as well, noticing this inheritance.²⁴¹

Overwhelmingly dark and tragically comic elements, that which is twisted, a warped reality which criticizes and evaluates, all proper of the *grotesco criollo* genre are constants throughout *Postales argentinas*. Also especially evident in the works examined in the previous chapter, the *sainete criollo* and *grotesco criollo* have come to be recognized as uniquely Argentine theatre traditions. Seeing these genre markings yet again in this piece provides a strong national link, letting the audience know that the piece is intrinsically Argentine and will address uniquely Argentine problems; this important genre marking connects family resemblances.

Some ways in which we see the *grotesco* and *sainete* traditions playing out in *Postales argentinas* are through costuming and corporeal gestures. Héctor, the main character, is described as wearing “una nariz postiza exagerada” which serves to highlight the twisted and grotesque, and provides a strong nod to the clown-like. The secondary *bandoneón* player character is also described in a similarly grotesque way, having “una mueca absurda”. All three actors on stage during Act I wear, “Vestuario: precario, sombreros con un aire tanguero, ropa agujereada y deformada” (42). The purpose of this tonal approach is to create a sense of discord that is poignant, disturbing us while awakening an emotional connection through humor. The

²³⁹ “Vanguardia y tradición: Acerca del actor argentino: A propósito de *Postales argentinas* y *Rojos globos rojos*” *El teatro y su mundo: estudios sobre teatro iberoamericano y argentino*. (248)

²⁴⁰ I would like to remind the reader of footnote 13 found in chapter 1 which reads, “I use the term ‘autochthonous’ here and in this study to describe those theatre traditions, “formed or originating in the place where found”, in this case, Argentina. The quoted segment of this definition is one possibility found in the Merriam-Webster dictionary entry.

²⁴¹ Dubatti, Jorge and María Fukelman. “‘Postales argentinas’ (1988) de Ricardo Bartís: dramaturgia de dirección, distopía y muerte del país” in *Del Centenario al Bicentenario: Dramaturgia: Metáforas de la Argentina en veinte piezas teatrales 1910-2010* Coordinado por Jorge Dubatti. Buenos Aires. 2010. Ediciones del CCC Centro Cultural de la Cooperación Floreal Gorini, p. 236.

physicality of each character's composition, the way in which they carry their bodies, and gestures they use, are jarring, disturbing, curious, and odd. Corporally, they communicate the darkness of this portrayed future, while also maintaining an unmistakable humor.

Bodies, gestures, and human behaviors are central to the composition of this work. The very body-centered process by which Bartís works is representative of the necessity to turn to recycling, and relies on both continuation and ruptures with tradition. At Bartís' theatre space *Sportivo Teatral* in Buenos Aires, in his 'posescénico' process, Bartís relies not on a script, but rather on on actors' bodies, improvisation, and repeated group rehearsals. Behaviors are acted out and reacted to, interactions are improvised and then rehearsed with slight alterations and differences. This evolution of actions that describes the creative process I also see as a form of recycling, or cycling through physical behaviors. Recycled movement is not a foreign a concept in the world of performance. Richard Schechner's concept of 'twice behaved behaviors' helps to imagine how we repeat behaviors again, with a focus on the process of creation, without an original movement in focus, but rather with the whole body of repetitions taking center stage.

Schechner explains,

"Ritual studies are turning from looking at the "finished product" toward examining the "whole performance sequence": training, workshop, rehearsal, warm-up, performance, cool-down, and aftermath. When this whole sequence is considered, it becomes clear that the ritual process is identical to what I call "restored behavior," "twice-behaved behavior," behavior that can be repeated, that is, rehearsed (see Schechner 1985:3–150). Ritual process is performance."²⁴²

Postales was created in much the same way, in a constantly reworking, shifting process, and at no point prior to rehearsal did a finished script exist. One could say that 'a finished piece' was never created. Describing Bartís' style of work, Dubatti and Fukelman say, "El suyo [de Bartís]

²⁴² Schechner, Richard. *Performance Theory*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 1988, p. 271.

es un método Criollo de teatrasta-creador: rejunte, mezcla, superposición, heterodoxia y fusión sin voluntad de clasicidad o pureza, suma de desechos, carencia, debilidad, precariedad y malentendidos” (93). Dubatti and Fukelman’s denomination of Bartís’ style as a “método Criollo”, points also to the remix, or the adaptation of an older form. That which is “criollo” is an amalgamation of the local Argentine cultural, social, and political contexts which mix to form anew, alongside an inheritance of the old.²⁴³ So, a national sense of self being reassessed in the light of the present (1988) and is found not only in the themes set forth in the body of *Postales argentinas* but also in the very process itself that is born locally. Bartís underscores that which has and still does define Argentina: this ability to create and recreate, recycling *a la criolla*.

Returning to *Postales*’ emphasis on the body, I observe that the use of humor connects the corporality on and off stage; a community of laughing bodies responds to the twisted bodies on stage, exaggerating the simultaneous darkness and ridiculousness of our present situation. As María Fukelman and Jorge Dubatti point out, Bartís’ theatre is one of “cuerpos afectados por el acontecimiento teatral y que constituyen en sí mismos el centro de la materia poética y la fuerte de imaginario” (90). describing his process and formation of theatrical pieces. Though Dubatti and Fukelman may mean to speak solely to Bartís’ nurturing of the actors’ bodies on stage, I wish to extend their argument into the sphere of the audience. Not only does Bartís’ piece speak with a language that centers on the bodies of those on stage, it also affects directly the bodies of those in the audience. This visceral language forms a powerful dynamic in the theatre space, which Dubatti and Fukelman continue to describe as “conciertos corporales” (93). Corporal

²⁴³ See the following definitions of ‘criollo’ from the Real Academia Española for example: “3. adj. Dicho de una persona: Nacida en un país hispanoamericano. Usado para resaltar que esa persona posee las cualidades estimadas como características de su origen.

4. adj. Autóctono o propio de un país hispanoamericano, o del conjunto de ellos. (From *Real Academia Española*)

concerts imply both production and reception which takes place through the theatre piece as a conversation which uses bodies to convey messages which are received by the audience.

Hernández also points to the impossibility of appreciating the feeling of this piece from the text alone, insisting that, “La trama de *Postales argentinas* parece simple al solo tomar en cuenta las palabras sin las acciones y movimientos absurdos que no se asimilan en nada al lenguaje” (82). It is necessary to experience it physically and personally and to absorb the multiple layers of text, sound, visuality, and especially corporality on stage to fully take in *Postales argentinas*.

Another way in which bodies interact while creating meaning occurs through play and playfulness. The word ‘play’ evokes the concepts of quick, joyous movements, dance, exercise, and game-playing. Moreover, the concept of ‘play’ itself is variably defined as rehearsing again, mimicking, practicing. Children often ‘play’ at elements of quotidian adult life and being. The English word ‘play’ in reference to the theatre, emphasizes this as it asserts that we are representing for our enjoyment, pleasure, or learning, a mimicked form that Johan Huizinga describes as a “quality of action which is different from ordinary life”.²⁴⁴ The theatre itself then, repeats or recycles the exterior world for us to contemplate in a framed setting. And yet, this is a tenuous border that is established between what we deem real or fictitious, serious or play. Bartís similarly problematizes this delineation between art and society, politics and culture, suggesting their mutual feeding upon one another without establishing a primacy of one or the other, or a direct cause-effect relationship. We play to learn, and learn to play.

Héctor and his mother engage in play as their adult bodies take on child-like techniques, reaching back to a past time in which play was a primary way of interacting with others.

Gestures and actions of youth are recycled in play. Bartís has said that the poetic of this piece is

²⁴⁴ Huizinga, Johan. *Homo Ludens; a Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. Routledge & K. Paul, 1949, p. 4.

linked to, “la necesidad de recuperar la capacidad de juego en el escenario, sin ‘componer’ personajes desde una formulacion psicologica” (39), emphasizing his reliance on the actors’ bodies and skills at improvisation in forming characters. Within *Postales argentinas*, ‘play’ takes on a multiplicity of meanings. As Héctor and his mother play cards, play at or rehearse death, and ‘play’ with one another sexually, play takes on childish connotations but also is at times twisted and perverse. While Héctor struggles with writer’s block, his mother rehearses her first of three deaths, and suddenly revives herself and suggests, “Juguemos entonces. (Madre lo manotea, le hurga en el bolsillo y le toca el sexo)” (45), establishing play as a simultaneously childlike and yet incestuous relationship between their two bodies, both pleasurable and dark. She also suggests this activity or co-creation as a sort of substitute for Héctor’s lacking creativity. However, playing with the bodies of the past (his mother’s physical body, or bodies of works from older artists and writers) is shown here as a ridiculously unproductive way of attempting creation if he merely repeats the past and does not renovate it or recontextualize it, or if he allows the voices of the past or his mother to take control of the process of creation. It must be Héctor that is inspired to create if recycling is to be a creative, forward-looking process.

The second moment in which ‘play’ is highlighted is equally pointless in nature, again showing confusion and a lack of productivity. After their frantic sexual game, they turn to playing cards. The stage notes describe, “(Juegan a las cartas. Durante el juego ella usará la conversación para distraerlo y hacerle trampa)” (46), and soon one card game (*póquer*) turns into another (*truco*), and different card games begin to mix and blend nonsensically. Héctor can’t follow the very game he is taking part in playing with his mother, and this scene results illogical for Héctor and the audience. The incoherence, illogical, and absurd nature of the card game is apparent, and the scene exhibits perfectly the fragmentation which characterizes this piece as

well as a simultaneous humor resulting from a lack of communication, which Hernández points out too, emphasizing that the signifiers and signified in this instance are broken.²⁴⁵ Here we come to realize that play and games have rules that when disregarded give way to utter chaos and disarray.²⁴⁶ Sliding back and forth in a balance between humorous and enjoyable to watch, and troublesome or foreboding, a teetering activity of play permeates the piece.

Throughout *Postales argentinas*, recycling, reusing, re-appropriating, hybridizing, and remixing form an important plot element and create a motif. Linda Hutcheon points out that a primary characteristic of the postmodern aesthetic is doubleness or duplicity, a quality that reuse and recycling certainly embody.²⁴⁷ This ability to reuse past items, words, and ideas formerly cast aside but now reworked and reintegrated with new meaning and purpose forms a powerful social message that encapsulates the dual ideology of the economic crisis moment in Argentina: destruction and rebirth. The coexistence of crisis and hopefulness come hand in hand, somewhat like the coexistence of the comic and the darkly twisted in the *grotesco criollo*.

The foremost way that we observe the theme of recycling in *Postales argentinas* is through constant citation, verging on plagiarism of texts, works, and words of other writers. The recycling of the words of others inserted into the body of the text and the mouths of Bartís' characters are cause for humor in many cases. Specifically, recycled words and humor intersect in their creation of odd or curious feelings of incongruity.²⁴⁸ Words of famous and past authors

²⁴⁵ See p. 90 in Paola Hernández's work *El teatro de Argentina y Chile: Globalización, resistencia y desencanto*.

²⁴⁶ See Huizinga's study quoted above too for more reading on the formation and adherence to rules in games and play. Also, Roger Caillois' 1961 *Man, Play and Games*.

²⁴⁷ This specific idea comes from *The Politics of Postmodernism* (p. 1). See also Hutcheon's work *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*.

²⁴⁸ See John Morreall or Simon Critchley's studies on the three traditionally agreed upon ways in which humor is created for concise explanations. "Incongruity" is one of the historically agreed upon theories of the comic.

are emitted from the mouth of the poor and unproductive artist (Héctor) and from that of his incestuous, absurd, ever-dying mother. In these moments, those in the audience with enough literary knowledge to hear the odd resonance of these quotes from the incorrect place of enunciation are surprised by the mismatch and laughter results. As Héctor struggles to produce even a single line of his own creation while he plays the confusing card games with his mother, he looks to her, to the past, for inspiration. Héctor proclaims, “Usted multiplica mi literatura, mamá. Por eso la quiero” (47). The use of the term “multiplicity” points to creation, instead of destruction, based on the past inspirations. Héctor continues to ask his mother for inspiration by asking her about his father, knowing that speaking of his father (another reference to inspiration which comes from the past) will incite his mother to ramble on and in turn will help him to steal or reappropriate her stolen words and finally to write. Her lines in this moment are so mixed with the words of others that an audience member might not be aware of all of the many intertextualities, but would certainly begin to capture some of them and therefore to see their multiplicity and the pattern of the regurgitation of the past that begins to form. She reminisces,

“¡Ah, tu padre! Era rubio y sus ojos celestes alumbraban una pasión argentina. Era blando, peludo y suave, casi se diría que no tenía huesos...Érase un hombre a una nariz pegado que te amaba con el amor de los elegidos, de los bienaventurados, que cambian toda su fortuna por el amor de un hijo” (47).

His mother creates a portrait of her former husband that feels playful, and odd, with a texture in which we can almost detect the stitched-together texts of others, even if we cannot remember the original authors of these lines. She quotes lyrics from popular tango, from Spanish author Juan Ramon Jimenez, and from Baroque Spanish author Francisco de Quevedo in one breath. It is at the core of the understanding of this piece to observe Bartís’ images of continued deconstruction, fragmentation, and emphasis of endless simulacra in this statement, as Hernández highlights. I intervene in my examination of the repetition with difference to also emphasize the *innovative*

contemporary creation taking shape.²⁴⁹ New textual combinations are only launched into existence in an oral format, defying their original textness altogether and taking on entirely new textures that reveal the creativity of this time in Argentina.

