



**Modern clicks:
cinema-theater relations
in Argentine
post-dictatorship**
*Clics modernos: las
relaciones cine-teatro
durante la postdictadura
argentina*



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Abstract: the article formulates a cartographic route around the different relationship modes that the Argentine cinema premiered between 1984 and 1994 sustained with the theater of the same time. We establishes five interactions areas between both disciplines: 1) the hegemony of testimonial realism; 2) The recovery of popular scenic forms (mainly linked to sainete, grotesque and the tango); 3) the formulation of allegoric films based on theatrical strategies; 4) Films that use theater as a meta-reflective operation; and 5) the appearance of cinematographic proposals contrary to realism whose dialogue was initiated with the emerging theater of the post-dictatorship.

Keywords: post-dictatorship; Argentina; interarts studies; staging; cartography

Resumen: el escrito formula un recorrido cartográfico alrededor de los diferentes tipos de relación que el cine argentino estrenado entre 1984 y 1994 sostuvo con el teatro del período. Para ello se establecen cinco zonas de interacción entre ambas disciplinas: 1) la hegemonía del realismo testimonial; 2) La recuperación de formas escénicas populares (fundamentalmente ligadas al sainete el grotesco y el tango); 3) la elaboración de alegorías fílmicas basadas en estrategias teatrales; 4) Los films que utilizan el teatro como operación metarreflexiva; y 5) la aparición de propuestas cinematográficas contrarias al realismo cuyo diálogo se entabló con los espectáculos emergentes de la postdictadura.

Palabras clave: postdictadura; Argentina; estudios interartísticos; puesta en escena; cartografía.

Introduction: modern clicx

The title of this paper anticipates, under the appearance of an implicit message, some keys to reading. These will probably be reduced exclusively to two and perhaps, in the course of what follows, they will end up becoming only one reading key. At the same time that a direct quotation to the foundational album that Charly García made in November 1983, that is, at the same time that the Argentine democratic return was being prepared, the allusion to the “Modern Clicks” is emphasized as a narrative starting point that will enable to advance on a research in development of which only some of its partial results are known (SALA, 2016, 2017, 2018a, 2018b). Unlike those studies dedicated to specific works, what is sought here is the construction of a comprehensive mapping of the strategies of inclusion and dialogue that Argentine cinema of the democratic transition maintained with the theatricality produced at the same time. The objective, therefore, is oriented to a general, panoramic vision, more than to the analytical meticulousness that would imply a frame that privileges the detail. In summary: The aim is to observe, within the multiplicity of variants that constitute each singular work, the consolidation of relatively stable trends on the modalities of interaction between the disciplines in question that took place during those years.

On the other hand, there is an additional reason why the reference to Charly García is enlightening: if the idea of “click” refers to the register of a moment, of a point (something close to the idea of cartography), the adjective “modern” delimits precisely where the focus will be placed. In fact, the ten years between 1984 and 1994² constitute the last phase of the modernizing theatrical and cinematographic project initiated in the sixties and, therefore, of some modes of exchange that these artistic practices established. In this context of decline, the “eighties” – a term that is still under discussion in the film industry (SUÁREZ, 2018) – is reconfigured as an instance marked by the crisis. And as in every period in which, as Antonio Gramsci (1981) pointed out, there is a survival of the old and the new, the decline of the will that this decade meant for some people had its counterpart in the emergence of innovative forms that were more or less in opposition to the first ones.

² The time frame is delimited by two central facts: in principle, the year 1984 marks the rearticulation of the National Institute of Cinematography under the direction of Manuel Antín, the elimination of previous censorship legislations and the strengthening of strategies aimed at the reincorporation of Argentine production into the international market. On the other hand, on September 28, 1994, the Law 24.377 (“film law”) was enacted, transforming radically the policies of promotion of the activity, causing considerable changes in all aspects of the activity, preparing the way for the emergence of a new generation of filmmakers (Pablo Trapero, Israel Adrián Caetano, Lucrecia Martel, Daniel Burman, among others).

In his critical review of the audiovisual productions developed inside this conceptual framework, Emilio Bernini proposes that “it is not possible to think of a cinema of democracy [...] *qualitatively* different from the cinema that took place during the dictatorship” (2017, p. 131, highlighted in the original). His hypothesis has the merit of undoing a certain consensus around the period, linked to the understanding of the eighties as a period with innovative characteristics, carried out by a sector of the academy (ESPAÑA, 1993). Under such premise, it is possible to detect antecedents that would prefigure the interartistic relations from 1984 in the last years of the military dictatorship. And here again Charly García appears as an agglutinating factor that will be able to shed some light at the moment of mapping out the different enclaves that faced the theater-cinema links within the Argentine scene of the stage in question.

