

THE PLAYS OF RICARDO MONTI AND THE PRODUCTION OF SPACE

by

MILTON LOAYZA

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Abstract

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The plays of Argentine playwright Ricardo Monti (1944-) propose a spatial coincidence between theatre and history. I build a theoretical lens that shows how the plays produce a space where the forces of history can be *felt* in a way that reflects our utopian impulse, our resistance to power, and our historical emergence. In chapter one, I argue that the *grotesco criollo*'s theatrical vision of 1920s River Plate and Monti's play, *Una noche con el sr. Magnus & hijos* (1970), represent a layering of the modern/postmodern local and global. In chapter two, a "tectonic" analysis of the dancers' historical-mythical-physical journey in *Marathón* (1980) is seen to embody the layered production of a global present. In chapter three I argue that the plays *Historia tendenciosa...* (1971) and *Visita* (1977) stimulate our intuition of a Foucauldian/Deleuzian diagram or location that maps the characters' relation to historical forces. In chapter four, I focus on how acting, directing, and design choices made in the Buenos Aires productions of *Una pasión sudamericana* (1989) and *La oscuridad de la razón* reflect the diagrammatic location and define a utopian practice. Monti's problematization of space may be used as a critical, ethical, and creative tool and has possible interdisciplinary applications in the study and practice of theatre and performance.

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INTRODUCTION

“How are Space and History Interwoven in the Theatre of Ricardo Monti?”

The social aspect is not what appears in the foreground.
--Ricardo Monti.¹

The scene outside is nothing like the scene inside; instead it is the necessary “context” or “counterpart” that makes it possible for the scene inside to appear as scene.
--Martin Puchner.²

The structural challenges of Ricardo Monti’s theatre.

Ricardo Monti is a recognized and powerful voice in contemporary Argentine theatre. Since the premiere of his first play, *Una noche con el sr. Magnus e hijos* [An evening with Mr. Magnus & Sons] in 1970, Monti has consistently challenged his audience with work that is striking textually and theatrically, and whose content may be considered both political and universal.³ The plays have been translated and performed internationally, received numerous national awards, and been the subject of several critical and scholarly appraisals. Like these critics, I believe, I am attracted and concerned with a mostly intuitive aspect of Monti’s work, which is an emphasis on settings that are theatrical, or metatheatrical, as well as the way the plays treat history as feeling or affect. These two aspects, though, have not been systematically studied in relation to each other and to an ethical dimension that seems to inform the very structure of the plays.

Ricardo Monti was born in 1944 and grew up on the outskirts of Buenos Aires. His parents were descendants of Italian and Polish émigrés. He briefly attended acting classes at Buenos Aires’s independent theatres but decided to try playwriting while pursuing a writing career and studying philosophy and psychology at the National

University of Buenos Aires. His academic career would be interrupted by the premiere of his first play.⁴ This dissertation project, “The Plays of Ricardo Monti and the Production of Space,” is in part about the question of why Monti not only chooses theatre but also conveys to his audience and readers the necessity that they choose theatre with him.

Among his influences or stimuli, Monti has mentioned the work of Ibsen, Strindberg, and Brecht on the European side, as well as the Argentine authors Armando Discépolo, Roberto Arlt, and Griselda Gambaro.⁵ These assertions suggest an interest in using theatre as both a tool for broad-ranging social critique while drawing from the Argentine popular and experimental use of grotesque and metatheatrical elements.⁶ The plays nevertheless acquire structural complexity by the explicit theatricalization of history as it is inflected by myth, intertextual references, and the combination of dramatic genres. In this sense, Monti’s plays can be described as theatrical constructions that pose a hermeneutic challenge to the audience. Critics have responded to this challenge by often recurring to a textual, semantic approach as, for example, Luís Ordaz does in “Ricardo Monti y el juego de los símbolos” [Ricardo Monti and the Play of Symbols], and Liliana López in “Poéticas refuncionalizadas: mito e historia en *La oscuridad de la razón*” [Restructured Poetics: Myth and History in *The Obscurity of Reason*].⁷ Others, like Osvaldo Pellettieri, have tried to tame the complexity of Monti’s plays by creating a periodization or classification of the work according to perceived shifts in modality.⁸ Although I do not agree with this periodization and its “taming” effect, it may be useful here for introducing the plays.

In his overview of the plays, Pellettieri perceives a modality of “socio-political intertext in *Historia tendenciosa de la clase media argentina...* (1971) [Biased History of the Argentine Middle Class...] and *La cortina de abalorios* (1981) [The Beaded Curtain],” where the aesthetic references belong to “reflexive realism” and “neo-avantgarde.”⁹ *Historia...* is an experiment in epic and documentary theatre—a farcical chronicle of Argentina’s twentieth-century history that shows the audience their degree of economic, political, and social agency. *La cortina de abalorios*, an expansion on one of the scenes of *Historia...*, is set in a brothel run by a Madam. The latter play “is clearly a critique of turn of the century colonialism [... and a] reference to the military dictatorship and its neoliberal economic policies.”¹⁰ What makes these plays more overtly political than the others is not only their content but also the context of their production. *Historia...*, staged in the independent theatre Payró, was very much inserted within then current evaluations of Argentina’s neo-colonial situation and of a politicized theatre provoked by the repression of Peronist forces. *La cortina de abalorios*, on the other hand, was part of the movement of theatrical resistance known as Teatro Abierto that challenged the censorship imposed by the repressive military government of the period (1976-1983).¹¹

The second modality described by Pellettieri is of a “theatre of the satirical absurd: anticipated [...] in *Una noche con el Sr. Magnus e hijos* (1970) and realized in *Visita* [Visit] (1977) and *Marathón* (1980).”¹² In these plays Pellettieri sees a “concretization of theatre as literature” while “projecting a metaphysics of theatrical creation.”¹³ I might agree with Pellettieri here if he means the concretization of a particular vision of theatre and the establishment of what could become a canon. A

certain dramaturgical development, so to speak, can be devised from these plays, and it has to do with its treatment of space. In *Magnus*, the father manipulates his sons within a self-enclosed place that has trapped the offspring inside. Therefore the sons seem to have no choice other than parricide. In *Visita*, a character comes into the enclosed space (a run down apartment inhabited by an old couple and their adoptive dwarf son/slave) from the outside, although whether this happened by choice or accident remains ambiguous. In *Marathón*, dancers *choose* to participate in a dance marathon and some of them decide to stay in the enclosed environment of the ballroom. The play refers to the violent repression during the “Dirty War” by setting the play in a ballroom in the 30’s, the so-called “infamous” decade during the Uriburu dictatorship, and bringing the 1980 audience to double as a 1930’s audience in a dance marathon. *Marathón*, which includes enactments of historical “myths,” links what Pellettieri would call the “absurd” of the situation to, more specifically, our being in history.¹⁴ The specificity and self-consciousness of the characters’ insertion in history is, I think, what marks the development of Monti’s work as well as his conceptual use of the scenic space.

Finally, in *Una pasión sudamericana* [A South American Passion Play] (1989), *Asunción* (1992), and *La oscuridad de la razón* (1993), Pellettieri recognized a “mythical interpretation of our [American continent] origin,” developed with a baroque aesthetic that resists the “marginal modernity” of Argentine culture.¹⁵ During these post-dictatorship years Monti’s contribution to Argentine theatre is reaffirmed when he receives numerous national awards, including the First National Award for authoring the best drama, tragedy, or historical play during the 1988-91 period. *Una pasión sudamericana* combines in its plot the narratives of nineteenth-century Argentine civil

war, the real-life fateful romance of Camila and the priest Ladislao (played by buffoons), and the *Divine Comedy*. *La oscuridad de la razón* reworks the *Oresteia* as “a tragedy framed by a mystery,” where the destiny of the narrative of Mariano’s return to his homeland is crossed with a Christian-oriented redemptive narrative.¹⁶ *Asunción* presents two protagonists in a constructed “passion play” or performance: a native woman about to give birth to “the first mestizo of the land” and the dying concubine of a conquistador.¹⁷ In these plays, we see a deliberate intervention in established theatrical genres with the crossing of tragic and medieval mystery narratives. This procedure seems to increase the dialectical tension between a protagonist and what appears to be his own “historical” destiny. The characters are loosely historical as they refer to or relate to major personalities of colonial (Pedro de Mendoza’s mistress in *Asunción*), the war-torn Independence movement (Mariano Moreno in *La oscuridad*), and post-independence Argentina (Juan Manuel de Rosas in *Una pasión*). The situations, though, are again very much defined in the context of enclosed spaces that serve as catalyst for a meditation on the protagonist’s and our insertion in history. In spite of his periodization, Pellettieri sees a unity in the work, consisting in the modernist 1960s tendency to represent aspects of the unconscious and the “invisible in the socio-political plot.”¹⁸ A more productive way of approaching the work of Monti is suggested here, one that would connect the complexity of Monti’s work to the plays’ major themes or concerns.

Monti himself has identified the question of power and its significance in human behavior as a theme of his plays.¹⁹ The theme also appears in critical appraisals of the plays. Roberto Previdi Frolich, for example, examines the play *Magnus* in terms of showing how power relies on the complicity of victims and victimizers.²⁰ The theme of

power has often been contextualized by critics and scholars in relation to Argentine authoritarian politics and governments. This critical perspective has led some critics to consider the plays as metaphors of Argentine political reality, but also to recognize the breadth of Monti's critique as extending beyond the national and encompass modernity as a whole.²¹ Pellettieri labels the work as a resistance to marginal modernity, implying a post-colonial perspective, while Jean Graham-Jones takes a more post-structuralist stance when remarking: "Ricardo Monti has traced the enduring presence of nineteenth-century myths in contemporary Argentina in order to dramatize the perceived failure of Western modernity and its aesthetic counterpart, modernism. [...The] plays demonstrate a rejection of totalizing systems of power and an attempt at experimenting with alternative structures."²² This brings us to another major theme in Monti's work, that is, the question of history in relation to our utopian beliefs. The question of history brings into focus not only Monti's representations of power but also the author's use of metatheatrics.

Graham-Jones notes that there is a connection between Monti's use of metatheatrics and the author's "own obsessions with issues of history, myth, truth, fiction, reality, and representation."²³ This is an important link that I would like to develop further by calling attention to the work of Freddie Rokem on modern and postmodern plays/productions about the holocaust and the French Revolution. Rokem's description of these plays as "performing history" could also be applied to Monti's work and render the connection between metatheatrics and history more specific. Rokem explains:

from the theatrical perspective [...] when historical events are dramatized and performed on the stage something is shown again which has already taken its course. The processes of the theatre, including the preparations and rehearsals for the performance, have been created in order to confront and reconcile these contradictions. The dialectics between these retrospective and prospective perspectives is even more complex when theatre is performing history. The historical figures who are presented on the stage act in their own time “as if” their deeds are being done in the present, while on the stage their actions are determined by the fact that they represent historical figures who are appearing again, repeating the past by theatrical means creates interesting tensions that draw attention not only to the theatrical medium itself, but also to the deeper thematic concerns of such performances.²⁴

The metatheatrics of Monti’s plays could thus be studied from the perspective of a performance of history that brings to light deeper concerns. In this respect, we should consider the existence of an “ethical intentionality” that Monti says he projects across his work, giving it unity and structure.²⁵ While this ethical dimension seems to be more transparent in the later plays, the perspective of a performance of history may guide us to locate an ethical dimension in all the plays. The words of Raymond Williams encourage this task when he defines history as a performance of ethical relevance. In *Keywords*, Williams writes: “*History* itself retains its whole range, and still, in different hands, *teaches* or *shows* us most kinds of knowable past and almost every kind of imaginable future.”²⁶ David Simpson remarks that Williams’s definition points to the “urgency of

history” to be found in its “immediate applicability to a range of options for reading the past and projecting the future. It instructs and points out; it is part of the present.”²⁷ The perspectives of Rokem and Williams coincide with regard to the level of reflexivity that they see in the practice of theatre and history, when these are understood as events occurring in the present. As for Monti’s theatre, I’d like to propose that a coincidence between theatre and history as reflexive events is made possible by a particular conception, use, and production of space. To a certain extent one could say, following Williams’s definition, that Monti puts history in the hands of theatre in order for history to fulfill its didactic and ethical potential.

The purpose of this dissertation is in part to build a theoretical background and a methodology for looking at the plays in terms of this theatrical/historical space. One fact that makes this project more feasible is that Monti is our contemporary, and his engagement with history and ethics is compatible with or could well be inserted within current debates about modernity and postmodernity.²⁸ Therefore, in formulating my hypothesis about the scope and content of Monti’s work, I may also (and necessarily) be taking sides within the debate; but it is important to point out that it is Monti’s work itself that has challenged me to attempt to find the most productive description and assessment of his work.

Since the production of his first play, *Una noche con el sr. Magnus & hijos*, Ricardo Monti has challenged his audiences with theatricalized visions of Argentina’s history and peripheral modernity. In one form or another, the plays make evident Argentina’s insertion in a global system of the diffusion of power. For example, the intensification of an oedipal contest between father and sons in *Magnus*, the historical-

mental-physical journey of the dancers in *Marathón* (1980), and the confrontation of a nineteenth-century Brigadier with the pressures of making a world in *Una pasión sudamericana* (1989), all stage the actions of “authoritarian” agents and complicit victims as effects of larger, intercontinental forces. These themes are relevant to our understanding of the theatricality and layered structure of Monti’s work in two major ways: a) they suggest that we may approach their specific metatheatricality as a layering of the local and the global; and b) they allow one to consider the context of their performance—that is, the stage and the theatre—as a space that is both localized as a “power” institution and globalized as a historically specific production of space. This procedure puts in relief Monti’s significance in terms of the relation of the theatrical event to the way space is produced and experienced in our time. Moreover, an awareness of space as socially and historically produced leads me to the need to map the plays in terms of the relation of the theatre space to the broader social space. I see this mapping as being in tune with, and responding to, the very challenge put forward by Monti’s plays, that is, towards a thought that has both an ethical and utopian relevance.

Historical background: populist consensus, authoritarianism, and democracy in Argentina.

By the time of Monti’s first writings, starting in the late 1960s, the Argentine crisis was expressed in the failure of populist politics in a country polarized by right-wing and left-wing tendencies.²⁹ A representative event of this period was the right-wing nationalist “Argentine Revolution” of 1967, where the left-wing language of revolution was used to describe a right-wing coup (in which case the emphasis was

shifted onto the category of “Argentine”). Two years later, the riots in the city of Córdoba, primarily instigated by university students and automobile workers (who were, not infrequently, one and the same) contributed to the "mythical moment of the union of the left with Peronism."³⁰ In 1971, a “democratic” alliance of the center and right, which resulted in “The Great National Accord” [Gran Acuerdo Nacional], looked to placate the guerilla struggles and left-wing political forces. At the ideological level these events reflect a crisis of Argentina’s modernity and a reactionary movement away from the internationalism inspired by the continental movements of liberation, themselves symbolized by the Cuban revolution. The perception of political projects as good or bad utopianisms very much informed the ideological discourse of the time.

The building of a “nationalist” consensus between left-wing populists and the right was evident in the activities of the Peronist Youth [Juventud Peronista]. The group prepared the ground for Perón’s return from exile, which it saw as a redemptive revolutionary opportunity where national liberation and socialism were perceived as identical. However, the arrival of the populist leader only created more violent activities by both the left and right wing factions. The continued violence and worsening of the economic crisis, plus the fact that Perón’s widow, Isabel, was totally unqualified for the job, weakened her short presidency. In 1976 the military grabbed the opportunity to take command of the government, striking a blow to Argentina’s “populist dreams.”

The military junta installed a violently repressive regime. This so-called “Process of National Reorganization” [Proceso de Reorganización Nacional] was combined with an incorporation of a liberal market regime. In the early 1980s the effects of global recession were felt in Argentina and resulted in a renewed presence of

pro-democratic will and voices of protest carrying an ethical weight, like those of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, who protested the disappearance of their children by state-sponsored terrorism. The loss of the Falklands War [Guerra de las Malvinas] to the British led to a crisis within the military and a demand for elections. The human rights activism was an integral part of Argentina's will to reconnect to the international civil society.

Democratization signified first a cultural renovation, away from the oppositional dynamics of the past and a search for closure regarding the atrocities sanctioned by the military. Initially there were trials of the Junta that had governed in the years of the Proceso. Later efforts were unsuccessful due in part to the loyalty of lower ranking military.³¹ On the political level, democratization in the late 1980s and early 1990s signified a gradual shift of power from the unions (which had returned after the military) to big business and corporations, for whose interests President Menem and his minister of economy Domingo Cavallo were its main executors. In some way, Monti's plays deal with, and problematize the historical efforts to tame the national space (from the 60s to today) when foreign forces appear to destabilize it from the inside.

Theoretical background: the limits of the notion of scene, and a materialist perspective on the plays.

In the broadest sense this project intervenes in the philosophical debate about the foundation of the disciplines of theatre studies and performance studies. Martin Puchner frames this debate in relation to Burke's exploration of dramatism or reliance on personification which, Puchner argues, "constitutes a limit of theatrical

philosophy.”³² Hence “the necessity of thinking the limits of dramatism, which we can take as a point of departure for thinking the limits of performance.” The context of this need is the poststructuralist, but also materialist, critique of the subject, based on a valorization of the social context. Monti’s conception of the plays’ settings as enclosed and functionally self-contained spaces invites a thinking about the inside stage of drama and the social space outside of the theatre, because these settings appear to put pressure precisely at the limits of this “double scene” and force the appearance of the outer scene.³³ The plays may thus reveal, in the words of Puchner, that “the scene outside is nothing like the scene inside; instead it is the necessary ‘context’ or ‘counterpart’ that makes it possible for the scene inside to appear as scene.”³⁴

Although I had earlier invoked Rokem’s notion of “performing history,” I will resort to terms that are “counter to performance” in an effort to “inscribe the radically nonperformative at the center of performance.”³⁵ I believe that the problematization of the “scene,” as indicated by Puchner, can be a fundamental reference for the development of a materialist account—in the Marxist sense--of the theatrical text/performance/event of Monti’s plays. My choice and use of various theories of space and models for a production of space are efforts to access and deal with the “pressure at the limits of the ‘double scene’” from the practical perspective of the writing, production and reception of Monti’s plays. Henri Lefebvre’s theory of space as being socially produced; Fredric Jameson’s notion of a “utopian impulse,” which he understands as an unconscious political desire; Kenneth Frampton’s advocacy for a “tectonic” architecture as a way to resist the dramatism of a building’s presence; and Gilles Deleuze’s conceptual “diagram” as a means to map experience as a location of

social forces are theoretical tools that collapse the inside and outside scenes by showing the structure of the double scene, thereby allowing a reading that is focused on Monti's theatrical space/s while being attentive to its non-performative aspects.³⁶

The chapters.

In the first chapter I look at Monti's first play, *Magnus*, as it happens to be very appropriate for introducing and contextualizing the "scene" of Monti's work. Here, as in all my chapters, I resort to the notion of space as "that which enables the interaction of scene and performance without being *of it*."³⁷ For instance, Henry Lefebvre's concept of a socially produced space that is itself "social" allows access to various levels of abstraction in the spatial practices of society, in the coded representations of space, and in the experience within representational spaces, while avoiding reifications of space as being *of the theatre* or *non-theatrical*.³⁸ In terms of Monti's play, *Magnus*, I deemed it necessary to first look at the representational space coded as a particular grotesque and avant-garde aesthetic. Here I am interested in the "scene" of such a mode of performance and its description as a historically determined production of space. I search for connections between the settings in the River Plate tradition of *grotesco criollo*, the urban modernity of 1920s Buenos Aires, the metatheatrical space of *Magnus*, and Argentina's entrance into a post-Fordist international space. I begin with the question of why, in *Magnus*, we have the confined space of the household as well as a "space of performance" set up in "the living room." I trace a genealogy of this space back to the confined spaces that characterized the *grotesco criollo* plays of the 1920s and 30s. This enables me to contextualize the need for a performance space or

simulation in relation to Argentina's own modernity and post-modernity, not as two discrete periods but connected in a relation of ground/surface. This analysis appears to project the plays both into the past and the future in part because the theoretical perspective, like the play itself, seeks to break what I would call the "fourth wall" of modernist aesthetics of presence and its linear view on historical change.

The play *Marathón* (1980) is analyzed in the second chapter, because its formal and theoretical proposition seems to complement my view of *Magnus* as a layered space. *Marathón*'s "action" is analyzed as the collective embodiment, by the characters who are engaged in a dance marathon, of the tension created by this layering. My close reading is supported by accounts of the production and reception of the original performance in Buenos Aires. Drawing on Frampton's concept of tectonic architecture, I am able to detect, in the play's recounting of Argentine history by ballroom dancers, frictions between the local and the global built as an architectonic metaphor of space in-layered in place.³⁹ Like in the doubling of the theatre into a local ballroom hall (in the Teatro Payró's production), I find that the play builds superimposed metaphors, like place/space, factory/machine, commodity/present, where tectonic tension maps the present as taking root in the European colonization of the Americas. The first two chapters use two plays to build the theoretical lens that directs us to what I see as the main concern reflected in Monti's plays: the possibility for theatre to produce a space where the forces of history can be *felt* in a way that reflects our utopian impulse and resistance to power. I develop a perspective on space and embodiment in the first two chapters in order to explain why in all of Monti's plays the characters find themselves in a theatre and decide (as actor and/or character) to stay in it. In a way, I see these

plays and my analysis of them as what Jameson calls a “cognitive mapping,” that sets the stage, quite literally, for a discussion of an ethics of choosing theatre.⁴⁰

The ethical perspective demands that I return to the problem of the use of the “live” theatrical environment. In the third chapter, the context of collective creation in the making of *Historia tendenciosa...* (1971), as well as the didactic presentation of its political/ethical message, are productive grounds for my inquiry. I explore the points of pressure and practical difficulties produced by the perceived distance between the inside and outside “scenes” of theatre, reflected here in the tension between the didactic and ethical messages of the play/performance. The question of how to speak of these difficulties and pressures as a problem of performance (rather than drama) informs my advocacy for the use of the Deleuzian “diagram.” Taking a cue from the unstable physical system of *Marathón*, I argue that the plays stimulate our intuition of a Foucauldian/Deleuzian diagram as “the map of relations between forces [...] which [...] at every moment passes through every point.”⁴¹ This intuited map may be detected in textual and production choices. For example, in the satirical allegory *Historia tendenciosa...*(1971) the insertion of “implosions,” where the actors connect to the narrative with a recounting of personal memories, reveals a need of a diagram that would enable them to find their way back into their own history. The play *Visita*, often considered as Monti’s most metaphysical play, provides an opportunity to evaluate the play in terms of a diagrammatic practice—the idea being that it is its diagrammatic location that influences its seemingly absurdist form and/or performance. The almost tactile relationship of the intruder Equis, in *Visita* (1977), to the mysterious household he stumbles upon is analyzed as a diagrammatic representation of Equis’s confrontation

with the contingent space of modernity, and as the remembering of the traumatic “accident(s)” that, as Paul Virilio argues, originate in modernity.⁴²

In the fourth chapter I end my study by looking at post-*Marathón* plays like *Una pasión sudamericana* and *La oscuridad de la razón* because the mythical historical elements of these plays seem to incorporate *Marathón*'s historical mapping into the diagrammatic location discovered in *Historia* and *Visita*. Since the mapping and the diagram are somehow internalized in the circumstances of the main protagonists, I consider specific productions of these plays as the main sites of exploration of diagrammatic elements, seen in the confrontation of the character/actor with the historic/diagrammatic/theatrical space surrounding them. I show how the notions of contingency and accident help to describe the actions of the characters as performances that choose the diagrammatic location as a site of resistance. This “choice” explains the apparent treatment, by the characters, of historical moments as mythical events with an ethical and utopian import. The relevance of the diagrammatic perspective to theatrical practice is proved in this chapter by looking at acting, directing, and design choices made in specific performances. In *Una pasión*, Ana Alvarado's design of a double or mirroring theatre(s) is related to the confrontation in the “double scene” of civilization and barbarism involving the Brigadier and the Madman. The topological structure of the scene design for Jaime Kogan's production of *La oscuridad de la razón* (1993), on the other hand, is related to the strategies of resistance, by the female characters, to a virtual space of war, dominated by men.

Conclusion.

In the final analysis, this study of the work of Monti constitutes an evaluation of contradictory impulses in his work, one materialist and the other idealist, and I argue that the ethical and utopian value of his work is to be found in the first, non-transcendental tendency. This doesn't mean that I seek to demystify Monti's work but rather to show how the "mysterious" elements of the plays are relevant to the way our experience of time and space is grounded in modern/postmodern history and an "American" location. The largely chronological order of the plays in this study is justified as a means to build a cognitive mapping of the kind of "present" that Monti builds into his plays. Monti has admittedly recognized a unity in his work in the sense that each play derives from and in turns produces new intuitions. This study has in some way given an analytical shape to that intuition and shown how some works build on each other in a synthetic fashion. I am therefore arguing that the historical-mythical plays of the late 80s and the 90s are best understood if we assume that the layered space of *Magnus* (1970), the "tectonic" location of *Marathón* (1980), and the experience of "accident" in *Visita* (1977) are somehow coded in the later plays.

The research also suggests that a problematization of space as revealed in Monti's plays may be used as a critical, ethical, and creative tool. The spatial perspective therefore has potentially interdisciplinary applications in the study and practice of theatre and performance studies. In this respect I believe that for Monti, and also for myself with respect to this project, to historicize means to construct one's practice as a production of the contemporary (space). I expect that Monti's work, emanating from a trans-modern Latin American culture and history, "an uncertain in-between modern and postmodern

that also carries colonial traces” can give us clues towards a remapping of the contemporary.⁴³ Monti’s work, in some way, has given theatre a role in this remapping, and therefore the plays are sites for an inquiry about our modern/postmodern location, as well as ground for the development of a different practice. Finally, my articulation of concepts of space, affect, and the utopian, is meant to guide both the analysis and future practice of Monti’s plays (and performance in general) in the context of their relevance to the issue of an ethics for our use of history and theatre, or of the events that history and theatre are.

¹ See Charles Driskell, “Conversación con Ricardo Monti,” *Latin American Theatre Review* 12.2 (spring 1979): 43.

² Martin Puchner, “Kenneth Burke: Theatre, Philosophy, And the Limits of Performance,” in *Staging Philosophy: Intersections of Theatre, Performance, and Philosophy*, ed. by David Krasner and David C. Saltz (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 53.

³ See Ricardo Monti, *Una noche con el señor Magnus & hijos* (Buenos Aires: Talía, 1971).

⁴ See Jean Graham-Jones, “‘A Broader Realism’: The Plays of Ricardo Monti,” in *Reason Obscured: Nine Plays by Ricardo Monti*, trans. by Jean Graham-Jones (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2004), 8.

⁵ See Driskell, *Ibid.*, 46.

⁶ Armando Discépolo is the prime author of plays from the River Plate theatrical tradition of *grotesco criollo*, popular in the 1920s and 30s. Roberto Arlt is an author who participated in the avant-garde theatrical scene of the 30s, led by Teatro del Pueblo. Arlt’s work was also influenced by the local grotesque tradition. Since the 60s, Griselda Gambaro has been writing plays with grotesque elements that treat the issue of political violence from a feminist perspective. All three authors also use metatheatrical elements in their work.

⁷ See Luís Ordaz, in *El teatro argentino*, ed. by Luís Ordaz (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1981), vii-x; and Liliana López, in *El teatro y los días*, ed. by Osvaldo Pelletieri, Colección Estudios Sobre Teatro Iberoamericano y Argentino 3 (Buenos Aires: Galerna, 1995), 101-9.

⁸ See Osvaldo Pellettieri, “El teatro de Ricardo Monti (1989-1994): La resistencia a la modernidad marginal,” in Ricardo Monti, *Teatro, tomo 1* (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1995), 9-13.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 12. See Ricardo Monti, *Historia tendenciosa de la clase media argentina, de los extraños sucesos en que se vieron envueltos algunos hombres públicos, su completa dilucidación y otras escandalosas revelaciones* (Buenos Aires: Talía, 1972); and *La cortina de abalorios*, in *7 dramaturgos argentinos: 7 piezas en un acto representadas en el ciclo de Teatro Abierto de 1981*, ed. by Miguel Angel Giella (Ottawa: Girol Books, 1983), 139-73.

¹⁰ Graham-Jones, “A Broader Realism”, 21.

¹¹ For an account of the “political” reception of *La cortina de abalorios* in the context of Teatro Abierto, see Beatriz Trastoy, “Teatro político: producción y recepción (notas sobre “La cortina de abalorios” de Ricardo Monti),” in *Teatro argentino de lo ’60—Polémica, continuidad y ruptura*, ed. by Osvaldo Pellettieri (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1989), 217-23.

¹² See Ricardo Monti, *Visita* (Buenos Aires: Talía, 1977); and *Marathón*, in *El Teatro Argentino. 16. Cierre un Ciclo*, ed. by Luís Ordaz (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1981), 57-122.

¹³ Pellettieri, “El teatro de Ricardo Monti (1989-1994),” 12.

¹⁴ See *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12-13. These plays are compiled in Ricardo Monti, *Teatro, tomo 1*.

¹⁶ Ricardo Monti, quoted by Jean Graham-Jones in “A Broader Realism,” 30.

¹⁷ See Ricardo Monti, *Teatro, tomo 1*, 251.

¹⁸ Pellettieri, 13.

¹⁹ See Driskell, “Conversación con Ricardo Monti,” 49.

²⁰ See Roberto Previdi Froelich, “Víctimas y victimarios: Cómplices del discurso del poder en *Una Noche con el sr. Magnus e hijos* de Ricardo Monti,” *Latin American Theatre Review* 23.1 (fall 1989): 37-48.

²¹ See, for example, Graham-Jones’s discussion of Monti’s plays written/performed during the Argentine Dirty War in her *Exorcising History: Argentine Theatre under Dictatorship* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2000).

²² See Graham-Jones, “A Broader Realism,” 33.

²³ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁴ Freddie Rokem, *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000), 101.

²⁵ See Charles Driskell, “Conversación con Ricardo Monti,” 51.

²⁶ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 148.

²⁷ David Simpson, “Raymond Williams: Feeling for Structures, Voicing ‘History,’” *Social Text* 30 (1992): 9.

²⁸ See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990); and Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/ Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

²⁹ I base my short account of Argentine history mainly on José Luis Romero, *Breve historia de la Argentina*; augmented edition (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica de Argentina, 1997), 167-204.