Purposefully blurring the lines between borrowing or plagiarism and true creation and originality, Bartís brings to our attention the very recycled nature of our entire contemporary world. As Héctor hurriedly writes some of his mother's plagiarized lines in his notebook, we realize that not only has Héctor stolen words from his mother, but Héctor's mother stolen these lines from famous authors of great importance to the tradition of Hispanic literature, and in turn, Bartís has incorporated these lines into his play seamlessly and without mentioning their source. Pamela Watson (Héctor's girlfriend, another younger generation character) supports Héctor's blended constructions, encouraging her boyfriend by reminding him, "Las palabras no pertenecen a nadie" (56). Hector's mother also voices her encouragement of borrowing words, reminding Hector that unopened letters left in the abandoned post office will never be delivered now and so he might as well purge their contents for his own benefit. She urges, "Debes sorber, robar allí, encontrar el alimento de tu literatura" (46) using gastronomic imagery to insinuate the nutrients these words could provide in the otherwise barren post-apocalyptic landscape. In one climactic moment, Hector stuffs newspaper shreds in his mouth, consuming the refuse, "se come los papeles de diario" as he is overwhelmed with the realization of the constant plagiarism and citation of his mother. We are reminded of the 1928 Brazilian *Manifesto Antropófago* by Osvaldo de Andrade in which he highlights Brazil's history of "cannibalizing" other cultures as its greatest strength. For Andrade, cannibalism was a way for Brazil to assert itself against European post-colonial cultural domination, similar to how Argentina has continually asserted its

²⁴⁹ See pages 88-89 in Hernández's already cited chapter.

‘*criollo*’ nature as autochthonous, exhibiting similarity, yet difference from European origins. In these examples of conspicuous plagiarism, or regurgitation and re-consumption in *Postales*, Bartís focuses our attention on the very recycled nature of contemporary culture in Argentina and in the globalized world. In the contemporary era, we live in a world of constant borrowing, incidental plagiarism and yet through those same means we produce, and reproduce.

Blended materials are an unavoidable part of the contemporary world. As Roland Barthes postulated,

“We now know that the text is not a line of words releasing a single theological meaning (the ‘message’ of an Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture.”²⁵⁰

In this layered performance of recycling, we may laugh due to the incongruity of the place of enunciation, but, the idea that this could even be considered plagiarism is also questioned and ridiculed in *Postales* because although Bartís has borrowed these lines, he also inserts them into a new context with renewed meaning. As Hutcheon describes the newness created paradoxically in a postmodern aesthetic, she says, “This is not a nostalgic return; it is a critical revisiting, an ironic dialogue with the past of both art and society” (1988: 4) That is to say, the reuse and reinsertion of ideas of the past into the present is a new form of creation in itself and is not mere repetition. Something like Pierre Menard’s rewriting of the Quixote, the famous words of the authors of the past in *Postales argentinas* are inserted not only into the mouths of new speakers, but into new contexts and especially into a new historical context, all of which resignify the citations in a critical light to be read and interpreted by the audience.²⁵¹ This repetition with marked difference, as Linda Hutcheon has described, is often identified as what we call ‘parody’.

²⁵⁰ See Barthes’ full essay, “The Death of the Author”, published in 1967.

²⁵¹ See Jorge Luis Borges’ short story contained in his work *Ficciones* (1944), “Pierre Menard autor del Quijote”.

Parody is the form of artistic recycling which I show here to be useful in both expressing and combatting the angst of the current moment for Argentina.²⁵² As Linda Hutcheon points out, parody, “is a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text.” and she continues to add, “Parody is, in another formulation, repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity” (1985: 6). While parody does not necessarily include a response of humor in all of its forms, humor does remain a frequent emotional response. And though some scholars have lately tried to separate the comic from the parodic, it is my contention (and that of scholars like Margaret A. Rose) that elements of the comic and parody coexist more often than not.²⁵³ The comic element present in a situation of parody may lean more towards ridicule and critique than light or superficial. Usually parody allows the observer of parody to experience an evaluation, though the direction and target for the critique may vary greatly. In *Postales argentinas*, the moments of intertextuality take the form of parody and additionally, the entire play itself can be seen as a parody of the sainete genre. By specifying that this sainete is “de ciencia ficción”, Bartís allows us to imagine how Héctor, his mother, and Pamela, might be affected by the ‘neoliberal economic experiment’ in this science fiction piece. Bartís warns us about this possible ominous future as Héctor’s mother says, “El apocalipsis...” and gestures with her hand forward, purposefully towards the audience, inviting us to see our future.

²⁵² Linda Hutcheon also claims that parody is a key element of postmodern aesthetic. “Parody—often called ironic quotation, pastiche, appropriation, or intertextuality—is usually considered central to postmodernism, both by its detractors and its defenders. For artists, the postmodern is said to involve a rummaging through the image reserves of the past in such a way as to show the history of the representations their parody calls to our attention.” (2002, 89)

²⁵³ Rose spends much of her work *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern* discussing this dilemma. See in particular pages 22-37 and 239-242.

Parody requires an audience to recognize the code being accessed and re-worked. Without recognition, parody does not do its work and the depth of the problems and dilemmas set out in this play cannot be engaged with or appreciated. Again, as we've seen with humor in general in previous chapters, interaction which is available with a live audience is necessary in order to deliver the messages and receive feedback for the actors on stage. Linda Hutcheon highlights the importance of this interaction in the existence and success of parody, determining that, "The experience of literature involves a text, a reader, and his or her reactions, which take the form of systems of words that are grouped associatively in the reader's mind" (23), continuing to summarize, "Texts do not generate anything— until they are perceived and interpreted" (23). For our purposes, if we think of the audience and gathered spectators to the play as the 'readers' mentioned by Hutcheon, we can similarly see that parody is a code or language which requires interpretation in order to be understood, cause laughter or a pleasant response from experiencing something funny, and thereby raise intrigue. Humor is present in parody as a call to our active participation and to think critically about our social surroundings.

Speaking to the specific context of repetition in the theatre, Marvin Carlson notices something similar to Hutcheon's parody at work in theatre which references previous cultural memory on stage in his work *The Haunted Stage*. For Carlson, this repetition on stage, or,

"This complex recycling of old elements, far from being a disadvantage, is an absolutely essential part of the reception process. We are able to 'read' new works [...] only because we recognize within them elements that have been recycled from other structures of experience that we have experienced earlier" (4).

Carlson gives a nod to the recycling work which is done by a perceiving audience when recycled elements are portrayed on stage aesthetically or in the play's text in word form (as intertextuality). Recycling as a motif then jumps off the stage and breaking the barrier of the proscenium, where we as an audience must undertake the task of comparing the presented words,

images, sounds, etc. on stage with our previous knowledge and do comparative work, literally undertaking the act of recycling in our minds as we take in the piece. This very active participation by the audience, often undertaken in an affective mode (involving innate emotional responses) as a form of knowledge creation. Observing humorous moments and partaking in the enjoyment of humor in the theatre can actually lead to a further creation of knowledge and understanding.

Not only is it important for the viewer to recognize that parody is present when Héctor's mother eulogizes his father with Quevedo's words, but Hutcheon points out that it is necessary for this parody to have an impact upon the perceiver. She believes that, "With parody, the effect upon the reader is a necessary element. The reader creeps in" (22). If we think of the reader as the watcher in the context of the theatre, Hutcheon seems to focus on the response that parody has the power to create knowledge, albeit in the emotional and affective realm. Therefore, it is not enough merely for parody to be noticed, but it must evoke a response, a reaction, be processed, and that response must be externalized or thrown back out into the world to complete the conversation that it elicits. We might see parody here as a formal or structural relation between two texts or a dialogue that is created.²⁵⁴ In the moment of recognition of the parody, an affective response, often of humor (exteriorized by laughter or a smile) is formed. Returning to ideas established by affect scholars like Brian Massumi, Sara Ahmed, or Teresa Brennan then, we can see that in this space of inbetweenness, between the social body (the entire event of and gathering at the theatrical production, and also the ideas of the social communicated by the theatre piece itself) and the individual body (of each audience member) is where affect flows and

²⁵⁴ This might be akin to Bakhtin's textual dialogism.

is transmitted.²⁵⁵ It is affect's position both within the individual and outside of it (Ahmed), or the lack of distinction between the "individual" and the "environment" (Brennan), that nurtures the affective experience of parody (and the humor thereof) in the theatre. The space between presented piece and evaluation by the audience is the space of affect. Pleasure is experienced purely upon responding to parody that is present and the pop of feeling that happens in the moment that the unknown suddenly becomes known is a humor producing instant which occurs as affect moves between bodies.

Unique to the experience and recognition of parody in the theatre versus on the written page is the ability to experience this moment of recognition and to experience the pleasure of having put into dialogue the layers of text present in the company of others: communally, publicly. In this group, "affects can be compounded by interactive dynamics" (51), as Teresa Brennan points out, or, our various external processing of situations while in the presence of a group combine forces, circulating between the individuals' bodies to affect the group dynamic or feeling of being as a group. The encoders and decoders of parody form an understanding which multiplies the layers and web of connectivity that parody establishes (Hutcheon, 94-95). Parody is included in *Postales argentinas* knowing that the intertextual moments must be recognizable to the majority of the watching community in order to be successful, so a recognizable body of works (from all strata and time periods of Hispanic cultural production, especially focusing on popular Latin American cultural references) is accessed for our group of watchers. Just as a collective actively communicates in some form (as suggested by Benedict Anderson) to articulate and feel its sense of national community, we similarly actively communicate with one another during this theatre piece, 'feeling' *hispanidad* and *argentinidad* together. Humor

²⁵⁵ See: *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* by Sara Ahmed, *The Transmission of Affect* by Teresa Brennan, and "The Autonomy of Affect" by Brian Massumi.

resulting from noticing parody especially builds and reverberates between bodies within the audience. One individual's realization of a moment of parody spurs on a laugh, indicating to others the presence of a funny juxtaposition that they then can locate too.

In the very moment of taking in parody, a sort of mental palimpsest or layering takes shape in which two references are simultaneously contemplated. Suddenly the unclear becomes clear, and a sudden resolution which creates pleasure for the decipherer is often expressed by an utterance of laughter, or a sudden smile of understanding. This moment is part of the incongruity theory in which as M.P. Mulder says, "humor is perceived at the moment of realization of incongruity between a concept involved in a certain situation and the real objects thought to be in some relation to the concept."²⁵⁶ The moment of the creation of the comic is, as Immanuel Kant explains, "the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing" (133).²⁵⁷ The person experiencing incongruous humor suddenly is faced with that which is not following the assumed rules. The odd juxtaposition contemplated produces pleasure in the very curiosity.

Humor caused by the incongruously placed intertextual quotes from Hispanic authors and personalities of the past (ranging from Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer and Rubén Darío to Juan Domingo Perón) does not criticize the words of those past voices. By recontextualizing these words in the theoretical and post-apocalyptic world of Argentina of 2043, new life is breathed into them, forming a surprising critique of the present-day and future Argentina. Though messages of hopelessness and loss of identity, vacancy and the absence of creativity might be expected by the audience, upon further interaction with intertextuality woven throughout the

²⁵⁶ The Incongruity Theory is one of the three principal theories of humor. M.P. Mulder, A. Nijholt, "Humour Research: State of the Art". *CTIT technical report series*, Centre for Telematics and Information Technology, University of Twente. 2002.

²⁵⁷ Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgment*. Transl. Bernard, J.H. Dover Philosophical Classics, 2012.

piece, I argue that reusing and recycling are framed here as productive and meaning-creating modes of artistic expression, truly generating uniqueness through techniques of remix as an entirely new aesthetic springs from pieces of the old. The fragments chosen often reference positive, forward looking ideas. ‘Stolen’ quotes reference relationships between parents and children, speak about freedom, encourage the audience to forge onward and to make their own destiny, and insist on human immortality, for example. Reminiscent of musical ‘sampling’, or the act of taking a portion of one sound recording and reusing it as an instrument or element of a new recording, new creations are born based upon already existing works.

Humor not only calls our attention to these situations of intertextuality in which words and speaker are incongruously out of synch, but it also troubles the concept of identity in a productive way. As the whole play revolves around issues of contemporary and future Argentine identity (the very title alerts us to the intention to problematize this), identity is decentered and re-stabilized by moments of citation, which creates the idea of a new hybrid identity. Identity is called into question to such a degree that Héctor, trying to reverse the doubt surrounding who in fact he definably IS (since most of the work focuses on who he is not, or who he imitates or follows), shouts, “¡Soy Héctor Girardi! ¡Soy un argentino!” (57). Discomfort and uneasiness created by the out of place citations simultaneously remind us of the history and tradition that form Argentine identity and also of the struggle to form original identity which Argentina and all of the Americas grapple with. Probably half of the moments of intertextuality come not from Argentine or American authors or *personas*, but rather from peninsular authors or non-Argentine voices (Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, Rubén Darío, Antonio Machado, William Shakespeare, Francisco de Quevedo, etc.). These parodic moments reveal that *Argentinidad* is not pure, but

has in fact always been influenced by and in relationship with other cultures and identities.²⁵⁸ Bartís in this way supports the case for a global Hispanic literature as he inserts quotes from varied voices, including even comedians, tango singers, and other marginal voices together. Simultaneously then, we realize that the path to future identity for Argentina, in which globalization mixes and blends identities and ways of belonging, especially focusing on cultural production, is not that different from this tossed-together amalgam of speech: intelligible, yet noticeably mixed and thus curious. Uneasiness, uncertainty, and discomfort brought about by humor also form a moment of reconsideration and realization. Argentine identity in the past, present, and future, lies then in the ability to mix, combine creatively, reuse and construct from pieces and fragments, creating something utterly new and unseen before. The intertextual moments cause laughter and uneasiness, while the entire play questions whether Argentina is doomed to failure in a decidedly humorous light (through exaggeration, costuming, and *sainete* and *grotesco criollo* influences), yet this dark theme is productive. As Philippa Page observes how this discourse on failure in the dark future may be read by the audience, “It is nevertheless this friction that opens up a liminal space in which the discourse of failure can be challenged” (103). In part, I see the humor created throughout *Postales argentinas* to be friction-creating in this productive way that Page notices.