Total interference

During a concert by Serú Girán in 1981 recorded on the album *Yo no quiero volverme tan loco* (I don't want to go so crazy) (2000) García presented to the full audience of the Coliseo theater the unknown *Bay biscuits*, a group that the musician had seen for the first time acting within the cycle “Danza abierta” (Open dance). Charly defined the art of these women – Mayco Castro Volpe, Fabiana Cantilo, Lisa Waykoluk and Viviana Tellas – as alternative, non-professional, in short: as something *underground*. After his words, the *Bay biscuits* began their presentation by performing a punk version of “Marcianita,” a Chilean song from the early sixties. The musical theme, popularized in Argentina by Billy Caffaro, one of the members of the television program “*El club del clan*” (The clan club), mixed in equal doses the rhythms in vogue at that time – the twist with some rocky accents – with the foxtrot of the twenties (GONZÁLEZ, 2013). However, “Marcianita” was just an excuse for the deployment of an allegorical performance through which this group of women exhibited a performance called “Opening ceremony of the first space plant in Argentina.”

The introduction of the singer and the subsequent musical show operate as a kind of symptom, marking an epochal *ethos* that enables a different kind of reading. The origin of the four performers (1), the reminiscences to a remote past to which the song used refers (2), the appeal to the allegorical discourse (3), the reflexive effect produced by this short-circuit (4) and, finally, its parodic, mocking notes, as well as the style of the *Bay biscuits* (5), build some horizons from which it is

possible to delimit five zones (with their porosities) that determine the modalities of the intermediate link between the stages and the cinema of the time.

Like all theoretical abstractions, it must be adjusted to the cases and not the contrary. Therefore, it will be feasible to observe, in what follows, how any film is part of more than one of the categories. Likewise, it will be noted that the parameters of analysis proposed allow some apparently unsuspected associations between films that were not previously thought as part of the same conglomerate.

Coming out of melancholy: *Teatro Abierto* and the realistic imprint as a horizon

The mention of “Danza abierta” organizes a first aspect to be observed, marking a vanishing point. The allusion to the movement, not without a hint of irony by Charly García (“something like everybody expressed themselves...”) refers precisely to a sector of production that occupied the center of the scene within the global cinematographic conception of the period. In this sense, the place where the *Bay biscuits* were “discovered” is directly linked to another space, that initiated by the theatrical artists who occupied the top level of the cultural field as an action of resistance against the dictatorship. In fact, the phenomenon inaugurated by the cycle *Teatro Abierto* (Open Theater) in its different editions (between 1981 and 1985) marks the dominant bias and at the same time close to its decline that had in this stage the scenic poetics whose origin dates back to the early sixties. Its strength during the last years of the civic-ecclesiastical-military regime was due to its capacity to condense the most important dramatic and scenic tendencies developed in the previous decades (realistic and experimental, both in their diverse declines). The *Teatro Abierto*, in turn, fulfilled the modernizing precept of art politicization, re-establishing a link with the radical expressions of past decades (PELLETTIERI, 1992). From this impulse, theatrists returned to the center of the stage as committed intellectuals within a kind of hostile environment.

Within this panorama, the realist aspect had a very favorable reception within the cinema, in particular from the preponderant role assumed by several playwrights coming from this place who became scriptwriters of a large number of films. The films produced after seven years of dictatorial terror, built on the basis of conjuring up the forced silence provoked by censorship and state violence, did so by articulating the demand to see and artistically show what had previously remained hidden.

Practically in a speculative way to what happened in the theatrical field, those films that formulate a continuity with the modernizing guidelines of the cinematographic field of the past decades are concentrated in this area. It is,