³⁰ Luis Alberto Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, trans. by James P. Brennan (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 150.

³¹ In 1987, the Congress approved the law of “required obedience” [obediencia debida] exculpating the majority of officers that had participated in the repression. See Romero, *Breve historia*, 196.

³² Puchner, “Kenneth Burke,” 51.

³³ Burke himself locates a conceptual space for thinking the limits in the notion of “scene,” which Puchner identifies as “a double term, one that marks the outer limit (the ‘nondramatist’) but that is at the same time part of dramatism. The result of this double limit [...] is the collapse of dramatism.” See Puchner, 52.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991); Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981); Kenneth Frampton, “Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance,” in *The Anti-aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. by Al Foster (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983), 16-30; and Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. by Seán Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

³⁷ Puchner, 54.

³⁸ Lefebvre, 33.

³⁹ See Frampton, 26.

⁴⁰ See Fredric Jameson, “Cognitive Mapping” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 347-60.

⁴¹ Deleuze, 37-38.

⁴² See Paul Virilio, *A Landscape of Events* (Cambridge : MIT Press, 2000), 32-4.

⁴³ Román de la Campa, *Latinamericanism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 60.

“Parapenality and U-topia: Modern and Postmodern Scenic Space in River Plate Grottesco Criollo and in Ricardo Monti’s *Una noche con el sr. Magnus & hijos*”¹

In one terrible minute of struggle, I saw my whole life. It has passed, it has ended, and I have not begun.--Armando Discépolo.²

Here or there. One side or the other. Only a step separates the two, one never knows.--Ricardo Monti.³

Introduction to chapter.

In the broadest terms, my aim in this chapter is to historicize Monti’s first play, *Una noche con el sr. Magnus & hijos* (1970). My focus on the theatrical process is in part responding to Monti’s own theatrical proposition. In my analysis, I attempt to broaden the perspective of theatrical “relationships” produced in performance beyond the parameters of theatre as an art form. The role of culture and history in the production of texts, actors, and audiences and their own institutionalization will be considered as part of theatrical practice. With this perspective in mind, I make the case for establishing a historical relationship between the *grottesco criollo* genre, which flourished in 1920s Riverplate, and Ricardo Monti’s plays, taking as my example *Una noche con el sr. Magnus & hijos*. A comparison of the *grottesco* to Monti’s plays may be argued on aesthetic grounds, if we consider the metatheatrical and grotesque as elements shared by both theatrical expressions. But I do not place this analysis in the context of a history of a theatrical genre or type of play but from the perspective of what theatre produces (in the relationship between performer, audience, and text). Such relationship has its own historicity, related to the institution of bourgeois theatre in the modern urban environment, its places of performance, and its playwriting-acting-spectatorship culture.

Therefore, it is not only because of a dramaturgical particularity that I link Monti's plays to the grotesco criollo, but also because of their particular positioning in relation to Argentina's history as well as to bourgeois theatre.

Argentine critic Osvaldo Pellettieri (2000) has noted the "difference" of Ricardo Monti's work in relation to the "realist" and "avant-garde" theatre that originated in the sixties, in Buenos Aires. Pellettieri places the work in relation to the "new realism" of Roberto Cossa and the "new-avant-garde" of Griselda Gambaro, two authors whose work mixes avant-garde and realist elements. Still, Pellettieri notes a difference between the persistent "positivism" of Cossa and Gambaro, and the "symbolic density" of Monti's work.⁴ In relation to Pellettieri's view, my goal is to balance the perception of Monti's theatre as obscured in some ways by its layers of reference. I will argue that Monti's dramaturgy, rather than seeking to obscure, seeks to make evident the relevance of the conditions of the theatrical event for what happens in the play. In a 1977 statement, for instance, Monti attempts to reconcile the tension between what Pellettieri calls the (positivist) "didactic optimism of testimony, [...] the transparency of theatre seen as pure communication" and the apparent interposition of cultural, historical, and symbolic allusions within the action of his plays.⁵ Monti says: "what happens is that I include, within the represented reality, other zones which are not the zones of the everyday [...] I enter the internal world of the individual, his laboratory of ideas, his dream factory, which is also part of reality."⁶ With this, Monti aligns himself to an expressionistic phenomenology he considers a more direct route to the ambivalence of ideological experiences. It also reveals his concern with the processes of making meaning rather than with meaning itself—processes whereupon theatre participates as an institution.

Monti's own strategic positioning, underplaying both symbolic signification and realistic presentation, may be put in the context of the sixties' theatrical culture that helped foster the 1970s generation of playwrights of which Monti is an early example.

Jean Graham-Jones remarks that

sociopolitical critique and aesthetic experimentation [in the 60s] were not so easily separated. Nor were the lines as neatly drawn in daily theatrical practice, despite assessments of the period that divided the two in an ideological debate between politically committed realism and apolitical absurdism/ experimentation. Many of the same actors that performed in "realistic" plays also participated in experimental efforts [...] The socioaesthetic blurrings of the 1960s Argentinean *vanguardias* helped foster the 1970s generation of "political" playwrights.⁷

When Ricardo Monti starts writing in the late sixties, we can assume that his political awareness did not limit his aesthetic experimentation. On the contrary, in order to find expression to his own political position he needed to work, in his own words, "without limitations of forms or precepts."⁸

I suggest that we locate Monti's political positioning in his ambivalent participation in theatrical culture. An uneasy relationship to theatrical practice can be read in his statement that "the crisis of bourgeois theatre is the crisis of the bourgeoisie."⁹ Yet Monti decided to acknowledge the crisis within his work, in order to "modify the mode of thought of a society."¹⁰ There is the implication of a metatheatrical project in the idea of making theatre within and for a theatre in crisis. How Monti understood this crisis is clarified by his statement of purpose, of making "a theatre capable of freezing internal

images, of creating in the spectator doubts and contradictions: a theatre capable of provoking anger and rejection, because rejection is a form of acceptance.”¹¹ Anger and contradiction may provoke awareness, in the spectator, of his own complicity with the very content that he rejects. Rejection may function as a confrontation with the political implications of bourgeois forms of acceptance, as they are expressed in the theatrical event. To locate this process, we must look at how the plays mirror the structures put in place by the bourgeois institution of theatre itself, structures that the event actualizes through the practice of spectatorship and performance. Monti’s own conception of theatre as “a relation between the actor, the word he incarnates (the written text), and the audience,” expresses, in my view, an awareness of theatre as a social practice of the bourgeois class.¹²

One goal of this chapter is to elucidate how Monti communicates this awareness through his theatre. I will take as an example his first play, *Una noche con el sr. Magnus & hijos* (1970). Another goal of the chapter is to establish a connection between the mode of awareness promoted by *Magnus* and the one promoted by the grotesco criollo plays, which were written in the 1920s by such writers as Armando Discépolo and Francisco De Filippis Novoa. The years separating the writing and production of these plays reflect in part the macro-perspective of my analysis, taking as its subject a developing “bourgeois theatre” in the city of Buenos Aires. More specifically, the plays explored represent, in my view, a tradition of socio-cultural self-consciousness expressed through theatre. This tradition will be explained by tracing how notions of space are relevant to the way the plays both appropriate and reject the theatrical tradition that gave them shape. I will argue that the grotesco criollo plays and *Magnus* share a mode of foregrounding a social

complicity with the content of the play. I will ground the implied rejection of their practice in the spatial awareness promoted by the play.

In order to trace this spatial awareness of history, I will analyze the dramaturgical differences between the grotesco and the *sainete* genre that preceded it. Such differences will elucidate how the characters' self-awareness of the space they inhabit contributes to the social critique enacted by the plays. An understanding of space and its modern "use," in the grotesco criollo, will give theoretical and historical support to my view of *Magnus* as postmodern, and therefore enable me to historicize the grotesco and *Magnus*'s metatheatrical aspects. I will show how the grotesco criollo and *Magnus* produce space and how they challenge or force an implosion of that same space. I argue that in both cases the challenge arises from an awareness of being confined by the space produced. Following Foucault, I will view this confinement in terms of parapenality or the notion of the "institution created in order not to be a prison."¹³ Another argument linking the grotesco and *Magnus* is my understanding of the conflict between father and sons in all these plays: how the self-destruction of the father acts as a kind of ritual that aids in the implosion of space and leaves the new generation in a u-topia, or non-space. The significance of this practice is put in relief in the context of Argentina's history, its modernity, and its postmodernity.

This broad historical perspective explains the circumventing journey on which I take the reader. My starting point will be the prologue of *Magnus* (1970), which helps me define the notion of parapenality. I will then go back in time to the early century to discuss, through an analysis of the genres of *sainete* and grotesco, the historical production of a parapenal space and the awareness of that space in the theatre. An

understanding of the use of space in the grotesco criollo will help to define the historicity of the space produced by *Magnus* and to look for the relevant historical context, referring mainly to the late 1960s. A close reading of *Magnus* in its historical context will bring additional focus to our perception of its production of space.

Space in the grotesco criollo and *Magnus*: general background.

The highly popular theatrical genres of sainete criollo and, later, grotesco criollo are worth considering in terms of the way in which the city of Buenos Aires assumes its own modernity and, later, its own postmodernity. In the developing Buenos Aires's metropolis of the turn of and early twentieth century, the rise of an urban theatrical culture out of which the sainete and grotesco forms arose, is historically relevant as an expression of a peripheral modernity.¹⁴ Both genres staged Argentina's entry into an urban modernity with their focus on the lower class immigrants that populated Buenos Aires and with the way these people were redefining Argentine identity. Within this macro-perspective, I seek to define the broad historical relation between the performances of grotesco criollo in the twenties and thirties and the 1970 performance of *Magnus*. Argentine critic Jorge Monteleone corroborates this view when he remarks that

with regard to the tradition followed by Monti's theatre, one could relate it to foreign models. Nevertheless, Monti has conceived his theatre in relation to [authors of grotesco like] Discépolo, Defilippis Novoa, Arlt, and, in the last decade, to [authors of neo-grotesco like] Griselda Gambaro. This relationship is without a doubt more accurate, and, moreover, Monti sharpens the perception of certain latent elements within that line of Argentinean theatre.¹⁵

On the other hand, an effort to qualify Monti's theatre as adhering to a grotesque aesthetic would defeat the purpose of finding out what this theatre is producing and how, within the realm of culture. This is where a view of the transition that occurred when the grotesco criollo replaced the sainete criollo as the dominant genre staged in Buenos Aires theatres becomes highly relevant. In this respect, the contrast between the public setting in the sainete plays, and the private one in the grotesco, enables us to document, not a change of practice, but the process involved in this change--in this case, the process of transforming a public space into a private one.

In the sainete, the setting is the overcrowded tenement building patio, or *conventillo*, the space shared by a melting pot of Italian, Spaniard, and other European poor immigrants when they populated the city's suburbs. In the grotesco we reencounter the Italian immigrant (who outnumbered all other nationalities in the sainete); but this time he is virtually imprisoned within the bounds of the household he heads. I will argue that this passage describes a metatheatrical process through which the immigrant "character" self-consciously withdraws from the public stage, where he sees himself objectified, in order to consolidate his identity in the relative safety of his own household. From this perspective, the metatheatrical does not describe theatre per se but a process of cultural transition and transformation that enacts changes in the codes of production of texts, performance, and spectatorship. From the point of view of this process, the theatre is a sort of transitional process by which cultural codes are being transformed and eventually institutionalized. A similar process, or phenomenon, can be observed in Monti's play *Una noche con el sr. Magnus & hijos*. In effect, the enclosure of Magnus's house is a place from which the father, like in the grotesco plays, rules over his sons. This

time, though, the space also doubles as a “place for performing.”¹⁶ I suggest that such layering of the stage reflects a new cultural transformation and, I may say, an added level of abstraction in the way space is being conceived and used. I will argue that the layered space of Monti’s play is symptomatic of Argentina’s own transition from a modern to a postmodern experience.

In the sketched descriptions of sainete, grotesco, and Monti’s play, I have called attention to a particular logic organizing their setting and their stage. I propose to establish the historicity of such logic by viewing theatre, following Henri Lefebvre’s axiom, as a “(social) space [that] is a (social) product.”¹⁷ Like Lefebvre, I am careful to view such axiom as methodological rather than theoretical, seeking the insertion of the idea/s of space “into the context of what is generally known as ‘history,’ which will consequently itself emerge in a new light.”¹⁸ For Lefebvre, a reconsideration of space is motivated by a need to compensate for the illusions of “transparency” and “realism” that inform our apprehension of history. Lefebvre’s warning against a view of space as a transparent site, where mental activity and invention is finally materialized, can easily be applied to the theatre and its “transparent” deployment of motivation, conflict, and action by “live” performers on a “tangible” stage. Likewise, the illusion of “realism,” mentioned by Lefebvre, will refer, in the theatrical context, to our view of the performance as form, shaped by the materiality of the stage’s site, the fleshy bodies seen as moving organisms, and the relative density of theatrical elements like stage, scenery, and props as well as words, lights, and music. On the other hand, what makes theatre such a fascinating site for an exploration of (social) space is its accentuated dependence on these illusions and, by the same token, its potential for challenging them. Such challenge is already implied

in Monti's view of theatre as socially produced in the relationship between actor, text, and performance. But such relationship must be described as a process, and should also consider, as Lefebvre reminds us, that "for it to occur, it is necessary (and this necessity is precisely what has to be explained) for the society's practical capabilities and sovereign powers to have at its disposal special places."¹⁹ The theatre space, in other words, must be viewed as a place built and put "aside" by the representatives of social/cultural power. Theatre, in this context, allows for a process of production of space that supports institutions of power as well as society's main mode of production.

Magnus's prologue: parapenalty and the production of space.

From a general plot perspective, *Magnus* deals with the confrontation by three sons with their own parricidal impulse towards their oppressive father, Magnus. The father, in turn, gives an oedipal twist to the conflict by bringing in a young female guest, allegedly as a replacement for his late wife whom he might have murdered. I suggest that we look at this layering, of an oedipal enactment over a conflict between sons and an oppressive father, as an example of supercoding, which exceeds the plot and aids our experience of the play as a specifically theatrical process rather than product. In effect, when Magnus brings the young Julia to the house, he also brings "theatre," with its load of expectations in terms of narrative, conflict, and a search for resolution. The play makes this gesture literal by presenting a series of theatrical enactments where the characters take turns in the pseudo-roles of performer, spectator, playwright, or director. The oedipization of the conflict and the enactments within the play are some of the ways in

which we are reminded of the role of the text, the actor, and the spectator in producing the theatrical event.

In my reading of the prologue I follow the hypothesis that the play “brings theatre with it.” Therefore I view the prologue as an enactment of the fact that spectators and performers have gathered in a theatre to be witnesses of the theatrical event. More precisely, the prologue expresses the collective need for theatre (or for its spatial environment) that makes possible the experience of theatre in the first place. In the prologue we see the three sons fighting one another for the assertion of their individual space. The manner in which the sons assume their corporeality will define the final shape of the space they inhabit. In their struggle, the space has not still taken shape—one might say that it hasn’t been produced. Gualterio demands an indeterminate, perhaps infinite, space of darkness where only Mozart’s music can be heard. Santiago, who masturbates in a corner, is negotiating a private space where he can prolong his pleasure, free of interdictions. Gato, who voices an interpretation of his own nightmare about a rat being killed by the three brothers, wants to impose a space of knowledge, understood as an “inside” that matches the laws of “outside.” Of the three perspectives, Gualterio’s may seem to us as the most tyrannical, or authoritarian, since he selfishly imposes a single experience as the only acceptable one in his “dark” space. Santiago’s onanistic pleasure-seeking is the least demanding in terms of space, but he ends up in alliance with Gato as a way to escape the interdictions and admonishments of Gualterio. Gato’s nightmare has a more powerful effect because it denotes a social consciousness in the image of the three brothers banding together to kill the “rat,” who represents their own father, Magnus. A

sense of social responsibility is also felt in Gato's need to equate knowledge with a kind of collective discipline. Gato tells Wolfi:

If there is anything that can stop you, it should be the horrible things that the laws of this city reserve for those who violate their sacred norms, and don't you know there's no worse atrocity and stupidity than provoking the atrocity and stupidity of others, I beg you, you disgusting pig, I beg you, never again to blanket my eyes in darkness. [46]

In Gato's warning we see the contradictory impulses of the brothers giving shape to a concrete space. The infinite dark space that Gualterio conceives for Mozart's music and the private space enveloping Santiago like a cocoon acquire a social form in Gato's mixed space. Here, light and darkness, terror and comfort, knowledge and "stupidity," inside and outside, lawfulness and transgression coexist and balance each other structurally. As a result, both Gualterio's "tyrannical" space and Santiago's "private" space are contained and elided by a disciplining space. In effect, in this space, Gualterio's darkness is contained by a need for light in the form of knowledge, and Santiago's privacy is included as a realm to be controlled in the light of existing laws.

This space is produced by the equation of two kinds of violence: the violence of the law and the violence of the impulse to transgress it. And here I should point out that there is something chimerical about this space because both types of "violence" are actually one and the same. The violence of the law, as Foucault has pointed out, is a disciplining, where punishment and the terror of transgression are only "external" and internal reminders.²⁰ In the prologue, both kinds of reminders are produced by Gato. The parricidal dream may be felt by Gato as a kind of punishment, since he did not "ask" for

it and he feels now “coerced” to share it with his brothers. The effect of the law, in other words, is felt internally in the form of the dream. On the other hand, the law itself is perceived as something existing “outside” and punishing from “outside.” In assuming the “validity” of the dream as a description of his own impulse, Gato confronts the terror of his own transgressive impulse, expressed in his frantic call for knowledge and discipline. Here, again, Gato appears as the originator of the space, where knowledge and discipline match the “outside” origin of law and punishment.

I suggest that the call for knowledge and discipline comes not only from Gato, but also from the spectator. They both bring the brothers together into some form of socialization (Wolf and Santiago are, from the audience’s perspective, the antisocial ones) and onto the same stage. This “act” of socialization could be called a process of *mise-en-scène* whereas the tyrant and the anti-social are put literally in “their place.” I understand *mise-en-scène* as the putting of bodies on a stage. An example of *mise-en-scène* is the way Gato places himself and his brothers in a disciplining space. The theatre space, which includes stage and auditorium, thus becomes part of a Foucauldian disciplinary system. In relation to the carceral, and its twin methods of punishment and disciplining, the *mise-en-scène* functions as a form of confinement, a means of surveillance. In this context, theatre does not appear as representation but as institution, supporting “the normalization of the power of normalization.”²¹ The stage and its audience take part in “the entire parapenal institution, which is created in order not to be a prison.”²² Now, it would be useful to conceive of the parapenal as a process that feeds on itself, when it becomes a kind of institutionalized action, a practice of “normalization.” In this sense, the parapenal conceives of its own space as a prison,

which is not a prison, and culminates in Foucault's suggestive image of a “cell, on the walls of which are written in black letters: ‘God sees you.’”²³ In the parapenal theatre, the (theoretical) goal is the disappearance of the spectator, who would eventually be replaced by the omnipresent God. The enlargement of the stage so that it incorporates the audience would be the materialization of this impulse. From this perspective, the exterior walls of the theatre building become the true marker of the institution rather than the internal division of stage, backstage, and auditorium. Furthermore, the parapenal process produces a theatre that harbors its own antitheatrical impulse, but one that, paradoxically, can only arise from within the theatre. In this respect, the ideology of the parapenal impulse may be summarized in Shakespeare’s words: “all the world is a stage.”

The ambivalence of this theatre that is not a theatre, of this world that is not *the* world, points to the abstract nature of its space—theatre and its “outside” are therefore situated not within an absolute space of “natural” or pastoral man, but rather within a field of cultural production as well as of material culture. It is, according to Henri Lefebvre, an abstract space that has its own historicity, since it is

the space of accumulation (the accumulation of all wealth and resources: knowledge, technology, money, precious objects, works of art and symbols) [arising] in the historical town of the West, along the countryside under its control. It was during this time that productive activity (labour) became no longer one with the process of reproduction which perpetuated social life; but, in becoming independent of that process, labour fell prey to abstraction, whence abstract social labour—and *abstract space*.²⁴

At the same time, the existence of theatres as monuments, habitats, and sacred and public spaces are evidence of a texture in abstract space that allows for its appropriation.

Lefebvre suggests that this entails a gesture of both affirmation and negation, for

every space is already in place before the appearance in it of actors [...]

This pre-existence of space conditions the subject's presence, action and discourse, at the same time as they presuppose this space, also negate it

[...] Thus the texture of space affords opportunities not only to social acts

[...] but also to a spatial practice, [...] a sequence of acts which embody a signifying practice.²⁵

In relation to an appropriation of space, I am interested in the way an awareness of the parapenal process affects the mode of theatrical practice in *Magnus* and in the grotesco criollo. I have suggested that the focus on a parapenal process is rendered somewhat transparent in *Magnus*'s prologue. It allows for a projection of the negative gesture in our appropriation of space; that is, it allows for an experience of ambivalence towards the "outside" that arises out of our own internalization of the law. In this context, the grotesque, as well as metatheatricality, may be seen as symptoms of an accented ambivalence; we are made to be particularly aware of a spatial production where "walls, enclosures and façades serve to define both a *scene* (where something takes place) and an *obscene* area to which everything that cannot or may not happen on the scene is relegated."²⁶ The theatre, in this respect, becomes the potential scene of a revolt against the unfreedom (prison) of our experience in the social field. It is in this awareness of the parapenal, I would argue, that the disciplined body comes to a realization of its fixity in place, and of the contingency of its immediate perceptual environment. In the theatre as

“prison,” the materiality of the stage (its fixity within the theatre), and the corporeality of actors on it, become perceptual witnesses of, in Merleau-Ponty’s words, our “contact with the world, [and] a permanent rootedness in it.”²⁷ The phenomenological emphasis of theatre, in this perspective, is a symptom of parapenality, and must be treated in its historicity as well.

The phenomenal level of theatre is related, I believe, to the illusions of transparency and realism pointed out by Lefebvre. I am arguing now that seeing phenomenology with an awareness of parapenality, and the “mixed” space or environment (physical as well as sensory and psychological) that it produces, allows us to give to it a historical context. In order to understand this context, Lefebvre suggests we must look beyond a simple inside/outside structure--in the theatre, for example, the stage/non-stage organizes both realist and non-realist traditions-- and get a sense of the space’s monumentality. Lefebvre calls monumentality the relationship between a space’s architectonic environment and its affect, its way of organizing the experience by members of society into a “consensus.”²⁸ In bourgeois theatre, for instance, the enclosure of spectators and performers, and the separation of lit stage from dark auditorium are at the source of its affect and consensus. The spectator follows the bodies of the actors in a constant phenomenological shift imposed by the stage/nonstage (scene/obscene) structure of theatre. The theatrical event can be seen as a dialectical play between spectators and actors who decide what will become visible and what will remain hidden. A certain appropriation of the event is produced through interchange between visibility and invisibility, sound and silence, light and darkness, interiority and exteriority, meaning and non-meaning, the negative engendered by the positive and vice-versa.²⁹ Thus theatre

imposes a particular form of discipline, where each must decide, consciously or unconsciously, how much to reveal or hide, how much to see or not see. In other words, one might have a sense of having seen too much or having revealed too little in relation to our cultural expectations. In fact, there is no reliable phenomenology in the theatre, while, at the same time, it depends on an assumption of reliability.

My analysis of *Magnus* and of the grotesco criollo will be concerned with phenomenology while advocating a Marxist, materialist view of theatre and its historical production of space. The notion of parapenality in this analysis describes a historical, ideological use of the theatre and its stage by a society. An awareness of parapenality, in the theatre, translates into an acute awareness of its mise-en-scène and, consequently, of its scenic space.

Parapenality will also aid my understanding of the metatheatrical and grotesque elements in Monti's plays and in the grotesco criollo—their foregrounding of phenomenology, and their self-consciousness about mise-en-scène itself. The playwright himself appears to corroborate this perspective when he declares that “the secret is not in the dialogue—a common error—but in the environment in which this dialogue is uttered: the scenic space.”³⁰ From the point of view of this material stage that confines and grounds the bodies of the actors, and of the theatre environment connecting the actors to spectators, the theatre event is most of all a spatial practice that demands a level of consensus from all the parties involved. The director, the actors, the playwright, and the spectator—in short, the members of the whole apparatus construed by theatrical culture—are complicit with what is done in this space. Monti's emphasis on the scenic space is therefore his way of foregrounding our complicity.

In what follows, I will discuss how *Magnus* and the grotesco criollo contribute to an awareness of this complicity in our experience of the plays. I will explore the history, in Argentina, of the parapenal logic of the space created, and I will elucidate how the plays deal with the sense of revolt brought by an awareness of parapenality.

The issues of consensus and revolt and their theatrical expression are at the core of this investigation. An exploration of the genres of sainete and grotesco become relevant because each of these practices corresponds to a moment of consent or revolt vis-à-vis the new urban experience. From the turn of the twentieth century, the suburbs of Buenos Aires, where the new population of immigrants was concentrated, became emblematic of the urban environment. This is a time in which massive immigration changes the demographic balance of the country, which used to be Creole oriented, and becomes more European oriented. The new urban environment becomes a place where a national identity, still in formation, will be consolidated. One may speak of the city's monumentality (and, more specifically, of its suburbs), in Lefebvre sense, to describe how its architectural environment conditions a set of collective affective responses that are tantamount to consensus. This relationship between collectivity and environment has a particular history in the sainete stage, where disparate immigrant types meet in the single setting of the tenement building patio or conventillo.

Buenos Aires's monumentality and the two moments of sainete criollo.

The theatre historian Luís Ordaz offers a telling description of how this relationship is perceived as the sainete becomes more institutionalized. Ordaz writes that

the city and its suburbs [become] an immense stage on which each and every person performed, in his everyday life, his role in the sainete manner. There was a time when, in a similar way, our theatre became a permanent tenement building patio, like the settings in the sainete, as if our authors were aware only of that environment within the changing and complex reality of the country.³¹

This quote indicates that there was a moment where the sainete setting coincided with the monumentality of the city and its suburbs in the eyes of the immigrants. This meant that the immigrants would recognize themselves in the sainete characters, even while they tended to be caricatures. If the immigrant willingly seems to play “his role in the sainete manner,” it is because sainete represented an urban entertainment practice that responded to a consensual need of the population to insert itself in a commercial modernity, promoting the “materialism” of the new capitalist mode. As expressed by David Viñas, “the market, understood as a space of the concrete, had grown wider with the incorporation of new sectors of society. This desire was anchored in the need to feel *recognized*: of seeing their experiences reflected on the stage.”³² From the point of view of the lower and middle classes, who attended in masses the popular and commercialized theatres of Buenos Aires, the sainete reflected a consolidation of a public space where a new Argentine identity formed around an optimistic model of social mobility within the city. This public space demanded a gradual institutionalization of popular expressions marked by the passage from the carnival circus to the specifically theatrical.³³ The process of transculturation, by which native forms were being asserted, had to give way, in the end, to commercial pressures and the ensuing “nativization” of European

conventions like the fourth wall.³⁴ In this new theatrical space, the playwright becomes responsible for translating his observations of a new urban life into theatrical language.

The sainete criollo is popularized as a humorous musical play mixing melodramatic elements with the “tragic ridicule of everyday, deformed by caricature.”³⁵ The sainetes made a spectacle of the various nationalities and dialects seen and heard in the city, while representing a spectrum of urban character types. A world of vendors, clerks, opportunists, drunkards, petty criminals, and lovers was the comic background for a conflict of passion, jealousy, and revenge resolved with poetic and legal justice.³⁶

There was a relationship between the world of the sainete and the real experiences of immigrants in the city. Historian Donald Castro notes, for instance, that while Creoles, blacks, mestizos, and immigrants (the latter also known as “gringos”) are stereotyped, they are “described in a context of conflict” that mirrors society’s “values in the changing class structure of Buenos Aires between 1880 and 1930.”³⁷ Therefore, the democratic spirit of sainete resides in the way the stereotypes can be equally included in the tragicomic vignettes of urban life—it allows the immigrants, in other words, to feel included in a public space where daily struggle is visible to all and accepted as part of the urban experience. In this context, the tenement patio of the conventillo, in the sainetes, reproduces Buenos Aires monumentality with picturesque realism.

I am interested now in contextualizing that second moment of sainete, described by Ordaz, where the genre becomes a convention that does not accord with a changing reality and, one may add, with the changing “monumental” effects of the city environment. This is when the tenement-patio setting, instead of being a democratic site where all urban types are recognized, becomes merely a background for the negotiation

of a new Argentine identity. A brief historical overview of the role of immigration in Argentine politics will contextualize the need for negotiation

European immigration was a strategy of modernization devised by the country's nineteenth century political leaders, who were motivated by elitist and racist desires to give Argentina a Europeanized identity in sink with economically and culturally advanced countries of the north.³⁸ As a result of their policies, a huge wave of immigration started in the 1860's, and the immigrant population became a political and ideological force in the national imaginary.³⁹ The enormous influx of foreigners, mainly to Buenos Aires, with Italians being the largest group, proved the success of nineteenth century policies. On the other hand, the lower-class component of these masses of immigrants was disappointing to the "cultural" ambitions of the elite. This provoked a kind of ideological reversal initiated by the rural elite in order to protect their gains from immigrant labor. Mico Seigel notes that,

as the spread of capitalism transformed gauchos into wage laborers, the figure of the gaucho began to be romanticized in memory and its extinction nostalgically mourned. Nostalgic praise and contempt fit hand-in-hand as a modernizing elite attempted to mold the gaucho-as-icon into and an ideological weapon.⁴⁰

The figure of the gaucho became, from the elite's perspective, an ideological means to negotiate a new Argentine national identity in the face of drastic cultural and political changes brought about by industrialization, capitalist competition, and immigration.⁴¹ As Castro explains, the oligarchy, who felt displaced by a "foreign" urban culture, fostered a nationalist ideology and "Argentinism" founded itself on the rescue of "Creole" values.⁴²

In this context, a notion of Argentine spiritual purity, as symbolized by an idealized image of the gaucho cowboy of the pampas plains, was made to contrast with the impurity of urban immigrant's concern for material survival.⁴³ The popular theatrical entertainments of the time reflect how this ideology played in the space of the city where native "Creoles" and the immigrant majority competed together for recognition.