An emphasis on the cyclical and cycles is present both in the idea of recycling and in the endless cycles of crisis experienced in Argentina. One way this is manifested in the piece is through conspicuous metatheatricality which layers theatricality itself, creating a loop or cycle of theatre creation. First, the two actors portray two artistic troubadours who function like archeologists from the year 2300 have found, as the character, simply called *actriz* explains that

²⁵⁸ A mixed, impure identity that samples from the past and recycles, reminds us of Dubatti and Fukelman’s observance of a “método criollo” in Bartís’ style of creation which was cited earlier.

all that remains of Héctor is, “una colección de fragmentos y residuos defectuosos” (42). The *actor* and *actriz* characters present a ‘conference’ in 2043, a reenactment, as they fill in the gaps, creating upon another’s creation and recycling conspicuously right before our eyes. From fragments cast aside long ago these two archeologists reanimate and literally use their bodies to in turn bring back to life the bodies of Héctor, Pamela, and Héctor’s mother. Through this conspicuous metatheatricality, we are able to consider how the art of theatre itself produces anew in each performance moment, through recycling, re-enactment, and re-presentation.

Finally, the cyclical trope expresses the fact that destruction, deconstruction, and failure cannot be the end point that Bartís envisions for his country. As often as death (the ultimately finality) is present, this death is incomplete and the cyclical dominates much more frequently. *Postales* does not appear to offer a solution or precise path to the future— it is left rather unresolved, hopeless. A certain cyclical nature perturbs the piece too, repeating mistakes and failures, suggesting their continual repetition throughout the duration of the piece and perhaps beyond, if change and renovation do not take place. The cyclical nature and the quality of unfinishedness is highlighted when Hector’s mother comes back to life, destabilizing the finality that death normally assumes. Hector doesn’t believe his mother is capable of dying, exclaiming, “¡Usted no se va a morir nunca!” (44), however, both his mother and Pamela Watson, his girlfriend, die multiple times and are resurrected or return in different forms. The ghost as a symbol is often seen as a figure which meddles with and troubles those that are living and here this continual and tiresome undying may represent as well the ghost-like fragments of texts from Hispanic literature which come back and haunt the speech of the characters. Bartís highlights these spiraling cycles that return and re-work, constantly highlighting the creation and destruction present in the aesthetic of recycling and of Argentina in this period.

To conclude, I assert that the aesthetics and poetics of recycling both in the inner working of the play itself and in Bartís' process of creation demonstrate a possible route into the future, while keeping in sight the ills and dilemmas of the transition to democracy. This recycling is present in the vast use of intertextuality of all sorts, ranging from references to theatrical genres (*sainete* and *grotresco criollo*), a dedication to popular comic personalities, the use of the omnipresent and grimacing figure of the *bandoneonista*, and the intense citation/plagiarism of tango texts and literary works of Hispanic tradition alike. Recycling also takes place importantly through parody. Parody is a form of repetition with critical distance that asks the perceiver of parody to critique and which most often arrives at this evaluative stance through humor. It is this humorous form of recycling that creates meaningful audience interaction with this theatre piece. In *Postales*, many references are incorporated not in their original tone, but warped or ironically, parodying the genre (of *sainete* or tango for example), causing humor in the ironic new resignification that contrasts original and new. I assert that parody is the humorous mode of recycling. This duality of pleasure and hope contrasted with sadness and hopelessness is perfectly summarized in Hector's pre-suicidal proclamation, "¡Qué hermosa está Buenos Aires! ¡Negra! ¡Negra y brillante como un presagio de la muerte!" (61). The duality of recycling (and crisis) is exposed: something which aggravates and amasses, but also suggests the ability to look back and rework traditions in new combinations. Moments of crisis force new forms of creativity. While at times recycling may be portrayed as ridiculous and unproductive, alternatively it is shown to be perhaps the only means of production available in the present era, amidst crisis.

La tempestad reciclada

Idangel Betancourt's 2013 adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, aptly named *La tempestad reciclada* directly confronts the moment of the Argentine economic crisis in 2001. While *La tempestad reciclada* maintains much of the classic theatrical conventions of the original 17th century play (5 acts as in the original which are divided into scenes, and retaining many of the original characters and some of the key plot elements), the play incorporates continual references to contemporary Argentina as an extended allegory of destructive storm as economic crisis. Intertextuality, recycling, adaptation, and parody allow for a fresh approximation to an internationally well-known textual reference. Parody here frames the way we view the entire piece, thereby creating humor in the constant juxtaposition between the present staged work and the familiar piece by Shakespeare. To understand and find humor in parody, it is imperative that the audience be familiar with not only the parodied work, but also with the new context or adaptation. Parody is created through 'Argentinization' of language, situations, characters, scenery, and references. The local code of this parody narrows the intended audience (these pieces are by and for Argentines), highlighting the important self-reflective work that the theatre of this time period is undertaking. It also calls Argentines to approach and deal with current issues, becoming agents to promote change. I continue to show how humorous recycling, or parody, creates an affective mode which uniquely captures and critiques the economic crisis in Argentina. By 'recycling' Shakespeare's text in the present era, Betancourt constantly draws the audience back and forth between familiarity with the 1610 piece and his new creation, forcing a comparison that does not allow us to see the new world without the old. In sum, *La tempestad reciclada* captures the essence of the 2001 crisis, communicating with a specifically Argentine audience, and suggests that the way through crisis must be

innovative, but that it must also look back to materials of the past as a base, and finally, that we must do this work of surviving and prospering after crisis collectively, engaging actively.

The characteristics of doubling, recycling, layering, intertextuality, and parody are foundational to both the construction and the experience of this multi-faceted work. This is especially evident in the role of actors which constantly double, multiplying themselves into different characters conspicuously on stage and performing metatheatrical moments on stage.

One performance review summarizes the layering achieved, stating,

“En cuanto a los personajes que intervienen en la obra, el autor estructuró un paralelismo entre los de Shakespeare y los de la historia argentina. Así, Próspero se entrelaza con Domingo Sarmiento; aparecen Evita y Eva a través del cuento de “El simulacro de Borges”; Calibán se funde con un activista social, y todo se articula con textos del Facundo de Sarmiento, de Rodolfo Walsh, de Fito Páez, de Rodolfo Kusch y de Eduardo Galeano... La obra fue valorada por su puesta coral que involucra ocho actores en escena, que se desdoblán constantemente, con cambios de vestuario, travestismo y una dinámica que hace que la puesta no caiga en una bajada de línea, sino en un espacio que convoca a la emoción.”²⁵⁹

The way in which audience members are able to understand this densely-woven fabric of references is, as this reviewer notices as well, through emotion. Nevertheless, the emotional tone of this piece is not overwhelmingly light or humorous at all. At times, in this intense and constant superimpositioning of historical, cultural, and literary references, the chaos of crisis is imitated and we feel what it is to return to the 2001 moment. However, in other moments, there is a break from the chaos and momentary respite. The two fools, Gastrínculo and Esteban especially bring a lightness to the moment of storm/*tormenta*, jovially laughing and enjoying themselves on stage in spite of crisis. Their light-hearted commentary echoes some of the behavior witnessed in *Antígona furiosa* by that pair of buffoons. These two also depend highly

²⁵⁹ “La tempestad reciclada” aborda la crisis de 2001.” *La Gaceta*, 26 Jul 2014.
<http://www.lagaceta.com.ar/nota/600948/espectaculos/tempestad-reciclada-aborda-crisis-2001.html>

on their quality of being a duo to wittily respond to one another, building humor up between them. Also, as characters transform into secondary characters and metatheatrical moments alter the context by bringing a contemporary Argentine pop star to stage or by allowing for *La Patria* to perform a short vaudeville piece, these juxtapositions lighten the tone. Distance grows and wains between each scene and the 2001 crisis (temporally, or allegorically), creating a varied tone of light and dark that as audience members we find our place within, while responding to the curious layers and juxtapositions, or simply feeling emotional responses to these layers.

The 2013 production by Salta, Argentina's theatre troupe Teatro Estable de Salta parodies an entire work instead of parodying a genre as in *Postales argentinas*.²⁶⁰ This provides a constant comparison throughout, one which often results in humorous juxtapositions. When the audience is familiar with the parodied text (a likely situation given the general renown of the Shakespeare piece), humor for the audience comes about as a contrast with the 'expected' or 'original'. What we are familiar with is altered in surprising ways, defamiliarizing for a moment and creating a critical distance from the original piece. This critical distance is a space within which we may place ourselves to contemplate the reasons for the alterations. I contend that the humor generated from parody in this work is a mental, often interior contemplation, what I denominate an evaluative humor. We experience this interiorly as we draw on our previous knowledge of the parodied piece, and don't necessarily laugh out loud, but rather experience pleasure in the mental puzzle which we undertake by identifying comparisons and contrasts.

Parody requires our interaction with two works simultaneously: the new text and the original text. The enjoyment we experience when watching *La tempestad* does not come about without the audience's evaluative role in this interaction between texts, consciously placing the

²⁶⁰ *La tempestad reciclada* was both written and presented in 2013 and this troupe is based in Salta, Argentina, in the North, instead of hailing from the capital city of Buenos Aires like the other pieces treated in this study.

two texts in dialogue. Parody is a call to our active participation and a call to think critically about our social surroundings, made through theatre that recycles and interacts with prior knowledge. The play reinforces the theme that crisis is continual and repetitive in the Argentine context as it references other past crises such as the Malvinas War or the memories of the protests of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo. While this theme may seem to focus on hopelessness and a lack of future, I believe it suggests an important role for the populace ruled by crisis. By focusing on this theme through parody, therefore, it is my contention that in *La tempestad*, we are called to actively engage with our political and social surroundings to successfully intervene and actively take a role in disrupting a seemingly endless cycle of crisis.

In the reception of this piece, humor is experienced mainly in interior evaluations that cause interior mental pleasure but which do not circulate between audience members audibly.²⁶¹ This may seem to fragment and separate individuals from one another, but I believe community feelings underlie this performance experience as well. I believe that community is already present in the shared knowledge of the parodied text, *The Tempest* along with its many Latin American-based reworkings such as José Enrique Rodó's text *Ariel* and Roberto Fernández Retamar's essay on Calibán.²⁶² These are canonical and foundational texts that establish a conversation about power and hierarchy between Europe and the Americas, the Old world and the New world, the colonial order and the neo-colonial continuation of this dynamic. We share

²⁶¹ This observation on one hand of a silent audience, and on the other hand, laughter which is contained to the characters and only emitted from actors on the stage space, comes from my observation of the video archive available of the work, and from a noticeable lack of any indication of audience laughter in performance reviews.

²⁶² It is true that this piece could address a larger-than-Argentine audience/community: it addresses the American community (understood as composed of those from Central and South America), and extends to the colonizing communities (the British in particular, but also North American). However, the layers of intertextuality provided by the Latin American interventions in Shakespeare's text which are readily-present in this piece would not be accessible to a Western audience, and therefore I still believe that a more localized Argentina and Latin American community are gathered and addressed specifically.

this web of knowledge as we watch the re-telling of Shakespeare's tale in light of the 2001 crisis and the neo-liberal destruction that recycles a tale of domination and abuse that has continued ever since the colonial period.

Composed of five acts of varying lengths (from two to five scenes each), *La tempestad reciclada* takes the names, settings, and plot points directly from *The Tempest*, while deftly interweaving moments of the 2001 Argentine turmoil into the story. One review of the piece explains, "que [la obra] habla sobre el colonialismo, la civilización y la barbarie" adding that it focuses however on one specific recent historical moment which is, "la caída del Gobierno de Fernando De la Rúa en 2001 y las manifestaciones sociales que se produjeron en la *Plaza de Mayo* de Buenos Aires."²⁶³ As the play begins, we simultaneously experience a storm (the tempest of Shakespeare's work) and the December 2001 riots, bank crisis, and president De La Rúa's abandonment of the *Casa Rosada*. Lighting is intense and juxtaposes vivid colors and drastically alters the hues on stage as the scenes unfold. The other overwhelming visual element is an all-encompassing use of trash in costuming and scenery. Characters wear dresses sewn of old milk bags layered and folded so elegantly as to mimic a cascading rich textile, and jackets are made expertly of newspapers. Some authentic newsreels of the events of 2001 are projected on a screen behind the stage, incorporating the visual textures in the form of documentary evidence and making the connection to 2001 more than allegorical. The conspicuous presence of live music in front of the stage and the musician who jumps between acting on stage and creating musical accompaniment is another notable element of the performed experience of this work. This musician repeatedly plays Beethoven's *Tempest* (Sonata no. 17), recycling and combining musical with theatrical genres, the auditory with the visual, akin to the role of the *bandoneonista*

²⁶³ "La tempestad reciclada aborda la crisis de 2001." July 26, 2014.
<http://www.lagaceta.com.ar/nota/600948/espectaculos/tempestad-reciclada-aborda-crisis-2001.html>

and incorporated tango in *Postales argentinas*. Other characters leave the stage to sit in the front row of the audience to deliver lines periodically, further connecting on and off-stage spaces.