therefore, the last stage of that project interrupted by the dictatorship and is, in many ways, its epigonal, testamentary face, although not for that reason it has ceased to have a positive impact on vast sectors of the public. The communion of searches of the cinematographic and theatrical realism allows to appreciate how the success obtained by a piece like *Papá querido* (Dear Dad)–, by Aída Bortnik (member of the first edition of *Teatro Abierto*) obtained its correlation in the transcendence that acquired a film whose script had her signature: *La historia oficial* (The official story) (1986), by Luis Puenzo. While not diminishing its evident public resonance (being the first Argentine film to win an Oscar), its preponderance can also be interpreted as a paradigmatic example of productivity among realistic playwrights and testimonial cinema that in the eighties sought to revise the hurts left by the *coup d'état*. In a wide thematic field that includes not only the remembrance of the immediate past but also the historical reconstructions of other periods, one can see the role played by Bortnik in *Pobre mariposa* (Poor Butterfly) (1986), by Raúl de la Torre, and *Tango feroz, la leyenda de Tanguito* (Wild tango: the legend of Tanguito) (1993), by Marcelo Piñeiro. Among the stories situated in a distant time and the comedy of customs, we can also find the scripts elaborated by other playwrights coming from *Teatro Abierto*, such is the case of Ricardo Halac in *La Rosales* (The Rosales) (1984), by David Lypszyc; Carlos Somigliana in Juan José Jusid's film, *Asesinato en el senado de la nación* (Murder in the Senate) (1984); Oscar Viale in *El año del conejo* (The year of the rabbit) (1987); Roberto Cossa in *No habrá más penas ni olvido* (Funny Dirty Little War) (1983) and *El arreglo* (The Deal) (1983 – in collaboration with Somigliana), all by Fernando Ayala; Jorge Goldenberg, one of the most prolific of all, together with the aforementioned Bortnik, with titles such as *Pasajeros de una pesadilla* (Nightmare's Passengers) (1984), again by Ayala; *La película del Rey* (A King and His Movie) (1986), by Carlos Sorín; *Miss Mary* (1986), by María Luisa Bemberg, or *Sostenido en La menor* (Sharp in A minor) (1986), by Pedro Stocki. In these works, with the exception of some sections of Sorín's masterpiece in which an artificial and uncovered theatricality is evident, the appeal to realism appears as a constitutive mechanism of the staging.

Converted into a symbol of cultural resistance to the dictatorship, the pillars on which *Teatro Abierto* was built – the vindication of the social function of art, of the national traditions linked to “quality theater,” of its collective character and, not least, of its pedagogical bias – operated as guidelines to be followed within the hegemonic cultural currents of the democratic transition. Premiered towards the end of Raúl Alfonsín's government, Arturo Balassa's documentary *País cerrado*,

Teatro Abierto (Open Theater, Closed Country) (1989), recovers those ideas as one of the achievements of the artistic field for the consolidation of the struggle for democracy. At the same time, due to his ability to capture the interludes of the movement, of the rehearsals and of some fragments of the stagings, Balassa's work stands as a sort of filmic monument of an ephemeral fact, although lasting due to its implications within the artistic field.

Beyond the proven coincidence of names, the foundations instructed by that theatrical movement were perfectly connected with a whole movement of the cinema of transition that sought to support its fictions on the basis of the problematization of the past. Although realism was not the exclusive poetics in the scenic expressions of *Teatro Abierto*, it was considered a reference point in its passage to the cinema. Even if they did not have the intervention of playwrights in the signing of the scripts, several films of that time showed a desire for testimonial construction based on their rhetorical devices: the formation of a recognizable reference, the verbal enunciation of conflicts, the calculated dramatic events and their internal rhythm, its audiovisual materialization in which the logic of continuity of the planes and narrative homogeneity prevails. Titles such as *Los chicos de la Guerra* (Boys of war) (1984), by Bebe Kamin; *La noche de los lápices* (Night of the pencils) (1986), by Héctor Olivera, or *Darse cuenta* (Realization) and *Sofía* (1984 and 1987), by Alejandro Doria, agree with those parameters through which hegemonic cinema constructed conclusive (and, in a way, non-problematizing) answers about recent political events.

However, despite its dominant character, this way of constructing movie stories received a fierce criticism. In 1986, after the release of *La historia oficial*, the filmmaker Rafael Filippelli wrote in the magazine *Punto de Vista*: "Today we live in the story of the tidy little house: that one is from here, this goes there and that one does not enter. Realism, in the most literal sense, conceived as *Realpolitik*, as the only possible, prevails in Argentina" (FILIPPELLI, 1986, p. 4). In short, what the director found in these films was associated with the fact that "we are watching the enunciation of summary judgments and at the same time simplifying our past" (FILIPPELLI, 1986, p. 4). Faced with the urgent need to build a testimony that would reach broad sectors of the public, a vast area of film, theater and even several television fictions of that time invoked a comforting *Realpolitik*. Regardless of this, the encounter around a way of dealing with past experiences expresses, in turn, the intensity of the links between artists identified with those disciplines.

To the youth of yesterday

Even at the expense of the preeminence of the majority line described above, the film production of the eighties also made visible another form of link with theatricality. While on stage a number of shows premiered during those years exhibited a greater permeability to include artificial procedures and a reminiscence of popular practices. A cinema appeared and specialized critics quickly described it under the misnomer of grotesque or neo-grotesque. If the allusion to the foxtrot in the song of the *Bay Biscuits* emitted its resonances towards an old style, the recovery that several films made with respect to some cultural currents previous to the modernizing processes of the sixties operated in an identical fixation in some remaining traditions.