The phenomenal clash between the demographic reality of immigration and the ideology of "argentineness," as mediated by the iconic figure of the rural gaucho, resulted in the carnivalization and theatricalization of the urban type.⁴⁴ In the sainete, the theatricality of immigrant types, emphasized by caricature and the contrast of dialects, served to mediate the ongoing negotiation of a new Argentine identity. On the stage, this negotiation demanded a self-conscious assertion of the characters' inhabiting of a theatricalized space. The ridicule and pathetic elements of the genre became a means for an appropriation of the urban space when this last becomes institutionalized. This demanded an introspective movement, by which characters attempt to separate their self-knowledge from the specular knowledge by others (their "being seen"). This meant that they had to acknowledge the mask created by the author of sainete. In early sainetes, like Carlos Mauricio Pacheco's *Los disfrazados* [*The Masked Men*] (1906), for example, the character who defines himself as "having a mask already" is invested in his "being seen" and therefore accepts his own theatricality. The character's self-consciousness allows the immigrant to appropriate its theatricality for himself: his own foreignness is taken as a mask, by which he can now playfully conceal his own actual "Argentineness."⁴⁵ Later sainetes develop a different logic in their theatricality. In Alejandro Berrutti's play, *Tres personajes a la pesca de un autor* [*Three Characters Fishing for an Author*] (1927), for

example, a character accuses the author's lack of originality, since it copies "a Galician store owner, a guard from the province, a Catalan cabdriver; [and] bring[s] them together to argue in a pub [in order to] end up with a sainete."⁴⁶ Here the irony focuses on the bringing together—like in a melting pot—that reflects the second moment of sainete. In effect, it foregrounds the theatricality of the space that artificially brings the foreigners together. As a result, it is their "foreignness" that appears to justify the creation of a "stage." The appropriation of this space is therefore more ambiguous, since it does not accord with the level of assimilation or of integration felt by the immigrant of the late twenties. In other words, the immigrant had less need of confirming his inclusion in the city. Therefore, there had to be a new consensus that kept audiences coming to the sainete performances. This consensus, now reflected in the homogenizing dialect, the street dialect called *lunfardo*, reflects, in fact, the production of the city as a national space. This is how, in other words, the sainete becomes nationalized.

Sainetes' nationalization and parapenality.

Lunfardo was the slang of the new generation with roots in the hybrid voices heard in the streets of Buenos Aires. Within the sainete, lunfardo's assimilation contrasted with the alienating theatricality of *cocoliche*, which by now designated a dramatic metalanguage that mocked the carnivalesque representation of the older Italian immigrant attempting to sound and look Argentine.⁴⁷

The history of lunfardo allows us to trace the production of a different space that coincided with the consolidation of a new national identity. David Viñas, commenting on the active participation of sainetero Alberto Vacarezza in the creation of the lunfardo,

notes that this urban populist language was “spoken” by the liberal, populist president Yrigoyen (elected in 1916).⁴⁸ Yrigoyen was invested in the melting pot spectacle offered by urban immigrants. He refused to view Buenos Aires modernity as a clash of competing pressures and favored an organicist perspective.⁴⁹ In this context, his populism used the new slang of Buenos Aires, born out of diversity, in order to establish the coincidence between the city’s space and national democracy. Yrigoyen needed a space through which he could exploit the ideology of national identity, promulgated by the elites, in his own favor. In this respect, the lunfardo could now be nationalized by function of its production of a homogenized “democratic” space. Therefore, by the time Yrigoyen came to power, the sainete participated, with its insistence on public settings, in the institutionalization of democracy as a “national” experience. Meanwhile, the reproduction of lunfardo, in the sainete setting, came to correspond to its populist perception as a democratic language. This is the second moment of sainete, when language, dominated by lunfardo, takes over caricature in the metonymic relationship between character and space. The persistence of the caricature in representation, though, created a tension in the sense that the national space, already being institutionalized by democracy, failed to be properly appropriated by stereotypical characters and melodramatic plots—hence the perception of the theatre as “a permanent conventillo” (as noted by Ordaz).

On the other hand, it was precisely this perception of the sainete setting as artificial and theatrical that promoted an experience of this space as a kind of prison—in other words, as a parapenal space. The theatricalized space made evident the need of the audience to confirm the authenticity of its own assimilation. This need became all the

more urgent when the reality of daily struggle created an ideological tension between a sense of assimilated Argentineness and social failure. The perceived “prison” of the sainete stage thus became an opportunity for middle-class theatrical practice to appropriate this space as a means to confirm its place in society by representing a need to escape this “prison.” The grotesco genre is the result of this production of a new space based on the parapenal nature of late sainetes.

Grotesco and the appropriation of the parapenal space.

The genre of the *grotesco criollo*, developing at a populist moment in Argentine political life, can be said to represent an appropriation of the parapenal space of a nationalized sainete.⁵⁰ Graham-Jones notes that

whereas the *sainete*'s action focused on the shared public space of the conventillo's patio and the collective experience of cultural encounter and miscommunication, the *grotesco* operated within the interior spaces of private dwellings to reveal the illusory nature of immigrant expectations.⁵¹

David Viñas describes this change as the transposition of the public and vernacular sainete into the private and textual grotesco. Furthermore, Viñas indicates how lunfardo is itself transformed in the internalized space of the grotesco.⁵² According to Viñas, “the passage, from the lunfardo of the sainete, to the lunfardo of the grotesco, implies [...] the transit from the entertaining mimesis of the picturesque to the expression of a social contradiction.”⁵³ The movement is from a space that requires outward expression of social hierarchies or levels to one that demands a degree of individual submission to “the materiality of language.”⁵⁴ Language becomes, for the grotesco protagonist who must

embody it, evidence of contradiction and the expression of ideological crisis. The embodiment of language, in other words, becomes an opportunity to confront, on the stage, the limits of his own discourse. The embodiment of contradiction is at the source of grotesco's metatheatrical quality or what I will define as the visible production of a "scenic space."

The transformation of space in the grotesco criollo involves contradictions with roots in a transcontinental historical narrative: The immigrant has been interpellated, called to the new land, in order to participate in a project of "making America" [hacer la América], through the possession of land. The grotesco play reminds the audience of this narrative with the figure of the father and protagonist, who has dragged his family to the new country in search of a better life. It shows how the "American dream" ends up in a frustrated insertion into a middle-class of small merchants, in order to survive in a capitalist urban environment. In this way, the grotesco plot puts the immigrant subject within a narrative of failure, suffered by the elder and from which the sons rebel. Within his own household, the protagonist acts as a proprietor, signifying his "lack of participation in the land as concrete prolongation of his body."⁵⁵ The oppressive rule of the father over his household is, therefore, a compensatory act that compresses space in order to deal with the contradictions of his own embodiment of the American dream. Indeed, in a very literal, physical, and material way, the compensatory act seems to be at the root of his self-imprisonment in a space that renders him theatrical---in a very "real" way, he is condemned to being theatrical.⁵⁶ The protagonist thus comes to occupy what Lefebvre identifies as the "interstice" of representational space, "between the Ego-seeking-to-constitute-itself and its body."⁵⁷

The grotesco character embodies the space of representation by creating a split between his “inside” and his “outside.”⁵⁸ He thus confronts head on the contradictions between representation’s materiality and immateriality, and between the concreteness of his experience and the abstraction of his field of action, what Monti designates as the environment of his theatre, the “laboratory” of ideological formation.

The split space of grotesco responds to a utopian impulse that aims at the coincidence between two realities or the two theatres of the inside and outside. If all attempts at reincorporation fail, and the protagonist is yanked back into the carceral inside, it is because there is a lack of agreement between inside and outside theatres.⁵⁹ This is a theatre that awaits a moment of agreement between individual actions and a sort of collective, social “success” or meaning. Within this scenic space we perceive a longing for, and a belief in what Pierre Bourdieu terms “a logic in action,” that is,

the practical sense of a habitus inhabited by the world it inhabits, pre-occupied by the world in which it actively intervenes, in an immediate relationship of involvement, tension and attention, which constructs the world and gives it meaning...The agent engaged in practice knows the world but with a knowledge which, as Merleau-Ponty showed, is not set up in the relation of externality of a knowing consciousness. He knows it, in a sense, too well, without objectifying distance, takes it for granted, precisely because he is caught up with it, bound up with it; he inhabits it like a garment [un habit] or a familiar habitat. He feels at home in the world because the world is also in him, in the form of habitus, a virtue made of necessity which implies a form of love of necessity, amor fati.⁶⁰

To endure failure and persist in one's delusions is a way to claim one's right to a sense of *habitus*. I believe that the grotesco uses its sense of parapenality in order to claim a sense of habitus—a familiarity with the world that connects individual action to the future and the society as a whole.

Several critics have rightly pointed out the critique to the liberal project implied in the grotesco narratives of failure.⁶¹ I am interested here in how the grotesco criollo, in its attempt to claim a sense of habitus, gains a new awareness of its modernity. In this context, the narrative of immigration functions as a return of a repressed history, serves as site of negotiation of meaning between the foreign and the national, and presents an identity aware of its location at a peripheral modernity. In relation to a negotiation of national identity, the immigrant becomes, in the grotesco criollo, the material source of Argentine identity, and the incarnation of a Promised Land. The immigrant is bound up to this land; he inhabits it and it clothes him with an identity clearly located at a peripheral modernity.⁶² But this gain of a habitus needs a sort of exchange of burdens between father and sons. This exchange constitutes the ritual aspect of grotesco's claim to a habitus that facilitates the new generation's eventual exit from its own theatricalized space.

In effect, the father's burden is generally his own family whom he is unable to support. Still he chooses to trap his family in his own prison in an attempt to selfishly complete his own delusional narrative of success. The narrative of failure, combined with the generations split, authenticates the struggle as one emanating from Argentine belonging, but one that only the new generation will be able to fully realize. The grotesco character, in other words, expresses a desire for habitus that needs the outside, history,

society, and the future in order to project itself; in fact, he needs to escape his own internal “theatre.” The audience, as well as the new generation, needs to witness the father’s self-destruction to affirm its belief in achieving a sense of habitus. Failure and eventual self-destruction are ultimately felt as a ritual necessity by the protagonist. The ritual finally accords a level of practicality and authenticity to his actions. The sacrifice of the father, in this sense, also redeems the outside as a utopian space---a space that owes a greater degree of agreement with the habitus of the new generation. In fact, the grotesco protagonist ends up in a U-topia, a non-place, or void, as a way to gesture towards utopia as a place of fullness. Thus the grotesco immigrant embodies Argentine modernity in a movement of no return. U-topia is the sacrificial stage that redeems the new generation with a sense of its modern Argentine identity.

The gained sense of habitus, combined with a utopian projection to an undetermined future, creates a transitional space where a sense of empowerment and the possibility of persistent failure coexist. This is possible because it is now the collective space of the national that carries the burden of failure and not the individual, as was the case for the grotesco protagonist. This means that the national is reaffirmed as a democratic space where a fair degree of faith in the negotiations of power at the political level are reflected in each individual’s sense of habitus.

The appropriation of parapenality in grotesco can be summarized this way: parapenality is appropriated through a compression of space and the establishment of a ritual stage by entering the mixed space of representation. The ritual is motivated by a utopian impulse to move into a sense of habitus and out of the parapenal. The second part

of this chapter explores how *Magnus* shares aspects of the grotesco practice in its dealing with parapenalty and in its utopian impulse.

Grotesco and the structure of *Magnus*'s scenic space.

The function of the narrative of parricide in *Magnus* is best understood in the context of the operations of the grotesco tradition, as I have delineated them. One may say that the narrative of parricide challenges the ritual aspect of grotesco by showing it as taboo. The insertion of parricidal thoughts, in this context, problematizes the utopian impulse registered in the grotesco criollo practice. This explains the status of the sons as co-protagonists who must deal in some way with the failure of their own spatial practice. I am implying here, that, for various historical reasons, the sense of habitus that allowed the younger generation, including the spectators, to negotiate their immigrant history in favor of individual empowerment within a national space ceases to be a viable option by the time *Magnus* is written. In other words, the grotesco's sacrifice of the father, like in *Stéfano*, where the small orchestra musician dies after he discovers the delusion of his belief in being a talented composer, was able to redeem the young generation by endowing it with a more efficient habitus. In *Magnus*, the parricidal impulses indicate that such sacrifice is problematic or provokes ambiguity in the sons.

In *Magnus*, the characters engage in a series of enactments in which the oppressed sons try to outdo the oppressive father in his desires. In the grotesco criollo, the correct identity for survival and achieving success was measured in terms of practicality as a reaffirmation of habitus. Monti's play, on the other hand, reveals a Nietzschean performance of socialized *ressentiment*--of abject identification of the

oppressed with an oppressor. The play's scenic space is governed by a different logic, where desire supersedes need, since "man does not live by bread alone" (as Magnus proverbially tells his sons). Performance is here a cultural practice that lures spectators and performers into the love/hate feelings towards the powerful--a libidinal investment represented, in the play, by the parricidal narrative. This theatre interpellates actors and audiences, not because they wish to be transformed by the practical coincidence of needs and actions, but because they wish to authenticate their own desire for power. The perception of power, which has come to the fore by Magnus's return to his household, creates a moral crisis in the sons that could be articulated by the questions "do I deserve power?" or "is my desire for power legitimate?" These questions demand resolution. The representation of desire in the prologue, therefore, responds to a wish of correspondence between desire and power, solving thus the moral dilemma. The parricidal narrative functions thus as a self-fulfilling prophecy, since it is the force of forbidden desire, from this perspective, that will potentially lead one to power.

The action of the play shows that the need for representation (of desire) leads paradoxically to theatre as parapenal institution--an economy of desire governed by the self-censorship of the critic, the middle class moralizer, and the intellectual who tacitly condemn the excesses of the libidinal patriarch. The character of Magnus, in this respect, enacts his own response to the untold desire of the sons in the prologue---he performs power in the form of libidinal excess in order to exert a sort of oedipal fascination on the sons. To this end he brings with him his latest conquest, the young Julia, whom he presents as a replacement to his deceased wife. I am insinuating a circular logic connecting parricidal desire and Magnus's response, or *Magnus* and its own prologue, in

order to explore its layered scenic space and its performance mode. But we can establish for now that there is a material site of theatrical representation and a second layer of ritual authentication through performance. The first layer deploys an oedipal narrative that works teleologically towards resolution through parricide. The second is a simulation that signifies a surrendering to the demands of representation. The incorporation of Julia into the performance dynamic of the play in act one will clarify the dynamics of this layered performance.

Simulation and *Magnus's* space.

In the geography of *Magnus's* setting, the layer of simulation is marked as a place—the living room—which, becomes a “place for performing.” The empty stage, set aside for performance, conceals the material scenic space, site of the destiny of “Argentine” bodies, and serves to implicate the audience in its parricidal narrative. The performance becomes simulation, in the sense that the appearance of bodies on this “place” is dependent on the signifying of filial revolt. With the preponderance of the sign, the place becomes both stage and theatron.

The main action structuring act one is the incorporation of Julia, a young woman brought into the family unit by Magnus. The manner in which Julia is incorporated demonstrates that her entrance sets off a different dynamic of performance, as if a certain structure had been created as a preparation for her entrance (as demonstrated by the prologue). The act begins with the entrance of Magnus and Julia. Magnus introduces the empty place to his young guest as “the living room. Or the stage, as the boys call it” (49). The living room/stage is a reminder to the spectator that the narrative of parricide serves

as pretext for another performance in which Julia has a key role. One may even add that Julia will complete the performance and make it more real. The need for a more persuasive reality is evoked by the description of the house by Magnus as “a little large,” where “sometimes even [they] get lost” (49). The “new” reality begins when Magnus shows off Julia to his sons as his sexual conquest. From this point on, Magnus becomes “directorial.” His first indication to Julia is to “give [him] that little hand... (*He takes Julia’s hand.*);” And then he tells her: “That’s it...Now give me a smile. A beautiful smile for this bossy but inoffensive fatty” (49). Magnus even gives Julia instant advice on how to easily enter a mode of performance by “deliver[ing] oneself from all preconceived notions. [To] deliver oneself up, white and naked, to the moment” (49). The “moment” is an illusory temporality, which would be experienced through the coincidence of Julia’s surrendering and our acceptance of the always-already-there theatrical institution, with its structure of audience, stage, actors, and representation. In other words, Julia’s “performance” will be successful only if it adds “nothing” to a preexisting practice set up by the institutional theatrical practice. In this performance, which is ostensibly directed by Magnus, the father asks his son Gualterio (he calls himself “Wolfi” [Wolfy]) to greet the young woman. The dialogue shows that, for Julia, it is enough to “fill in the blanks” with her own name in order to perform well. This is shown in the following dialogue:

Magnus: “From now on, she’s going to be our friend. Her name is...

Julia: Julia.

Magnus: Julia, that’s right. Wolfy, I want Julia to be like a mother for you, understood?

Wolfy: Yes, Papa. [50]

In terms of practice, this performance appears to “borrow” a body for which one is both actor and spectator. As a result, the distance between performer and spectator is reduced, creating a state of paranoia, since one can be interpellated as one or the other, or both at the same time. The imposition of roles and their reversibility constitutes simulation’s parapenal function.

Graciela Castellanos, the actress who played Julia in the original production, provides a rationalization for her embodiment of the character that is telling with respect to my description of simulation as a double interpellation. She describes the character as “somebody looking for an image of herself while not having it clear [...] She was continuously trying to find herself reflected in something [...] She let herself be attracted by images.”⁶³ The logic of her characterization suggests that as an actress her own body became also the occasion to be a spectator of Julia as the character became reflected in images. The character’s lack of definition allows the actress to use images, both to lend her body to an image or borrow the image for herself. The actress’s internal images become the Stanislavskian means for the inhabiting of simulation by “borrowing” her own body as a reflection.

Magnus, within this scheme of borrowed bodies, functions as ward of simulation. His summoning of performance functions as a call to order. Monti’s didascalía describe such summoning in the following manner:

The Sons and Julia have formed a group, from which there emerges a guffaw [...] Magnus turns towards them. All movements are almost automatic, without any apparent motivation, and simultaneous. A kind of dreamlike change in the action [...] Julia goes to Magnus, with almost a

hypnotic resignation. The Sons form a tight, envious group of spectators.

[51]

But as soon as Julia and Magnus begin their “performance” of Magnus’s seduction of Julia in a bar, the sons abandon their position as spectators in order to create the environment for the play within the play (by incorporating themselves in the role of waiters). This sequence puts in evidence a specific dynamic of performance, with its own imaginary spatial delineation. It appears as an ever-enlarging structure made possible by the widening incorporation of spectators (the sons) who in turn become performers (for each other and the audience of the play *Magnus*), building thus a pattern of ever greater concentric circles--of ever greater magnitude. For instance, the spectator in the theatre, watching *Magnus*, is each tacitly consenting (according to the performance’s imaginary spatial logic) to become a performer for a wider audience. If there is an outside of performance, it is always deferred to the next peripheral level, which is the site relegated for the spectator, or the now forgotten “eye of god” encrusted on the imaginary wall of the parapenal.⁶⁴

This spatial logic found an apt equivalent in the design for the Buenos Aires original production. Leonor Puga Sabaté’s scenography was an apparently hermetic cube, with no perceivable “outside.” Nevertheless, invisible doors allowed for the entrance and exits of the characters, confirming its “theoretical” function of parapenality, that is, of making the dimensions of the “prison” absolutely relative. The set even included a small window high up, suggestive of a condition of surveillance.⁶⁵ The incorporation of ever wider circles into the space of performance seems to have been reflected in the stage performance and its reception also. One review speaks of an effect of “reverberation” and

“agglutination” [empaste] attributed to the various centers of action and spectatorship on the stage.⁶⁶

This is the space of simulation which, can be understood as a disciplining space, that is, in Foucault's sense, a mechanism of normalization. This space corresponds to a “type of power, a modality for its exercise,” and more than a “‘physics’ or an ‘anatomy’ of power, [it is] a ‘technology.’”⁶⁷ Its spatial logic results in the production of an infinite space that relativizes the location of the stage, which has now no inside or outside.⁶⁸ In this space Magnus is able to incorporate Julia into the scheme of the performance by simply calling for a confirmation of her own paranoia--he asks: “Dear, could you tell me where we are?” To which she can only respond: “Here or there. One side or the other. Only a step separates the two, one never knows” (53). This should be considered the expected answer, which helps us understand that Magnus does not produce the performance, but enforces a specific spatial configuration. It is the space that allows the narrative to become a performance rather than a mere representation. In the performance, the narrative is being authored rather than represented so that it does not precede the performance. The oedipal narrative (Julia has come to replace his late wife Bibí, and the sons will rebel against him) is in a sense overdetermined because it is authored and enacted in the same instance.

We see Magnus “authoring” the narrative when he tells his sons a story: “I was at the bar, holding a hot cup of coffee and a lit cigarette,” he recalls, “and Julia [was] out there trembling in the cold” (52). In assuming simultaneously both the roles of character and spectator Magnus also short circuits the usual feedback loop between performers and spectators. For example, he relishes his own credibility or lack thereof by saying,

“everything moves me” and then yelling to the sons: “I already know that you don’t believe me” (52). With the neutralization of feedback, the private or internal rehearsal so crucial to grotesco criollo’s habitus is replaced by a trial-and-error tactic integral to the performance. In other words, Magnus allows himself to repeat the action “from another angle” until it succeeds. For example, he tries insulting, inspiring pity, and then inciting the admiration of others in order to overcome Julia’s resistance to his invitation to become a “companion” to his sons (54). Finally, it is simulation’s spatial logic (of infinite concentric circles of stage/auditorium) that forces the characters to become collective “authors” of the narrative. This logic allows Magnus to leave the “stage” and let things “happen” as they must, that is, by letting Julia “decide.” Julia cannot decide because she is left both within and outside of her performance. The Sons, who have been watching the performance, encourage Julia to leave, but Magnus’s tactics have now confounded her sense of location, without which she is unable to act. Therefore, in the end, Magnus decides for her by “retelling” her story: “when I returned,” he explains, “you were still at the table. That cigarette between your fingers was burning down to the butt. I said to you, ‘Let’s go, sister.’ And without a word, you got up and followed me” (54).

The de facto incorporation of Julia into the narrative scheme marks also the incorporation of the play’s audience into the logic of performance. The audience is put in the role of the sons who acquiesce to the sequestration of Julia’s body as co-actor and co-spectator. Together, they advance their own interpretation of a performance already determined by its oedipal narrative. We’ll see that Julia’s status as icon is in fact the symptom of this collective sequestration.⁶⁹ In her new situation, Julia ends up being used by the men as a medium for meaning negotiation.

Julia admits that she has entered “the house,” and reveals her sense of having become iconized in the process—she asks Magnus what she “means” to him, to what Magnus answers: “A whore. Is that what you want? An Angel. A lost little lamb. A woman of the world. Anything” (56). The answer shows symmetry between the enigma of Julia as icon and the appropriation of her body as object of interpretation. In this respect, Julia is like the material side of the audience’s “gained” interpretive practice. Interestingly, Magnus also lets things “happen as they must” with respect to the interpretive practice—“What a relief! But no, I don’t have any idea. (Pause),” he concedes; thus disappropriating Julia as a sign (of anything). The process of iconization comes, therefore, with an extra gain for the audience: Julia, as icon, becomes also a sign of freedom of interpretation and exchange of signs. When Magnus finally tells Julia: “You can stay,” he is tacitly responding to an acquiescing audience ready to capitalize on this freedom (56). The incorporation of Julia in the play is a metatheatrical comment on the reliance by the audience on the iconization of bodies. The icon, here, allows the audience to assert its interpretive freedom. This freedom belongs to the space of simulation. Its capacity for reproduction as a sign allows us to relate it to the commodity and its reproduction in the market. We will see that this “freedom” explains also the iconic power of Julia’s gender.

By stepping back from interpretation, Magnus helps to make of iconization a collective act and of the space of performance a field that inverts the signifier/signified referential logic. In the presence of iconic bodies, relegated to a condition of “pure” presence, “freedom” becomes a sort of floating *signified* circulating through bodies and objects. Magnus, for example, projects this freedom *through* the icon when he says,

“[he]’ll go through [Julia’s] body like a gust of wind blowing over the earth” (53).

Freedom allows for the accumulation of signs and the temporal reproduction of freedom as signified. The enigma of Julia, or of her gender constituted as pure presence, is the enigma of commodities, which is, as Lefebvre notes,

entirely social. It is the enigma of money and property, of specific needs and the demand-money-satisfaction cycle [...] Once it is apparent, there is no call to decode it; it has no need of decipherment after the fashion of the ‘beings’ of nature and of the imagination. And yet, once it has appeared, its mystery deepens. Who has produced it? Who will buy it? Who will profit from its sale? Who, or what purpose, will it serve? Where will the money go? The commodity does not answer these questions; it is simply *there*.⁷⁰

The enigma of Julia as commodity is reflected at the level of the play’s oedipal narrative. Moreover, the narrative may appear now as a device for the sort of (commodity) exchanges occurring in the play. In effect, Julia’s presence exists as a replacement to the dead mother, Bibí. As such, her youth serves to deepen the mystery of her significance. Graham-Jones has pointed out that the name Bibí, “homophonically recalls *viví*, literally ‘I lived’ or the familiar command “live!”⁷¹ The homophony suggests that Julia, as a commodity, may stimulate the sons’ memory of their mother, their forgetting, or even their desire. The various options of interpretation serve also to reproduce freedom (of interpretation) as signified. Yet this freedom, this commodity produced in the context of an oedipal narrative, reminds us of Luce Irigaray’s feminist and Marxist critique of culture’s privileging of the male sex as standard of symbolic

order. Freedom here reveals its root in the "exclusive valorization of men's needs/desires, of exchanges among men."⁷² Therefore woman becomes an abstract measure of exchange value, a commodity whose value is evident only "when they are compared by and for man."⁷³ The nature of Julia's iconicity may be understood through Irigaray's explanation that "*In order to become equivalent, a commodity changes bodies. A super-natural, metaphysical origin is substituted for its material origin. Thus its body becomes a transparent body, pure phenomenality of value.*"⁷⁴ In fact, the incorporation of Julia (and the audience) in a field of "pure phenomenality," or pure presence, shows the role of the audience in a movement between the spatial layers of stage representation and performance.

The presence of Julia parallels the presence of the audience within the interpretive space of theatre. Julia's participation as icon parallels the audience's participation as interpreter. From this perspective, one may say that Magnus's function is simply to allow the icon into the theatre. In that same vein we may interpret Monti's hint to include an erotic pop poster in the scenic design as a mirror of Julia's new status.⁷⁵ Whether we consider Julia's presence, her participation, or both, will modify the perspective from which the play achieves its logic. Because of the bond that both spectators and performers establish with the icon, there is no way to separate performance from interpretation. It thus becomes a simulation--a place, from which, as Baudrillard tells us, "it is no longer a question of the ideology of power, but of the scenario of power."⁷⁶ The scenario exists in a particular spatial imaginary occupied by performers and spectators who effect "a short-circuit of reality and to its reduplication by signs." Baudrillard adds, with typically dystopian irony, that "it is always the aim of ideological analysis to restore

the objective process; it is always a false problem to want to restore the truth beneath the simulacrum.”⁷⁷ Still, the dynamics of performance in *Magnus* indicate that simulation corresponds to a historical practice that appropriates bodies and reproduces the phenomenological enigma of commodities. In the context of the play, Baudrillard’s comment also implies that the character of Magnus does not have to be necessarily read as a representation of power, but simply as part of the scenario of power which, in the play, takes the form of an oedipal narrative.⁷⁸

Meanwhile, the character of “Old Lou,” described as the defeated rival of Magnus, may well represent the antithesis of the commodity and consequently his uselessness in the space of simulation. A look at this antithetical character will help us make a clearer distinction between the oedipal narrative and the space of simulation, or, more precisely, to see narrative and simulation as autonomous elements. Lou looks into the action of the play from a window and appears to be excluded even from the pleasures of performance brought about by the presence of Julia. The sons protest against Lou’s entrance through the window. Their exclamations of --“He’s dirty! He Stinks! He’s old! He could die in here then we’d be responsible--” suggest that Old Lou could well be a representation of the 1920s grotesco father who seems out of place in the space of simulation (57). The old-style grotesco father has lost the redeeming value that had been accorded to his own failure and temporal impracticality. The sons’ reaction to Lou’s presence reveals, on the other hand, a repressed fear of failed performance, perceived this time at the level of appearance/ representation, without the grotesco criollo’s concern for practicality. From the perspective of a grotesco tradition, Old Lou has been replaced by Magnus because he, unlike Old Lou (who is handicapped by a deep sense of failure), is

always able to represent desire. This “replacement” is reenacted in a scene that Lou and Magnus perform for the others. In this scene the oedipal narrative is expanded by insinuating that Magnus had taken Bibí, his wife, from Lou and that, after ‘enjoying her,’ Magnus had killed her (63). This revelation, rather than intensifying the oedipal narrative, appears to parody it and neutralize it, as if the oedipal logic itself, like the old grotesco, were deserving of the attribute of failure. Old Lou, who used to represent the authenticity of habitus, has failed, ostensibly, because of the harshness of his surrounding habitat. Yet, Lou, somewhat ironically, asks Magnus to replace his (Lou’s) *imaginary* with a more fitting one that Magnus would “sell” him. Lou’s gesture suggests that he himself is giving up on pursuing the oedipal line of his own story. But Magnus falls into Lou’s trap when this last refuses to take Magnus offer of a product, which is presented in its most abstract form: a sales pitch describing it as “the essence of your own dreams and projects, the culmination of forty centuries of culture” (63). Lou forces Magnus to reveal the abstraction of commodities in order to reject them. As a result, Lou is able to remain outside of simulation and trap himself in the material scenic space of the grotesco lying beneath it. Old Lou appears as sole witness of the individualized space of grotesco criollo. The other characters define themselves by a relation of difference with respect to Old Lou—they constitute a collective rather than a group of individuals. They are invested in performance rather than practicality. Meanwhile, the sales pitch represents a social process of commodification and is used in the play to involve the audience in that process as well.