We, the audience, are immediately implicated and inherit an imperative to engage with the work through the blending of on and off stage space, beginning our affective dialogue with the work. Beginning in the purely physical construction of the space in which the piece is performed, a segment of the physical stage space extends out into the audience, as a boardwalk or a piece of a ship might extend over the water, suspending the actors which stand here in a liminal zone between the distinct stage and audience limitations. As the play commences, a soccer ball is tossed from the audience onto the stage, the arch of the floating physical object creating a visual bridge that connects us from the onset, setting the stage for the contemplation of our role in this piece. The piano player, who is located in the traditional ‘pit orchestra’ in a no-man’s land suspended between stage and audience, alternately plays music and acts on stage. At one point he marches dressed in military fatigues and chants the Malvinas march, representing a ghostly figure of a Malvinas veteran. The veteran’s struggles are represented in a ghostly fashion to show how this segment of society has been abandoned during the economic crisis.²⁶⁴ Spatially, these techniques beg for interaction, curiosity, dialogue, and do not allow for passive comfort or passive emotional catharsis. Betancourt insists that, “la puesta [en escena] busca una expansión espacial de forma que los espectadores *se sientan* en una isla donde en cualquier momento lo que sucede en escena los pueda tocar.” (my emphasis)²⁶⁵ So, not only is the island-like sensation and allegory of abandonment and insularity part of the staging, this

²⁶⁴ Just as the actor representing the Malvinas veteran is relegated to a non-defined in between space (Am I supposed to see or should I ignore his presence? Is he a character in the piece only when he is on stage?), the real Malvinas veterans in Argentina have also held this insecure space as well.

²⁶⁵ This information is elaborated in the unpublished dossier of the piece, provided to me by the playwright.

feeling is extended to the watchers of the piece. The staging of *La tempestad reciclada*, activates our emotional relationship with this art piece, and begs us to remain aware of our surroundings and most importantly, to respond.

After the initial storm/crisis moment, we watch *caceroleros* in the *Plaza de Mayo* as Miranda joins the protesters, demanding the return of her father's finances to him and we are caught up in the protests.²⁶⁶ A feeling of confusion and chaos are created on stage for Miranda and also for the audience. Próspero educates his daughter and the audience (addressing us directly) on the history of the interaction between the West and the Americas, acting the role of the professor explaining the turmoil and chaos that they've landed in. Continually, references to the contemporary situation are interspersed (protests which confront police presence, the crowded *Plaza de Mayo*, and the deserted *Cada Rosada*). Miranda, a representative of the younger generation, struggles to understand the relevance of the past to the present moment. A protester, morphed into Calibán, joins in the impromptu classroom and tries to understand what 'Argentina' and 'America' mean. He repeatedly claims that the *Plaza de Mayo* belongs to him (a representation of the place of the people that feel a sense of belonging in this symbolic place in central Buenos Aires). Gastrínculo and Esteban play the role of the buffoons as secondary characters who make light of the plight of Miranda, her father, and Calibán and who joke and minimize the darkness of this moment. References to the disappeared and to the fallen Malvinas soldiers are made as Alonso searches for his lost son (a plot point of Shakespeare's text too). By the end of the play, the characters sense the coming of yet another tempest, another crisis. I believe that this play reveals the cyclical nature of crisis in Argentina, which perturbs and ever-

²⁶⁶ As Natalia Pecoraro explains in her article in *La Nación*, "Breve historia de los cacerolazos", "Esta forma de protesta se asocia a las masivas manifestaciones de diciembre de 2001 en la ciudad de Buenos Aires, pero nació en Chile en la década del 70." <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1524597-el-cacerolazo-no-es-un-invento-argentino>

returns with the victims perpetually being the people, *el pueblo*. It is illuminated that crisis in Argentina is in fact, recycled.

In part, our interaction with this piece requires an awareness of the parody of *The Tempest* and we consciously evaluate the relationship of the two texts. On another level however, due to the highly chaotic, stitched-together, and fragmented nature of this piece, our senses are at times overwhelmed while the work pulls on our natural affective responses to the tightly layered texts and references. While we cannot hope to pick up on every reference that is present in this densely significant piece, we are impacted and experience instinctual reactions to the multi-sensorial experience. These reactions place us in the center of the turmoil of 2001, reminding us how it felt at the time to live in uncertainty. Presented in 2013, it is necessary to remind the audience of this feeling. Miranda and Calibán both feel lost in the center of the rubble.

Additionally, the constant repetition and return to the same themes, phrases, and symbols, (America, *La Plaza de Mayo*, *la tormenta*, economic instability, an absence of knowledge, incommunication between older and younger generations, trash, death, ghostliness, etc.) aid in reinforcing the feeling of cyclical crisis in Argentina. Though crisis is the central theme, the piece is far from hopeless. In fact, I believe it relies heavily on inspiring in the observing audience the acts of creation, uprising, protest, and in nurturing a voice of the people throughout this piece which communicates through the aesthetic of recycling and parody.

While the use of humor is important in creating an audience understanding of the piece through parody, a distinguishing feature of the humor in this piece is that the act of laughing and the sound of laughter are mostly contained to the stage space (characters utter laughter, while the audience is relatively silent). This can be observed in the video archives of the work.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁷ Video of *La tempestad reciclada*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKsa9Amz_sU

Witnesses to laughter examine the process of affect creation and transmission, a kind of reflection that one cannot take part in if you yourself are laughing. To watch others laugh is perhaps more of an anthropological approach to understanding the rules and assumptions governing the observed situation. An attempt to understand the explanation for laughter is the interaction undertaken by audience members, instead of simply emitting instinctual laughter. The fact that the observer does not laugh, marks a difference and distance between them and us. Something is not shared or similar between that viewed on stage and the audience's off-stage space: that world is a different world, an absurd world that causes us to puzzle over the difference and bizarreness. We begin to study a world that though it may run parallel to our known world, is governed by different rules, and therefore presents a hypothetical alternate situation to contemplate.

As previously stated, *La tempestad reciclada* addresses the crisis in Argentina which came to a head and exploded in 2001 much more directly than *Postales argentinas*. However, like *Postales*, this play is concerned not so much with the actual events of December 2001, but with the deeper and more pervasive national problems relating to foreign debt, corrupt politics, and the neoliberalism of the 1990s, that resulted in crisis at all levels of society. In a similar effort to highlight these endemic national issues, Idangel Betancourt, the playwright (and director and an actor in the production) of *La tempestad* lends a hand to deep and continuous recycling on multiple levels: parody, intertextuality, and a striking visual aesthetic of recycling. Historical intertexts from nationally recognizable and foundational documents and personalities of Argentina and quotes from Shakespeare's work are interwoven with references to historical context from 2001 Argentina. Betancourt therefore works back and forth between multiple registers (popular culture, erudite yet globally recognized literature, music, poetry, political

history of the nation, etc.) to thoroughly immerse his audience that likewise will recognize and relate to different registers of referentiality. This collage or montage inspired technique of assemblage is aesthetically much in line with postmodern art forms that experiment with recycling tactics to make anew from the everyday, that which lies all around us and which we have come to take for granted.

The citation of others, including cases which lead us to question morality or legality of appropriation and plagiarism are not new in the world of art. Especially in the 20th century, we might think of the collage of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, the work of Marcel Duchamp's readymades, Jorge Luis Borges' proposition to re-present *Don Quijote* under new authorship, or Pop Art usages of image re-appropriation in works by Andy Warhol or Roy Lichtenstein in reference to re-use and artistic citation. What we consider broadly in the world of art (visual, physical, or textual, etc.) to be collage, assemblage, or pastiche, "entails a more active kind of engagement involving the physical act of selecting (or rescuing) the extant and repurposing it" (4), as curator Dick Goody notes.²⁶⁸ However, more than just an extremely active engagement by the artist who creates is required in collage, but also an active engagement by the consuming public of the art piece. Roland Barthes suggested this in his 1966 essay "The Death of the Author", repositioning the perceiver, spectator, reader, or consumer of art as the producer of meaning, instead of the artist. Therefore, as spectators of the collage of intertextuality present in *La tempestad*, we take a very active role in the creation of meaning and understanding. It is not easy work, as collage pulls together so many reference points and nuances, from many different times, cultures, genres, and registers. Goody explains that, "Every collaged fragment releases a cascade of juxtapositions" (5) which, "convey[s] the density and variety of global...culture" (3).

²⁶⁸ In his curatorial remarks in the introduction to the dossier for the exhibition "Borders and frontiers: collage and appropriation in the contemporary image" Oakland University Art Gallery, February 2011.

So, as time passes, the overlapping layers of references an artist has to pull from become more varied. Collage is a language of the times and a code of understanding of our globalized world. It may lead to feelings of chaos and confusion, but that may be an accurate artistic affect of our most contemporary times. Goody summarizes, “Rigged-up and mish-mashed juxtapositions of images and objects are one of the elemental trajectories of contemporary art” (7).

To construct a work of collage implies to take part in the act of recycling, or reinserting objects, ideas, or words into new uses and new contexts. As playwright and director Idangel Betancourt explains the use of the word ‘*reciclada*’ in the title and the entire poetic of recycling spliced throughout,

“El término ‘reciclado’ tiene que ver en un plano específico de la historia política y social argentina, pero también americana. *Habla de cómo figuras, modos de operar y de pensar terminan cíclicamente llevando a la sociedad a una crisis, donde los muertos y los castigados están siempre del mismo lado: el pueblo, sin que este pueda advertir cuando es arrastrado por intereses ajenos.*” (my emphasis)²⁶⁹

Betancourt describes how recycling in all its forms allows for the pointed critique of the cyclical nature of Argentine crises. National identity is, in effect, recycled/reconsidered during extreme crises: moments which mark the passage of time in the Argentine nation. Recompilation, borrowing, reusing, referencing, quoting, pastiche based on the multifaceted and complex layers of the nation of Argentina are shown again to be not only a postmodern aesthetic, but an effective way of highlighting the destructive cycle of crisis that has become part of the Argentine identity and which both Bartís and Betancourt address in an attempt to help their audiences recognize and therefore mentally challenge themselves with ways to break the cycles of crisis or thrive in spite of crisis, forging forward creatively and finding locally specific solutions to devastation.

²⁶⁹ “*La tempestad reciclada* aborda la crisis de 2001”, July 26, 2014.
<http://www.lagaceta.com.ar/nota/600948/espectaculos/tempestad-reciclada-aborda-crisis-2001.html>

La tempestad reciclada is both a product of its time, and also exudes the essence of the time it captures. As with *Postales argentinas*, intertextuality, parody, and recycling form major foundational elements for the storytelling process undertaken on stage. Additionally, recycling is a predominant art form of the 1990s onwards worldwide, a tradition into which this Argentine aesthetic fits. As Nicolas Bourriaud describes this phenomenon in his work *Postproduction*,

“Since the early nineties, an ever-increasing number of artworks have been created on the basis of preexisting works; more and more artists interpret, reproduce, re-exhibit, or use works made by others or available cultural products. This art of postproduction seems to respond to the proliferating chaos of global culture in the information age, which is characterized by an increase in the supply of works and the art world’s annexation of forms ignored or disdained until now.” (13).

Beyond the crisis being lived specifically in Argentina, this historical moment which aligns with a new artistic moment calls to artists and cultural producers to remix on the basis of past traditions and cultural forms as the only way forward and to create anew.

The visual quality of the *mise en scène* of *La tempestad reciclada* exudes amassed debris, materiality, refuse and reuse which are aesthetically overwhelming to such a degree as to alter the texture of the theatre space. From costuming, to set design, and props used, the recycled aesthetic is highlighted. In particular, three garments stand out and become emblems of the production’s texture: Próspero’s cape, Esteban’s jacket, and the gown that Miranda dons as she becomes the personification of *La Patria* (the homeland/fatherland). Each of these pieces feels special, like one-of-a-kind, show stopping, over-the-top garments that effectively mark and identify key characters. Nevertheless, they are each made out of common materials that would be considered disposable trash under an everyday lens. Próspero’s cape is made of sheets of white printer paper, giving it a feathery and layered look, adding volume, thereby doubling his stature and importance when it is placed on his shoulders. The buffoon and lowly drunkard Esteban’s

jacket is sewn of plastic coated milk cartons and plastic chip bags, but is done so that the marketing logos and repeated colors produce a pattern effect that when seen from a distance by the audience, appears to transform into another material altogether. Finally, *La Patria*'s formal gown, floor length, complete with ruching and flowing folds, is made of plastic milk bags which from a distance take on a similar texture and pattern to Esteban's coat. These physical costumes are parodies of elegant garments: we easily recognize them to be both fine, dramatic clothing, and obviously made of trash. This contrast creates humor as we see how tenderly the pieces are treated, and how regally they are donned despite being assemblages of trash.