The key film and the one that probably appears as an emblem of the search for a connection with the scenic procedures of popular origins is the rewriting of the Jacobo Langsner's work, *Esperando la carroza* (Waiting for the Hearse) (1986), by Alejandro Doria. Not only because of the theme discussed, but also because of the excessive performances and, fundamentally, due to an organization of the staging in which the characters are constantly crowded into the frame, Doria's film builds its evident links with the *sainete*. A relationship that increases in the decision to sustain in most part of the film the actions in internal yard of that house, remembering in its iconography the internal yards of the theatrical pieces of the beginning of the century. Likewise, this recurrence of situating fictions within neighborhood mythology, the tango universe or popular jargon is extended to other cases. Juan José Jusid's film, *Made in Lanús* (1987), as well as Carlos Orgambide's *El acompañamiento* (The Supporter) (1988); *Cien veces no debo* (I shouldn't, one hundred times) (1990), by Alejandro Doria, or *Convivencia* (Coexistence) (1994), by Carlos Galettini, are representatives of this trend based on nostalgia. Although all of these are examples of rewriting theatrical pieces,³ that is to say, they plot a direct variant of linking artistic practices, the persistence of the *sainete*'s pattern and of the forms associated with tango and popular forms appears in other titles such as *Flop* (1991), by Eduardo Mignona, or *Gatica, el mono* (Gatica, the Monkey) (1993), by Leonardo Favio. In both biopics, the first one dedicated to the figure of the theatrical and cinematographic actor

³ Jusid's film was based on the piece *Made in Argentina*, a successful contemporary work by Nelly Fernández Tiscornia; Galettini and Doria, in turn, rewrote two pieces that had been premiered well earlier: *Convivencia* (1979), by Oscar Viale, and *Cien veces no debo* (1970), by Ricardo Talesnik; finally, *El acompañamiento* (1981) was the translation of the homonymous piece by Carlos Gorostiza, which was part of the first edition of *Teatro Abierto*. In particular, this film shows the porosity of the categories displayed here and the possibility of linking a film to more than one of them.

Florencio Parravicini, while the next one recovers several sections of the life of the boxer José María Gatica, the atmosphere of the mass culture of the first half of the 20th century is reconstructed. Within this framework, both proposals show the way in which, during those years, variety theater, tango, sport or the radio industry (to which politics could be added as a show in its own right) coexisted in a true synergic link.

Cuarteles de invierno (Winter quarters) (1984), the work that closes the filmography as director of Lautaro Murúa, reconstructs, from the figures of a tango singer and a boxer in decline, the role that popular entertainment had within the dictatorial structure. Unlike *Esperando la carroza*, Murúa's film is a bitter work of defeat that reveals how the spectator's pleasure in the pugilistic disputes or the tango auditions was a deception that hid the genocidal character of the government that supported these artists.

At the end of the period analyzed, *El acto en cuestión* (The act in question) (1993), by Alejandro Agresti, is situated in a similar direction to that of Favio and Mignona, by reconstructing the biography, in this case fictitious, of a magician from the suburbs of Buenos Aires. However, more than direct references to the stage (with the exception of stylized magic tricks at various times), the director's staging resorts to a strategy that could be called visual paraphrasing: calling, above all in its first part, to a logic analogous to the variety of bodies in the tenements of the theatrical *sainetes*, *El acto en cuestión* formulates a family with the popular vernacular tradition without having to explain the reference sources from which it is inspired. In this film, not only the *sainete* but fundamentally the literature of Roberto Arlt and the cinema of tricks of Georges Méliès converge in the consolidation of an aesthetic that the filmmaker himself qualified as "maximalist" (WOLF, 1993, p. 10).

Collective unconscious

While the *Bay Biscuits* played "Marcianita" to allude to a specific political situation in Argentina at the end of the military government, they configured some indirect, but unequivocally recognizable narratives, the cinema also made use of metaphors, establishing new contacts with the local theatricality. The metaphor, the transversal mention of certain situations through the construction of a complete and homogeneous fictional world, had been used since the years of the military government and continued to be effective under the democratic return (LUSNICH, 2016). The reconversion of this resource produced by the cinema of the eighties had to do with the will to leave behind what it considered as some of the characteristics of the behavior of the country. In the manner of an immovable

substrate (precisely, a supposed “collective unconscious”) these issues would explain (and, in some cases, justify) what happened to us. In this sense, the inclusion of the allegorical fulfilled an identical function to the use of the popular forms analyzed in the previous point.