The perfecting of the “sales pitch” structures the performance in *Magnus*. It parallels the oedipal narrative. Within this scheme, the Magnus/Lou scene farcically

represents the culmination of the sales pitch when it is described mockingly by the sons as “avant-garde theatre.” This enacted reference to theatre practice establishes the contemporariness of the performance. It is followed, in the rest of the play, by references to other forms, like “expressionism, farce, mystery play, Elizabethan theatre, and even children’s games.”⁷⁹ These “presentations” are like a loose genealogy of the performance of *Una noche con el sr. Magnus & hijos* and its representation of an oedipal narrative. These enactments emphasize, in a Brechtian manner, the transactional nature of these performances. In the self-titled scene, “funeral for our dearly departed mother,” the ritual performs a transaction in which the ashes of the dead mother are exchanged for the existence of her “soul.” This performance mirrors the exchange of the memory of Bibí, presented in a photograph, for the totem-like presence of Julia during the “fertility cult” ritual in the scene that follows. The discovery of a knife, at the end of the first act, prompts the possibility of a more radical transaction: the killing of Magnus to appropriate Magnus’s performance of power. All these exchanges have one thing in common: the sacrifice of bodies for the sake of their iconic power as symbols of destiny. In retrospect, Magnus’s “sales pitches” appear as an invitation to parricide, or, what ends-up being equivalent in terms of practice, the commodification of the oedipal narrative through performance. Magnus is also part of this performance or scenario and his persona may indeed correspond to historically specific perceptions of power in the Argentina of the late 60s and its production of space. The historical context shows more specifically how the oedipal and the iconic function separately.

Magnus's scenario and 1960s Argentine politics.

Monti's play was written in the late 60s, in the years of General Juan Carlos Onganía's dictatorship (the self-labeled "Argentine Revolution" of 1966-69). The play deals with the political reality of Argentina after Perón. The oedipal strain in Argentine politics was felt in the persistence of the patriarchal figure of Perón as ghostly guarantor of mass support. In effect, since the fall and exile of Perón in 1955, political discourse in Argentina had been articulated in relation to Perón and Peronism, either in an effort to negate and bury it, or to revive it. The figure of Perón was thus experienced by all political tendencies of the time as a return of the repressed. What was being repressed was an Argentine identity formed in the years of Peronism. The populist appeal of the charismatic figure of Perón was emblematic of an Argentine modernity negotiating its relative independence from European and American centers of capitalism with a fictitious "third position" intermediate between capitalism and communism.⁸⁰ A desire for a modern Argentina, becoming a power in its own right, was translated into a nationalist politics that produced the illusion of the nation as a third center, or an off-center of capitalism. In Perón's speech of June 28, 1944—for example—we can see the leader's effort to construct a genealogy of Argentina's "manifest destiny" based on its peripheral colonial past. He stated that

The Argentine Republic is the product of the Spanish conquest and colonization, which brought to our shores the cross and the sword, joined together like brothers with a single will. And in these present times it seems as if that extraordinary conjunction of spiritual forces and of power

will again be created, representing humanity's two greatest symbols: the Gospel and the Sword.⁸¹

The invocation of colonial symbols of power for nationalist ends is an example of Perón's desire to give a peripheral modern identity to Argentina. Perón's use of the Gospel and the Sword are like rehearsal tools for realizing an Argentine national habitus. Perón came to power in 1945 and the success of his leadership could be interpreted like a success of the Argentine habitus. In effect, Perón exercised the Argentine "body" and Psyche with a concerted management of the Church, the military, and the working class. Historian José Luís Romero describes how Perón's government was able to maintain stability by "threatening the army with the popular masses and with the specter of a general revolutionary strike, while intimidating the workers' organizations with the apparition of the army and of military dictatorship."⁸² In fact, "Peronism represented a social pact with the nationalist sectors of the bourgeoisie in alliance with organized labor."⁸³ The support that Perón gathered and sustained from proletarian groups was crucial to his experiment.

The specter of Perón's "successful" paternalism, its moral legitimacy based on the support of labor, was a major influence on the (oedipal) political discourse of the 60s. In 1955, the military ousted Perón. His deposition provoked a political crisis, which was expressed around issues of legitimacy and national identity. *Magnus*'s oedipal enactments perform, in this context, a repressed function of Nietzschean resentment towards Perón as emblem of political power in Argentina.⁸⁴

When a military junta forced the resignation of Perón, the government sought ways to gain support of the same Peronists that it had alienated. The president of the

deposing junta, General Eduardo Lonardi, for example, had declared that this “revolution of liberty” [revolución libertadora] [...] would produce “neither vanquished nor victors” [ni vencidos, ni vencedores].⁸⁵ He meant that an Argentina without Perón would be an Argentina with no need of Perón, capable of maintaining a stable identity while absorbing the Peronist resistance. This idea crystallized in the notion of “Peronism without Perón,” suggesting the need for a more bureaucratized leadership which would internalize the power of the charismatic leader while effacing the emblematic power of Perón’s name.

When the military failed to disguise itself with a neo-Peronist identity, it shifted its strategy from the demagogical containment of heterogeneous interests to a fight for moral legitimacy. The need to ignore the demands of labor by local economical interests and the need to pursue a nationalist politics while negating the pro-labor legacy of Perón were some of the contradictions of political discourse of the time. While Perón used his paternalistic power (even while in exile) to apply the cohesive glue of mass support, the military gradually moved into a moral offensive in its efforts to suppress opposition forces. The offensive was possible in part by the investment that political discourse had in an Argentine national identity. In this respect, to be free of Perón was an opportunity to discover “true” Argentineness, as a basis for self-discipline and as carrier of historical momentum. The vilification of Perón as the “fugitive tyrant” (el tirano prófugo), the dismantling of Peronist hierarchy (principally in the unions), and the abolition of the 1946 constitution were some of the measures taken by the liberal wing of the military, under General Pedro E. Aramburu, to exclude Peronism from the renewal of Argentine identity.⁸⁶ Besides manufacturers and farmers, a large portion of the middle class supported the liberals. This indicates that the middle class was also invested in an

Argentine civil identity that didn't include the participation of the Peronist working class. The belief in a "true" Argentina, one that would be revealed through a new beginning, or renaissance, was a factor for "the ease with which the coup was welcomed" at first.⁸⁷ This (post)oedipal belief or ideology that usurps Peronist legitimacy through an appropriation of "Argentineness" as new sign of legitimacy is represented in *Magnus's* narrative, that is, its (oedipal) appropriation of Julia.

Julia's incorporation has shown that the performance also involves the self-sequestration of audience and actor/characters' bodies and interpretive power in order to produce iconic authentication. This process should be distinguished from the oedipal appropriation. In Argentina, the sequestration process was visible when the country becomes a site of an immanent project of moral relocation. In the moral battle of the mid-60s there is no "outside" of Argentina. In the words of General Onganía, "the community organizations within the new circumstances which the Revolution has created [...] are being reborn and relocating themselves in their *proper* place."⁸⁸ Argentineness is not defined in opposition to an outside non-Argentineness but in relation to itself. Identity is being reassessed in terms of moral legitimacy by performing a process of internal "relocation." In *Magnus*, the incorporation of Julia corresponds to this internalizing shift, where the outsider becomes insider as witness of an Argentine "spiritual unity." Thanks to Julia-as-internalized-audience the play becomes a performance. Both in *Magnus* and in Argentina, the "new" insider is now treated as true or false and serves a crisis that seeks resolution through the social or collective body. The space of performance is here "a panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanisms."⁸⁹

With Julia's entrance, the phenomenal foregrounding of the icon's commodity form resolves the contradiction between needs of exclusion and incorporation, of liberation and identity, of autonomy and legitimization, that informed Argentine politics in post-Peronist 60s as well as the behavior of the sons in *Magnus*. In effect it is the exchange value of commodities and bodies that allows for the proliferation of signs of "individual" freedom as well as the production of a public space, or marketplace where a sense of the collective can be renewed. The simulation in *Magnus* reveals that iconization and commodification have actually a neutralizing function with respect to identity and morality. The performance, in other words, legitimizes and delegitimizes, individualizes and de-individualizes, because our acting and spectatorship are constantly challenging each other. During Onganía's "Argentine Revolution" this challenge is intensified through the military's strategy of moral exclusion that ruptures the sense of Argentine location. On the side of power, this strategy was "the implementation of a forced discrimination of large sectors of the population, many of which had been previously incorporated by Perón's populist, nationalist politics."⁹⁰ Proaño-Gómez sees the effects of this strategy in the "poetics of rupture(s)" that permeate cultural texts at the time of the Onganía dictatorship. She says:

The poetics of rupture(s) deploys a reality that is deeply divided into two incompatible spaces [...] To each one of these spaces correspond also the "bodies" that inhabit them and whose perception depends also on the position from which they are described or valued.⁹¹

The rupture of space and the destabilization of location only exacerbate the effect of iconization of bodies and bring them to a level of terror. In the end, it is the "insider" that

is interpellated with the imperative to “relocate.” Proaño-Gómez’s analysis serves to corroborate this view when she notices a “symbolic inertia” in the metaphors used by both the discourse of power and the opposition: “the categories that are valued unanimously as positive are Unity, Being, Reality, Truth, Authenticity, the Movement, Health and Energy. The negative categories are Fiction, Appearance, Non-being, Statism, Illness and Death.”⁹² This shows that Onganía’s emphasis on “spiritual unity” had an interpellating power that worked on both sides of the polarized space, since it invoked an inalienable “reality” of national “spirituality”.

The moral discourse served, from this perspective, to multiply the possibilities for transgression and to transfer the struggle for legitimization from the elites unto the general population. The country is seen, not as place, but as a space in need of surveillance--in need of incorporating itself as a unified place for Argentine identity. The parapenal manifests itself when the surface moral landscape translates into the immanent struggle of bodies to escape its carceral logic. Yet it is this same effort that ends up in a production of symbolic capital. In *Magnus*, this process of accumulation of signs of “real” or imagined freedom is presented quite farcically. In effect, Julia and the three sons have many opportunities to enjoy themselves by acting beyond the demands of their performances. For example, in act one, Santiago grabs the woman’s behind—an action that results in the sadistic enjoyment of Magnus and Julia, both of whom beat and kick him. The violent action is followed momentarily by an evangelical tableau of Julia offering water to her own victim. The symbolic image appears here as a benign, that is, commodified version of a violent process.

The very process of commodification is seen here as a collectively and simultaneously performed cycle of transgression, punishment, and iconization. Here the roles of victim and victimizer are traded with the ease and speed of market exchange and contribute to the production of symbolic capital and its apparent neutrality. It is the site of a practice on an abstract space where “desire and needs are uncoupled, then crudely cobbled back together. And this is the space where the middle classes have taken up residence and expanded—neutral, or seemingly so, on account of their social and political position midway between the bourgeoisie and the working class.”⁹³ In Argentina, this site corresponds to the tacit acceptance of Onganía’s power in the first months after the coup. Polls showed that middle-class concerns for “the cost of life” influenced their belief in the impartiality of the government and its wish to make Argentina an ideal “place” for middle class comfort.⁹⁴ But it is also the site of fragmentation where opposing views will remap the moral landscape of Onganía’s version of Argentineness. In these “alternative landscapes” the polarization of included and excluded is qualified by “real” or “false” in order to refute and invert the normative interpellations of the dictatorship.⁹⁵ Proaño-Gómez notes, for example, how union leader Agustín Tosco recognized a “non invented Argentina” in the growing shantytowns of the suburbs.⁹⁶ Likewise, a political opposition (including Perón) perceived the “falsely” Argentinean economic plans of the government, which responded to transnational powers in contrast to a genuine commitment to social justice.⁹⁷ These discourses are invested in an empirical appropriation of “Argentine” space, which reclaims symbolic capital on the side of resistance. The symbolic value is made evident in the various (positive or negative) appropriations of “otherness” (foreign power, shantytowns) as markers of truthfulness or falsity. Such a process also converts

the space into a political theater where the “stage” of history is fragmented, making of it a u-topia, a no-place, up for grabs until it reaches “stabilization.” This unstable space is held together by its mirror, the icon, Julia/Bibí/virgin/whore/soul/etc. Julia is and represents “Argentineness” as commodity form.

Investment in the iconic value of Julia, for instance, was reflected in the reception of the original production. Actress Graciela Castellanos, who played Julia, was repeatedly questioned by the audience about the verisimilitude of her character’s transformation from innocent girl to prostitute, as if they were trying to protect Julia’s iconic value.⁹⁸ A review of the performance, likewise, approaches the question from a narrative point of view by describing the character as “a young prostitute or virgin (it is not quite clear).”⁹⁹ Proaño-Gómez’s quoting of an influential liberation theologian’s account of his own “conversion,” after the fall of Perón, is a testimony of empirical investment as source of symbolic capital. Father Carlos Mugica discovers the negative meaning of his own location in the upscale district (Barrio Norte) in contrast to the impoverished Villa Retiro, his place of work, where “the poor people were in mourning.” He reasons thus: “I had a sense of misplacement: I was on the opposing sidewalk...Indeed, I was on the wrong sidewalk” (42). The sight of poor people and the need to become incorporated into the other’s “stage” implies an iconization, not only of the other’s body but of one’s own, in the hope of symbolic exchange between bodies, of some form of commodification and circulation of symbolic capital. This compulsive exchangeability is evident in the desire to escape one’s prison as well as in the iconization of bodies. It finds its theatrical counterpart in the acting style suggested by Monti in the first edition’s preface to the play (1971). The author calls for “furtive gestures, or fake pathos, arbitrariness of the

imagination in particular, multiplying the internal allusions in an infinite play of mirrors, abrupt breaks in rhythm, jumps without transition to different zones of reality: in brief, every gesture should be a creation.”¹⁰⁰ This acting style indicates that the virtual fragmentation of space has replaced the carceral logic of the theatrical *mise-en-scène* (its demarcation of inside and outside). But the parapenial returns in the form of energy and expenditure. The additional energy required for moving across this space (signified by “breaks” and “jumps”) reveals an investment in form as well as in the creation of new meanings and potentialities. The performance thus calls for a doubling of the body in its experience of culture. It may appear at times as counterculture, whose potentialities, according to Lefebvre, “respond[] above all to the demands of a body ‘transported’ outside itself in space, a body which by putting up resistance inaugurates the project of a different space... a counterspace in the sense of an initially utopian alternative to actually existing ‘real’ space.”¹⁰¹ The fragmented space, even so, has a coercive effect as energies are more easily channeled towards compliance to normative demands. There is therefore a compensatory element to the expenditure of energies, particularly when bodies “resist.” The energy of bodies accounts therefore for both the freedom and unfreedom of performance. Monti’s model for this practice is something akin to “a circus spectacle, which puts reality into the unreal, within artifice.” “Everyday reality,” Monti continues, “does not give us reality anymore. We have to distort it in order to truly find it again.”¹⁰² Distortion, in Monti’s play, is not aesthetic, but a way to position his theatre within the space of simulation and its performance’s expenditure, or, as a perceptive reviewer of the performance expressed it, “the grotesque is false, only to the extent that it contains an ‘excess’ of truth.”¹⁰³

In order to “find reality,” Monti grounds this performance in the old grotesco scenic space, where the body, invested in habitus, is more aware of its expense of energy. In *Magnus*, the act of “distortion” is a wavering between the two layers of the scenic space. This wavering can be seen through the lens of crisis in the habitus sustained by an Argentine sense of autonomy as well as through the relation of this crisis to global shifts in capitalist production.

The increased presence of multinationals in Argentina, and a developing industry’s need for foreign investments, was seen as a threat to the country’s fictitious sense of autonomy. In the post-Peronist period, the acquiescence of the middle class to capitalist maneuverings of the country’s economy against the interests of labor became central to political power. As a result, “autonomous” identity was being negotiated at the time by both nationalist and democratic ideology, combining a politics of place and choice. Since 1959, the Cuban revolution had further complicated the imaginary scenic space of Argentine politics by giving labor the option to reposition its struggle in terms of worldwide class struggle. Even though the Peronist left generally resisted that notion, the army began to attack Peronism by conflating “working class or trade-union-based Peronist opposition with the new enemy: international or Cuban based communism.”¹⁰⁴ Thus, the vilification of communism allowed the political right to attack the nationalist legitimacy of Peronism. The democratic governments of the early 60s continued their efforts to boycott Peronist political participation while they projected a technocratic need to reorganize the country’s economy. Under Arturo Frondizi’s presidency (1958-1962), labor had to be kept in check while plans of industrial development, which were heavily dependent on foreign capital (and signified only an illusory economic recovery) were

executed. Arturo Illia's government (1963-1966) sought populist favor (without including labor) by trying to protect middle class consumption through a protectionist policy and control of wages and prices, which itself worked against the needs of manufacturers and farmers for capital flow and foreign investment. A wave of strikes in early 1966 put in evidence the failure of the government to coopt working class support. Onganía's coup, on that same year, represented a plan to restore "true democracy" after installing a period of "stabilization." This crisis of nationality corresponds to the intensification of global strains in the capitalist world. This would lead, according to David Harvey, to a transition from Fordism to flexible accumulation. By the mid sixties "the West European and Japanese recoveries were complete, their internal market saturated, and the drive to create export markets for their surplus output had to begin."¹⁰⁵ International competition grew, challenging the hegemony of the United States. A loose monetary policy on the part of the United States and Britain maintained "the momentum of the post-war boom" while creating inflation and excess funds. Third World development and the move of multinationals off-shore channeled capital flow while exporting capitalist tension with labor to these developing countries. The link of liberal national sectors, in Argentina, with multinational interests was a factor in the reinscription of national borders as referent of national identity. As David Harvey notes, the "serious diminution of the power of individual nations states [like Argentina] over fiscal and monetary policies" had a reactionary effect of making "localism and nationalism [...] stronger precisely because of the quest for the security that place always offers in the midst of all the shifting that flexible accumulation implies."¹⁰⁶ In this context, the focus on "Argentineness" and on its ephemeral "spirituality" may be seen as a symptom of a loss of faith in habitus, the

modernist belief in historical becoming, and a shift into “flexible postmodernity.” Harvey builds a table of oppositions between Fordist modernity and flexible postmodernity in order to bring the point of their interpenetration as tendencies in capitalist society as a whole. This table can be partly reproduced in order to differentiate the tendencies of the two layers of *Magnus*’s space, one of (modern habitus) and another of (postmodern) simulation. It would go like this (see table 1.):¹⁰⁷

Table 1: Habitus (in grotesco criollo) and simulation (in *Magnus*) as tendencies under capitalism.

Modern Habitus (as in grotesco criollo) ¹⁰⁸	Postmodern simulation (as in <i>Magnus</i>)
Paranoia/ alienation/ symptom [Stéfano’s paranoia about not being the accomplished musician he thinks he is]. [...]	Schizophrenia/ decentering/ desire [Magnus’s decentering of desire onto a place of performance]. [...]
Production capital/ universalism [Stéfano’s economic success is dependent on his talent being “universally” acknowledged]. [...]	Fiction capital/ localism [power is negotiated according to a fictional advantage within Magnus’s oedipal circle]. [...]
God the Father/ materiality [the outside “god” of fairness is measuring stick of inside material status in Stéfano’s household]. [...]	The Holy Ghost/ immateriality [Julia as icon, is immaterial mediator of meaning]. [...]
Blue collar/ avant-gardism [the mastery of habitus is like the mastery of one’s “work”]. [...]	White collar/ commercialism [simulation works like through a marketing of meanings: What is success? What is power? What is Argentineness?]. [...]
Utopia/ redemptive art/ concentration [Stéfano’s “ritual” death is redemptive to sons].	Heterotopias/ spectacle/ dispersal [<i>Magnus</i> ’s space functions according to widening circles of spectatorship and performance that tend to disperse the sons.]

With respect to this table of oppositions, Harvey asks:

What if the table as a whole itself constitutes a structural description of the totality of political-economic and cultural-ideological relations within capitalism? To view it this way requires that *we see the oppositions across as well as within the profiles as internal relations within a structured whole*. That idea [...] helps us dissolve the categories of both modernism and postmodernism into a complex of oppositions expressive of the cultural contradictions of capitalism. We then get to see the categories of both modernism and postmodernism as static reifications imposed upon the fluid interpenetration of dynamic oppositions. Within this matrix of internal relations, *there is never one fixed configuration, but a swaying back and forth* between centralization and decentralization, between authority and deconstruction, between hierarchy and anarchy, between permanence and flexibility. Between the detail and the social division of labour.¹⁰⁹

Likewise, I suggest that *Magnus*, by letting us see the layers of its space, also allows us to perceive it as “a structural whole,” while the performance makes evident a “swaying back and forth” between those layers, making the performance itself a “fluid interpenetration of dynamic oppositions.”

In order to connect to the materiality (the structural whole) of *Magnus*’s “project,” we must be attentive to the surfacing of a concrete space. In this respect, I return to Lefebvre’s notion of a production of space in order to connect to the material process at work, even in simulation.

***Magnus* and the production of space under capitalism.**

The process of commodification in *Magnus*, as we have described it, suggests a relationship between the commodity and the forming of space. As noted by Lefebvre,

the commodity, along with its implications –networks of exchange, currency, money—may be looked upon as a component of social (practical) existence, as a ‘formant’ of space. Considered in isolation, ‘in itself’, however, it does not have the capacity, even on a world scale, to exist socially (practically). And it is in this sense that it remains an abstraction, even though, qua ‘thing’, it is endowed with a terrible, almost deadly, power. The ‘commodity world’ cannot exist for itself. For it to exist, there must be labour. It is the result of a productive activity. Every commodity is a product (of a division of labour, of a technical means, of an expenditure of energy—in short, of a force of production). Under this aspect also the concept must be spatialized if it is to become concrete. The commodity needs its [concrete] space too.¹¹⁰

In relating the abstraction of the commodity world to *Magnus’s* simulation, we come to understand that the formation of simulation through commodification and iconization does not account for its production, that is, for the spatial practice that produces and reproduces it. Instead, what we perceive as simulation is the mode in which commodities dominate space because of “the economic wish to impose the traits and criteria of interchangeability upon places.”¹¹¹ Again, following Lefebvre, we may look at a built-in opposition within the concept of commodity. This may help unravel the

concreteness of the space of simulation and the manner of capitalist interpenetration of layers. In the commodity, the

opposition between exchange value and use value, though it begins as a mere contrast or non-dialectical antithesis, eventually assumes a dialectical character. Attempts to show that exchange absorbs use are really just an incomplete way of replacing a static opposition by a dynamic one. The fact is that use re-emerges sharply at odds with exchange in space, for it implies not ‘property’ but ‘appropriation’. Appropriation itself implies time or ‘times,’ rhythm (or rhythms), symbols, and a practice.¹¹²

For Lefebvre, therefore, it is the use-value of commodities that can lead us to the concreteness of its appropriation. Our appropriation of commodities is elusive to our consciousness because

only at the moment when the exchange cycle is completed, the moment just prior to consumption, do we observe the re-emergence of the product’s materiality, and of the need it answers—the re-emergence, in other words, of whatever natural (material, immediate) aspects still attach to the products of industry and of social labour.¹¹³

In order to allow the concreteness of our appropriation of nature and its spatialization in the world of commodities, Lefebvre suggests that we make use of Marx’s concept of “productive consumption,” for the concept indicates an act of elimination of material, energy, labor powers, and an apparatus. “It uses (up): it is a use and a use value. It also *produces*.”¹¹⁴ The model space for productive consumption is the machine. In effect,

a machine draws energy form a natural source [...] and uses it to perform a sequence of productive tasks [...] The result is a radical but contradictory transformation of the productive process: whereas labour is ever more divided and segmented, the machine is organized into an ensemble that is ever vaster, ever more cohesive, ever more unified, and ever more productive.¹¹⁵

Taking the machine as its model, Lefebvre attempts to draw a history of productive consumption by looking at the development of the town and city under capitalism. The town becomes

a vast machine, an automaton, capturing natural energies and consuming them productively [...] With the introduction of connections—of sewers, water supply, lighting, transportation, energy delivery (or flow), information channels and so forth, [...] the town has become a machine appropriated to a certain use—to the use of a social group.¹¹⁶

We may go back now to our understanding of habitus and its impulse at incorporation into a “logic in action,” and relate it to the logic of the city, its networks and flows of energy and material. From this perspective we can see habitus as productive consumption, using and reproducing the city with its spatial practice. With habitus, in other words, the body and the city must agree with each other. The city as “second nature” becomes the referent for the development of the body’s “second nature.” Thus, the city dweller puts his faith in rehearsing and achieving his own habitus. Habitus, then, is the productive consumption of the city within which commodities are circulated, consumed, and produced. As Harvey, describes it, citing Bourdieu, “‘habitus [is] a

durably installed generative principle or regulated improvisations' which 'produces practices' which in turn tend to reproduce the objective conditions which produced the generative principle in the first place."¹¹⁷ We may ask now why and how does the habitus become repressed, in *Magnus* as well as in late capitalism, under the surface of simulation. In other words, what is the model of productive consumption in *Magnus*'s space of simulation? A look at the second act of *Magnus* gives us some clues.

At the beginning of act two, a Renaissance banquet scene reenacts the oedipal complex as the envy of the sons for the hedonistic appetite of the father, who is placed "slightly higher than the rest" (70).¹¹⁸ A phenomenology of Nietzschean ressentiment for the hedonistic father shows that identification with the "other" is mediated by a kinship with the oppressing father and a continuous investment in simulation. The tentative nature of Magnus's superior placement is a clue to the ritual nature of the action and of the reciprocal nature, or leveling, of the relationship between father and sons. The kinship allows a form of compensatory performance that resolves feelings of lack. When the sons are unable to outdo their father with deeds, they will do it through words, intellectual skills, or mere self-aggrandisement. Gato quotes medieval Goliardic verses in Latin, praising an indulgent life of pleasure; Gualterio berates the indulgent rebelliousness of the verses while translating them for his father; and Santiago narcissistically aggrandizes himself in his own reflection in a glass of wine. Only Julia, who ends up vomiting, and Lou, who is busy catching the scraps of food thrown at him, fail to capitalize on the ritual family dinner. The familial dynamic shows envy being transformed into identification with the patriarch. The sons' compensatory actions are the catalysts of this transformation since their self-allowed indulgences produce a leveling of the family members' self-

valuation—they can now face their father as an equal. The leveling justifies an ingestive logic of accumulation (of capital), which could be expressed as a “right to property” balanced by a repression of moral impropriety.¹¹⁹ We can relate this leveling of self-valuation to the spatial practice of late capitalism where the generation of surplus value “has ceased to occur solely within an area close to the point of production, confined to a local banking-system. Instead, this process takes place through a worldwide banking-network [...] The realization of surplus value, has, so to speak, been ‘deterritorialized.’”¹²⁰ As a result, our very relation to power has been deterritorialized. The dynamic of resentment between the sons and their father signifies the distance from power that deterritorialization effects. In fact, the new efficiency of money circulation worldwide has given new impetus to capitalist command of space.” As Harvey notes, domination of marketing networks and spaces remains a fundamental corporate aim, and a bitter struggle for market share is fought out with the precision of a military campaign to capture territory and space. Accurate geographical information (including inside information on everything from political development to crop yields or labour struggles) becomes a vital commodity in such struggles.¹²¹

Urban space, though, Lefebvre reminds us, “continues to ensure that links are properly maintained between the various flows involved: flows of energy and labour, of commodities and capital.”¹²²

In terms of spatial practice, this means that the urban space maintains its practicality as a container of habitus, while it becomes also important to *influence* the spatial direction of capital circulation. In this respect, Harvey remarks that “in material

terms this means that those who can affect the spatial distribution of administrative, political, and economic powers can often reap material rewards.”¹²³ Thus rapid monetary circulation means that the money form is more ephemeral—it never quite materializes as a use value. This tension between the reality of power and the ephemerality of money is reflected in the identification with the father in *Magnus*’s banquet scene. Here, Magnus is a stand-in for power, hence his hedonistic and excessive representation. The intuition that Magnus has no real power, that his personification is excessive, is reflected in a performance review stating that the “ambiguous relations between dominators and dominated [...] reveals, with cruelty, the intrinsic weakness of Magnus.”¹²⁴ But Magnus is also a way for the sons to reclaim a right to power, to compensate for a lack of solid (or fixed) capital investment—hence the leveling of status through kinship with the father. The leveling is necessary for power through investment (appropriation of modes of production) to be replaced by power through simulation. Power is now socially produced through a production of space. In this respect, Harvey elaborates about the vast range of phenomena to be considered. Indeed,

it varies all the way from one neighbour inciting another to help improve local property values by painting the porch, through systematic pressures by land and property developers to put in water and sewer connections that will improve the value of the lands they hold, to the interest of military contractors in exacerbating geopolitical tensions (such as the Cold War) as a means to ensure bigger and better armaments contracts. Influence over the ways of representing space, as well as over spaces of representation, can also be important. If workers can be persuaded, for example, that

space is an open field of play for capital but a closed terrain for themselves, then a crucial advantage accrues to the capitalists. Workers, in conceding greater powers of mobility to capital, [...] might be more liable to concede before the threat of capital flight than would be the case if they were convinced that capitalists could not move.¹²⁵

The paradox of this space is that, even though it is socially produced, it does not make a collective space. Instead, it is on one side a strategic space where consensus is not a goal. On the other side it is a space whose ground compensates for the movement and flow of capital. In this respect, *Magnus*'s narrative of parricide represents the virtual abandonment, by a middle class who is most susceptible to the flow of capital, of old forms of recognizing power. Instead of recognizing power in terms of groups, classes, interests, centers, and property --power is understood as a measure of influence on the direction of capital flow. The sons' parricidal impulses are therefore a form of self-punishment, a way to castigate the ego for its final demise of collective identity to global flows and networks. Magnus, in other words, is the scapegoat for the sons' guilt. Living with guilt while denying it makes space for a double game. On one side there is an attachment to democratic aspirations, under laws that become more localized in relation to the vast spatial domination of networks. On the other side, it produces a space that denies the very logic of consensus. Thus guilt has here a double function of repression and safeguard. It represses habitus in order to leave room for the production of a space of simulation. It also rescues habitus in order to maintain some sense of (collective) identity needed to function in a space shared with others. We can draw now a fuller model of productive consumption in a space of simulation. The world of commodities is produced

and consumed by redefining power in terms of influence and by producing a space that is necessarily layered. This productive consumption leads to a guilt that is in turn repressed. Such repression blunts our awareness of the layers of a space that is both practical and strategic, both collective and compensatory.