Each of these magical wardrobe pieces is present on stage for the duration of the performance. They hang from clothing hangers (themselves suspended by wires over the stage), hovering over the stage to each side. When the articles of clothing are on the hangers, we are given the impression of ghostly bodies, or uninhabited bodies that float above the stage. Keeping the costuming present always also reveals the theatrical switches that actors make as they transition from Argentine protester of the 2001 riots to Esteban of the *Tempest*, or from Miranda of the *Tempest* to *La Patria* of the short vaudeville, a metatheatrical moment. These clothing items therefore are valuable signifiers, props, represent additional bodies, and transform the actors' bodies spontaneously as we watch, playing key roles in the production. This unexpected and novel visual way in which the piece is brought to life on stage through trash mirrors the playfulness of the text itself.

Moreover, visually this production gives the impression of being done on a very low budget, perhaps not purchasing any new materials but only using found objects to source their material needs. Between the conspicuously hand-made costuming to the trash that litters the stage, there is no grand stage design nor commercial theatre staging pomp present here.

Whatever the real production budget, the appearance of a do-it-yourself, collectively created piece lends an important aesthetic feeling that imitates the necessities of much of general society in 2001 to make do with what was on hand. This same approach was taken by theatre productions of the crisis period, which needed to recycle props and costumes and borrow spaces, time, and labor in order to continue to produce theatre.²⁷⁰ Rubén Szuchmacher comments, “Cuando estás pobre, el teatro— que necesita relativamente poco dinero— es la única cosa para reconocerte, para representarte. El teatro es el arte político por excelencia”²⁷¹ The staging of *La tempestad* is so raw that literal trash is strewn about the stage floor. Material clutter is kicked, moved, and even lands offstage with the audience at times, and also creates rustling noises as the actors wade through it and move. Though we may perceive the objects and artefacts on stage as ‘old’, ‘used’, or ‘trash’, we are also aware that this refuse was actually carefully selected to perform a role. We are asked to reconsider these physical objects, beautifully repurposed here, and in the same way perhaps we can extend our reconsideration of that which is taken for granted and continues to aggravate in the Argentine social and political systems that cyclically return to crisis.

While much of the aesthetic and poetic of recycling in this play is a product of the uniquely Argentine moment, on the other hand, this time cannot be separated from a global network, or, “the continuities in an economic structure based on inequality and embedded in global networks obeying the logic of neoliberalism in which Argentina has become entwined”,

²⁷⁰ See Stefan Eiter’s article, “Resistiendo la crisis: el teatro porteño”, Osvaldo Pelletieri’s book *Teatro argentino y crisis (2001-2003)*, Eloïse Cohen-de Timary’s article “En Argentina, la crisis de 2001 no ha refrenado la creatividad” or Clara Augé’s article “Argentina: life after bankruptcy” for further reading on the topic of the survival techniques and adaptations necessary in the Argentine theatre scene during the time of economic crisis.

²⁷¹ Quoted in the article “En Argentina, la crisis de 2001 no ha refrenado la creatividad” by Eloïse Cohen-de Timary.

according to Victoria Goddard.²⁷² As Betancourt has pointed out too, the cyclical crises experienced in Argentina continuously and inextricably are promulgated by foreign or exterior forces. Neoliberal ideas were first set in motion by the dictatorship itself and were nurtured far beyond the dictatorship into the newly revived democracy, especially under policies supported by the government of Carlos Menem. While the moment of crisis affects the country, it takes place in an international context of neoliberal economics. The artistic modes of recycling in the plays of this chapter are examples of how this crisis is simultaneously national and international. Postproduction is a phenomenon of the 1990s, of globalization. Argentine artwork contends with this chaotic new moment by recycling both autochthonous traditions and also reaching out to international models.

A culture of use and of consumption surged in Argentina from the return to democracy onwards and we can see the present plays interacting critically with this unbridled consumption (evidenced by the clutter of material on stage), and yet ironically and schizophrenically, a vacillation between this over-consumption and great scarcity (more directly focused around the 2001 corralito). Art which remixed and recycles, seeking new combinations and pastiches focuses more on the *experience* of art and less on the art object as mere object. That is to say, the old idea of “art for art’s sake”, or the idea that artists should create art merely to produce beauty for our pleasure is cast aside. Artists who work in postproduction attempt to focus the viewer on the interaction with the artwork. As Bourriaud describes the impact of globalization and consumerism on the changing art form,

“when the basic functions of our daily lives are slowly transformed into products of consumption...it seems highly logical that artists might seek to rematerialize these functions and processes, to give shape to what is disappearing before our

²⁷² Goddard, Victoria. “‘This Is History’: Nation and Experience in Times of Crisis—Argentina 2001.” *History and Anthropology*, Vol. 17, No.3, September 2006, p. 279.

eyes. Not as objects, which would be to fall into the trap of reification, but as mediums of experience” (32).

The intricate use of parody and intertextuality in both pieces in this chapter, and especially the continuous hand of pastiche present in *La tempestad reciclada* exemplify this desire to produce art as experience. The experience offered to the viewing audience of *theatre* takes on a new dimension as theatre allows for perhaps the ultimate experience of interaction with art.

Parody has been shown to be very interactive. The title of this play is itself a parody: it does not copy Shakespeare’s title but adjusts it, calling our attention to the similarity, but creating a critical distance from the onset. We are immediately curious about the recycled element that is advertised as present in this contemporary reworking. While Shakespeare’s piece certainly contained some humor, brought about by buffoon like characters, and dramatic irony. A new humor enters this modern adaptation as parody does its work. Often humor (whether merely mental or expressed externally with a smile or laugh) is created as Margaret Rose describes, as “a comic dislocation, through its contrast with the new and foreign context” (21). This is then a subset of the incongruous in which we compare that which we expect by logic or prior knowledge to that which surprises us and comes about as unexpected. When parody focuses its critique through the comic, according to Rose, “comic effects and their causes should be interpreted as intentional” (37). So, the playwright is relying on the interaction between their work and the audience carried out through a comic mode. This comparative message relies on the humorous which is shown to have an intentional epistemological power entirely its own, especially to reach a level of affective communication, passing on information about how situations were felt, or how they impacted individuals and populations emotionally.

The parody we can observe in *La tempestad reciclada*, I contend, is present in order to lend an affective lens that incorporates a range of the humorous, ranging from what Hutcheon

describes as, “playful, genial mockery” to, “biting ridicule” (15). Both of these extremes (light and dark humor, to put it simply) assist the audience in seeing this painful crisis moment through a variety of tonal ranges as they reflect on that dismal moment with emotional distance from pain. A crisis is not easily processed as anything aside from painful, destructive, and negative in the moment that it occurs. Betancourt looks back with his audience in 2013 now able to contend with a bigger picture in mind when they think of this crisis’ impact on their country. Parody which plays continually with Argentine specificity intimately ties the audience to the work.

Several specific moments of parody mark the distance between Shakespeare’s 1610 theatre piece and Betancourt’s 2013 piece giving repetition with distance and variation. A cornerstone to understanding the entirety of the piece as a parody, the meaning attributed to ‘*tempestad*’ is altered in the 2013 Argentine piece. This *tempestad* is not a storm at sea that causes a shipwreck, but rather, refers to the chaos of the country, the citizens of which are the *naufragios* or shipwrecked. Specifically, the eye of the storm, of this tempest, takes place in the protests and contentious encounters between the masses and the police and government in 2001. While this specific moment of parody might not incite humor upon being described, embedded within the piece, the destruction of the country described as a shipwreck does become humorously parodied. Gastrínculo shouts out that he has sighted land as video footage is projected of De La Rúa escaping from the presidential palace in a helicopter, effectively abandoning the disaster. Gastrínculo continues to proclaim that they are sinking in a melodramatic tone, mixed with his emittance of insane bouts of laughter. The absurdity of the reality of December 2001 is elevated for the audience to consider as this mad man faces the storm.

The unexpected approach to depicting the crisis that describes the citizens as abandoned at sea in the middle of a storm is a conspicuous enough reference to be comprehended by the

audience. Additionally, this is also such a fresh comparison between the disaster of shipwreck in Shakespeare's *Tempest* and the 'sinking' of their own country, that the audience might connect the references with a knowing smile of recognition. If the reference is understood, a spectator might experience pleasure at having brought together the layers of comparison. Henri Bergson's description of the experience of parody supports this process, as he explains, "Transpose the solemn into the familiar and the result is parody. The effect of parody, thus defined, extends to instances in which the idea expressed in familiar terms is one that, if only in deference to custom, ought to be pitched in another key" (123).²⁷³ In analyzing how this process comes to work, Steven Barfield and Philip Tew contend, "Parody must maintain the link with the original source in order to produce its humorous and dislocating effects...Parody therefore has a 'deconstructive' force that reminds us of the original context, even as it makes us laugh at the new context into which the material has been situated" (101).²⁷⁴ So "repetition with critical distance" is present, especially as the viewer's attention is focused not so much on the original inspiring text, but rather on the new creation, *La tempestad reciclada*, a work that focuses our attention on a new way of understanding and perceiving the Argentine crisis of 2001. The play is immediately a new creation of its own right, not merely another rendition of *The Tempest*.

As the same opening scene continues, using the language of shipwreck to describe the tumultuous period surrounding December of 2001, Esteban declares, "Todos muramos con el rey..." The king is parodied as De La Rúa, who again is simultaneously portrayed as abandoning his citizens in the middle of the storm. Certainly, this parody which strikes a critical comparison between a despotic king and an unpopular president who deepened the already suffering

²⁷³ Bergson, Henri. *Laughter*. New York: Atropos, 2009.

²⁷⁴ Engelberts, Matthijs, Marius Buning, and Sjef Houppermans. *Pastiches, Parodies & Other Imitations*. Rodopi, 2002.

economic situation of Argentina will be understood by the audience and enjoyed minimally with a smile, or perhaps with open laughter; in either case, the pleasure of this moment of parody also results from the audience member having successfully understood the link between a bad king and a bad president. Immediately following Esteban's declaration, Trínculo continues laughing an odd, crazy laughter, here expressing perhaps contempt for De La Rúa, as the audience might similarly feel upon reliving the imagery of his desertion. Trínculo's laughter here might also express a laughter the audience feels upon considering De La Rúa as a leader who has failed them, a laughter resulting from a feeling of superiority as the audience judges De La Rúa's actions.²⁷⁵ This laughter comes off as manic, troubling, and as it continues it unsettles the listener. This twisted laughter in the face of disaster is portrayed as a last effort by Trínculo to deal with a crisis moment that has no other solution or remedy. Forced laughter can be seen as an attempt to trick the body physiologically into altering the dire experience of reality.²⁷⁶ Moreover, as Robert Scruton describes laughter that results from a feeling of superiority, he observes, "If people dislike being laughed at, it is surely because laughter devalues its object in the subject's eyes" (Morreall 1987, 168). This sort of laughter allows the audience to discharge some of their retained anger, following the Relief Theory, that can most likely never engage directly with the former president, giving them some power here to express disapproval.

²⁷⁵ "Superiority" here refers to one of the three classic theories of humor which points to humor resulting from one party feeling superior to another, therefore feeling amused and this turns into laughter. John Morreall delves into this, one of the longest standing theories to explain humor, in his work *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*. "Theories of laughter and humor originated in ancient times with the view that laughter is an expression of feelings of superiority over another person. This superiority theory was held by Plato, Aristotle, and Hobbes" (5).

²⁷⁶ In her work *Trauma and Recovery: The aftermath of violence— from domestic abuse to political terror*, Judith Herman quotes a disaster relief worker who describes how she was able to do her job in aiding trauma survivors without taking on residual trauma or the contagion of trauma herself, saying, "To tell the truth, the only way me and my friends found to keep sane was to joke around and keep laughing" (152).

Throughout the entire piece, parody modernizes and contextualizes the play to 2001 Argentina. In the initial scene that establishes chaos and shipwreck, crowds take part in *cacerolazos*, and confront the police in tumultuous moments of protest. As Victoria Goddard describes the phenomenon of these popular *cacerolazo* protests, she points our attention to how these massive protests movements formed spontaneously and united citizens in the street behind a common feeling, reinventing a feeling of being Argentine together, even in the midst of this developing crisis. Goddard says of how different interviewees spoke of the December 2001 protests in retrospect a year later, “Those at home listening to the radio or watching TV, or those out on the streets or at work felt that something momentous was happening and that it concerned them, as individual men and women and as a national community” (279). These *cacerolazos* portrayed in the play again represent the continual storm that brews on stage. Explaining the relationship between older and newer context in parody, Hutcheon posits that, “many parodies today do not ridicule the backgrounded texts but use them as standards by which to place the contemporary under scrutiny” (57). The contemporary crisis of 2001 is directly criticized throughout *La tempestad reciclada*, creating a focus on the new work, and not ridiculing or dwelling on the Shakespearian text at all. The focus on the contemporary context is especially notable in moments when the modernization of references is the chosen mode of parody, helping the audience to both connect more intimately with the piece, and also drawing our attention to the 2001 time period, while *The Tempest* remains in the background; we are conscious of the parodied text, but it does not take the foreground.

A persistent concern as we look at recycling and particularly the form of recycling known as parody revolves around envisioning these forms of return and remake as true creation and innovation as well. As I claim that recycling is a new form of creation emblematic of the era

which coincides with the economic crisis in Argentina, we might wonder: does parody really create something new? I contend that in fact, the new art of the 1990s and early 2000s which recycles and remakes is not relegated to the past, but in fact is forging a new aesthetic vision alongside new ideologies. Parody is able to create anew because, as the previous example showed, the parodied text or raw recycled material remains in the background, while our attention lands on the alterations. Hutcheon believes that, “works that actually manage to free themselves from the backgrounded text enough to create a new and autonomous form— suggest that the dialectic synthesis that is parody might be a prototype of the pivotal stage in that gradual process of development of literary forms” (35). In much of artistic creation, newness rests on remakes of previously known ideas and forms. The overt nature of this connection with the past is a strength of parody, making the past and present exist simultaneously in our minds as we experience parody.