The allegorical strategy was simple: run the discourse of immediate referentiality and, from an exercise of estrangement – very much in tune with the theatrical –, make visible some themes. However, according to Nicolás Suárez, in many cases it was a limited use of the powers of that figure, as it appears as “a mere technique of representation in images of a pre-existing and static concept” (2018, p. 51). If allegory during the dictatorship became a recurrent figure in the face of the impossibility of openly denouncing a state of affairs – cases such as *La nona* (Grandma) (1978), by Héctor Oliviera, based on the play by Tito Cossa, or *La isla* (The Island) (1979), by Alejandro Doria, with a script by Aída Bortnik – in the transition, these films addressed sensitive issues without being accused of being futile direct testimonies of the moment.

One of the most remarkable premieres that inaugurated the democratic opening, María Luisa Bemberg’s award-winning and successful work, *Camila* (1984), obliquely alluded to the immediate political events from a homologation with a distant historical time: the Argentina of the mid-19th century under the government of Juan Manuel de Rosas. A similar operation, still presented at the time of the military government, is the one formulated by Griselda Gambaro in her play *La malasangre* (Bad blood) (1982). In both cases, the formation of a melodramatic plot served as a communicating channel that facilitated the formation of a solid connecting bridge between individual and political-social conflicts. On a similar way, it would be possible to recover other historical reconstruction films mentioned above, such as *Pobre mariposa* or *No habrá más penas ni olvido*.

The theme of the confinement and the omnipresence of houses delineated as claustrophobic environments were recurrent dramatic nuclei that allowed to unite the searches of the cinema with an evident theatricality of the conflicts. Ana Laura Lusnich (2016) mentions how this reduction of the walking space by the protagonist orders the visual repertoire of a film like *Hay unos tipos abajo* (There’s some guys downstairs) (1985), by Rafael Filippelli and Emilio Alfaro. Beyond the fact that the spatial-temporal circumscription establishes an unmistakable echo in relation to the triple Aristotelian unity, the theatricality of the film also takes place in other decisions. In this sense, the will to continually sustain an out-of-field (an extra-scene) threat, implies the existence of points of contact with the

dramaturgy that Eduardo Pavlovsky had been testing since *El Señor Galindez* (Mr. Galindez) (1973) and that returns in an ominous way in one of the key premieres of the period: *Potestad* (Authority) (1985).

Although *Hay unos tipos abajo* refers to the years of the dictatorship under unmistakable references such as the 1978 World Cup, in other stories the confinement allowed the formation of an autonomous microcosm from which it was viable to read metaphorical allusions to the country or social classes. *Malayunta* (Bad Company) (1986), José Santiso's masterpiece based on the piece *Patemoster*, by Jacobo Langsner; *Diapasón* (Tuning fork) (1985) and *En el nombre del hijo* (In the name of the son) (1987), both by Jorge Polaco, or *La sagrada familia* (The Holy Family) (1988), by Pablo César, are inspired by this idea that equates spatial closure to the constrictive, to the repression that society exerts on subjects. Through the recognition, in this open case, of the metaphorical character, these films tended to expose their affiliation with the theater without any hesitation. In Poland's work, in particular, the continuous use of the sequence plane and the scenography stage of his spatial constructions also refer to this artistic field. The omnipresence of the houses inhabited by these monstrous beings that populate both their fictions and those of Pablo César, or the organization of the prison-room in which *Malayunta's* characters are found, unmistakably recognize their debt to the stage by using the space as a stylistic nucleus.

While watching the new waves

The call to theatricality by the cinema of the eighties also prepared the way for some directors to formulate a series of reflections about the creative act. Likewise, the reference to the stages served to configure stories whose structures were based around the establishment of some specular games of representations within representations, typical of the baroque period. If reflection and the construction of perspectives in the abyss were undoubtedly the main standards of the modernizing discourse that began in the sixties, its most finished expression in the transition was carried out by two of the most distinguished filmmakers from its most avant-garde tendencies: Pino Solanas and Alberto Fischerman. Particularly in *El exilio de Gardel* (Tangos) (Tangos, the Exile of Gardel) (1985), by the first one, and in *Gombrowicz o la seducción (representado por sus discípulos)* (Gombrowicz or seduction: As presented by his disciples) (1986), by Fischerman, the theater operates as a continuous bass that impregnates the narrative and visual display, collaborating in a disarticulation of the unicity of the story in benefit of the emergence of multiple centers of interest.