The play dramatizes this guilt integral to simulation and consequently provokes our awareness of it. This occurs in the “ideological” debate (between Gato and Magnus), that follows the dinner. The chat is introduced as an “after dinner divertissement,” replacing the ingestive logic of the banquet with a digestive one. Here Gato is forced to engage in the conversation with “a full bladder.” Gato’s consent (on a full bladder) reminds us, not only that the debaters are sharing the same table, but also that the debate takes place with the complicity of father and son. Gato’s complicit engagement in debate with the father reminds one of the author’s own declaration about the complicity of his own practice. He said that

from the moment that [He] accept[s] with full responsibility to incorporate [his] practice within the circle of the bourgeois theatre and of a bourgeois aesthetics, [he] ha[s] to indicate with precision that [he is] addressing, in principle, a guilty audience...¹²⁶

Monti, in a way, appropriates the oedipal narrative in order to affect the reception of theatre (and therefore of his play) as well. Theatre itself becomes simulation, where the audience, in filial relationship to an “outside” spectator, fantasizes itself as the “critical side.” This, in Magnus’s telling words, made of “the martyrs, the idealists, the intellectuals [...] the artists!” (75). The new “outsider” is now also “inside,” in order to simulate the position of the parapenal “eye of god.” This fantasy aligns theatre to the

production of “opposition to power” as a symbolic capital, which circulates unevenly in the fields of “high” and “low” culture—“What would you like, Winston?” Magnus protests, “sublime art in the paws of the sinister hordes?” (75). The scene thus lays bare the complicity of theatre with the guilt of simulation and its affinity with the exclusionary function of “high culture.”¹²⁷

In this regard, we might point out the difference of reception of the first production when presented in Buenos Aires, and in the tour to the southern provinces.¹²⁸ The audience was more receptive in the provinces than in Buenos Aires where, Monti recalls, he encountered “a lot of refusal and incomprehension towards the performance.” This contrast could be attributed to the greater importance, in Buenos Aires, of a production of symbolic capital in the arts. This made the porteño audience more susceptible to the potential pessimism of the play because they expected messages where the solution is at least clearly implied. The audience also had difficulty in digesting a production that refused to create either a realist or sublime aesthetic, in which they were invested. Beatriz Hilda Grand Ruiz’s review, for example, saw a sterile vision in the cave-like world of the play.¹²⁹ Another reviewer refused to admit the legitimacy of the acting style by describing the actors as “absolutely unskilled.”¹³⁰ Germán Rozenmacher, in his review in *Siete Días Ilustrados*, wished more clarity in how the problem of the sons’ submission was presented. This should be done, according to him, with “dramatic truth” [verdad dramática]. His comment does not necessarily imply his preference for dramatic realism since he finds “truth” in the sublime and grotesque parody of the mother’s funeral.¹³¹ This reflects how “truth” was highly valued as symbolic capital by the Buenos Aires public. The southern public was, by contrast, much more open to

Monti's theatricalist proposition, aided by the program notes where the author declared the use of theatrical artifice as a medium for social content. Review titles such as "A Desperate and Grotesque Criticism to a 'Concentrationist' Society" and "A Farce for a Revelation" are indicative of such reception.¹³²

But the banquet scene goes beyond a mere suggestion of complicity by making Gato increasingly aware of his placement in a contradictory space. This is significant because this is where Monti appears to launch his challenge for a different representational space, one that, by working through contradictions, could prefigure a different production of space.

Magnus's challenge to theatre or for an alternative production of space.

The "ideological chat" in act two performs a sort of fall for the character of Gato, whose "full bladder" becomes a form of self-consciousness, a grotesque embodiment of his "guilt." It is as if the layer repressed through simulation had suddenly surfaced. The full bladder actually makes him aware of a passing of time. But it is not *his* time but a time of events lost to his own consciousness. In the Gato-Magnus exchange, the atemporality of symbolic capital, encapsulated in the notion of a "Promised Land"--eternal in its simultaneous presence and non-presence--clashes with Gato's acquired sense of time going by, and past, Magnus's house. This contradiction provokes a literal materialization of Gato's guilt in the vision of a "parade of contorted faces...their hunger, their frustration, their greed" (75). Gato, by inadvertently embodying his own guilt, thus sees human needs and frustrations in a different temporality than his own, and therefore, in a different space. His own space becomes a prison, a long dream from which he must

wake up and step out of. This moment I would characterize as “grotesco” because here Gato is entering a representation of his own performance. In other words, the image of a prison, or dream, is self-produced for the sake of modifying, or correcting, his own embodiment of space, just as the grotesco criollo’s protagonists did. In this sense, Gato’s internalization only reinforces his investment in performance since his escape from this “prison” can only be another performance.

The scene makes this clear when Gato admits to have “lost control” of his performance, which, in reality, is a way to find a footing on the layer of simulation, and earning him the applause of the audience within the scene. This occurs when, unable to give authenticity to his sense of alienation, he begs his audience to believe in his intuition of another space. The other space he sees at a distance, from where he hears voices “far away” while his own emplacement becomes an inescapable “no-man’s land.”¹³³ In relation to this distanced heterotopia, his admission to have “lost control” is double edged. Even though it implies a yielding to the forces of normalization, it also carries a potential for empowerment. This potential does not reside in the possibility of moving into another place or heterotopia, but in a different incorporation into performance. The thought of this option is possible by a kind of retroactive understanding of his “fall” into performance that leads him to recognize its contradiction. He can now deduce that to lose control of the performance is itself a performance. This moment of self-consciousness can destabilize the scenic space, because it constitutes a re-embodiment that adds friction to the layered space—they are now *felt*, as if they were active tectonic plates.

In effect, Gato’s vision of a “parade of contorted faces,” like bodies used up by an immense machine, may reveal that, unlike habitus, for which time has a use-value of

rehabilitation and reproduction of work force and practicality, the idea of rest from exertion is alien to performance. This absence may seem an abstraction from the local perspective of habitus, but gains reality in connection to global networks, where time never stops yielding (for the capitalist) its rates of profit. As Lefebvre would say, “The notion [in this case, of an absent time of rest] becomes concrete by becoming spatial (and vice versa: it is spatialized as it achieves concreteness).”¹³⁴ Thus Gato may get a sense of simulation grounding itself on two time frames that need superimposed spaces: a space of no rest for performance/ simulation/ capital, and a space for human and material reproduction that involves worldwide organic life/ work/ habitus. Now, Gato’s “fall into performance” means that he has to assume the contradiction of this layered space by doing the “work” of performance. This “work” connects him to the use value of performance: to produce *with his own labor* (as part of global social labor) a space aligned to the global flows of capital, labor, material, and information. By connecting to the use value of performance, Gato is already beginning to re-appropriate his own performance. For instance, he is now aware of the time for labor reproduction that simulation conceals from him. The challenge of appropriation is one posed by what Walter Benjamin calls “a materialist thought” where history itself becomes present to that thought. Walter Benjamin writes in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (XVI) that “the historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop. For this notion defines the present in which he himself writes is writing history.”¹³⁵ To stop time may indeed be impossible, but such thought is necessary from a materialist perspective, in order to “stop[] in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad”¹³⁶ Monti’s play, I suggest, produces a representational

space that aids in the “stopping” required for this thought. It does so by intensifying the frictions produced in a layered space. This exacerbation is indicated by the ritual nature of the parricide at the conclusion of *Magnus*.

The ritual starts after Gato’s “fall.” I have explained above why this moment constitutes a turning point, a sort of shock rather than a dramatic climax. For the characters involved (all of them I would say) the shock provokes a shift from guilt to responsibility. For the sons it means that there is no truth in their scapegoating. In *Magnus*, it prompts a confession that carries with it a kind of necessity, or fatalism—he says: “My success lay in anticipating everything. As soon as I saw something being born, I swallowed it up. And only later I offered it up as mine. I was a mirror all my life. A polished, empty surface. I made a fortune selling everyone back their own images. Of course, to all of you, too” (85). Following my line of interpretation, this confession means that *Magnus*’s performance was not needed in the first place for producing the power relations within the family. Monti himself has explained this in relation to *Magnus*’s death—he says, “if [*Magnus*] dies, it is because he has lost control over the performance as a whole—in other words, he has decided to stop performing or supporting the performance done by others.”¹³⁷ Therefore the sons must face the virtual disappearance of power or of its referent, as well as the purposelessness of their scapegoating. This is equivalent to a paradigm shift for which existing codes of representation are inadequate. The inadequacy of codes for representing this shift is reflected, for example, in Monti’s own assessment of the ending of the play. He asks: “What will the sons do with this truth [of *Magnus*’s death]? Will they be able to be upheld by it? Or will they transform it into a new mask behind which they will hide?”¹³⁸ This is important for an understanding of the

ritual as an attempt at codification, and therefore its intrinsic inadequacy as a performative gesture.

The shift also means that an enormous amount of energy, previously used in the oedipal family dynamic, is now released. Therefore, the ritualization also engages this energy release. Such energy seems to be part of a materialist thought that, for Benjamin, involves a perception of history and, in *Magnus*, an embodiment—

in order to blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history; blasting a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the life-work. As a result of this method the life-work is preserved in this work and at the same time canceled; in the lifework, the era; and in the era, the entire course of history. The nourishing fruit of what is historically understood contains time as a precious but tasteless seed.¹³⁹

Benjamin thus presents a thought that is full of energy, accounting for the release of a “life-work” and “work” until now repressed by our practice. The ritual is a way to encode this release within the oedipal representation. Therefore the ritual works also on two levels: it performs an end of the representation by concluding the narrative line with a parricide. On the other hand the ritual codifies the parricide as a way to achieve a “halting” in its thought and the related release of energy.

Having delineated the performative needs of the ritual, I can attempt now to decode it. Monti’s didascalia describes a syncopated formation and dispersion of the “parricidal” group, accompanied by the fragmented use of music, rhythm and silences;

when the rhythm has become unbearable, the military formation takes two quick steps and covers Magnus. There is a sudden, heavy silence.

Then we hear a subhuman howl. The line of the Sons circles again and we see the spectacle of Magnus's agony. The bloody knife lies on the floor. Magnus takes a few hesitating steps and falls. At this moment, the compact group of the Sons falls apart. Gualterio runs upstage and vomits [...] Silence. All remain motionless during a few long seconds in the middle of blinding white light. Then, a quick and complete BLACKOUT. [89]

The movement leading to the “killing” performs the ending of the representation while the dispersion away from the dead body and the expressions of disgust mark the realization of a virtual absence of power and the release of energy. Finally, the motionlessness at the end, under “blinding white lights,” marks the halting of thought. The ritual thus embodies the tectonic ground of a layered space in order to experience the shock of a paradigm shift.

Conclusion.

Magnus's “death” has the sacrificial function equivalent to the self-destructive end of the old grotesco criollo character, because, by leaving the fictitious center that he occupied, the layered space is revealed and a challenging thought is produced. Like in the grotesco tradition, the thought leaves us for a moment in a u-topia. It is a no-place between a space produced by our present practice and a different production of space. The play's end reveals a utopian impulse, but it is not utopian. Rather, my reading reveals that the play makes a concrete challenge to begin to own our spatial practice, starting with the representational space of theatre. Monti's aim, I believe, is not to

complicate or problematize, but to elucidate and challenge. This reading, therefore, also allows us to shift our understanding of other interpretations of Monti's work. I will give but the example of Horacio González as a kind of reference.¹⁴⁰ González suggests a rationale for what happens at the conclusion of the play based on the action on a single layer, occupied by the characters, that is, "the house of Magnus." From this perspective, he suggests there are only two options possible for the characters: "infinite performance or ritual murder." The two options impose themselves here as a kind of fatalism, condemning the characters to an unreal state because of some outside or metaphysical force. My own reading of the ritual as performative, allows us to reassert the positive relation between the "problem" condition of "infinite" performance and the "solution" of ritual. González adds that, "the secret wish of all the characters is to abandon the representation." Instead of re-inscribing the characters' entrapment, my reading can give a positive turn to this assessment, which, on some level, rings "true." In fact this is a positive wish, the challenge (historical, political and artistic) to produce a different representational space and a different production of space.

In order to understand this challenge, we've had to look back at a theatrical tradition of the 1920s and 30s where we found a specific way in which the modern urban space was appropriated by theatrical practice. More specifically, the intimate relation between parapenality and theatricality was found to be at the root of the potential for using theatre as a self-conscious spatial practice. This practice had to be contextualized in terms of historically specific social needs by the groups engaged in theatre production and spectatorship. The modernist periphery of the Buenos Aires metropolis of the early century was found to be the ground of a production and reproduction of habitus which the

grotesco criollo rescued from the contradictory space reflected in the sainete. The dynamics of simulation in Monti's play, *Una noche con el sr. Magnus & hijos*, was found to reflect the production of a layered space when Argentina enters its "postmodern" era. While simulation describes certain dynamics on a particular space, the practice should be more properly called performance. In order to link the practice of reproduction of habitus and performance to a production of space, I worked with Lefebvre's term of "productive consumption" (itself borrowed from Marx). The focus on a production of space was essential for defining the challenges posed by both grotesco and Monti's plays. The production of space in *Magnus* and its challenge for a different production will be starting points for further investigation into Monti's plays, their performances and to how the other plays respond to the challenge put forward by this first play.

¹ The hyphenation of "u-topia" is meant to signify a "non-place" or "placelessness" as opposed to "no place."

² Armando Discépolo, *Stéfano*, in Luís Ordaz, *Breve historia del teatro argentino*, vol. v, ed. by Luís Ordaz (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1962-1965), 53. All translation, unless otherwise noted, are mine.

³ Ricardo Monti, *An Evening with Mr. Magnus & Sons*, in *Reason Obscured: Nine Plays by Ricardo Monti*, trans. by Jean Graham Jones (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2004), 53. Unless otherwise noted, All quotes from Monti's plays in the course of this dissertation will be from Graham-Jones's translations in *Reason Obscured*.

⁴ Osvaldo Pellettieri, "El teatro de Ricardo Monti (1970-2000): la resistencia a la modernidad marginal," in Ricardo Monti, *Teatro*, tomo 2, ed. by Osvaldo Pellettieri (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 2000) 9-10.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ricardo Monti, Interview by Julio Ardiles Gray, *La Opinión Cultural*, Buenos Aires, March 27, 1977.

⁷ Jean Graham-Jones, "Aesthetics, Politics, and *Vanguardias* in Twentieth-Century Argentinean Theatre," in *Not the Other Avant-Garde: The Transnational Foundations of*

Avant-Garde Performance, ed. by James M. Harding & John Rouse (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2006), 181-82.

⁸ Ricardo Monti, *Revista Análisis*, Buenos Aires, June 23, 1977.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Press statements by Monti on the occasion of the theatre opening of *Una Noche con el Sr. Magnus & hijos* (1970), cited by Perla Zayas de Lima, in *Relevamiento del teatro argentino, 1943-1975* (Buenos Aires: Editorial R. Alonso, 1983), 115.

¹² Ricardo Monti, in “La difícil enseñanza de la libertad,” 38-42.

¹³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 296.

¹⁴ The sainete and grotesco criollo were actually Río de la Plata phenomena, but my discussion will center on the Argentine side, Buenos Aires, and not the Uruguayan side, Montevideo.

¹⁵ Jorge Monteleone, “El teatro de Ricardo Monti,” *Espacio de Crítica e Investigación Teatral* 2.2 (1987): 72.

¹⁶ In the original Spanish it is “lugar para representar.” “Representar” in Spanish means performed representation, signifying the function of the stage, a meaning beyond the Platonic sense of “representation.” Graham-Jones translates “lugar para representar” as “the stage.”

¹⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991), 26.

¹⁸ Ibid., 27.

¹⁹ Ibid., 34.

²⁰ See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 26-7.

²¹ Ibid., 296.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 294.

²⁴ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 49.

²⁵ Ibid., 57.

²⁶ Ibid., 36.

²⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 148.

²⁸ Lefebvre, 224.

²⁹ This dialectic between actors and spectators could be extended to all forms of theatre and plays, yet what I am emphasizing here is how Monti's play makes evident the condition of the theatrical event itself.

³⁰ Ricardo Monti, "El teatro, un espacio literario," *Tiempo Argentino*, Cultura, February 17, 1985.

³¹ Luís Ordaz, *Breve historia del teatro argentino, vol. iv* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1962-1965), 17.

³² David Viñas, *Grotesco, inmigración y fracaso* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Corregidor, 1969), 23.

³³ Silvia Pellarolo notes, in her study of the genre, that the sainete and its emblematic setting of *conventillos* celebrated a process of cultural hybridization between natives and immigrants in the working class suburbs of Buenos Aires. Pellarolo emphasizes the democratic spirit of this process, which she evidences in the carnivalesque logic of its cultural mode, inheriting the local, popular traditions of the circus and the tango. Yet, Ordaz and Viñas's evaluations suggest that the carnivalesque served also to assert the monumentality of a new urban landscape, which included a more commercialized theatre. See Silvia Pellarolo, *Sainete criollo/democracia/representación. El caso de Nemesio Trejo* (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1997), 50-71.

³⁴ For an account of the replacement of native circus for theatre in Buenos Aires, see Guido Podestá, "La reescritura de *Juan Moreira*: La política del decorum en el teatro argentino," *Latin American Theatre Review* 25.1 (fall 1991): 7-19.

³⁵ Edmundo Guibourg, "Introducción," in *Trejo, Pacheco, Novión, Vacarezza*, ed. by Edmundo Guibourg (Buenos Aires: A-Z Editora, 1987), 8.

³⁶ Susana Marco et al. define two kinds of sainete criollo: the "lyrical" and "playful moralizing" [divertimiento y moraleja]. The first is sentimentalist and didactic in relation of the values it imposes on the spectator. In the second, the humor, produced by the dialogue and the mixing of dialects, predominates within an arbitrary plot with tragic resolution. See *Teoría del género chico criollo* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 1974).

³⁷ See Donald S. Castro, "The Sainete Porteño, 1890-1935: The Image of Jews in the Argentine Popular Theater," *Studies in Latin American and Popular Culture* 21 (2002): 33-34.

³⁸ Juan Alberdi, for example, thought that “English liberty, French culture, North American, and European values” were needed foundations for the development of the Republic. See Juan Alberdi, *Bases y puntos de partida para la organización política de la República Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1984), 67.

³⁹ A first wave of immigration between 1860 and 1880 brought about 160,000 people. Between 1880 and 1910 300,000 more came. About half of the immigrant population settled in Buenos Aires. See José Luís Romero, *Breve historia de la Argentina*, augmented edition (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultural Economica, 19), 105.

⁴⁰ Micol Seigel, “Cocoliche’s Romp: Fun with Nationalism at Argentina’s Carnival,” *The Drama Review* 44.2 (2000): 59. See also Richard Slata, *Gauchos and the Vanishing Frontier* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 179.

⁴¹ This strategic consensus between liberals and nationalists is partly explained by the fact that both political currents, as Patrice Mc Sherry notes, are “deeply invested in the creation of a national identity”: economic liberalism needs the disciplining of a working force under the banner of national character. The nationalists, on the other hand, “tend to espouse state-controlled development of strategic industries, protectionism, a corporatist, Catholic-organic view of society, and an anti-imperialist rhetoric in some cases.” See Patrice Mc Sherry, *Incomplete Transition: Military Power and Democracy in Argentina* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 34.

⁴² See Castro, 30.

⁴³ As put by Ana Cara Walker, the elites were faced with the threat of growing demands by urban laborers “unwilling to be exploited like the gauchos.” See Ana Cara-Walker, “Cocoliche: The Art of Assimilation and Dissimulation among Italians and Argentines,” *Latin American Research Review* 22.3 (1987): 41. Also, the canonization of José Hernández’ poem about the gaucho hero Martín Fierro is witness to the appropriation of the gaucho as symbol of Argentine identity. Hernández’ publication of a sequel to his *Martín Fierro*, called *The Return of Martín Fierro*, reveals the changing views about the gaucho, now seen in need of paternalistic moralizing by Hernández himself. On the difference between the dignified protest of *Martín Fierro* and the moralizing of *The Return of Martín Fierro*, see Nicolas Shumway, *The Invention of Argentina* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1991), 282-91.

⁴⁴ Seigel points out that cocoliche carnival performances, in their representation of “a bumbling hick dazzled by his new surroundings, reproduced precisely [Argentina’s] country-to-city migration narrative.” See “Cocoliche’s Romp,” 63. For an analysis of the notion of cocoliche and its development as a carnivalesque enactment of “argentineness” see also Ana Cara-Walker’s article. Cara-Walker explains that “a makeshift mixture of gaucho and immigrant characteristics, Cocoliche the dramatic persona and his hilarious italo-Argentine speech were the creation of native criollos [...] But the Cocoliche character also offered natives and newly arrived “tanos” (Italians) a way to negotiate their

differences through ritual and symbolic confrontations onstage, in carnival activities, in print, and ultimately in everyday life. Cara-Walker, 37.

⁴⁵In Pacheco's play, a character refuses to wear a mask to the carnival because he sees himself as wearing one already. See Carlos Mauricio Pacheco, *Los Disfrazados*, in Jorge Lafforgue, ed., *Teatro rioplatense* (Caracas: Biblioteca de Ayacucho, 1986), 156-77.

⁴⁶ Alejandro Berrutti, *Tres personajes a la pesca de un autor* [Three Characters Fishing for an Author], in *Antología del género chico criollo*, ed. Susana Marco et al. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1978).

⁴⁷ See note 45.

⁴⁸ Yrigoyen took advantage of the 1912 electoral reform, itself the initiative of an elitist oligarchy. The institutionalization of political participation through voting was a strategic move by the elites to legitimize political parties as a balancing force against class struggles organized mainly by anarchist. See David Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987: from Spanish Colonization to Alfonsín*. Rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 186-87.

⁴⁹ See Hipolito Yrigoyen, *Pueblo y gobierno vol. 1: La reparación fundamental*, ed. by Roberto Etchepareborda, (Buenos Aires: Raigal, 1955), 126.

⁵⁰ This analysis corresponds to a non-essentialist perspective on cultural forms, as expressed by Stuart Hall: "The meaning of the cultural symbol is given in part by the social field into which it is incorporated, the practices with which it articulates and is made to resonate. What matters is not the intrinsic or historically fixed objects of culture, but the state of play in cultural relations." See "Deconstructing 'the Popular,'" in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, ed. by Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 235.

⁵¹ Graham-Jones, "Aesthetics, Politics and *Vanguardias*," 170.

⁵² Viñas denominates "internalization" a process that affects the production of the grotesco genre at multiple levels, like language, acting, setting, plot and spectatorship, and through which the ideological codes of a new middle class are imprinted. See Viñas, 64.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Viñas, 62.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ An example of theatricality as destiny can be found in *El organito*, by Armando Discépolo, where the peddlers have to face the inadequacy of their street act. See

Armando Discépolo, *El organito*, in Armando Discépolo, *Obras Escogidas vol. 2*, ed. by David Viñas (Buenos Aires: Editorial J. Alvarez, 1969).

⁵⁷ Lefebvre, 203.

⁵⁸ Such split is made obvious in *Mateo*, by Armando Discépolo, where the horse cabdriver, Miguel, seems to find his material alter ego in the moribund Mateo, the horse of the play's title, whom he uses to compete for fares "outside." See Armando Discépolo, *Mateo*, in Armando Discépolo, *Tres grotescos: Mateo, Stéfano y Relojero*, pref. by Juan Carlos Ghiano (Buenos Aires: Losange, 1958).

⁵⁹ Miguel, in the play *Mateo*, for example, finally ends up in prison, after his first attempt at robbery.

⁶⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 142-43. Brackets are in the original translation.

⁶¹ For an analysis of grotesco emphasizing its critique of the liberal project see Eva Claudia Kaiser-Lenoir, *El grotesco criollo: estilo teatral de una época* (Havana: Casa de las Americas, 1977), and Viñas.

⁶² Most notably in *Stéfano*, by Armando Discépolo, the three generations rehearse their incarnation of the Promised Land through their dreams.

⁶³ Graciela Castellanos, in conversation with Jean Graham-Jones, quoted in Graham-Jones, "Magnus, a los (casi) 30 años," in Osvaldo Pellettieri, ed., *Indagaciones sobre el fin de siglo* (Buenos Aires: Galerna, 2000), note 6, 142.

⁶⁴ "Eye of God" is a reference to Foucault's description of the parapenal. See Foucault, 294.

⁶⁵ See Graham-Jones, "Magnus a los (casi) 30 años," 144.

⁶⁶ See O.C. in *Rio Negro*, May 10, 1970.

⁶⁷ Foucault, 215.

⁶⁸ We may compare this abstract space to the more concrete space of the 18C parapenal city space described in a letter quoted by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*, 307. It goes like this:

"Moralists, philosophers, legislators, flatterers of civilization, this is the plan of your Paris, neatly ordered and arranged, here is the improved plan in which all like things are gathered together. At the centre, and within a first enclosure: hospitals for all diseases, almshouses for all types of poverty, madhouses, prisons, convict-prisons for men, women and children. Around the first enclosure, barracks, courtrooms, police stations, houses for prison warders, scaffolds, houses for the executioner and his

assistants. At the four corners, the Chamber of Deputies, the Chamber of Peers, the Institute and the Royal Palace. Outside, there are the various services that supply the central enclosure, commerce, with its swindlers and its bankruptcies; industry and its furious struggles; the press, with its sophisms; the gambling dens; prostitution, the people dying of hunger or wallowing in debauchery, always ready to lend an ear to the voice of the Genius of Revolutions; the heartless rich...Lastly the ruthless war of all against all.” (*La Phalange*, 10 August 1836).

⁶⁹ I use the term “icon” in the sense of an image whose presence allows the viewer to reproduce specific meaning/s.

⁷⁰ Lefebvre, 340.

⁷¹ Graham-Jones, “A Broader Realism,” 10.

⁷² Luce Irigaray, “Women on the Market,” in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 171. Emphases in the original.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁷⁵ Monti, “Algunas sugerencias,” in *Una Noche con el sr. Magnus & hijos* (Buenos Aires: Talía, 1971), 5.

⁷⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. by Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), 48.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ This is not to deny that in terms of reception, Magnus is often identified as the figure of power or the oppressor. Monti himself states: “Now I think that the most shocking for an audience inserted in the light surfaces of postmodernism would be the materialization of parricide...I do not know how today’s public would react, because it all depends on whom people project the figure of Magnus. In the period of military dictatorship it was very clear...in Spain [in 1975] where the production by the Rajatabla Group from Venezuela was enormously successful, [Magnus] was Franco, of course.” Conversation with Jean Graham Jones, Buenos Aires, 1998, quoted by Graham-Jones, “El teatro de Ricardo Monti,” in *Estrategias postmodernas y postcoloniales en el teatro latinoamericano actual: hibridez-medialidad-cuerpo*, ed. Alfonso de Toro (Madrid/Frankfurt: Iberoamericana/ Vervuert Verlag, 2004), 511.

⁷⁹ Graham Jones, “A Broader Realism,” 9.

⁸⁰ Donald Hodges argues that this third position was tantamount to a fascist project. He states that “Since fascism has historically represented a last-ditch defense of capitalism through a political transfer of power from the traditional parties of the bourgeoisie to a professional bureaucracy ruling in its own interests, the Peronists share the political objectives of fascism [... in their] opposition both to the political sovereignty of the bourgeoisie and to a social revolution from below. See Donald Hodges, *Argentina 1943-1976: The National Revolution and Resistance* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1976), 128.

⁸¹ Juan Domingo Perón, *El pueblo quiere saber de que se trata* (Buenos Aires, n. p., 1944).

⁸² José Luís Romero, *A History of Argentine Political Thought*, intr. and trans. by Thomas McGann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963), 248.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ In the post-Peronist era, “from 1955 until 1966 came a series of failed efforts to destroy Peronism and to erect a civilian alternative that could command majority support [... and] between 1966 and 1976 the struggle between the military and the Peronist intensified” starting with Onganía’s coup. See Rock, *Argentina*, 332-3.

⁸⁵ See David Rock, *Authoritarian Argentina: The Nationalist Movement, its History and its Impact* (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1993), 183.

⁸⁶ See Rock, *Argentina*, 335.

⁸⁷ See Rock, *Ibid.*, 333-46.

⁸⁸ Juan Carlos Onganía, *Speeches. Vol 8* (Berkeley: University of California Doc), 16; cited by Lola Proaño-Gómez in *Poética, política y ruptura: Argentina 1966-73* (Buenos Aires: Atuel, 2002), 27.

⁸⁹ Foucault, 217.

⁹⁰ Proaño-Gómez, 21.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 10-11.

⁹³ Lefebvre, 309.

⁹⁴ Polls published in *Panorama*, September 1966, indicated 74% approval of Onganía. See Proaño-Gómez, 50.

⁹⁵ See Proaño-Gómez, 38-43.

⁹⁶ Agustín Tosco, cited by Proaño-Gómez, 39.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ See Graham-Jones, “*Magnus*, a los (casi) 30 años,” note 6, 147.

⁹⁹ O.C., “Una crítica desesperada y grotesca a la sociedad ‘concentracionaria,’” in *Río Negro*, May 10, 1970.

¹⁰⁰ Ricardo Monti, “Algunas sugerencias,” 5.

¹⁰¹ Lefebvre, 349.

¹⁰² Ricardo Monti, *Confirmado*, November 2, 1971. Section “teatro,” signed E.E.E.

¹⁰³ O.C.

¹⁰⁴ David Rock indicates that “in many quarters, from the major business associations to the Peronist Unions, the coup was welcomed as a new beginning, which it proved to be, although in unexpected ways.” See Rock, *Argentina*, 346.

¹⁰⁵ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 141.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 305-06.

¹⁰⁷ See *Ibid.*, 340-341.

¹⁰⁸ For this table, I’ve chosen Discépolo’s play, *Stéfano*, as representative of the grotesco criollo genre.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 339-42. My emphases.

¹¹⁰ Lefebvre, 342.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 343.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 356.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 344.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Emphasis in the original.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 345.

¹¹⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 78. See Harvey, 219.

¹¹⁸ Emphasis is mine.

¹¹⁹ The dinner can also be read as a foundational moment (for the accumulation of symbolic capital), related to the formation of a High Culture elite and liberal politics in Argentina--the “Happy Experience” represented by the Rivadavians in the 1820s. Nicolas Shumway tells us that ‘between 1821 and 1827 [Rivadavia] is the dominant presence in porteño political, cultural, and intellectual life, a period labeled by sympathetic Argentine historians, *La feliz experiencia*, or “The Happy Experience.” “The Happy experience,” Shumway continues, “resulted from the apt confluence of four ingredients necessary for High Culture: prosperity, a nascent upper class with time on its hands, peace, and a fascination with the ways of European aristocrats.”

¹²⁰ Lefebvre, 347. Emphasis in the original.

¹²¹ Harvey, 233.

¹²² Lefebvre, 347.

¹²³ Harvey, 233.