Parody in this play causes humor, but a mental humor, mostly restrained inside the audience members’ bodies, and not outbursts of laughter. A mental game that is solved tantalizes our mind as we compare and contrast, and are surprised by the new form that an old familiar story takes and attempts to find a way for this to fit into our contemporary knowledge of the situation in Argentina. While this humor may cause the audience to smile knowingly or grin, and while it is a more individual experience, I contend that it is nonetheless a form of communicating through humor deployed successfully by the playwright through the language of parody. Arthur Schopenhauer for one, noticed this element of humor, for whom, “humor depends on the pleasure of finding unexpected connections between ideas” summarizes David Hector Monro.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁷ Monro, D. H. "Theories of Humor." *Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum 3rd ed.* Laurence Behrens and Leonard J. Rosen, eds. Scott, Foresman and Company, 1988, pp. 349-55.

Parody is not the only entrance that relies on humor to communicate in this piece. Humor is focused especially around the character pair of Gastrínculo and Esteban who form a special intercessor bond with the audience in their function as the duo of buffoons.²⁷⁸ They are the origin of the ridiculous laughter emitted from the stage, and also serve to lighten the most dire of situations. While Shakespeare's piece likewise includes this pair of fools, these two characters also modernize and make Argentine a mode of humor that is already nascent in the original and which Betancourt sees as full of potential to be exploited in an Argentine tradition. They function in roles that are quite traditional and typical in the legacy of Argentine theatre and its antecedents: the two buffoons. While exaggerated, silly, and utterly ridiculous at times, these two are also allowed to speak truths that the well-behaved are scared to speak, revealing another level of wisdom. This dichotomy of deep wisdom contained within light-hearted and seemingly simple characters is a popular characteristic of the archetypal fool. The two are cleverly disguised in this piece as two homeless men, connecting them to the contemporary situation in Argentina.

The two buffoons emit much of the laughter that we witness on stage. Stage notes frequently demand that the two undertake long, drawn-out, at times nearly grotesque chortles. For example, at the very onset of the play, Gastrínculo has the first line and declares that he sees land in the distance, metaphorically representing the shipwrecked state of the nation and echoing the shipwreck in Shakespeare's piece. Simultaneously, images of the protests in the *Plaza de Mayo* and De La Rúa's escape by helicopter in December of 2001 are projected on screen behind him. Esteban answers back, hopelessly proclaiming that all is lost, as they will surely perish in this storm. And while this seems to set a somber and dark stage, what follows is alternating and

²⁷⁸ Since the medieval era, and in the carnival tradition, the buffoon characters lighten the mood, bring about comic relief, and balance out darkness in theatrical situations. Though not uniquely Argentine, they have been adopted through the Italian theatre and repurposed, such as the buffoon duo in Griselda Gambaro's *Antígona furiosa*.

drawn-out laughter, as they continue to proclaim the sinking of the ship and imminent deaths of all onboard the metaphorical ship that is the country of Argentina in 2001. Trínculo cries out, ¡Zozobramos! ¡Sobramos! ¡No le sobra algo por favor! Hua hua hua, jajajaja hua...zonzobramos...zonzobramos...” and carries on, “Reycemos, reycemos, Recero...Huaaaaaaaaaaaa ajajaja huaaaaaaaaaaaa”. The laughter here is completely grotesque— as an audience we in no way are encouraged to laugh along with the characters, but rather, they exacerbate the trauma we perceive on stage through laughing somewhat insultingly in the face of this tragedy. The laughter we witness here illustrates a way of willing crisis away, trying to ward it off with awkward and uncomfortable laughter. It is bizarre and discomfiting to see them howling and braying, as if animalesque instincts overtake their bodies. We can watch how such a crisis impacts those involved, something that many of the audience may have been too close to during the December 2001 protests to be able to analytically contemplate. A critical distance is drawn and an affective tone that alternates between dark and light is established.

In witnessing the two fools, we are reminded of the play discussed in chapter 1, *Antígona furiosa* by Griselda Gambaro and the buffoon duo of Antinoo and Corifeo. Obviously a theatrical tendency that is as old as the Ancient Greeks, carried through to Shakespeare’s time and beyond, a duo of fools here is recycled and successfully parodied in the modern day Argentine interpretation of the Shakespeare piece. The archetype of buffoons often requires for them to be present as a pair. In a duo, they are able to undertake conversation and dialogue, an interaction that maintains a silly level of playfulness. Together they may joke about that which is normally considered no laughing matter. As the fools test limits, we are allowed to observe their laughing and playfulness as an audience. Fools often have a difficult time assimilating into the serious world around them or understanding the rules, limitations, or prohibitions of it. Likewise, we

often have a difficult time accepting buffoonery into our ‘serious’ world, full of non-foolish affect. Between the pair of them, interaction, reaction, joking and affective response (laughter) may take place— they are a self-contained community of performer and audience. The inclusion of a duo of buffoons is not an original decision by Betancourt, but rather an element recycled from Shakespeare and from earlier medieval times as well. Betancourt noted that much of the humor in the piece is an attempt to preserve the humor he found and experienced in the original work, saying, “he tratado aprovechar las líneas de humor que trazó Shakespeare.”²⁷⁹ Clown, buffoon duos are common recourses in popular performance, connecting with the audience from the perspective of *el pueblo* and therefore, this humor-inducing strategy is another example of recycling and parody in *La tempestad reciclada* that is recognizable yet approached anew.

Very much in the same vein of absurd humor described and analyzed in *Postales argentinas*, humor frequently is begot of situations in which communication fails, confusion abounds, and to put it briefly, the absurd forms a part of the humorous language at work in *La tempestad reciclada*. As George Woodyard explains, “The absurdist playwrights [of Latin America] explore the anguish and the helplessness of modern man in attempting to impose a rational order upon an incomprehensible world.”²⁸⁰ This purposeful creation of confusion leaves the audience bewildered to make the point that life and our world surrounding us are bewildering and do not necessarily make sense although we may try to understand, create rules, and organize these. Non sequiturs, questions without answers, dialogue that appears to jump logical steps, and dialogue that degenerates into a list of words or phrases that do not have obvious connection, like

²⁷⁹ From a personal email interview with the playwright, conducted on June 28, 2015.

²⁸⁰ See page 186 in: Woodyard, George W. “The Theatre of the Absurd in Spanish America” *Comparative Drama*; Fall 1969; Vol. 3, Issue 3; International Index to Performing Arts. pp. 183-192.

a stuck record, are but some examples of the type of confusions that purposefully disorient and cause humor due to incongruence. Miscommunication or the inability to communicate through language are also characteristics of theatre of the absurd. Woodyard explains that theatre of the absurd incorporates fragmentation, distortion of language, time and space, disintegration of traditional dramatic structure. These are all elements of the Latin American absurd which were implemented especially in the 1960s to display social and political unrest, signaling a breakdown in the fabric of society again. This recycling of elements of the absurd both highlights the problematic relationship of man with the present society, but adds an additional layer in the connection it automatically weaves with the 1960s , in order to link crisis moments.²⁸¹

For example, Trínculo and Esteban begin a sing-song, rap-inspired recitation of Oliverio Girondo's calligram "Yo no sé nada", repeating rhythmically and stomping on stage, "Creo que creo en lo que creo que no creo", accentuating confusion.²⁸² Absurdity centered in the written or spoken word, linguistically we come to question the efficacy of our own human tongue. This ironically exposes the devolution being experienced in the present day, even in the midst of supposed advances in human civilization. These elements of confusion appear to share much in common with aspects that are foundational in theatre of the absurd. Then, linguistic confusion and the creation of an amalgam of unrelated pieces of conversation which painfully disorient while entertaining, is a recycled and reworked element of theatre of the absurd. Betancourt borrows absurdist elements to purposefully display the confusion and chaos of this crisis moment, and to show us how irrational and unreal the very real world feels in this moment of

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Girondo's calligram from 1932 is a visual poem in which the verses form the shape of a human body (specifically, a scarecrow, which stands for the falseness or mimicry of a human). The actual words describe confusion and a lack of knowledge, pointing to the disorientation of the younger generations.

turmoil. Humor that works to communicate through the mode of the absurd is felt by the audience watching, while the humor does not resonant as such to the characters involved in the absurd situation on stage. The absurd is a part of their world and though it creates chaos, confusion, and frustration, it is not understood by the characters living in the absurd situation.

Much of the parody of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* happens when the actors or characters shift and take on the roles of different characters, donning masks or specific wardrobe. Protesters become characters from *The Tempest*, Gonzalo becomes Eva Perón, El Toba converts into Calibán, and the pianist steps on and off stage periodically taking on and off roles, moving between a faceless producer of musical accompaniment to an active character in the piece. A certain fluidity between characters recycles the very human bodies on stage, keeping us ever alert as we look for cues to determine what character a certain actor or actress currently represents. Costume changes, gestures, voice alterations, and positioning on or off stage alert us to these changes too. These elements of metatheatricality focus our attention on ideas of falsity, feigning, and playing or putting on masks or taking on roles, and here in particular highlights the artifice or theatricality present in our real lives (in the politics of Argentina that present one truth of neoliberal success to the people when another reality underlies it, for example).²⁸³ Utilizing this theatrical recourse also keeps us from fully immersing ourselves emotionally in the plot, keeping us aware that reality and fiction blend and bend far too easily to take for granted.

Metatheatrical moments maintain our awareness of our witnessing of theatre and of the real-life, non-fictional context within which all of the play nests: the December 2001 crisis. Framing the work, the crisis is confronted head-on: in the first moments of the play De la Rúa's helicopter flees. Throughout the piece, the recognizably fictional world of *The Tempest* blends

²⁸³ See: Lionel Abel, *Tragedy and Metatheatre*, ed. Martin Puchner. New York: Holmes and Meier, 2003.

back and forth with portrayals (theatrically and with documentary film footage) of the *cacerolazos*, *Plaza de Mayo*, protests against the police, among other evidence of the December 2001 unrest. Fiction and reality lend insight into one another then, as we read *The Tempest* unavoidably in the context of the crisis, and the crisis in relation to *The Tempest*. The concept of ‘reality’ is turned on its head as we ask which is stranger, reality or fiction? The reality of the 2001 protests is depicted so that it becomes as strange as fiction for the audience, highlighting the absurdity in our daily lives as we negotiate the boundary between reality and fiction.

In the closing scene, characters switch roles to a further extent, stepping out of the roles of their fictional characters and into their autobiographical characters who relate their personal experience of the crisis. This final scene is much akin to the documentary theatre work *Mi vida después* discussed in chapter 1, as the actors who play themselves speak directly to the audience, breaking the fourth wall and narrating in a sort of confessional their subjective experience of the crisis. This could be seen as yet another repetition with difference from the original 1610 text in which Prospero also breaks the fourth wall and solicits applause from the audience in the epilogue. The actors in Betancourt’s *Tempestad* give testimony that is personal, intimate, and emotional about their experience of the 2001 crisis, but we perceive these recountings as an alternate form of truth. With the multiplicity of individual experiences, they gain strength and their feelings and stories are verified by the witnessing audience who instinctually create connections between those human experiences of crisis related on stage and their own experiences. Nicely cyclical, the first and last scenes frame the entire work blatantly addressing the crisis of 2001, and also create the affective link with the audience necessary for this parody of a classic Shakespeare work to penetrate into the contemporary Argentine reality. This documentary technique along with that of incorporating video footage of the height of crisis

unmistakably links this version of *The Tempest* to the local context, heightening the originality of the new work of parody. Shakespeare's *Tempest* (present in references to shipwreck, existence on the island, searches for other lost castaways, and in the power dynamics between Europeans Próspero and Miranda and native Calibán) is not the focus, rather, Argentina's contemporary allegorical 'shipwreck' are central in *La tempestad*.

This final scene which ends on a much more documentary and testimonial note than the rest of the piece is not the only example of the interactive nature the play develops with its audience. Betancourt adapts some of the formal elements of the Shakespeare play and makes stylistic choices which alter most notably the interaction this piece forms with the audience. These adaptations (such as breaking with the fourth wall to a further extent, conversing directly with the audience about the 'real life tempest' (December 2001 corralito), sitting with the audience as fellow spectators, among other tactics) facilitate spectators' closer involvement with the piece and I believe that these artistic choices are in place for the purpose of affectively motivating the audience body. This movement of 'closing' between audience and stage seems necessary to implicate the audience in what is presented not as the history of others, not the story woven by Shakespeare in 1610, but rather, their own history that they have a duty to own, contemplate, and consider as they move forward as a country. Here again, the parody which recycles *The Tempest* proves to not merely adapt, but to request audience interaction in parody and thus they feel ownership over the dilemmas depicted on stage, similar to Prospero's final intervention in the original Shakespeare text, but in a new context, to a much further extent (the characters in *La tempestad* step out of character and become themselves, the actors, whereas Prospero stays in character and merely addresses the audience).