As Solanas mentioned in one of his characters-alter ego: “it is not disorder, it is another order; it is not lack of style, it is another style, it is another form.”

El exilio de Gardel relates the misfortunes of South American political refugees in Paris. The collective and multifocal character of the story takes the rehearsals as an intersection point of the ‘tanguedy’ that gives the title to the film. The identity between the film and the staging that it frames magnifies, therefore, its reflective character. It is not, therefore, a mere appointment to the theatrical universe or the inclusion of moments of this kind – dance, more specifically⁴ – but the formation of a parallel metadiscourse (PÉREZ BOWIE, 2010) in which the scenic performances, the resignation of one of its directors (played by Pino Solanas) and, especially, the impossibility of finding an ending for the piece, show the difficulty of forming a poetic thought about the experience of exile that is not marked by defeat, but by a collapse.

Fischerman chooses, instead, the documentary record to outline a polyhedral portrait of the Pole writer Witold Gombrowicz, who lived in Argentina for more than twenty years. For this purpose, he calls four of his disciples to invoke and represent him as if it were a ritual of spiritualism filmed in the confinement of an empty set. Theatricality becomes, then, of a mechanism of unveiling of the constructed character of all discourse.

By underlining the artifice, the movie manages to stagger the idea of the documentary as a field associated with the reliable transmission of reality. What it shows, however, is that this is a goal that is somehow unattainable and, moreover, an unwanted goal. Consequently, the actor resources of the four men, beyond not having some apprehended techniques, do not try to be referential or to look for a realistic approach. Fischerman is not interested in objectively unraveling who Gombrowicz was. On the contrary, his search is based on a dual exercise: showing how the trace of the master was imprinted on the subjectivity of those who incarnate him; and vice versa, exposing the disciples as interpreters capable of fictionally transforming the raw material of the facts.

Symptomatically, in Fischerman as well as in Solanas, there is a call of attention to the new generations, to the “new waves” that they, from their present and their well-known trajectory, are observing. In Solanas this intention is expressed in the figure of María (Gabriela Toscano), the daughter of exiles who establishes the main

⁴ The elaborate choreographies that appear in the film were carried out by the group Nucleodanza, directed by Susana Tambutti and Margarita Bali.

point of view of the story. From her speech and her look at the camera it is possible to imagine “a different future than the one conceived by her parents in relation to their return to the homeland” (AMADO, 2009, p. 71). The operation in Fischerman is more subtle and is placed on the value of the documentary itself. Regardless of the fact that this is in every sense a discourse about the traces that a master left in his disciples, it was also a pedagogical experience of the filmmaker himself as a teacher at the Center for Experimentation and Filmmaking (CERC). Among his assistants were Ana Poliak and Andrés Di Tella, students at the school and future protagonists of the renovation that took place a decade later. The latter in particular showed the consistency of the legacy, noting the place of *Gombrowicz o la seducción* as a pivot between the searches of a devoted director and the exploration of new horizons (DI TELLA, 2017). However, the configuration of the new and, therefore, the links with the most innovative theater, will come from the collaboration of several directors who began in these years.

New rags/videotape eyes

While the groupings outlined above respond to a series of practices already put into play previously by local theater and film, it remains to be seen how the emerging expressions of the theatricality of the eighties were shaped as a horizon and possibility of interdisciplinary contacts. The term “underground” enunciated by Charly Garcia to refer to the *Bay Biscuits* denotes to the Gramscian idea of crisis mentioned at the beginning, of something that emerges as another thing is falling apart.

In contrast to the realism modulated by Costumbrism, to the allegorical fictions or the recurrence to the establishment of bridges with the past cultural traditions, the innovative artistic practices of the post-dictatorship propitiated the emergence of heterodox forms that tried to challenge the hegemony of the *Realpolitik* denounced by Filippelli. Using strategies such as parody, narrative discontinuity and visual shock, and the irruption of elements that attempted against the decorum installed by the dominant cinema, these forms sought to obtain a differential space within the field, using an intense relationship with theatrical practices that emerged in parallel. The work of two filmmakers, Jorge Polaco – the already mentioned *Diapasón* and *En el nombre del hijo* (1987), to which we could add *Kindergarten* (1989) – and of his disciple Pablo César – *La sagrada familia* (1988) –, but also of the even more underground Jorge Acha – *Hábeas Corpus* (1986), *Standard* (1988) and *Mburucuyá, cuadros de la naturaleza* (Mburucuyá: Portraits of Nature) (1994) – make

up a showcase in which their staging decisions are similar to the spectacular strategies developed from some areas of the renovating theater of the period.