¹²⁴ O.C.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ricardo Monti, quoted in Néstor Tirri, *Realismo y teatro argentino* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones La Bastilla, 1973), 190.

¹²⁷ Going back to our reference to the Rivadavians, the after-dinner chat also expresses the oedipal relationship of the elite with Europe (Shumway provides an example in the literary soirees dedicated to the discussion of the latest European trends.) Says Shumway: “In 1822, the Literary Society of Buenos Aires was created with the support of Rivadavia, to ‘give foreign nations a knowledge of the state of the Country and its progress, to spread enlightenment, [and] to organize opinion.’” See Shumway, 86-7.

¹²⁸ This is related in Graham-Jones, “*Magnus* a los (casi) 30 años,” 144-45.

¹²⁹ See Beatriz Hilda Grand Ruiz, “Una noche con el Sr. Magnus & hijos,” in *Propósitos*, No date.

¹³⁰ Jaime Potenze, “Modesta expresión dramática en el Teatro del Centro,” September 20, 1970.

¹³¹ See Germán Rozenmacher, “Magnus e hijos,” in *Siete Días Ilustrados*. No date

¹³² See O.C.

¹³³ This is reminiscent of Mugica’s occasion for his own “conversion.”

¹³⁴ Lefebvre, 346.

¹³⁵ Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), XVI, 262.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, XVII, 262-3.

¹³⁷ Ricardo Monti, "Presentación," in *Del parricidio a la utopía: el teatro argentino actual en 4 claves mayores* (Ottawa: Girol Books, 1993), 2.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Benjamin, *Theses*, 263.

¹⁴⁰ My discussion of Horacio González's assessment of Ricardo Monti's play, in "El teatro de Ricardo Monti: el misterio y la carne" (unpublished, 1992), is based on Jean Graham-Jones's comment about González's work in "*Magnus*, a los (casi) 30 años," 146.

CHAPTER TWO

***Marathón's Tectonics: Towards an Ethics of the Theatre Space.*¹**

A boundary is not that at which something stops, but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing.--Martin Heidegger.²

Introduction: *Marathón* and tectonics.

In chapter one, I looked at Monti's first play, *Una Noche con el Sr. Magnus & hijos*, in relation to a socially and historically specific production of space. The nature and structure of a layered scenic space were analyzed symptomatically by looking at the dynamics of performance and spectatorship presented by the play. I also argued that this layered space could be felt from within the performance through a halting of thought that allowed bodies to sense space's seismic (tectonic) ground. *Magnus* leaves us with a challenge, since it ends with the shock of a paradigm shift still in need of appropriation (through praxis).

I am interested in the fact that the challenge is presented within the representational space of theatre. This may imply that the historical challenge for a different production of space begins in the production of a different representational space. In this respect, the conclusion of *Magnus* may constitute a foundational ritual for renewing theatrical practice by an act of choosing theatre as a site of appropriation of the layered space of postmodernism. In the paradigm shift enacted at the end of *Magnus*, the bodily sense of a tectonic friction destabilizes a previous orientation in the space of simulation. The tectonic, in this context, presents itself as a potential site for rebuilding and/or redescribing one's orientation in relation to a layered ground. Therefore, *Magnus*

challenges theatre to become a cognitive structure that unveils and dis-covers a layered and hence complex ground that sustains our experience of the modern/postmodern world.

In this chapter, I argue that Monti's later plays respond to the challenge by creating a fully tectonic theatre. I'd like to refine an understanding of tectonic by referring to Kenneth Frampton's use of the term in his advocacy of an architecture that would resist "the endless processal flux of the Megalopolis." Frampton's "critical regionalism" opposes the "technocratic gesture which aspires to a condition of absolute placelessness" by engaging in the act of "building the site."³ Frampton argues that with such engagement it is possible for the history of the region to become "inscribed into the form and realization of the work."⁴ Thus, he continues,

[t]his inscription which arises out of "in-laying" the building into the site, has many levels of significance, for it has a capacity to embody, in built form, the prehistory of the place, its archeological past and its subsequent cultivation and transformation across time. Through this layering into the site the idiosyncrasies of place find their expression without falling into sentimentality.⁵

The notion of "in-laying" leads Frampton to a consideration of the tectonic, now understood in the architectonic sense of the explicit resistance of a structure to the action of gravity. A tectonic architecture, Frampton suggests, embodies architectural autonomy by "distilling play between material, craftwork and gravity, so as to yield a component which is in fact a condensation of the entire structure. We may speak here of the presentation of a structural poetic rather than the re-presentation of a façade."⁶ The point of maintaining the autonomy of architectural elements is precisely to enhance our

experience and cognition of a particular site, that is, its ground and environment. The cognitive function resides in the tectonic form rather than in a scenographic representation that would conceal the layers and inflections of the site itself. Concealment occurs here through the relinquishing of the visual to a universal gravitational force. This opposition between the scenographic and the tectonic is present, for example, at the conclusion of *Magnus*. There, the representation seems to stop with the sight of a dead Magnus and the apparent stasis of the characters. This is the scenographic tableau that reinscribes the entrapment of the characters in the logic of representation (ending in the aporia of “infinite performance” or “ritual murder,” as González suggested in his assessment of *Magnus*).⁷ We have seen that the tectonic perspective, on the other hand, places the ritual in a tactile relationship to the layered space of performance, producing thus a moment of cognition. The challenge, in the context of *Magnus*’s end, is to produce a sense of permanence of that thought in order to extend the paradigm shift to a new experience of the world.

This is where the concept of a tectonic architecture, applied to theatre, becomes useful by linking the solidity of a built structure to the historical permanence of a specific production of space. The tectonic perspective allows us to see architecture/theatre as a “bounded domain,” not in the strictly Heideggerian sense of a dwelling for “Being,” but in the materialist sense of a site of praxis. The bounded domain is found, for example, in *Magnus*’s living room as a “place for performance,” that is, the historically specific site where praxis results in simulation. This site, we have seen, has a certain historical permanence, where the ground of habitus and the space of simulation are layered like tectonic plates. The site is bounded in the sense that the “sediments” that result from a

historically specific production of space organize and set limits to social action and experience. Frampton posits the bounded domain as a place-form. This is “the space of human appearance” in Hannah Arendt’s terms, where power and the density of human groupings come together. In this respect, Frampton quotes Arendt’s *The Human Condition*, to remind us of the relationship between power and the density of urban population. Arendt writes that,

Only where men live so close together that the potentialities for action are always present will power remain with them and the foundation of cities, which as city states have remained paradigmatic for all Western political organization, is therefore the most important material prerequisite of power.⁸

The sense of density of the place-form and its relation to not only the limits of power but also to the potentialities for true collective empowerment are crucial to Frampton’s tectonic architecture. In effect, Frampton is interested in ways to resist the dispersion of these potentialities through globalization, spatial exchangeability (the work of simulation), and postmodern sub-urbanization. There is thus an affinity between Frampton’s project and the challenge posited by Monti at the conclusion of *Magnus*. In both cases, it is a matter of resisting through: first, an acknowledgement of a tension between a local emplacement and global spatiality; and second, an ability to experience this tension as a means of appropriating space and its historical potential for collective empowerment.

I suggest that, in *Magnus*, Monti manages to grasp the place-form of theatre. It arises from urban density, and it is potentially able to cognitively reproduce or produce

the present historical conditions of power. I will now look at a later play, *Marathón*, to see how an awareness of a layered space helps Monti build a tectonic theatre that productively reappropriates the space of simulation.

Marathón (1980) was the second play (the first being *Visita*, in 1977) by Monti, that premiered during the years of military repression that called itself “Proceso de Reorganización Nacional” (1976-1983). As Jean Graham-Jones remarks, in 1980, “after four years of dictatorship, “the Argentine people were exhibiting signs of a collective anguish, and *Marathón* tapped into both this ongoing suffering under repression and a growing critical awareness regarding what have been called the guiding fictions that had led the country to such end.”⁹ The play was directed by Jaime Kogan, who had already directed two of Monti’s plays, with a set design by Tito Egurza.¹⁰ The premiere of *Marathón* also inaugurated the Payró Theatre’s new home at the Teatros de San Telmo, designed specifically for the production by the architect Osvaldo Giesso.¹¹

The concept and setting of the play invite its consideration as a theatrical construction or place-form: a Buenos Aires ballroom in 1932, where a dance marathon is taking place before an attending audience.¹² The 1932 event is in a way the site on which Monti builds the structure in the form of a performance of *Marathón* in front of a contemporary audience. The concept of place-form helps us conceive of the 1932 site/event as a place of historical permanence that grounds or in-lays the contemporary play. The sense of permanence is given by the historical parallel between the so dubbed “infamous decade” of 1930s under Uriburu’s ultranationalist dictatorship and the Proceso. The repetition or permanence of the situation is therefore part of Monti’s (in his own words) “atrocious metaphor.”¹³

The director Jaime Kogan also expressed a view compatible with the concept of place-form when he said that, ideally, every play demands its own proper space, and added that “in the case of *Marathón*, that need was implicit in the text.”¹⁴ The sense of permanence is enhanced by the five “myths” that are presented, or enacted, somewhat chronologically as the play advances, providing thus a somewhat historical narrative. The five guiding myths are—in the playwright’s own words-- “the Conquest, the Independence, the dream of a pastoral America, the dream of an Industrial America, and the Fascist myth.”¹⁵ These myths also act on the marathon dance by giving it historical gravity, that is, a temporality that goes beyond the anecdotic 1932 event and extends it to an experience of “modern times.” We already notice a tension between the local reference of the 1932 event and the more global reference of the myths, which point to wider historical phenomena. This is the tectonic site of local/global permanence on which the “concreteness” of the play performance is situated.

The characters enter the mythical by going into a state of dream or half-sleep, from which “arises a sort of collective memory,” as put by a reviewer of the performance, and “allows these characters to connect with moments of America’s history. The small world of this marathon is broadened with that historical and mythical world.”¹⁶ The link between this site and the “construction” of the play performance is the character of Animador [Emcee], who addresses the other characters, or the imaginary spectators of 1932, and, at times, the contemporary audience of the play.¹⁷

Architectural autonomy between the site and the performance construction is prefigured in the title of the play. Monti purposely adds the letter “h” to the correct (Spanish) spelling (“maratón”) of “marathon.” This, I suggest, is an indication that the

play is a construction that resists the mimetic equivalence between site and setting in order to re-describe that relationship. Monti explains that the play is “about a concrete marathon and at the same time a metaphor. The [added letter in the spelling of the title] is a form of distanciation, signaling that the action is not as real as it appears to be.”¹⁸ I take Monti’s remark as referring to the non-mimetic and non-scenographic relationship of the performance to the “historical” 1932 marathon dance. In other words, Monti’s purpose is not simply to involve the spectators into taking part in the action of an anecdotic 1932 ballroom event; nor did he intend the insertion of myths to result into an allegorical journey through space and time. Instead, the performance event should be a stimulus that makes us aware of our own embodiment, in the present, of the “historical” site proposed by the play. We encounter here Frampton’s tectonic strategy, consisting in the “tactile resilience of the place-form and the capacity of the body to read the environment in terms other than those of sight alone.”¹⁹

The non-scenographic relationship became evident in the rehearsal process, as directed by Jaime Kogan. Rehearsals dealt with the 1932 “historical” site by first working on the characters in a chronological manner. But that chronology, which allowed for the construction of personal narratives, was then broken in order to enter into the different levels of performance demanded by the play’s insertion of various levels of experience (the dance marathon, the “dream” states, and the myth enactments). Such a performance required the concretization of a “historical memory” in the characters by integrating in that memory “documented information about various [historical] periods.” These periods were embodied in the different rhythms and dances that the actors learned by taking dance classes.²⁰ It is, therefore, the stage embodiment by a group of actors, or collective,

that makes manifest to actors and audience the historical gravity of the site/setting. The embodiments not only interweave levels of daily existential, subconscious and collective experience, as Graham-Jones has suggested, but tectonically in-lays these experiences in the historical dimension of the site.²¹ The question here is: in what way(s) is the marathon dance “concrete?” We may answer that it scenographically refers to a concrete 1932 event. It also refers, metaphorically to an experience of extended temporality spanning through the historical rise of various “myths.” Finally, the marathon is concrete in the form of the performance, which links these two references in front of a contemporary audience. In this last instance, the performance occasion provides both a space (the theatre) and an embodiment that involve both the actors and spectators. As director Jaime Kogan explains, “the very concept of the play was relevant to an investigation of the often discussed issue the scenic space, a concept that [...] has to be approached in terms of the theatre space.”²² Randy Martin’s suggestion for a politics built on the model of performance *occasions* may be applied to Kogan, who “instead of focusing on the traffic of ambassadors shuttling between fixed and stable domains [of on-stage and off-stage, performance and reality...], attend[s] to the way the gathering of a public actually occasions the performance, which in turn provides the stage that allows acts of reasoning to become realized as ideas.”²³ Accordingly, Kogan can affirm that, “in the case of *Marathón*, [he is] not only interested in what happens on the stage, but also in registering the behavior of the public.”²⁴

Structurally, the dramatic element of the unrevealed “prize,” for which the dancers are competing, is architectonic in the sense that it plants the performance in the setting/site. In terms of tectonics, the prize serves as an anchor to actors and spectators

who experience the theatre as a bounded domain that projects our experience of it into the future. In other words, with the introduction of an *unrevealed* prize, the play becomes an event whose presence is autonomous *and* in friction with the ground in which it is in-layed. The dramatic element is there so that we may enter in a tectonic relationship with the site and participate in a cognitive process of knowing and feeling its “reality.” The “prize” is itself a reality that needs to be decoded in terms of our experience of the site itself. The marathon becomes *Marathón*, a theatre where characters and audiences engage in an interpretation of the very theatre that they occupy. Characters as well as audiences struggle with this question: what is the “prize” for our participation in this marathon event that is our history (our past, our present, and our future)? This is ultimately an ethical question that can be re-articulated as “is there a prize given for a truer understanding of my current mode of participation in this ‘marathon’?—is that prize the possibility of acting more honestly or ethically in relation to my own history?” The answer to these questions is already given in part by the structure of the play as place-form, which responds to a felt need to better inhabit social space. My reading of the play will therefore look into how this “theatre” builds a possible ethics of historical participation. But we must first understand how tectonics engages the audience into a cognitive process. In this respect, we’ll see that the relationship between tectonics and metaphor is instructive.

Tectonics and the metaphorical process.

The concept of place-form as the very structure of a tectonic architecture, or theatre, indicates that a tectonic construction is metaphoric since it relies on the statement “this place is its form.” I’d like to consider this metaphor in terms of “live metaphors”

that, according to Paul Ricoeur, are capable of yielding some true insight about reality. As Max Statkiewicz explains, for Ricoeur, “production and interpretation of metaphors is a work initiated by the original aporia or puzzlement, it is an effort to solve the enigma.”²⁵ Max Statkiewicz writes that Ricoeur’s theory of metaphor proceeds from “critical analyses of the rhetorical efforts to reduce the enigma of poetic imagination to a fixed system of metaphorical patterns [...] His hermeneutic approach aims at understanding the enigma of metaphors rather than at explaining it (away).”²⁶ Ricoeur builds on the theoretical insights of Aristotle, Cohen, Beardsley, Henle, among others, as well as those of modern poets such as Valéry, Reverdy, and Claudel in order to develop a theory of metaphorical reference as one that “maintains the ordinary vision in tension with the new one it suggests.”²⁷ The metaphor, Ricoeur says, “is a semantic innovation that belongs at once to the predicative order (new pertinence) and the lexical order (paradigmatic deviation). In its first aspect, it depends upon a dynamics of meaning; under the second, upon a stasis or non-dynamic state of the system”²⁸ In order to point to the role of the reader’s imagination in connecting to the “primordial reference” of the metaphor, Ricoeur explains that the new predicative meaning “emerges from the collapse of the literal meaning, that is, from the collapse of the meaning which obtains if we rely only on the common or usual lexical values of our words. The metaphor is not the enigma but the solution to the enigma.”²⁹ The truth claim or “primordial reference” of the metaphor, then, exists in a negative condition *between* the two references of the metaphorical statement. In relation to tectonics, the cognitive value of a place-form exists somewhere between place and form. Ricoeur’s contention that the poets’ constructions or fictions (which fully preserve the dynamics of the metaphorical process) may present

“under a concrete mode the split structure of the reference pertaining to the metaphorical statement,” is most relevant to tectonics.³⁰ The tectonic “construction,” in effect, may be understood as the imaginative concretizing of the metaphorical primordial reference. Monti’s tectonic theatre may be analyzed as an example of such construction, or fiction, that, according to Ricoeur, may reveal through the work of imagination the deep structures of reality. Ricoeur also gives a cognitive function to feelings as a way to attune to a reality “which cannot be expressed in terms of the objects referred to in ordinary language.”³¹ In this respect, an analysis of tectonics can help us connect to both that reality and those feelings. This analysis would try to follow how *Marathón* builds on a basic metaphor that could be expressed with the following statement: “our history is a 1932 Buenos Aires ballroom dance marathon.” In terms of tectonics, this metaphorical statement is an example of an in-layed spatial construct that guides the use and experience of its “materials,” that is, the imaginative solution(s), to the metaphor’s enigma.

The point of an analysis such as this one is to maintain both metaphoric tension as well as a sense of the tectonic autonomy of the construction in relation to what appears as a specific site. Certain considerations are therefore necessary in order to avoid an allegorical (and therefore, scenographical) reading of the play. The latter kind of reading could be summed up with the statement: “*All of history (or dictatorships, or fascisms, or modern myths, or life, etc) is/are like a 1932 Buenos Aires ballroom dance marathon, as Monti’s play and its performance shows it.*”³² Such a general interpretation can be found, for example, in Eugene Moretta’s evaluation of the play as being about the repetition of “the destiny of those [Argentine, American] people, in different places and periods and

through power systems where the individual, being cheated by some seductive promise, allows himself to be enslaved by this or that tyrannical regime.”³³ From a tectonic perspective, on the other hand, the metaphoric construction would instead read more specifically in the following terms: “*History is a 1932 Buenos Aires ballroom dance marathon as written by Monti and performed in this theatre today.*” (This metaphor, I illustrate with diagram1).

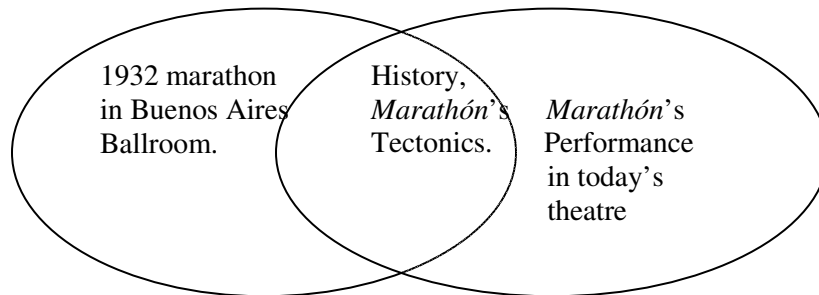


Diagram 1.

A proper reading of the play implies thus an acute awareness of the theatrical context as part of the play’s coding of its message. The diagram above also serves as a model for reading the other diagrams in the chapter. The subject of the metaphorical definition is in the middle. The predicate of the metaphorical statement connects the site of the tectonic construction on the left with the tectonic construction on the right.

The fact that this is a play by Monti and that it has been placed, in my own project, in relation to *Magnus*’s challenge should not be overlooked. My interpretation will try to tune in to the modern/postmodern contradiction, seen in *Magnus*, between place and space. I will therefore consider: 1) *Marathón*’s theatrical event (this marathon is a theatre) as an architectonic equivalent, of this space/place tension. Certain key questions will follow from this perspective: How do the characters and the audience

locate their “own” marathon as a site? What are the dimensions and coordinates for this site?; 2) How the kinetic and energetic component of the “dance marathon,” as well as the enactment of myths, guides our imagination of the performance as a kind of machinery of production, or reproduction (this marathon/theatre is a machine). What is being produced? Is the site being built through such production? How does the site as machinery sustain itself? How do characters and audiences participate in such production/reproduction?; and 3) How the insertion of suspense through the unrevealed prize guides through feelings our projection of the performance into a redemptive, dystopian or utopian future (this marathon/theatre/machine is my projection of today into the future). What are the different feelings towards the future? How does the particular temporality of the site help in elaborating an ethics of the scenic space? Finally, the three-part organization of my analysis corresponds to the three moments of the metaphorical process according to Ricoeur, who suggests that there is “a structural analogy between the cognitive [*Marathón* as theatre], the imaginative [*Marathón* as machine], and the emotional [*Marathón* as feelings] components of the complete metaphorical act.”³⁴ These three moments correspond also to the expressed objective of author and director of stimulating and provoking the spectators in their thought, sensibility, and imagination.³⁵ In the end, my analysis of *Marathón*’s tectonics is an investigation into the spatial and temporal coordinates of modernity and post-modernity. To this end I will focus on the way characters and audiences inhabit the dance marathon conceit and build the “site” as place-form. In this respect, I will consider the three metaphorical constructions—*Marathón*/History as theatre, as machine, and as feeling—and argue that this site may constitute a place for an ethics of participation in a modern/postmodern space.

Tectonics 1: this dance marathon is a theatre, or the place/space of modern history.

In *Marathón*, the theatre audience doubles as the audience of an event occurring in a Buenos Aires ballroom sometime in the early thirties. This conception transcends a scenographic perception of setting, since the “represented” ballroom doubles as the theatre where the contemporary performance is taking place. In this process, the represented constructs another reality that is the theatre as setting (place) and the make-believe as environment (space). The premiere of the play in a theatre still in construction confirmed this vision, as it allowed the director, Jaime Kogan, to use a “ballroom” as *the* place where the theatrical spatial environment is produced. As Ricardo Monti remembers, Kogan “had been looking for another space that would put the spectator in the situation” of the 1932 dance marathon event. Kogan accepted the offer by Giesso to use the facilities of Teatros de San Telmo, still in construction. There, says Monti “he found the space he was looking for: a central dance floor made of concrete with steps on one side, a balcony wrapping around other steps, and a circular stage allowing multiple view points.”³⁶ In this space, the performance is the occasion for the 1932 ballroom to become the contemporary theatrical space. Thus both actors and spectators are complicit with this transformation of place into space. It is a space/place where the agency of the audience as participant is foregrounded in the form of choice: “Some of you weren’t sure about coming here tonight,” the Emcee ironically greets the audience at the opening of the play (134). At this point we encounter a first instance of tectonic dislocation, since the dancers appear to be already in place (they have already “beaten all records” in terms of time) while the audience disrupts the place (entering at this late point in an ongoing event) by imposing a spatial dichotomy between the darkness of the auditorium and the illuminated

space of the stage. In the performance, the audience, upon entering the theatre, would be witness to the competition as it saw the “dancing couples gliding on the stage under dimmed lights and with morbid steps.”³⁷ This spatial division reminds us that by choosing theatre we disrupt place and spatialize it. The Emcee’s words suggest that such disruption facilitates some form of denial. The dancers, for example, occupy the place of the stage because “they’re desperate” without realizing it yet, while the audience’s comfort in being in a space “sheltered by the dark,” from death and exhaustion, is perhaps delusional (134). The force of the metaphor of theatre as space/place of denial lies in its reversibility, through which considerations of denial or privilege are neutralized by the reality of theatre as a gathering place/space or site for a collective practice, where issues of privilege and denial are in fact questioned.

The reversibility of subjective interpellation in *Marathón* is exemplified in the literal repetition of a judgment by the Emcee, who addresses the audience at the beginning and end of the play with identical words. He declares, talking about the dancers on the stage:

Blindly, they go marching toward their end, toward the thrill of victory or the agony of defeat. I ask you, ladies and gentlemen, who understand mankind? I wouldn’t even presume to try to answer. But there they are, they stir, they move, they die... They ferociously destroy themselves. And then they’re reborn, reborn like mayflies. But nevertheless, fighting against indifference and nothingness even unto death, they build their fragile works, preparing themselves for eternity. Ladies and gentlemen, if this weren’t so ridiculous, it would be a tragedy. [135 and 181]

At the end of the performance (but not of the dance marathon, that must continue according to the Emcee), the audience leaves the theatre unredeemed (it is *not* a tragedy), and is now condemned to reenact their denial in the place/space of their own life. To leave the site of *Marathón* is to join the “real” world as an alternative already put in question by the irony of the Emcee’s words: what is the guarantee that we will escape the ridiculous, or that we will find the consolation of “tragedy”? I see in the shift of interpellation, from the character to the audience, a condition for an ethics of the scenic space expressed in this case as the non-denial of denial (the denial of denial of denial). This could be articulated in the following terms: “theatre is an expression of my denial, I go to the theatre to get acquainted with my denial, and, after leaving the theatre, I wish to avoid denying my denial by seeing myself as a character that is desperate without realizing it yet.” Non-denial is grounded in the metaphorical tension between theatre and world, between stage and audience, enacted by the place/space of *Marathón*. As a result, the question of the mode of audience participation that has occupied modern theatre is projected onto the world. In other words, “the question of *where* the audience should be situated—*how near? How far?* In what sense of distance? With what allowance of illusion?,” as Herbert Blau puts it, becomes a question that does not concern what happens inside the theatre per se, but pertains to our own sense of belonging, with our bodies, to a “worldly” site of collective denial and potential non-denial.³⁸ Thus *Marathón* interpellates us as worldly participants rather than theatrical “spectators.” This view affects the critical distance allowed by a foregrounding of the spectator’s role. Jean Graham-Jones, for example, considers that “a space is created textually for audience complicity in, and thus responsibility for, what is happening in the ballroom; yet, at the

same time, the audience is given critical distance from which to analyze and judge what transpires.”³⁹ But the “critical” distance, I argue, is itself compromised by the fusion of theatrical and worldly witnessing. Therefore, in *Marathón*, to leave the space of theatre is no guarantee of leaving the *site* on which bodies are grounded by the activity of dancing (and performing) even when the spectators have “theoretically” left. The elegant couple, for example, who in the play decide to leave the theatre, become for a moment spectators of themselves by feeling “tectonically” bound, through their own bodies, to the other bodies on the stage--they see their own bodies “in front of [them...] dancing;” reproducing thus, in their own experience, the metaphoric tension of the site. A similar effect was achieved in performance, involving, this time, the spectators themselves, whose illusion of being outside of the representation would be broken when they took sight of dolls, representing spectators, that had been spread throughout the auditorium.⁴⁰ In this concrete manifestation of audience passivity, the positivist arrangement of the theatrical space, which allows for dramatic irony to be played on the fate of the characters, is reversed. The spectators are now seen as planted, like in Plato’s cave, unknowingly embodying the “darkness” of history as myth, while the dancers are now “outside,” enjoying the “enlightenment” of history... as representation.

The tension between distance and coincidence between one’s body and the other’s body becomes properly tectonic when it is felt within one’s own body as if the body were torn from itself. A clear example is the treatment of the character of Vespucci. In scene three, the Emcee stops Vespucci’s compulsive dancing, under the pretext of interviewing the bricklayer. In the process the guard is asked to replace Vespucci on the dance floor for a moment and join his (Vespucci’s) wife, Asunción. This becomes an occasion for

taunting the bricklayer as cuckold, at which point the separation from where his body is “supposed” to be (on the stage/dance floor with his wife) is felt as a lack of manhood. Vespucci, who has become a temporary spectator, somehow recovers his own “manhood” with his very participation in the marathon, whose prize will pay, according to him, for the mortgage of his house. That recovery, though, is in tension with another separation: that between the site of the marathon dance, and the house itself, that the bricklayer reveals to have built himself. For Vespucci, in other words, the dance produces both a separation from the product of his own work, and a means toward its recovery in the form of “property.” That tension is somehow bridged with his thought of “home,” where “everything’s alright--” a thought that may bring the audience and the spectators ideologically together without undoing the aforementioned tensions (142). This scene shows how *Marathón* leads to an experience of tectonic tension by bringing gender, property, and ideological relations into the space/place tensions between stage and audience.

In *Marathón*, metaphoric relationships exist as by necessity, where gender and property, in this case, are treated as ideological forces keeping audience and performers both together and separate. The force of ideology is presented as a power to create a sense of lack, an emptiness that must be filled, and a space that must become place. The materiality of gender identity and the immateriality of property relations are revealed as measuring sticks that are in tension with each other, producing the very gaps that constitute our sense of lack, the blind spot of ideology (home as ideal place/space). In the space/place of theatre, ideological necessities can be fulfilled as a matter of phenomenology. Phenomenal indeterminacy is enforced by the variety of interpellations

through which we seek identity —what do I or does he/she own, and to what extent? Who is more manly or womanly? To what extent do I or do not feel at “home?”—are questions that, by remaining unanswered, compel us to choose theatre, again and again.

We may relate this ideological commitment to indeterminacy to the “crisis of place” that structures modern drama.⁴¹ According to Una Chaudhuri, “the materiality of [realist] stage environment” grounds, “in a stage-home, characters who [are] essentially homeless.”⁴² Chaudhuri sees in realist and environmentalist drama a reification of homelessness as “exilic consciousness,” reflected in narratives of arrival, departure, homecoming, and travel. Her study of modern and contemporary drama views this consciousness from the psychological perspective of “geopathology” understood as “a century long struggle with the problem of place.” *Marathón*’s place/space, I suggest, grounds this struggle in a tectonic reality (property and gender relations, for example) that reproduces the phenomenal indeterminacy of “home.” The Emcee’s words, in the beginning of the play, help maintain the tectonic tension away from the ideological synthesis of home and its “supplementary” feeling of “exile” by emphasizing the psychological difference between spectators and dancers. He reminds the spectators of their detachment, with a mention of how they mark time by objectifying the event as a spectacle, where they’ll see “the passage of: time, time, time!” (134). Meanwhile, the dancers are given an ecstatic experience of “preparing themselves for eternity” (135). Here, the difference is shown as an old dichotomy between being (the dancers) and knowledge (the audience). But, in this case, the tectonic faces another kind of reification through a universalization of time and space as eternal absolutes.