Like in *Postales argentinas*, recycled intertexts also abound in this piece; voices and phantasms of other times and places converge. As they are recontextualized and embedded within this adaptation of the Shakespeare work, they become parodies. Beyond intertexts from *The Tempest*, segments of speeches from Eva Perón, the inter ‘text’ of Beethoven’s 17th Sonata (often referred to as *Der Sturm*, The Tempest), Oliverio Girondo’s calligram “Yo no sé nada”, the Argentine anthem, a song by a contemporary Argentine pop star (also coincidentally named Miranda), and other text fragments appear within this play. Betancourt, like Bartís, reveals to us that our contemporary world is composed of reused and recycled bits and pieces from various time periods (though with a heavier focus on uniquely Argentine texts than *Postales*) that when creatively assembled, align to form something new while keeping consciously present all of the layers of these intertexts as we consider the new creation. These moments of intertextuality do not seem to give way to overt laughter, but provide pleasure and enjoyment as the audience identifies these elements and finds them curiously recontextualized, forming new, previously unconsidered juxtapositions. This mental playfulness is certainly a more subtly funny tone, which I have described previously. Our active participation and interaction with the performed work becomes a necessity as intertexts parodied demand work be done by the viewer to decipher their imbedded codes. We necessarily approach the work, reconsidering each old text placed in a new context as these words (and music) gain new life, recycled in the present.

As already indicated, texts that are brought into conversation in the play range from references to literary works, and words from thinkers and philosophers such as Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, Jorge Luis Borges, Rodolfo Walsh, Ernesto Sábato, and Rodolfo Kusch to lines attributed to political figures such as Eva Perón, Juan Perón, El Che, and also references to pop culture of the 2013 present such as interwoven lyrics from musician Fito Páez and the pop

rock group Miranda.²⁸⁴ These intertexts span social, cultural, and political spectrums, and temporally reach back to the foundation of Argentina in the mid-19th century up until the late 20th century. However, that which they share is their connectedness to *Argentinidad*. The text fragments, reassembled into this one artistic medium, become a collage of words, voiced from new places of annunciation. Similar to the work that parody asks us to do, intertextuality also plays a game with us intellectually as we solve the puzzle of the original intention of these utterances, layered with a new context, together as a textual palimpsest that creates a brand new and nuanced meaning. These moments of intertextuality draw together *The Tempest*, the 2001 crisis, and recognizable recycled words of scholars, artists, politicians, and other relevant figures all into a singular new conversation. Solving the nuances of such riddles gives us pleasure upon solving, much like the recognition of parody. While not outright laughter, I contend that this pleasure provided in these instances to the spectator is genealogically related to the humor that results from word games, teasing out puns, and other sorts of intellectual playfulness. However, each moment of intertextuality also maintains the Argentine/Latin American specificity for us to focus on local identity in the face of crisis, how it is constructed, maintained, and how it gives us the tools to look forward.²⁸⁵

Intertextuality evidences the possibility of new creation through old, already-known texts that goes on during this play. For example, Calibán muses about what in fact Americanness is, and draws upon the words of Rodolfo Kusch, concluding that, “lo americano es primordialmente

²⁸⁴ All cited by the director himself in the dossier of the play.

²⁸⁵ This moment in which the spectator aligns different planes and comes to a new and personal realization might be likened to Ernest Hemmingway’s ‘moment of truth’ (a term he uses in his work *Death in the Afternoon*), which I understand to be a convergence or moment of enlightenment experienced by a reader who has actively put together pieces found in the text. Or perhaps James Joyce’s understanding of a moment of ‘epiphany’, or sudden, dramatic and startling moments which seemed to have heightened significance and to be surrounded with a kind of magical aura. See the James Joyce Center’s description: <http://jamesjoyce.ie/epiphanies/>

lo indígena y en segundo lugar, el mundo construido por el hijo del inmigrado.” First, this very quote states that Americanness is in fact, a remix, or a recycled identity. Secondly, this language is much too eloquent to belong purely to the original character of Calibán, striking the listener as strange, or incongruent. But the newly composed Calibán of *La tempestad reciclada* is able to ponder the essence of Americanness; he is a new creation that combines previous elements. In speaking these words of another, both the symbolism of Calibán the constantly recycled character, emblematic of the autochthonous in America, and the conceptualization of American identity via Kusch are put into conversation. Recycling and parodying call our attention to age-old discussions that merit revisiting in the present crisis.

Identifying and reading these intertexts within the play prepares our viewing minds to see other sorts of duplicity. Many of the lines delivered by characters from *La Tempestad Reciclada* utter adaptations of Shakespearian lines while overtly referencing some aspect of contemporary Argentine society. This duplicity of significance keeps us constantly in a state of awareness of the dual worlds portrayed, ever straddling the divide between the crisis experienced by these shipwrecked 17th century Englishmen confronting ‘the Other’ in the Caribbean, and the contemporary crisis being lived in Argentina. For example, as already mentioned, immediately after playing footage of De la Rúa’s helicopter leaving the *Plaza de Mayo*, as Trínculo cries out that they are sinking, we not only understand this to be a physical shipwreck, but the shipwreck of a country. As Calibán proclaims his ownership of ‘this plaza’, claiming that Próspero stole it from him, the depicted discord is both between 15th century colonizer and colonized native in the Americas, but also that of a 20th and 21st century dispute between colonizer and colonized: Próspero here represents the IMF, the United States, capitalism, and neoliberal politics, and Calibán the Argentine populace.

The very characters and plot points of *The Tempest* are of course endlessly recycled elements in Latin America. Calibán, Próspero, and Ariel are especially deeply layered symbols that have been used and reused, appropriated and reappropriated by thinkers such as Roberto Fernández Retamar and José Enrique Rodó. Retamar's 1971 essay "Calibán: Notes towards a Discussion of Culture in Our America", responds to the turn-of-the-century work "Ariel" by Rodó. Both recycle the characters of Shakespeare, while also dialoguing with the 1845 work *Facundo: Civilización o barbarie* by Argentine author, journalist, and president Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, centering their conversation around the essence of and ideals for Latin American identity. The rewritings that comprise these layers of significance are all considered simultaneously as we reexamine Argentine identity (and Latin American identity along with it) in this 2013 recycling of *La tempestad reciclada*. Interestingly, in both writings by Rodó and Retamar, Latin American identity is under consideration because of and in relation to an exterior, capitalist, empirical identity: that of the former colonizers and specifically of the United States. It is significant and fitting then that in this new era of contention with the neighbor to the north that is at the root of the neoliberal crisis playing out in Argentina, returning to and recycling yet again the ideas in *The Tempest* is insightful and illuminating. And as the act of recycling takes place, the old identity of the material being manipulated does not disappear, but rather remains visible even through the new use and added significance (like the multiple layers visible in the palimpsest). Betancourt asks us to juxtapose charged symbols mentally as we perceive a new coming for the shipwrecked characters on the island that is Argentina of 2001.

Chapter Conclusions

Postales argentinas (1988) by Ricardo Bartís and *La tempestad reciclada* (2013) by Idangel Betancourt demonstrate visually, poetically, and affectively the devastation of Argentina

under an opening to the global market, neoliberalism, and capitalism. This shift towards neoliberalism began during the dictatorship, deepened during the Menem administration, and was supported throughout this period until the system collapse in 2001. Surrounding the climax of the economic crisis in December 2001, the Argentine artistic scene often turned to recycling and reworking previous forms in a search for innovation and renovation, and to illustrate the ideological woes of the nation. These works show recycling tactics visually, textually, literally, and metaphorically, exposing a multi-nuanced property of recycling (and by extension crisis) which aggravates and amasses, but also suggests the ability to look back and rework traditions.

Postales argentinas, *La tempestad reciclada*, and other pieces which portray the era of crisis (such as *Los Albornoz: Delicias de una familia argentina*) have been examined by other critics as manifestations of a feeling of desperation, desertion, loss, and absence which is undeniably given the utter and all-encompassing devastation of the late 90s through early 2000s. However, I want to add that such pieces which rely heavily on recycling, primarily through parody (parody both of genres, and by incorporation of intertextuality or other references that mimic and yet differ from the originals) as positive and future-looking, forging creatively through crisis. Parody itself, requests the audience's collaboration. In other words, we must bridge the connections and place into conversation the various references, available clearly only to those who possess a knowledge of the fragments inserted into concert. A local crowd which is versed in the local Argentine cues, both from popular and high culture is needed to complete the connected references. In a historical moment when Argentine identity was in a state of crisis in the face of growing globalization, the opportunity to understand local codes and references together (the *sainete*, clowning, and *grotesco criollo* codes in *Postales* for example, or the December 2001 events portrayed as if a shipwreck at sea in *La tempestad*), and to be collectively

connected to these local feelings in the theatre through nuances of humor, allows for a focus on that very identity in the present. By approaching these caustic themes primarily through parody, “the humor of recycling” as I contend, I believe that both Bartís and Betancourt inextricably weave together historical Argentina with the specific present, and autochthonous Argentina with the globalized web from which it cannot be separated. Argentine audiences come to understand through this parody how history is linked to their present state of being, and how their destiny is also deeply connected to the world and especially that of post-colonial powers (through neoliberalism). Argentines in attendance to both plays which are analyzed here formed temporary communities within the theatre and were presented with interactive and emotionally anchored forms of reconsidering their Argentine identity, role as citizens, and identity of their shared nation in a space of temporary togetherness inside the theatre. It is by way of the aesthetics and poetics of recycling, often arrived at humorously through parody, that these two pieces demonstrate a way forward and out of the paralysis of crisis. They communicate this possible future, while maintaining and emphasizing the dangerous qualities of the contemporary world, ever-globalizing and consumed by neoliberal policies.

Concluding Remarks.

Argentine Humor: Establishing Tradition, Forging Innovation, and *La trilogía argentina amateur*

“La risa es el vehículo de la comprensión y una orgía personal de la cual no podemos privarnos cada uno de nosotros.” -Mauricio Kartun

Argentine humor in the theatre is here to stay. Throughout this project, I have traced a body of humor which I believe to have locally specific characteristics sufficient to designate an ‘Argentine humor’ and have shown how it operates in the theatre. Certainly, I am not the first to group these comic qualities together. Playwright Griselda Gambaro uses the first person plural possessive to gather together and claim belonging to this tradition as she observes, “Non-Argentines are often taken aback by the acidity of *our* humor (my emphasis).”²⁸⁶ Other markers of the recognition of Argentine humor, ranging from a special edition of *Clarín* newspaper dedicated to “Humor argentino” in 2015, to the existence of a museum dedicated entirely to graphic humor in Buenos Aires (El Museo del Humor), and book collections with titles such as *Humorismo argentino* or *El humor: un vicio secreto de los argentinos*, establish the prevalence of this affective form of Argentine communication and identity.²⁸⁷

Rounding out its unique contours in this study, I have turned to humor’s specific application to the theatre. Argentine humor on stage has been shown to be a finicky, layered, nuanced humor that is often double-edged, not unlike the country itself which Gambaro describes saying, “This is a schizophrenic country, a country that lives two lives.”²⁸⁸ The local

²⁸⁶ In a 1989 interview with Marguerite Feitlowitz for *Bomb Magazine*.
<http://bombmagazine.org/article/1345/griselda-gambaro>

²⁸⁷ Murray, Luis Alberto. *Humorismo Argentino*. Ediciones Culturales Argentinas, Ministerio de Educación y Justicia, Dirección General de Cultura, 1961., Amer, Edgardo González, editor. *El humor: Un vicio secreto de los argentinos*. Ediciones Instituto Movilizador de Fondos Cooperativos, 1994.
https://www.clarin.com/tema/humor_argentino.html

²⁸⁸ From the same 1989 interview with Marguerite Feitlowitz for *Bomb Magazine* previously cited.

humor is also black while jovial, devastating while entertaining, and manages to provide serious reflection through an affective release often associated with the light-hearted. Hence, humor in Argentine theatre provides the audience with much more than a pleasant feeling; it is in fact an alternate way of knowing about history and human experience, as the epigraph here from playwright Mauricio Kartun indicates. Others, such as playwright Rafael Spregelburd have emphasized this quality of knowledge stored within the layered Argentine humor, saying “Para mí, la diversión y el humor son formas de desviación, *formas profundas de conocimiento*. Por eso no puedo escribir sin humor (my emphasis).”²⁸⁹

Since the beginnings of a nationally specific theatre at the end of the 19th century, humor has proven to be ever-relevant. It has continued to evolve, pushing forward in the theatre scene, while yet maintaining a strong and constant reference to the past. And humor does not play a secondary role, but rather, has been shown to take a lead in communicating knowledge from stage to audience, especially concerning the concept of nation and that of national identity. Moving through key historical moments of crisis in the chapters of this study, I have traced the contours of the ways in which humor specifically addresses trauma in Argentine theatre. A resulting depiction of identity that has been painted throughout the project, ranging from that of local *porteño* identity and individual identity to the identity of Argentines as a group and Argentina as a nation. This identity encompassing a feeling of belonging to the geographic space of Argentina, and an embrace of local language, food, traditions, and those imported from immigrants arriving around the turn of the century. And, in more abstract terms, I have pointed out the relevance of the ability to adapt and change, resilience in the face of crisis, and an

²⁸⁹ Hopkins, Cecilia. “El sentido común es mi enemigo”. <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/espectaculos/6-17507-2003-03-12.html>

acceptance of continual failure yet renewal as cornerstones of Argentine identity. Identity may be reevaluated and refocused via the affective communication that humor provides in the theatre which addresses the three primary crisis moments selected for study here, identified as the most recent dictatorship (1976-1983), Guerra de Malvinas (1982), and Economic Crisis (culminating in 2001).