The films of Polaco and César are similar not only because of the cult of excess and the ugliness promoted from the *under*, in which they dominated, among others, groups like *Las gambas al ajillo*, *Los melli*, *Los peinados Yoli* or the triad formed by the actors Humberto Tortonese, Alejandro Urdapilleta and Batato Barea. Moreover, in the search for a differential style, guided by a work in which the “barroquism” of the staging and the predominance of visual over narration prevail, the strategies of these filmmakers propose a proximity with the aesthetics of the theater of the image that had in Argentina mentors like Alberto Felix Alberto and Javier Margulis. On the other hand, Acha, one of the most unclassifiable filmmakers of the period, constructs in his filmography a repertoire of scenes in which an open recognition of theatricality predominates. *Mburucuyá*, *cuadros de la naturaleza*, for example, make great use of omnicomprehensive frontal shots (which refer to the gaze of an ideal spectator in an Italian-style box theater) in which the artificiality of the scenery and the performance of the actors is emphasized. In his films, there is also a predilection for second-hand materials, a taste for kitsch – attested, among other things, in the decision to work with the erotic film star Libertad Leblanc as the protagonist of *Standard* – and for the expressions of dissident sexualities that is part of his filmography. It is impossible not to recognize in these strategies an evident nexus with the transvestite corporality of Tortonese and Urdapilleta, with the cheap and recharged bijouterie of Batato Barea, with the intended ugliness of *Las Gambas al ajillo* and, above all, with the logic of the “almost good” celebrated by the *Bay Biscuits* that would be found in Vivi Tellas’ “bad theater” (BROWNELL, 2015).

The films of these filmmakers create a link with the underground scene through the exhibition of bodies that are different from the dominant canons of beauty. It is not only a matter of distancing oneself from a certain iconography advocated by realism, but also of dynamiting it through the construction of a physicality based on alterity (visual, sexual, age). In both artistic fields the eccentric, the boundless, is highlighted as a characteristic sign. In his performances, Emeterio Cerro “used to present the actors’ body as they were dolls, with very heavy headdresses, giant breasts, masks, excessive makeup” (GARBATZKY, 2013, p. 82). Similarly, the audiovisual figuration of Margotita Moreyra, the septuagenarian fetish actress of Jorge Polaco, turned her into a giant doll in ruins, a monstrous and at the same time seductive being that inhabits a house full of artifacts of this type as it was the main stage of *En el nombre del hijo*.

One of the main qualities of the emerging panorama of the eighties is associated with its evanescent condition. Several phenomena collaborated in this impossibility of preserving a repertoire: The predilection for the performances, the inclination towards a way of doing that, in some cases, disbelieved the elaboration of narrations in benefit of the senses, that located the improvisation in the place of guiding principle, as well as made prevail the improvisation of some spectacles that happened in the middle of a party, in bars or in a discotheque. Resistance to the archive, as indicated by Irina Garbatzky (2013), is a defining mark of these experiences. The cinema and, more widely, the audiovisual is outlined, in that sense, as an interesting reservoir in which many ephemeral practices of those years were registered. The intermediary relationship with the theatrical opens here a different path, associated with what Jacques Gersternkorn (1994) groups under the name of *explicit references*. Under this concept, both the filming of productions and the recovery of the surrounding activities are reunited: rehearsals, enter of public to the theatrical or paratheatrical spaces and other actions linked to the ritual of attendance to a production.

The progressive popularization of the use of video, as well as the use of formats such as Super 8 and 16 mm, facilitated in the eighties the collection of a large corpus of images of activities associated with the theater. These devices not only enabled the capture of complete sets (or of some fragments), but also of the rehearsals, as well as of the backstage of the groups and their innovative artists. Among the infinity of filming moments that today can be seen in different specialized portals (YouTube, Vimeo), the contact maintained between the experimental filmmaker Claudio Caldini and the group *El clú del claun*. This meeting resulted in works such as *Escuela de payasos* (Clown School) (1985) and a short film in Super 8 that opened the work *¡Esta me la vas a pagar...!* (You're gonna pay for this!) (1987). The film, just over seven minutes long, allows us to appreciate the group of actors acting in the street and within the facilities of *Parakultural*, a key space for the scenic and alternative renewal of the period.⁵ However, more than the documentary capture of a preconceived theatrical situation, Caldini's short film is an effective staging for the camera, which combines the theatricality of the performers with the awareness that their actions are being framed by the device. In a similar vein, *Uorc, la película* (Uorc, the movie) (1987) by Ezequiel Ábalos records the homonymous performance

⁵ Claudio Caldini's short film is available on the platform Vimeo as *El clú del claun – The movie* (available from: <https://vimeo.com/197672237>. Access on: May 20, 2020). I thank Ezequiel Lozano for the information about the existence of this material.

staged at the Cemento discotheque – another enclave of the emerging post-dictatorial scene – by the urban performance and action theater group *La organización negra*.