It is in relation to these “absolutes” (of being and knowledge) that we encounter the main tectonic gesture of *Marathón*—the tension between the temporal dimension of the marathon that tends to spatialize it as an “absolute” environment, and the location of the marathon as a site that calls for its historicization. This context helps us understand the dynamic between the two types of actions structuring the play: the management, by the Emcee and the guard, of the dance-marathon event; and the enactment of historical myths. These two events work in friction with each other. The Emcee, for example, will guide the audience’s logocentric and panoptic vision of the marathon as framed by absolute concepts of time. From his perspective the dancers are seen as human beings who “move [...] die [and...] ferociously destroy themselves” (135). Time remains a totality while being grasped by concepts of various magnitudes— eternal empty time, the cyclical time of nature, or theatrical time containing the swift plots of comedy or tragedy (135). These universalist time frames could support the eternal dramas of universal History, but they also support the present of performance—they determine, in fact, the presentness of the marathon dance and its “description” as a(n) (endless) marathon. The enactment of myths, on the other hand, imposes a different vision of this theatre’s presentness, its status as a site. The myths, whose enactments begin with those of the Conquest, Independence and “pastoral America,” signal its hemispheric American location, west of Europe. The myths of “industrial America” and “fascism” point to the peripheral position of the site in relation to the “centers” of modernity in the northern hemisphere. Therefore, universalist spatiality and a historicist platiality are not in opposition to each other but in friction in the presentness of *Marathón*. In the performance, such friction became evident, for example, in the moment that, after the

spectators had been witnessing the marathon dance in its local specificity, the lights would turn off and the high ceiling would be covered with garland-like small lights, giving an effect of stars, and therefore, universality.⁴³

A “fracture” inscribed in the names of the characters: Homero Estrella, Elena García, Pedro Vespucci, Tom Mix, etc, is another evidence of the friction between their “universal” and local history. The names are not only both contemporaneous and “historical,” but their multiple “identity” also traces a history that runs at a point of friction between the European and the American locations. Vespucci, for example, is also playing an Italian working class immigrant who in the 1930s was consolidating his own American/Argentine identity. His “Americanization” is diachronically announced by his name, after Amerigo Vespucci, the Italian cartographer and voyager who allegedly was a precursor to Columbus’s discovery. The name of his wife, Asunción, links him to early Spanish conquest and colonization (the foundation of the city of Asunción in today’s Paraguay) and the second foundation of Buenos Aires by Juan de Garay, who sailed from Asunción down the Paraná River in 1580. The fracture in the name transposes the character’s historicity onto a map. I argue that this imagined map is like a blue-print on which *Marathón* is being built.

In effect, in the enactment of “Myth One,” Vespucci is the Spanish Conquistador Pedro de Mendoza who, after founding Buenos Aires in 1537 (1535 in the play), dies on his voyage back to Spain.⁴⁴ In this scene the myth of the Conquest is set in a narrative of failed return and failed payment. This narrative is mapped through the various references made in the scene. Vespucci is dying of syphilis. His historical “marathon” ends in mid-sea where the land of “America” is revealed as the prize, but remains undelivered, and

thus a mythical unknown (142-43). Instead, Vespucci is made to suffer his illness as a punishment. The verdict is given by Ana D who, impersonating “the whore of Rome,” proves to be a fatal possession. With this, the myth of American Conquest traces its own itinerary back to the biblical apocalyptic myth of the Whore of Babylon “with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication.”⁴⁵ The scene is an oblique allusion to the power of the Spanish crown, the role of the Catholic Church in colonization, and the missionary logic of the Conquest. It also displaces the universalist vision of the myth of Conquest by situating it somewhere between the Old and New Worlds. Vespucci’s destiny, within the myth, fractures the mapping of Conquest with a mid-ocean line dividing the myth between the idea of Promised Land and the fear of final judgment. Therefore, the fractured map becomes the tectonic version, in-layed in the history of Conquest, of the ideology of home and its “poetics of exile.” The space/place of the map does not resolve the metaphoric enigma, but reproduces it with added meaning. The enigma is expressed in the spectral relationship between Vespucci’s mortgaged house and the Promised Land that he expects will finally “rise up from the sea” (143). Thus we are left with a metaphor that could be articulated as “my house/property is a Promised land rising up from the sea.” In this metaphor the myth becomes the macroworld of the bricklayer’s microworld. As Monti explains, in more general terms,

There is a relation between that marathon, lost in a corner of the universe, and the place of the myth (America). Our continent represents a mythical instance in the development of the history of humanity. The irruption of America with its own culture and landscape leads one to connect it with

particular metaphors. For that reason, the characters represent both a personal dream and a metaphysical reality.⁴⁶

The appearance of a map with a mid-Atlantic center replaces the idea of history as chronology and causality with a diachronic sense of the appearance and non-appearance of the land. This last image suggests that the map is a site of tectonic violence that is felt in the present of *Marathón*'s performance. The uncertainty of the appearance of the Promised Land is a metaphorical bridge that links the performance to a dependence on the map. This dependence establishes the relationship between the site and the future: the marathon *must* continue, and a sense of the worthiness of our participation must be constantly renewed in order for *this* "map" not to be erased. The map, therefore, has been traced according to a double matrix, one spatial, looking towards the "Promised Land," and the other temporal, depending on its "future."

This spatio-temporal map can be related to a fundamental relationship between colonization and modernity. Walter Mignolo establishes such a relationship by looking at the two kinds of colonial matrices--temporal (colonizing the Middle Ages) and spatial (colonizing the Americas, and then Asia and Africa)--put in place by the European Renaissance. The birth of modernity can therefore be established in the Renaissance, when "traditions were invented temporally in Europe and spatially in America, Asia, and Africa."⁴⁷ Mignolo thus helps us see how colonial matrices form the fractured "map" that carries *Marathón* (its actors and its audience) into the future.

This map imposes a rupture with the past and the imposition of an abstract relation to the future. Mignolo argues that the concept of tradition is a means for the modern subject to break from the past and recreate history. The implication of this insight

is that to think of history as modern is itself to be involved in a colonizing project, a simultaneous production and transcendence of “tradition.” As Mignolo puts it: “there is a Catch-22 in the opposition of modernity/tradition since the categories of tradition, ritual, myth, community, and emotion are not ‘realities’ but categories that made possible the discourse and the very self-definition of *modernity*.”⁴⁸ In order to deal with these contradictions, Mignolo suggests that the notion of coloniality is “a [potential] place of enunciation from where the invention of modernity can be disclosed and its “natural” underpinnings revealed.”⁴⁹ In *Marathón*, the place of enunciation is defined tectonically in the tension between the “place” of America and the “future” of the modern subject. Such tension is expressed, for example, in the short scene following the myth, and set in a “new day.” There, we see the Emcee waking up the dancers and reminding them of the day’s promising value by saying: “come on, friends. This can be the day.”⁵⁰ The dancers “enunciate” their modernity from the location of coloniality by performing their optimism and masking their exhaustion with a fake show of excitement.

In the following scene, the violence that defines coloniality reverberates in the way the participants feel burdened by an inability to assume the “newness” of modernity. The couple Héctor and Ema Expósito has a marital dispute. Ema takes her shoes off to relieve her foot pain and reveals her torn socks. Her husband’s embarrassment provokes her sarcastic remark about the “elegant gathering” around them and the actual humiliation of his situation as an unemployed man, living in her sister’s house (144). Héctor proceeds to berate their marriage as a joke he played on the “ugliness” she has resigned herself to, on “her stupidity” and “miserable spinster greed” (146). When Ema threatens to abandon him and the dance, Héctor’s apology reveals how his investment in the marriage depends

on its redemption through the competition's prize. The interaction indicates a tension between a degradation of the present and a dependence on the future that tends to be projected onto a degradation of the other, based on gender and class. I see this disconnection between the present and the future as a failure of these "modern" characters to make their agency completely subject centered. Even the prostitute's "pride" is based, in the scene, on her comparison to the self-humiliated "bourgeois" couple (148). A look at the formation of modernity, according to Mignolo, gives us clues to the characters' "imperfect" modernity. There are two kinds of colonial matrices that were necessary in the formation of modernity: "The colonization of time [that] resulted in the invention of the Middle Ages in European history," was a way to transcend the location of history, to make it subject-centered (to be modern is to be an agent of history).⁵¹ The invention of the Middle Ages allowed, in other words, for a *Renaissance* that transcended a *tradition* and made the European the subject position of *History*. On the other hand, a colonization of space was needed because the transcendental subject must produce a "place" that is like an infinite blank slate, that is, an open space on which *modern* History can be written.⁵² In this context, the disconnection between present and future in the characters reveals a failure of the colonization of time that creates the "present" of the subject. In other words, from coloniality, understood as the hidden or denied location of modernity, the European Renaissance, located far from the colonized periphery, cannot produce a modern subject position, but must be internalized as a transcendental event that must still or always take effect within the subject. This subject, who must always be reborn, postpones its modern agency to the immediate future, after he has degraded, like Héctor, Ema, and Pipa, his own present.

We may view the competitive energy of the dancers, which the Emcee stimulates by asking them to change partners, to the constant need of rebirth of the modern subject who, by competing, is bound to the location of the group, yet asserts his/her detachment as a free agent. The tectonics of competition is shown in the Emcee's interview of Tom Mix, the westerns movie star who has monopolized the attention of three female partners. Here the young Tom Mix claims that he has no stakes in his own participation. The Emcee challenges the truthfulness of Tom Mix's detachment from location by ironically mentioning other possible places of investment like "the classroom, the field, [or] a garage" (150). Tom Mix's response provides the irony that reveals his tectonic attachment to the location of *Marathón*: "I am not standing, sir, I am falling," he explains.⁵³ Tom Mix's "falling" fits and does not fit an understanding of subjectivity as "essentially" detached from place. His irony, in other words, produces the metaphor that puts him in tension with the place from which he wants to free himself: he wants his "fall" to be an act of historical agency, but it cannot be so. Tom Mix's "falling" reveals the ineffectual status of the first colonial matrix—the colonization of time—because his modern historical "agency" rewrites, in the active form, the destiny of the medieval "fallen man," that his colonization wanted to transcend. The second matrix—the colonization of space-- is shown also shown as a process of "falling," not through a space that allows him to write the modern subject's history, but as a path that points towards place as a never attained destination (a pathos reproduced in popular westerns). Tom Mix's falling points thus to an original tectonic gap between the modern self and a final concretization of his own history and/or identity.

A tectonics of falling in/through the place/space of modernity prepares the ground for the enactment of the myth of Independence. The myth is relevant here because it reflects the problem of an impossible “American” identity from the point of view of coloniality. The myth is appropriately enacted by Tom Mix, who appears to be a prisoner on the way to his own assassination. This concretization, of his own “falling” in the previous scene, is kept ambiguous since we don’t know exactly whose experience he represents. He could be an independence warrior made imprisoned by Spaniards or by creoles supportive of the local viceregal government. Or, on the contrary, he could be a captive of Amerindians against whom General Roca’s army led the so-called “conquest of the desert” [conquista del desierto]. I believe that these two possibilities are suspended in tension with each other in order to maintain the ambiguity of the “true” reference of an American identity.

This undetermined identity prepares the ground for Tom Mix’s own fractured “independence” speech. It is divided into two contrasting parts, one referring to the Viceregal America and the other to Independent America. Royalist America is described as one of racial tyranny resulting in the exploitation of Indians as labor for the mines and of African Blacks as slave property. This America is contrasted to another one, whose land exists like in a dream, “silent in her splendor, infinite” (150). The tectonic tension of modern space/place is made concrete in the juxtaposition of a utopian America inlayed on a site of exploitation and racial devaluation. This “enchanted” site is reflected in the recurrent image of “immortal children, laughing, await[ing] us at the shore” (153). In this image we see a version of the “enduring enchantment” of the “new” which, as Mignolo tells us, by the eighteenth century, “was taken literally by European intellectuals [...] to

mean, first, 'newness' literally, and second, to be associated with 'youth,' 'immaturity,' 'weakness,' contrary to the Old World that was 'mature' both physically and 'mentally.'"⁵⁴ This indicates that the European identify their own "oldness" in opposition to an "other" in the "New" World, while it is the feeling of "maturity" that is really "new." If, from the point of view of the European subject, "new" refers to the "discovery" of their position of superiority vis-à-vis a racialized "other," from the point of view of coloniality, the new promises utopian development and identity emanating from the land.⁵⁵

This enchanted site confirms that it is from the position of coloniality that modernity's tectonic tension can be felt. From this perspective, modernity is a "discovery" of a violent utopianism expressed as the relationship of the land to the "future." The modernity of the Americas can be explained (as Mignolo does) by the fact that "modernity, rationality, history, state, and reason are still taken as points of arrival, even when modernization is detached from Westernization [...] The desire for modernization is always a desire emanating from 'traditional,' 'third world' or postcolonial countries on the side of the colonized."⁵⁶ The enactment of the independence myth, therefore, completes the metaphoric schema of *Marathón* as space/place of history by displacing the spatial coordinates onto a temporal one. In other words, to participate in *Marathón* is to have a modern relationship to time and be guided ultimately by a racist and land-conquering utopianism.⁵⁷ Both characters and spectators participate in this mental trip towards the future. One reviewer, Gerardo Fernández, captures this effect in his assessment of the performance as "one of the most fascinating mental trips [...] towards oneself, towards one's city, one's land (Argentina and America) and towards all

the myths that have constituted our idiosyncrasy, our education, our thinking and affectivity, our material and spiritual conquests, our being and doing.”⁵⁸ This conclusion does not mean that the spatial and platial coordinates must be forgotten in favor of a temporal one. On the contrary, the space/place tectonics of *Marathón* constitute a metaphorical condition for our imaginative grasp of its temporality. In this respect, the play proceeds by continuing, through the work of imagination, the metaphorical process.

The machine metaphor serves to architecturally organize *Marathón* as a temporal site. The machine, in other words, is an imaginative device that serves to link the two main materials encountered in a tectonics of place/space: the modern subject and his/her future. The site of *Marathón* is therefore imagined as the modern machine that produces/reproduces its own futurity. From this perspective, *Marathón* is the subject/machine that produces its future, and in relation to Tectonics “1,” we may say that the relationship of land to future is the production of a specific mode of territoriality. Thus the spatial tectonics is solved by fusing territoriality and the function of production of futurity in the idea of the machine. This cognitive resolution I illustrate with diagram 2.

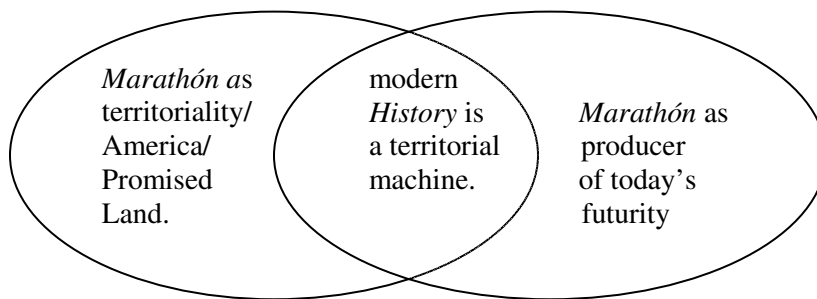


Diagram 2: The metaphoric tension is resolved in the definition in the center, which is itself a new metaphor.

Tectonics 2: this marathon/theatre is a machine, or the commodity state of capitalist production.

The scenes that follow the play's second Myth may be accorded greater structural logic when we consider the implications of the machine metaphor. The machine may be a figure of totalization in the sense that there appears to be no outside of the system represented by the machine. But *Marathón*'s tectonic suggests a different reading. In effect, the machine is of interest, not as the description of a system, but as a way to imagine how modernity produces a specific temporality. I am therefore interested primarily in the function of this "machine" rather than the simile "the system works like a machine." In this respect, Chris Jenks's understanding of another metaphor, that of "reproduction," is illuminating. Jenks recognizes two readings of the metaphor: reproduction as system and reproduction as function. The first reading is phenotypical, invoking "all the modern and sterile resonances of mechanicism and technicism, it speaks of a crafted or rather fashioned reproduction."⁵⁹ This dystopian reading is counterbalanced by a second reading which is genotypical, bringing "to mind the excitement and newness of sexual and biological reproduction." We may now connect these two readings (of the reproduction metaphor) in *Marathón*'s "machine" as both "fashioned" and excitingly "reproductive": *Marathón* is the modern subject who, as a group, fashions its (future) history out of the "excitement and newness" of its modernity. Thus, the scene following Myth Two is one where *Marathón*'s theatrical "machine" is "renewed" for the sake of its on continuation in the future-- the lights come up and the Emcee welcomes the entrance of newly arrived, imaginary spectators. The new spectators, we are reminded, are a sign of investment. The money one pays for the

spectacle allows for the theatrical audience-performers “mechanics” of performance-applause to go on, and for the dancers’ endurance to express “faith in the future,” “abundant joy,” and a celebration of “liberty” (85).⁶⁰

The following scene, where the dancers dream, like in a trance, their “reproductive” power (or potentiality), reveals the link between the sexualization of the future and its territoriality. Héctor has visions of what could be the ancient Inca City of “polished stones” (154);⁶¹ Pipa sees herself engendering an army of female flies; Tom Mix persists in his pastoral vision of naked children; Elena sees herself gradually drying up for lack of water; Vespucci sinks in his ship; and Ema finds a dead child. The dreams are like a virgin territory in need of cultivation, or better yet, it’s as if territoriality itself needed to be rescued from mere potentiality. What demand to be raised to territoriality are the new city, the new female, the new children-- the new bodies, in short, of modernity. The dream scene serves to maintain a tectonic tension in this imagined machine, where the fashioned “parts” are separate yet somehow tectonically grounded to a specific territoriality. When the lights come up again, this “territory” is actualized with the mock coronation, by the Emcee and Elena, of the poet Homero Estrella, who is designated as “the common man’s interpreter” (155). With this, the play builds on metaphorical associations between ideas of cultivation, culture, as well as of a reproduction of gender and economically classified bodies within the city. Eventually, these associated terms are tectonically connected in the territoriality of the *Marathón* machine which serves as a site of cultural reproduction, or of a cultivating function.

While the dream and coronation scene let us know what kind of machine *Marathón* is, the Homero-Elena scene that follows lets us see its functioning. The

couple's relationship is presented as an economy machine functioning according to a logic of gift and exchange between what they consider cultured and what they see as *naturally* gendered. While Homero as poet defends "a lady's honor," he sees his relation to Elena as a substitute for a sexualized youth, a consolation of his "old age" (155). Elena, on the other hand, sees her relationship as an egalitarian reward for her "cultural" work as a librarian. Elena's service to Homero, of typing his poetry, is perceived by the poet as a privilege of his cultural rank (to pay her would be "like paying a prostitute" while the cultural service of instructing Homero is perceived by Elena as her gender role—"behind every man there's a great woman," she says (156). While nature seems to become clearly inscribed through the logic of the couple's gendered relationship, it appears to displace the sexed body (represented by the prostitute) which appears at the margin of the gender-culture loop. Meanwhile, the economic logic is visible only if we are placed outside of the relationship, since the couple articulates their relationship in terms of gender and culture, not economy. The *Marathón* machine is, "in the last instance" (as Althusser would remind us when talking about Marx's materialist history), an economic machine, whereas gender and culture are its parts being articulated together. Meanwhile, the machine's mechanisms put limits to the sharing of benefits by directing those benefits towards a specific class: benefits may go to the producers of culture first, then to petit bourgeois Homero and Elena, but not to the prostitute, for example. Class structure, therefore, may be imagined as the architectural whole holding the culture/gender parts of the machine together, from the *inside*.

Kenneth Frampton's architectural notion of "joint" may help us understand the status of sex, and the "inside" placement of class structure in this economy machine. In

the Homero-Elena relationship sex may reappear “as a point of articulation of the initial system, a point that we can designate with the architectural term of ‘joint,’ [...] that point at which things break against each other rather than connect: that significant fulcrum at which one system, surface or material abruptly ends to give way to another.”⁶² In effect, it is sexuality that articulates the surfaces of culture and gender and reveals their relative autonomy. In other words, sexual excitement serves to separate what should be articulated as gender from what is articulated as culture. The architectural whole, which should now include the sexual “joint,” on the other hand, is equivalent to a structuring of class. Elena’s desire to publish “the complete works” of the poet, and Homero’s realized fantasy of having his poem published in the Sunday edition of a mainstream paper, are instances of virtual sexual consummation that effectively places them within the practice of a middle class and its shared privileges.

The notion of joint allows for the autonomy of both gender and culture to resurface and for class to appear as an architectonic phenomenon, a new perception of the whole from the inside. With the architectonic, the economy machine ceases to be a mere metaphor or a “dead metaphor” (of the kind “the economy is a machine system).” Instead the metaphor, as Ricoeur would say, becomes “live,” and is expressed this time as “the dwelling of my class is a machine where both gender and culture are articulated together, as if from a joint.” The metaphor’s primordial reference is a specific apparatus that is the site of our actions and praxis. On the other hand, it is the “system as machine” metaphor that allows us the possibility of appropriating the site, because, from inside the apparatus, our actions would appear overdetermined. In this respect it is necessary to see the machine from the inside, but *as if* from the outside, like through some X-ray vision. I

suggest that *Marathón* makes this possible when Pipa, the prostitute, becomes a sort of material joint, making us feel the tectonic tension produced by the sexual body. This occurs when the Emcee invites her to share her “history” and she refuses to share it by protesting that “I don’t have a history to tell. I’m only a body here” (158). With this gesture, Pipa disengages her body and sex from the culture-gender system of which she is a device. Pipa throws us out of the class apparatus that contains her by erasing her self—that is, where her body serves as an instance, if not the instance in which our embrace of a class relation is actualized. From the perspective provided by Pipa, the body/sex is both within and outside of the machine, because her body/sex is now viewed architectonically as a joint, that is, as tectonically necessary for the function of the economy machine, and yet an invisible point of encounter in the gender/culture system. In other words, we now see how the body/sex is phenomenally overtaken by class, for class is part of our perception of an architectural whole, a subjective totalization that allows for our appropriation of a space without bodies and sex. With the knowledge of this mechanism, it is possible to tectonically appropriate this machine by focusing on its social function, that is, the reproduction of class relations: I appropriate the machine by allowing for the existence of a cultured/gendered body, and taking my class position within a phenomenal architecture. I am pointing here to an apparent paradox, for what is appropriated is the same class position that appears to be overdetermined by this “machine.” The difference, I suggest, is ethical; and a look at the tectonic split between Homero as “subject” and Pipa as “body” will help explain what this ethics consists in.

The subject without body is constructed, for example, in Homero’s retelling of how he wrote the poem for the literary supplement by borrowing a word every week from

that same publication. Within the architecture of “class,” the subject sees itself as always already there in the shape of phenomenal certainty, whether in the “blank space,” with which Homero struggles before finishing the poem, or in the very certainty of having published the poem. The blank space, Homero’s belief and certainty, are figures of his experience of class and the “overdetermination” of its “contradictions,” in Althusserian terms.⁶³ This also explains why, in *Marathón*, characters never leave the competition entirely, even if, like Homero, they feel that because of their past achievements, they are “saved [and] could die happy” (158).

In contrast to Homero, Pipa only puts forward her body and withdraws, for the moment, the positivity of subject position. Pipa’s putting forward of her own body counters Homero’s performative self (“I publish, therefore I am”) by situating herself as the “other” of Homero. She thus displaces Homero’s individualized agency by calling our awareness to a social phenomenology between the “I” and the “other’s” body.⁶⁴

Peter Hitchcock’s “notes” on Bakhtin’s materialist architectonics provide an apt theorization of the displacement of agency produced by Pipa’s gesture. Hitchcock remarks that

understanding how Bakhtin specifies Being is part of what it means to think architectonically—to put together parts from what is otherwise a chaosophy (to borrow from Guattari) of presence in activity. Everything goes on, but not all our deeds are answerable or responsible within that continuum. Indeed, the making of architectonics could be understood as making time rather than marking it—simply letting it pass.⁶⁵

Pipa's forward or phenomenal body problematizes Homero's seemingly irresponsible deed: to publish and let himself "be." Homero's manufactured agency is indeed to simply mark time, as a way to establish the continuity of self and to perform the self-sufficiency of his body as the occupier of the blank space, the empty stage that makes him both author and actor. Pipa's body reminds us that, according to Bakhtin, "only the other is embodied for me axiologically and aesthetically. In this respect, the body is not something self-sufficient: it needs the *other*, needs his recognition and his form-giving activity."⁶⁶ Bakhtin specifies that "the other's body is an *outer* body" which value is actualized through its phenomenal immediacy, yet its value is not a given, therefore the body is "*set as a task*: I must actively produce it."⁶⁷ In this respect, Pipa's architectonic gesture repositions Homero's "art" as a social task, a praxis that involves the social re-production of bodies through an articulation of the gender/culture system (see diagram 3).

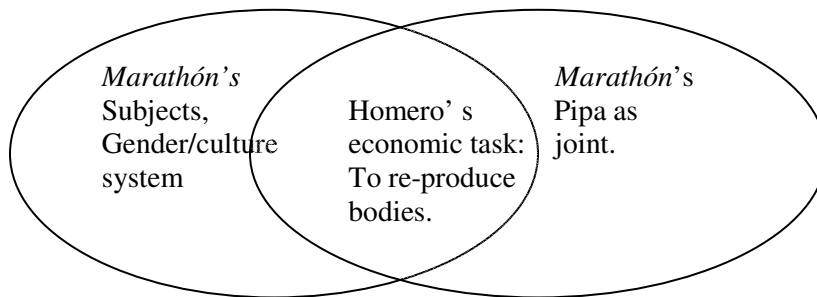


Diagram 3. The definition of Homero's economic task is a suspect resolution because of its circularity.

The subject's complicit connection to the bodies that form his own society makes the subject's professed autonomy necessarily suspect. This is a point of ethical tension

that the *Marathón* machine maintains and intensifies by re-imagining the machine in terms of a tectonic split between the subject and the collective body.

Accordingly, in scene Eleven the “sleeping” dancers, who have already reached a state of exhaustion, are unaware of the entrance of an elegant couple who are generically designated as Hermano and Hermana [Brother and Sister—or Man and Woman in Graham-Jones’s translation].⁶⁸ Man and Woman are like “innocent” intruders who have come upon the site of the marathon.⁶⁹ We may easily recognize here an irony on the “magical” entrance of the modern subject onto the stage of history. The irony is extended by the fact that Woman desires to join, at this late point in the game, the competition. Furthermore, the Woman is theatricalized, in the sense that her wish is to identify with the “other” and with the “real.” The otherness of the dancers is here emphasized by their visible exhaustion. Woman is, therefore, like an actress who *decides* what her mode of identification will be. Her self is alienated from the collective body, yet this alienation allows her to “decide” what her history will be. She is in fact different from the “bodies” who participate to history, in spite of themselves, with their collective praxis. In this respect, her difference itself is theatrical since there is no such thing as an alienated subject from the point of view of praxis, which is always social. But it is not an innocent theatricality, because a specific reincorporation in the collective seems to be its motivation. Theatricality is instrumental in forcing, in this case, an identification that is based on a universal. Woman expresses the universal by reasoning that she, like the dancers, wants to dance for the prize. This equation dismisses the evidence of the dancers’ expenditure, but it has a persuasive effect, allowing Woman to enter the competition “formally” (not without bribing the Emcee with a payment). But the

subject/body split exemplified in Woman's relation to the dancers has even more radical effects: It produces a decontextualization of collective praxis, transforming its bodies into some kind of inert mass, seen now as a block of exhausted dancers. It is a universalized block, and Woman's theatrical identification with it further naturalizes it. Also, the abstraction of the dancers' expenditure from social praxis and production is tantamount to a naturalization of labor power and its commodification (since we can "recognize" now the dancers', and our own, potential as labor force). The naturalization of the block of dancers is finally completed in Myth Three where the dancers become a herd of cattle and the site they occupy is "all of America: one motionless, thick, grimy mass of land. An immense, pregnant woman. Ceaselessly giving birth to sheep, cow, horse" (161). This grotesque image emphasizes the relationship between territoriality and the instrumentality of universalization. It allows for what Coronil terms "a 'grounded' view that complements the recognized importance of labor with the neglected but no less fundamental significance of nature in capitalism's formation." Coronil elaborates, saying that "by bringing out a neglected structuring principle of capitalist development, this perspective helps us to see capitalism as a global process rather than as a European phenomenon."⁷⁰ Thus, in *Marathón*, the elegant couple's alienated selves produce an abstraction of "nature" that prepares the ground for its intensive exploitation—"humanity" is redefined by "nature" as that which has a competitive advantage vis-à-vis this "nature."⁷¹ Therefore, while in the previous scene we saw the *Marathón* machine producing bodies, in Myth Three such production is territorialized as a production of an "American" nature that splits the body and nature from Man's "reason."

Myth Three and its herd enactment is a reference to the Argentine Pampas where an intensive production of cattle for meat exports is initiated by rich landowners. This new economy demanded the exploitation of the gauchos' cheap labor in their new status as rural peons. The labor of the gauchos is thus incorporated into the natural "wealth" of the pampas. In the myth, Man evokes the image of a bleeding America, a sacrificial image that is related to another image, that of the slaughterhouse. The power of the onstage herd enactment resides in its reference to a still important part of Argentine economy and to associated metaphors that have already been formulated by Argentine culture. It is no wonder that some reviews of the performance singled out this image as one of the most suggestive. The critic Ernesto Schóó chooses the herd image as a metaphor that extends to the whole play. He praises Monti's poetic imagination revealed, among others, in the transformation of "the suffering herd of dancers [...] into the cattle troupes that have roamed the Pampas and whose unsystematic killing was described with horrific precision in 'El matadero' [The Slaughterhouse], by Esteban Echeverría [...] Slaughterhouse for all, the author appears to tell us."⁷² Still, more than the imagery, it is the transformation, on stage, of the dancers into the cattle herd that embodies the reason-nature split with great tectonic tension, because it makes that split appear, precisely, almost impossible. Accordingly, reviewer Gerardo Fernández was right to give credit to the director Jaime Kogan for the "dazzling expressivity" of mood and intensity shifts, like in the transformation of the marathon dancers into cattle.⁷³ In the melancholic tension between the human-rational and the animal body of the stage "cattle herd" we may locate the pastoral dream whose loss is lamented in the Myth enactment.