Some questions which have remained lingering throughout the chapters of this study are: how can recovery truly be achieved after crisis? How can we know that trauma is overcome? Or, what real impact does the experience of humor in the theatre have on the gathered audiences? And finally, a question lingers which in my opinion is ultimately unanswerable and yet of key importance to acknowledge: can theatre change reality outside of the time and space of the theatre performance? As the most pervasive and scarring of all the crisis moments, the dictatorship seems to mark a moment which we now refer back to, mentioning the time that came before, and the current post-dictatorship period in which contemporary Argentina still lives. In conjunction with the question addressing the possibility of recovery from trauma, it must be asked: when will the post-dictatorship end? While I am not convinced that these questions can be answered, I am sure that we must keep them in mind and head towards them to glean further knowledge about collective trauma and recuperation possible through cultural production.

Genres of Humor at Play

Without formally creating a taxonomy of humor genres in use in Argentine theatre, it has become apparent throughout this study that several prominent types of humor are at work. These include the *grotesco criollo*, the Argentine absurd (and in conjunction, the humor of incongruence), black humor, and parody. These different genres made repeated appearances

throughout the six theatre pieces closely analyzed here. I do not believe that it is possible to delineate a closed correspondence between a certain time period and a certain mode of humor most adept at addressing the particular crisis, nonetheless, the last chapter pointed to a more direct relationship between the economic crisis of 2001 and the use of parody. With that in mind, in what follows I define my perception of the usefulness of the most pertinent Argentine humor genres in theatre.

The *grotesco criollo* has proven itself to be useful to address times of changing social fabrics or rifts between different groups or classes or peoples. Having originated in a climate of extreme influx of immigrants into the city of Buenos Aires as a way of exposing and coping with the strains this segment of society felt, the *grotesco criollo* has been brought back repeatedly to expose injustices and situations yet unresolved which require public attention. This is especially useful in highly politicized moments, when systems of power are abusive of the interests of the masses, and especially, when ‘reality’ and ‘fiction’ are confusingly intertwined. The *grotesco* is adept at framing falsities that we assume to belong to reality, and exaggerating to make the ‘mask’ that is worn conspicuous for observers.

The vein of the absurd that has come to reign in Argentine theatre since the 1960s is, as Griselda Gambaro claims, more a part of Argentine reality than separate from it. While the traditional European theatre of the absurd of this same era highlights a reality that is disconnected from ours, the Argentine variant instead reveals that the world we all inhabit is in fact dominated by that which is absurd. The Argentine absurd is not escapist then, but it directly dialogues with their reality. Naturally, to expose the bizarre of our lived reality, the absurd works through a strong dose of humor of the incongruent. A young playwright working often in the

legacy of this national absurd, Rafael Spregelburd comments on his work, “Cuando dirijo, yo suelo presentar situaciones muy absurdas como si fueran lo más natural del mundo”.²⁹⁰

Parody, the star of humor in theatre works focusing on the Economic Crisis, establishes a duplicity. The ability to place two works, voices, or references into conversation questions a singular perspective and unsettles certainty and belief. The ideas of falsity and originality are brought into question and thoughts are re-voiced. While this humor form is not always linked to outright chuckles and merriment, there is a degree of mental game-playing present that is pleasurable for the decipherer. Parody allows us to rethink assumptions in a creative fashion, applying the mental enjoyment of collage, montage, and other sorts of mimicry with difference.

The Role of Audience

The importance of connecting audience members to one another, and to the emotional dialogue that passes from stage through the proscenium into the audience, and back via affective flow is a keystone to understanding the important work of humor in Argentine theatre. Whether dealing with the humor of superiority and cruelty highlighted in Gambaro’s *Antígona furiosa* in reference to the disappeared, or in understanding the influences of the grotesco criollo in Acobino’s *Continente viril*, the audience has remained present. I have concluded that humor in the theatre works only when the audience is taken into consideration and incorporated directly by playwright, director, and actors in their approach to developing the performance. Moreover and excitingly, while this spontaneous, instinctual, human interaction can be considered beforehand while planning the production, the resulting effectiveness of the audience response can never be precisely predicted. Each audience is different and group dynamics shift in surprising ways. This unpredictability that raw human emotion and intuition lend to the performance reception is part

²⁹⁰ In an interview with *Página 12*, “Suelo presentar lo absurdo como una situación natural.” <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/espectaculos/10-10633-2003-09-24.html>

of my fascination with how humor is paramount and yet ultimately involves a factor of surprising happenstance. Though the humor I trace may be culturally specific and honed over the years in Argentine cultural production and performance traditions, humor is also individually relative and depends on our unique lived experiences, former knowledge, and perceptions to be processed. This duality of exciting potentiality and a frustrating immeasurability and unpredictability are the characteristics that first attracted to me to this project and which sustained my interest over the course of investigation. These qualities give me hope that this research will also lend itself to innumerable future tangential projects which all stem from the human emotional interaction with artistic production.

Argentina: Living in a State of Continual Crisis

It has been suggested in this study that repeated crisis may well be ingrained in part in a sense of Argentine identity, and that dealing with crisis has become a routine for the Argentine people. However, this may feel in conflict with part of what has historically defined ‘crisis’ as a term. A crisis is typically a unique moment, an isolated moment, and irregularity in contrast to the normal state of being is emphasized. Regardless of this, it seems that in the most contemporary era, a new kind of crisis has come upon some segments of society: a form of crisis which never truly dissipates. In the future, it may no longer be the conspicuous, all-enveloping crisis moments of the past that trouble Argentines, but perhaps a more all-enveloping state of crisis linked to the impossibility of resolving conundrums of the hypermodern world. This has been labeled as ‘chronic crisis’ or ‘endemic crisis’, versus ‘episodic crisis’, by some scholars such as Henrik Vigh.²⁹¹

²⁹¹ Posited in his article “Crisis and Chronicity” for example.

La trilogía argentina amateur

The ever-pertinence of humor in Argentine theatre that deals with social and political turmoil, trauma, or crisis is readily apparent in the works that grace the country's stages in the contemporary moment. The work of the newest generation of Argentine playwrights promises to carry on this legacy and inheritance of humor which I've mapped in this study. One example with provides a plethora of entrances into this theme is, *La trilogía argentina amateur*. Written and presented in Buenos Aires between 2011 and 2013, this three-part work deftly moves between tracing the Argentine theatrical traditions and addressing moments of political turmoil simultaneously, placing politics and theatrical creation into conversation. "El teatro es el único que puede seguir mostrando lo político a nivel contradicción" commented Mariano Saba, one of the playwrights of the pieces.²⁹² Along with the other playwright, Andrés Benetti, the two are conscious of the inheritance they have to work with, but also are aware that a stagnancy in simply reconstructing these genres in the present moment would not provide new criticism on the current state of life in Argentina. Stating, "las obras no son ni un grotesco, ni un sainete ni una epopeya isabelina; pero por otro lado funcionan a manera de homenaje. Hay algo del grotesco, sainete y teatro isabelino que nosotros tratamos de recuperar, si bien estamos hablando desde la contemporaneidad", Binetti links his works to the national genres, while creating a new distance as well to parody the genres themselves.²⁹³ This repetition with difference with which Linda Hutcheon describes parody, is able to provide a critique on the state of Argentine society,

²⁹² Soto, Ivanna. "Pensar la argentinidad: de Evita al Centenario patrio". http://www.clarin.com/teatro/trilogia-argentina-amateur-andres-binetti-mariano-saba_0_ryggV1boDmx.amp.html

²⁹³ Ibid.

especially regarding the perpetual power of art to intervene in politics, the common theme throughout the three works of the trilogy.²⁹⁴

The three works constitute an extended metaphor for the country, and focus on the theme of failure, while ricocheting repeatedly from lightness and humor to the tragic and serious reflection. Nara Mansur explains how the three pieces, “relacionan hitos políticos y expresiones del amateurismo artístico criollo en una constante dicotomía que habla de la identidad nacional tomada por ‘una especie de polaridad constante’” circo y peronismo, radioteatro y radicalismo proscrito, por ejemplo”, highlighting chaotic extremes, and mirroring the oscillation of Argentina and its identity.²⁹⁵ Argentina is painted as composed of both chaos and order, the good and the bad, prosperity and failure. The *grotesco* is helpful in highlighting this observation and criticism of national identity that Saba and Benetti wish to resuscitate and innovate. Saba explains the impulse to turn to the grotesco was propelled by, “La idea de lo grotesco como algo muy argentino, muy polar- esa idea de polaridad insalvable que tiene que ver con la identidad argentina, siempre oscilando entre dos extremos un poco arriesgados-, y con una especie de vaivén que a la gente le causa gracia.”²⁹⁶ Humor raises our attention again, refusing to let the audience remain quiet, coaxing out a disquiet through troubled laughter. This trilogy provides a perfect synthesis of the humor agents at work in the field of the most contemporary Argentine theatre which lean heavily not only on tradition, but also innovation. Benetti and Saba bridge past and present deftly, pointing out the continual usefulness of Argentina’s theatre traditions to the present.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Mansur, Nara. “En el lugar donde también se está”. *Picadero*, Publicación cuatrimestral del Instituto Nacional del Teatro, septiembre/diciembre de 2014.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

Outside the Frame/Proscenium

Many relevant pieces that center on the dictatorship years, Guerra de Malvinas, and Economic Crisis were necessarily left out of this study. Those works selected allowed for a presentation of various aesthetics, approaches, and purposes, but I do not mean these selections to imply at all a canon or that the body of work treating these crises is small. This representative sample attempts to trace contours of the field of contemporary Argentine theatre, but, the same techniques of analysis and the same traces of national humor genres could be applied to other works spanning the 1980s through the present. In particular, some of the playwrights whose materials I would wish to address in a future or more focused study, would necessarily include Roberto Cossa, Rafael Spregelburd, and Claudio Tolcachir, Mauricio Kartun, Eduardo Rovner, or Daniel Veronese, to mention a few.

Two local humor traditions that were not deeply explored in this study are those of the Argentine circus (*circo criollo*) and Argentine clowning. Though the influences are mentioned, especially in reference to the work of Los Macocos, a future trajectory for part of this project would look especially to the reasons for the success and longevity of clowning traditions in theatre, performance, and even daily life in this country (the work of *payamédicos* for example). As has been mentioned before, some scholars point to clowning, an element of the Argentine circus at the end of the 19th century, as the origins of truly local performance traditions, venturing away from repetitions of European modes of performance. Clowning also deserves a more in-depth study in the physical, gestural, and corporality that are applied to the training of many actors' bodies in more or less direct ways and resonances of which are observed in the theatre.

Beyond the reaches of theatre, other cultural productions in Argentina display the importance of humor in society. While these did not fit within the realm of this study, there is

space for future expansion crossing genre and format boundaries to show the pervasiveness of humor more widely in Argentina. For example, the new Museo del Humor, founded in 2012 in Buenos Aires, “Reúne las obras de los grandes maestros del dibujo, la ilustración y la caricatura”, according to its webpage, displaying the vast body of political cartooning, and other graphic arts from the end of the 19th century through the present.²⁹⁷ Recent film productions such as *Relatos salvajes* (2014), or *Topos* (2011) twist elements of reality, commenting on social ills through traits of the grotesque and employ a large dose of black humor.

While this study also has a strong focus on the particular theatre productions coming out of the capital city of Buenos Aires, I would like to point out here that I am not equalizing Buenos Aires and Argentina in this study. This is especially important to consider in the implications for how the selected theatre works here allow the audiences to reposition their notions of national identity in the post-dictatorship era. That is to say, these pieces open a lens to new perspectives towards the identity of all Argentines and the nation as a whole, not just a *porteño* identity. Most Argentine theatre works do enjoy more public, and a higher density of theatre practitioners (directors, actors, playwrights), and theatre critics and academics when produced and performed in Buenos Aires. However, keep in mind that Rosario, Córdoba, and Salta in particular have their own theatre scenes. One of the pieces treated in the final chapter (*La tempestad reciclada*) was an original piece by a troupe and playwright based in Salta. Hence, though the majority of the works examined here do happen to come out of the capital, they address themes of crisis which affected the entire *nation*, through *nationally* recognized cultural dialects such as the *grotesco criollo*.

²⁹⁷ <http://www.buenosaires.gob.ar/museodelhumor>

Finale

Through the humor revealed at work in each piece here, the audience has been involved in completing the story. They have been forced to contend with their own emotional responses to charged historical moments treated fictionally through the theatrical production. The past is not past in Argentina, and trauma has been shown to linger endlessly in the present, remaining to be dealt with. Humor takes part in troubling us into awareness, contemplation, and agency. In participating in these performances, audiences approach the nature of identity, both individually and collective, of Argentina in the post-dictatorship era. Different humorous tones have been shown to be useful with further or lesser distance from the moments of crisis (violently and disturbingly funny juxtaposed against incongruently absurd, for example in the case of Gambaro's work in contrast to Lola Arias' piece treated in chapter 1). While I have constantly insisted on the strength of a humor tradition that has been honed and developed over the years (for example by pulling out the influences of the *grotesco criollo* at play in Acobino and Cardoso's contemporary pieces influenced by the Malvinas crisis), I hope to have shown equal instance in the great ability of the Argentine artists in constant creative recycling and innovation from a base of these strong roots. I truly believe that recycling in our present era is the most fruitful route forward, linking ideas, generations, and art works in a nuanced web of signification that is apt for contemporary Argentina as playwrights Bartís and Betancourt display. Crisis may never end in Argentina; however, I am confident that the means to deal with crisis are alive and well in this country which constantly faces devastation with a grimace and a guffaw, *una mueca y una carcajada*.

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