Beyond the possibility of documenting an ephemeral artistic fact by nature, the explicit references and the presence of the new theater artists in the films collaborated in the construction of a distinctive epochal atmosphere in titles that sought to associate their own innovations with those novelties implemented from the stages. In *Vivir mata* (To live kills) (1991), by Bebe Kamin, the story places the protagonists as assistants to a performance by Alejandro Urdapilleta, possibly within the *Parakultural*. The film tells the story of a vampire who came from the 19th century and was transferred to the Buenos Aires of nowadays. Under this premise, Urdapilleta's performance, the applause of a public that receives his actions festively (although these may imply some aggression directed at the public), indicates what represented the most innovative within the cultural panorama of the post-dictatorship. While this theatrical moment operated under the impression of the record of the implications of current urban life, Kamin includes other instances of intersection. In another part of the film we can see a young Ricardo Bartís – an important theatre director in the post-dictatorial scenic renovation – composing a monologue in which he challenges a much younger Mauricio Dayub.

Bringing references from the field of theatre or emerging groups provided some strangeness that the protagonists of the films experienced in the face of the present of an unknown Buenos Aires. Two films propose a relationship of this type: In *Lo que vendrá* (Times to Come) (1988), by Gustavo Mosquera, the protagonist escapes from the hospital where he is hospitalized to find himself in his urban walk with a scene in which several members of *La organización negra* and *Las gambas al ajillo* exhibit situations that mix physical theater and the aesthetics of the shock characteristic of the first of these groups. Olivierio (Darío Grandinetti), the poet of Eliseo Subiela's *El lado oscuro del corazón* (The Dark Side of the Heart) (1992), meets Dalila, a member of the group *Los cometabrass*, in the subway, performing a version of Fito Páez's "*Ciudad de pobres corazones*." In both films, the meeting with the artists fulfilled an identical function of displaying the aggressive, punk and dissident zones, present in the bodies of the youngest theatrical performers.

Final remarks

The links analyzed were not, in all cases, the product of deliberate decisions. The possible relationships appear, in many of the films mentioned, as the result of

a shared feeling, as searches that perhaps did not have a common consciousness but that, nevertheless, were aimed in the same direction.

The eighties demanded three foundational questions that were combined in different ways in the different cases (and in some cases converged): 1) What happened to us?; 2) What did we do or how did we go to make it happen to us? As an alternative to the questions, a third fundamental question began to claim its own place: Where are we going? While the first two questions referred to the search for explanations about the past or about identity, the last one opened a question mark towards the future. And it is not by chance that the uncertainty came from the filmmakers who made the masterpieces, those who were not responsible for making a balance, but for whom it was imperative to establish a differentiation, to show that they were others, something different. So, while the appeal to a *Realpolitik* played a preponderant role in answering the first of these questions (with restrictive and, many times, conciliatory definitions), the answer to *how we are* is deepened in our historical cultural traditions and also in the conformation of allegories that allowed recognizing constant marks within unarmed identities. What is new, *what will come*, paraphrasing the title of Gustavo Mosquera's film in which Charly García played a secondary role, made use of the strategies and, above all, the faces and bodies of the emerging theater. It is symptomatic, in this sense, that the new twist in the history of Argentine cinema caused by a film such as *Rapado* (1992), by Martín Rejtman, was starred by Damián Dreizik, member of the group *Los melli*.

Many of the films from those years have been preserved in very bad conditions. In addition to the above, one must also consider the intrinsic technical difficulties of a technologically backward country, the ups and downs of fashions and, fundamentally, consider the open anger of the critics. Combined in various ways over the last few years, these themes have contributed to the concealment or direct negation of the values of these productions both as documents of a historical moment, but also in aesthetic terms. Without reaching the idea of "canon of multiplicity" used by Jorge Dubatti (1999) to characterize post-dictatorial theatrical productions, the films of those years present a greater variety than which the critical discourse has been disposed to recognize since it analyzed in a panoramic way the premieres of the period. It is not in vain that the eighties could be defined as a period in which a polyphony of voices coexisted. In short, a moment in which, returning to Charly García for the last time, the sounds of the *dinosaurs* were mixed with the stridencies caused by *those strange new hairstyles*.

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