The pastoral dream is presented through its negation, as if the utopian impulse of modernity were redirected toward the past. From this perspective the pastoral points to a mechanism of modern temporality that consists in “dreaming” the past as the ideal “future” site of rational Man. The pastoral is therefore an impossible dream of a “rational” nature—a dream that rational universalization has already sacrificed. In other words, the pastoral is a dream of the rational rather than a dream of the natural. The spectral melancholia of the pastoral and what it means for *Marathón*’s temporality may be understood through De Sousa Santos’ analysis of universalization as an equation of roots and options. He explains that

Such an equation confers a dual character on modern thought: on the one hand, it is a thought of roots, on the other, a thought of options. The thought of roots concerns all that is profound, permanent, singular, and unique, all that provides reassurance and consistency; the thought of options concerns all that is variable, ephemeral, replaceable, and indeterminate from the point of view of roots.⁷⁴

The law that establishes the relation of root and options determines the realm of possibility for the future. Therefore both root and options “are thoughts of the future” which is the thought that grounds modern practice. In Myth Three the root is the “natural” freedom of the herd which gives the option of its domestication; likewise, the infinite Pampean plain (root) demands fragmentation through appropriation (option); and America’s “excess” of nature (root) gives the option of America as a slaughterhouse (option). These examples show that the pastoral is negated by a root that always describes

the natural as an irrational excess. The pastoral thus reflects the “law” of the tectonic relationship of rationality to the “natural” territory that it seeks to dominate and control.

In the root/option equation, De Sousa continues, “the past remains largely underrepresented, Underrepresentation does not mean oblivion. On the contrary, it may manifest itself as ‘excessive memory,’ [...] an exercise in melancholy.”⁷⁵ In this respect, we may speak of the melancholia of the pastoral as a memory sensation that characterizes a present rather than a past or future. In this sense we may relate the pastoral to the modality of memory described in Althusser’s examination of the underrepresentation of the past in Hegel, where

we see that the survival of the past as the ‘*superseded*’ (*aufgehoben*) is simply reduced to the modality of a *memory*, which, furthermore, is merely the inverse of (that is, the same thing as) an *anticipation*. Just as at the dawn of Human history the first stammerings of the Oriental Spirit—joyous captive of the giants of the sky, the sea and the desert, and then of its own stone bestiary—already betrayed the unconscious presage of the future achievements of the Absolute Spirit, so in each instant of Time the past survives in the form of a memory of what it has been; that is, as the whispered promise of its present. That is why *the past is never opaque or an obstacle*. It must always be digestible as it has been pre-digested.⁷⁶

In relation to Althusser’s view, the tectonics of the pastoral suggest that coloniality’s territoriality and “excess” of nature always poses a threat to modernity’s “digestion” of the past. The pastoral “memory” thus maintains *Marathón*’s naturalizing machine in

tectonic tension with the past. Such tension is enacted in scene Thirteen where the marathon dance becomes the site of a sort of quarantine.

The Emcee proposes to dim the lights for the dancers to rest, but the dancers are anxious and resist the idea. The participants are made aware of a threat that is both absence (no “spectators” have come on that day) and a presence (of nature, of death threatening from the outside). The threat is cumulative because the “loss” of spectators denotes a loss of culture (will the past *not* be “digested” in favor of a future?). Therefore, this loss gives greater force to the threat of nature (will the irrationality of nature take over our memory of the past and the possibility of a future?) (162). The bouncer suggests that the dancers are actually protected from both threats by remaining inside the theatre. He says: “You’re all very lucky to be in here, nice and warm, well fed, able to move. Just think about the poor folks out there. How about getting disqualified now? If I was you, I wouldn’t even sleep just to keep my place...It’s below freezing!” (162). This sort of quarantine, where the dancers are advised to keep on dancing, is also able to “imprison” time itself, when the Emcee declares that “here time itself is the spectacle.”⁷⁷ The *Marathón* machine thus functions like a theatre whose spectacle protects us from the melancholia of the pastoral by abstracting time from nature. In this way, “nature” is rationalized in the form of “work,” which is the dancers’ intensive expenditure of energy measured in time. *Marathón* is a work producing machine. Its inexhaustible energy is assured by the parapeal spectacle expressed in the Emcee’s reminder that the dancers’ “own exhaustion is the spectacle.”⁷⁸ This is the spectacle of labor in the world’s factories. We may call this spectacle a modern simulacrum whose tectonics are felt in relation to a pastoral America. In effect, one may attest that “America” has been transported to the

factory where the latter functions as pseudo-nature, a sort of simulacrum where work force becomes the “rational” substitute of nature by deterritorializing the “working” body (see diagram 4).

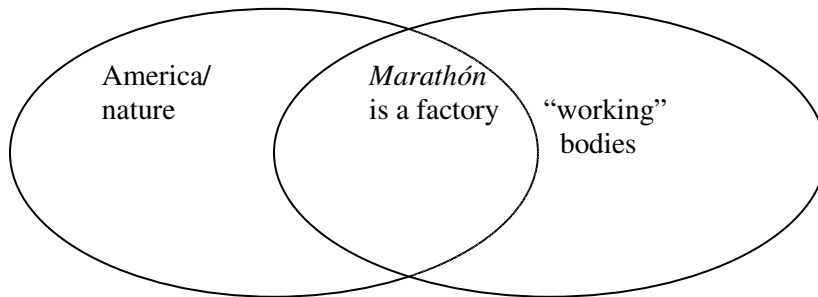


Diagram 4: America and the “working” bodies are de/re-territorialized in the factory.

The spectacle of the factory is a site of a radical positivism, which I take to mean the historical possibility of not going back to nature and envisioning a global future for modernity.⁷⁹ In the scene, the possibility of a return to nature is expressed by the anticipation of rest after the end of the marathon, by the exhausted dancers. This possibility is denied by the Emcee when he forbids Asunción from lying on the ground to rest: “It’s impossible. It wouldn’t be moral,” he tells her. “You would lose any incentive to go on. Resting will be the consolation prize for the losers,” he finally warns all (163). The correlation between restless work and an incentive to continue points to a tautological logic of this machine whose continuation in time follows a law of inertia of work reproducing its energy thanks to work’s moral value as “incentive.” This inertia indicates a transfer of *Marathón*’s spatial tectonics onto the kinetic, perhaps as a way to alleviate the melancholic relationship of modern rationality with the past.⁸⁰

The tectonics of inertia, though, can be explained by the frictional relation between the synchronic time marked by the ticking of the clock and the diachrony of a

historical relation to past, present and future. Here the clock keeps time anchored in a “present” of factory production. The meaning of this “present” differs, of course, if one is a worker or a boss. The boss’s “present” allows him to appropriate the products made in the factory and put them in the market for the gathering of a profit. The worker’s “present” reaps the reproduction of his own work force (in the form of a salary) and makes its set value available to the bosses in the factories of the world. The destiny of the worker makes clear that, tectonically speaking, one never leaves the “global” factory, that is, the circuit of capitalist exchange, since one is always grounded in some way to the “present” of production. Even what we call “the market” can be contained within the factory because what the market exchanges are not things but the value of things determined by the *value* put on work in the factory: See diagram 5.

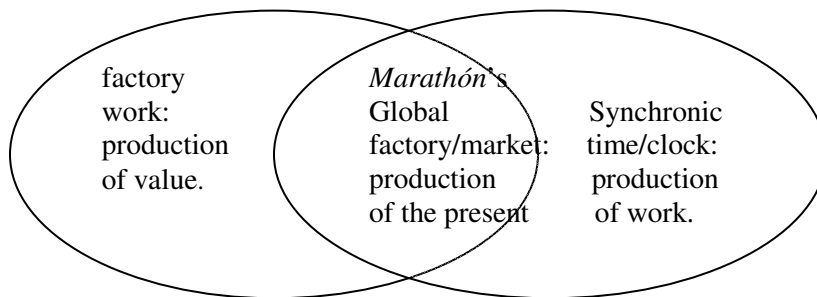


Diagram 5: the productions of work and of value fuse in a global present.

The tectonic reality of *Marathón* as factory-machine, able to contain everything within the “walls” of a present of production, allows us to contextualize Monti’s “aesthetics” beyond the merely metaphorical. For example, Argentine critic Olga Cosentino affirms that in Monti’s work, “the valorization of the dramatic material, elevated to a poetic level, is achieved through...the placing of all the actions in enclosed

spaces, where the ominous and choking sensation is added to the idea of a space destined for sacrifice.”⁸¹ From the tectonic perspective, the “poetic” elements, in *Marathón*, are not a means to an effect but are a property that structures the “machine” itself. In other words, an awareness of tectonics keeps us grounded in the imaginative process of the metaphor rather than rushing into the schematic syntheses of “enclosed spaces” and “ritualization.”

The “poetic” interpretation, in *Marathón*, is instead presented from within, with the declamation of Homero’s own poem. At the end of the “quarantine” scene, Homero delivers the poem, “The Wedding.” It describes the melodramatic story of a beautiful woman who denies her love to all until a man seduces her with the words “I love you” and then asks “all her idle hours to cast away/ in preparation for her wedding day/ which for the following year was set” (164). The poem reveals at the end that the seducer is none other than death itself who has come to join her, years later, when sickness is taking her life away. The destiny of the woman of the poem is an allegory of the absolute limit of the “present” of production, that is, death itself. In other words, death is the inescapable point at which a repressed past and future rejoin the present of production. The appearance of death is therefore the occasion of a profound melancholy towards the loss of tectonic connection (to nature, territory, America?) in the experience of the “factory.” This is expressed in the poem by the melancholic exchange of love for death, and, in the scene, by the fatalism and tears of the women characters. Death is also the opportunity for the future to be rethought, within the factory, through a root-option logic: the “presence” of death can be transferred to the product and, with this, the product can aspire to a kind of absolute, timeless commodity value that transcends the “present” of

both work and profits. This transfer is figured in the kitsch poetics of the poem and its Harlequin-romance narrative. At the end of the poem the woman fearlessly surrenders to death as if in a gesture of loyal love, that is, the transformation of love into a corpse-like body. The death-woman reflects the capitalist's option of performing his exchange of profits (immaterial value) through an exchange of commodities (things, material value) in the "market." If the commodity appears as a result of a root-option logic, it is not, strictly speaking, produced by the *Marathón* factory or capitalist machine. Therefore the commodity does not have to appear in the play as a thing but as an enigma (represented by the unrevealed prize).

We may understand the mystery of "material" commodities through its tectonic manifestation in the play. At the conclusion of the scene the women's tears seem to gain positive force rather than express fatal loss. The shift is marked by Héctor's surprise when, intending to mock Pipa's crying outburst by opening his arms for her, he ends up with his own wife, Ema, crying on his shoulders. The Woman ratifies the affirmative weight of Ema's gesture by laughingly imposing her desire to stay, against the Man's suggestion: "No, mon frère," she protests, "not until the bitter end," she exclaims (165). These gestures make sense if we consider them in relation to the women's identification with the woman of the poem. The feminization of death in the poem, for instance, allows the women to appropriate the theatricality of that feminine body for their own collective "femininity." Therefore, Woman's directive to go "to the bitter end" makes literal the narrative of the poem: it means that the women will carry the bodies of *Marathón* towards their death-like destiny. The tectonic tension of this journey resides in the implication that the women become immaterial by the fact that they are running *towards*

the materiality of death. We may say that the women's theatricality—their iconic immateriality/materiality reflects the tectonic state of commodities in the present of production.

The state of these iconic bodies is also related to the ghosts that, according to David Savran, haunt modern drama; and the tectonic state of commodities somehow solves “the enigma” of the ghost in modern drama. Savran argues that “the very category ‘modern drama’ is in fact a product of imperialism,” and that “its existence is predicated upon a certain disavowal, a refusal to credit the corporeal existence and the labor power of those nearly invisible Others who haunt the margins. Is it no wonder then that in all these modern dramas, the ghost remains an enigma?” Savran finally asks.⁸² The immaterial-material state of bodies in *Marathón*'s factory machine solves the enigma of ghosts as being the state of commodities transferred onto the bodies of the present of production. Furthermore, the tectonic perspective inverts the materiality-immateriality dynamic of modern drama by including the “Other” as well as the “self” in the factory machine. Whereas the ghost of modern drama “is both utterly material and utterly *dematerialized*, a nearly invisible producer at the beck and call of the prosperous few,” the “ghosts” of *Marathón* are utterly immaterial and utterly *materialized* in their commodity state.⁸³

With the women, we may conclude that the *Marathón*-machine produces commodities, not as things, but as a tectonic tension between an immaterial present of production and a material futurity of death. The women's gestures complete the second moment of *Marathón*'s metaphorical act by imagining the place/space of modern history as a utopian factory-machine that puts bodies in the tectonic state of commodities—

running towards the materiality of death. The utopian character of the machine is linked to the emergence of death. As Jameson argues in *The Seeds of Time*,

the relationship between utopia and death is an essential one, but not because of any mystical properties of death itself: rather, death is the aftereffect and the sign that the perspective of Utopia had been reached, which consists in a great and progressive distance from all individual and existential experience, from individual people, from characters (to raise the related issue of Utopian discourse versus narrative or storytelling). The emergence of death is then at that point the signal that it had been possible to take the point of view of the species upon human existence.⁸⁴

Jameson's point is that the perspective of the species, that is, of history and of a collective praxis, is utopian in the sense that the energy is projected according to a future that is imagined collectively. Yet the utopian can be neutralized when the consciousness of praxis or of a collective is erased and repressed. Jameson explains that

to understand Utopian discourse in terms of neutralization is indeed precisely to propose to grasp it as a process, as *energeia*, enunciation, productivity, and implicitly or explicitly to repudiate that more traditional and conventional view of utopia as representation, as the "realized" vision of this or that ideal society or social ideal.⁸⁵

The tectonics of the commodity helps us grasp what it means to neutralize the utopian. For instance, the sense of a utopian movement toward materiality is absorbed in the experience of the enigma of commodities as "things" that are alienated from praxis. Yet, in *Marathón's* machine, the utopian is sensed through the tectonic reality of

commodities, not as things, but as a kinetic or temporal state, in suspension (within the “present” of production) between the present and the future, between immateriality and materiality.

The second moment of the metaphoric process, that of imagining the modern space/place’s relationship to the future as a temporality-producing machine, ends with the conclusion that this temporality is a tectonic state that can only be fully expressed as a feeling. The machine metaphor encounters its limits with the fact that it produces a spectral present where the relation to a future is somewhat veiled by the production of commodities. In the third moment of the metaphorical process we would then explore feelings so that they may open up this apparent closure. This could be expressed with the statement: “This present-of-production machine puts bodies in the commodity state of ‘running’ towards the materiality of death” (see diagram 6).

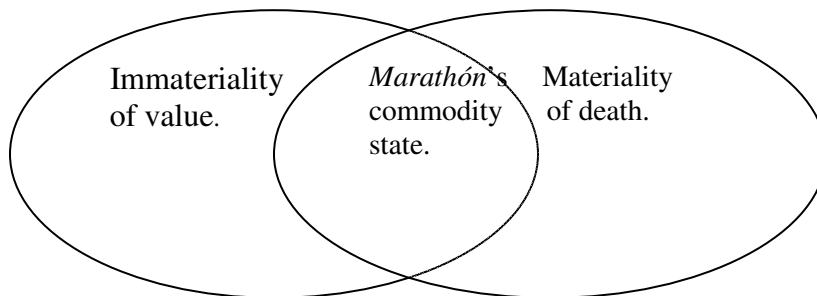


Diagram 6: The immateriality of value and the materiality of death fuse in the commodity state.

This “present” is, more specifically, a feeling towards the future that neutralizes its utopian impulse. I am suggesting that the women’s gesturing towards the “end” of their own marathon is directing us towards an exploration of “utopian” feelings that are the very reason for being of the *Marathón* event.

Tectonics 3: This marathon/theatre/machine is our feeling of tomorrow or, welcome to the redemptive/utopian crisis of modernity/postmodernity's "today."

It is not a coincidence that, with the women's gesture, the historical enactments of the play finally nears the "present" of *Marathón*'s performance. Indeed, the Emcee announces that it is March of 1932, meaning that the historical myth to be enacted almost coincides with the date of the marathon itself (in 1933). If we "read" this announcement through the metaphoric construct of the play, we may realize that it has a double effect. The closing in of a historical past with the present, in the marathon's enactments, means that the contemporary audience is also about to witness an enactment of their own present in *Marathón*. At the same time, the announcement produces, in this respect, a sort of anticipation of this "present," so that the present is somehow displaced onto a future, for both the dancers and the audience of *Marathón*. This tectonic dislocation mocks in some way the tension between the immateriality and materiality of bodies in the *Marathón* factory-machine. This whole process is corroborated by the Emcee, who greets a new-coming audience by announcing that "the critical moment is drawing near. They're only bodies, after all! Come on, ladies and gents! Tomorrow will be too late!" (165). This "tomorrow" may well be the "present" that we are now anticipating by nearly occupying its space in advance. There is a logic of terror in the Emcee's warning. It would consist in the imperative of never identifying with the moment of materialization, even as we anticipate it with greater force. Here, the play focuses on this element of terror that characterizes the "commodity" state of bodies running towards their death—the dancing bodies' terror consists also in their being characters who must appear and perform for the contemporary audience.

I am suggesting that, as the marathon reaches the present of performance, tension grows in the temporality of “live” performance because the demand for theatrical materialization would seem to send terrified bodies more forcefully towards their death. We may relate this tension to Herbert Blau’s assessment of the value of performance as existing beyond the marketable phenomenology of the “real” and “live.” He explains:

no seeming self-denial on the part of an actor, no pretense of immediacy, however momentarily powerful or time-effacing, can amplify the privileged instant, for it is only for the instant timeless [...] It is then that we realize that approval has been, in our very assent to the transgression of performance, institutionalized, historicized, *on borrowed time*. The theater is a space of amortization. The interest is in the performance, and there is no performance without interest on a loan that can never be paid.⁸⁶

The interest of Blau’s remark, in our context, is that it sees performance in the “instant” of the audience’s confrontation with the performing body. This instant becomes a site of a tectonic impact that provokes “amortization.” The remark also serves to highlight the usefulness of a tectonic perspective for avoiding Blau’s own essentializing of the “instant,” and of the eventually amortized “transgression” of performance. In effect, the perception of transgression *and* its amortization is only the result of the terror we feel as our bodies are made to run head-on towards death, because death has become our utopian (though veiled) anchor to the future. Amortization is then, more properly speaking, a resistance to performance that neutralizes our utopian impulse. The appropriate question is therefore, not what is performance transgressing, but why are we resisting performance.

Part of the answer has already been provided by the *Marathón* machine, which showed the benefits of the “present” of factory production. From that perspective, we know that that present somehow veils its actual relation to the future. What interests us now, though, is how resistance manifests itself through feelings, or, more precisely how feelings can be released by a breaking of resistances. In relation to Blau’s remarks, it is a matter of releasing the feelings contained in the “privileged instant” of performance. Such release is achieved in the scene between Pipa and NN, where the protective “bubble” of the present of production is somehow pierced.

In scene Fifteen, Pipa indicates that her watch has stopped. Her gesture is a performative strategy directed, quite appropriately, against the “resistance” of NN, who will impersonate the industrialist in Myth Four. The stopping of the watch becomes a metaphor with which Pipa begins to chatter the monolithic time of the capitalist factory-machine. She reminds NN that *her* “time is of some service” to him (166). Pipa thus calls attention to a time that belongs to the capitalist’s “other,” and that, in the absence of a watch, is non-quantifiable. The gesture, therefore, separates NN’s borrowing of (non-quantifiable) time as a means of production (time is money) from his need of a watch as a measuring instrument that systematizes exploitation and profits. As a prostitute, Pipa uses her own body metaphorically, that is, by making it imply that borrowing the other’s time is like, or rather, *is* borrowing the prostitute’s body. By referring us to the reality of paid sex, she also directs us to another tectonic split, that between the temporalities of the body, and of “payment,” in our experience of the time of production.

On one side there is the time of the body, eternal in the sense of being always available to the capitalist as work force; on the other side, there is the time of payment

and remuneration which cycles determine the rate of production and profits. It is the second “time” that the capitalist feels he needs with a violence that contrasts with the availability of the “body” time. Pipa, for example, plays on NN’s confusion of these different “times.” She first protests for NN’s non-payment of “the other five [hours] from before these that are up at seven,” to what NN responds that he is on schedule with his payments to her (166). Then, Pipa clarifies that what she charges for is “the time, whether I’m horizontal or vertical, of *services* rendered” (166). I read this “time of service” as a euphemism for “the service of *time*” to capitalist production. The service is the time of borrowed bodies (for the extraction of work time), that, in Blau’s perspective, is a loan that “can never be paid.” For NN, to participate in the marathon is to occupy this “borrowed” time as if it were his property. *Marathón*’s tectonics depicts this situation rather comically when Pipa threatens to leave. In the scene, NN surrenders to Pipa’s demand by desperately paying her (for the first time in his capitalist life) for the “mere” fact of “staying,” even while he is bankrupt. The scene thus reveals the hidden need of the capitalist to “borrow” the time of bodies. To recapitulate: a) NN’s performance consists in keeping his payments on schedule as a way to place himself in relation to work time; b) The need for the time of borrowed bodies is the feeling that is locked in that performance; and c) that feeling is released from NN’s performance through Pipa’s performative metaphor, which could be expressed as: “you have *borrowed* the services of [my] body time.” Pipa thus reverses the “time” object of the capitalist’s need (see diagram 7).

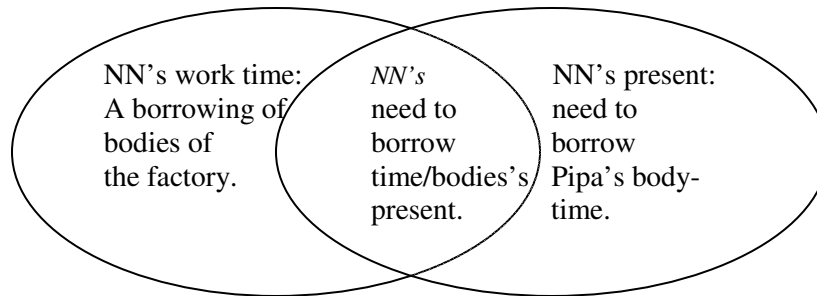


Diagram 7: NN's borrowing of bodies and need to borrow Pipa's body fuse in the need to borrow the present.

Pipa's performative reverberates with great irony when NN threatens to kill himself but finally decides to stay and give "time" a chance to fill the "hole" in his suicidal mind (167). The hole points to the tectonic gap between the need to own the time of bodies and the need to rationalize that need by paying for work time. Now that he is asked to pay for "borrowed" time, those two needs are in contradiction. This allows Pipa to mock NN by pointing to her now unavailable sex—"the only hole that matters to [her]" (167). The "holes" and the contradiction of needs are like a tectonic feeling of neutralization of the utopian. This feeling affects our perception of the entire *Marathón* machine—its very structure appears now defective. From the perspective of the present of production, the need for "borrowed" time reveals that such time cannot be "reimbursed," because it is by a perpetual borrowing that profits are produced. This is to say that the "historical productivity of the present of production (represented in the ideology of progress, for example) is itself an illusion. It is necessary, then, to take a new look at the temporality of the machine after the revelation of its hidden feeling.

If *Marathón* continues its course "to the bitter end," then whatever time it "borrows," allows for its projection towards the future in the form of production. But

when the schedule of payment and profit gathering arrives, the machine has already spent its own future (the time of bodies) in the form of labor. This means that the machine spends everything that it borrows, and therefore the “present” of production can only continue with further borrowing. This shows that *Marathón* ends up reproducing its present by being increasingly in debt towards its future—that is, by increasing the tectonic gap between the present and the future.

The tectonic gap in *Marathón*'s temporality provides an insight into a strictly historical interdependence between the logic of fetishism in commodities as well as in psychoanalytic theories of subject formation. Specifically, the relationship between a fetishistic phallic mother, which keeps at bay the “horror of the female genitals,” and the fetishism of commodities that keeps at bay death as the very destiny of the worker's borrowed bodies.⁸⁷ In *Marathón*, the fetishistic projection is removed as if it were a mask, leaving in its place a hole in NN's head and in Pipa's “sex.” It is the hole left by a debt of time borrowed through both a phallogocentric and an economic “symbolic” order. In relation to this hole, NN and Pipa's gestures reveal opposite forms of agency. NN puts his faith in a universalized time of production that would eventually redeem him and cover his “hole.” Pipa, on the other hand, by pointing to her sex, relies on the power of abjection, in Kristeva's sense of a perverse and ambiguous relationship to prohibition. As Tina Chanter explains,

Abjection concerns both the pleasurable and the fascinating, dangerous, or horrific—that which threatens. One can also say that central to Kristeva's psychoanalytic understanding of desire is the suggestion that it assumes, rather than following prohibition. The object of desire is desirable

precisely as forbidden. At the same time, however, Kristeva is interested in the instability of the incest prohibition, and therefore in the ways in which the symbolic function that is set up in its wake is liable to revision and transformation.⁸⁸

Symbolic liability is shown in Pipa's "abjection of self," that, according to Kristeva, simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject [...] when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it *is* none other than abject. The abjection of self would be the culminating form of that experience of the subject to which it is revealed that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural loss that laid the foundation of its own being.⁸⁹

For instance, the fetishized sex of the prostitute is found to be the base, not only of an impossible "future" that never materializes, but also of an impossible past that has been historically used up for a present of production. Her own "sex" is seen as the foundation of her "being." In this respect, Pipa's gesture can be thrown back at interpretations of the female characters by *Marathón*'s male audience. Read, for example, critic Ernesto's Shóó's psychological view of Elena—where he mockingly describes her cultural work as fulfilling her "sexual emptiness."⁹⁰ Pipa's abjection shows that fetishization of women fulfills instead a "male" historical inertia. This inertia is enacted in Myth Four's "industrialist America."

In Myth Four, NN's song and dance leads the dancers into a sleepwalking foxtrot. The regretful tone of the song reflects the regressive temporality of its present---

he sings: “There’s not left even a memory/ of the world of my invention,/ and so ends the short history/ of this honest, good businessman” (169). But, as the following scenes indicate, the melancholic regret of the businessman, supported by the unremembered body time of the prostitute, is not enough to convey the historical loss produced by the *Marathón* machine. Instead, loss is enacted in two scenes where the other women confront the trauma of their own “history.”

In the first of these scenes, Ema repudiates God’s right to judge her in the after-life because, as she protests, she is “not to blame.” Her context is the death of her two-month-old baby who, in her delirium, “comes back out of the darkness.” Ema remembers those two months of the child’s life as the only ones in which she herself “was alive” (169-170). She contrasts those months of living to the remaining years in which she had to carry the guilt of being childless (or of not being able to save the child from death). Her own desire to sacrifice herself for her child’s life is seen by her as a sign of being alive as well as of her innocence. Her recognition allows her to refuse the past as a sign of “guilt,” for which she seems to accuse her husband Héctor by calling him “trash” (170). The following scene continues the refusal of a gendered guilt, targeting the author of “The Wedding” himself, Homero. Elena expresses her own disgust at Homero by saying “*hysterically*”: “you make me sick!” (170). In these two scenes we see the repudiation of a male symbolic order as producers of woman’s “guilt.” The language of abjection—in the women’s use of words like “trash” and “sick--” are like a returning of abjection to the rulers of the symbolic order. Following Kristeva’s theory, abjection here is a “linguistic transgression that opens up within the symbolic order a way back to the forbidden,” that is, to a loss that was “constituted through the repudiation of the abject.”⁹¹

The abject reactions do not constitute outright rejection of the male culprits, but a gesture towards what has been lost, like in mourning. What has been lost is a feeling of the body's time, which has been exchanged for the feeling of an original "loss" of innocence. The women's abjection allows them to correct their own and the men's previous misapprehension of what Dominick LaCapra calls "loss on a historical level."⁹² LaCapra's qualification of loss is part of his critique of the discourse of absence as the source of an annihilation of a historical past and its concrete losses. In this sense, the guilt of the women (an absence narrativized as loss of innocence), imposed by a male symbolic order, "is the absence of an absolute that should not itself be absolutized and fetishized such that it becomes an object of fixation and absorbs, mystifies, or downgrades the significance of particular historical losses."⁹³ The women's abjection, in this context, is a rejection of an exchange of historical loss for a "guilt" made absolute by the fetishization of their own sexed bodies. In relation to Pipa's abjection of self, Ema and Elena's "linguistic" abjections remind them of Pipa and everybody's body, as a possible "forbidden" site of historical recuperation. Bodies are "sick" and "trash," "precisely because abjection does not operate at the level of desire, but rather constitutes the rejection that desire presupposes."⁹⁴ Therefore, the relation of these bodies to the prohibition of materializing in death is "not straightforward, but perverse."⁹⁵ Abjection allows the mass of "borrowed" bodies to perform, not as individual characters, but as a group, because it is as a group that the capitalist perceives the bodies in relation to his own desire for borrowed "time." Therefore, it is as a group that the abjected bodies most perversely approach death as the limit experience of their own traumatic history.

We may apply the power of the women's linguistic abjection to Monti's particular use, as Fernández noted in his review, of a "simple, colloquial language, [...] the play of common places, [...] a local language" that make of *Marathón* an Argentine work where "all is seen from a national perspective." This language, Fernández continues, is able to profoundly move its audience and "serves as a nasty but salutary shock on all levels."⁹⁶

Through the perverse body of the group, then, the stage becomes a place of enunciation of a utopian impulse that counters the melancholic regret of NN in Myth Four. The relationship between the process of abjection and the identification of a perversely utopian place is evident in the critical reception of the performance that might have recognized, in the group of dancers, the "bodies" of the people of Buenos Aires. Shóó's review is, in this respect, most suggestive—he says:

The audience won't have difficulty in recognizing, under the make-up and the shapeless rags that cover these beings, the people of Buenos Aires [...] forever carriers of a mysterious wound that, nothing, apparently, is able to heal. And it won't have difficulty in recognizing, in this metaphor of the hellish ballroom, [...] this city, the way that Borges did when he said: 'What binds us is not love but fright/ that must be why I love you so' [No nos une el amor sino el espanto/ Será por eso que la quiero tanto].⁹⁷

Borges's quote is relevant here because it traces the perspective of abjection as one going from a collective and intransitive "fright" to an intersubjective "love" that makes of Buenos Aires bodies a place of utopian enunciation.

A feeling of fright is provoked by the Emcee's list of "inventions of ways of not dying," which he voices over the dancers (170). The list should be heard in the context of

this abject group performance that seeks to express, with the help of the Emcee's words, the group's own experience of history. The Emcee's list, which I quote in full, refers to 1930s history, and negotiates by way of commonalities, the local Argentine and the global world contexts. The Emcee says:

Take Spain, for example. Or Berlin, with the little chancellor. And in our own little southern corner of the universe, an Australopithecus. From Wall Street, a specter is haunting the world. And in 1933, here in Buenos Aires—the city without hope, Le Corbusier called it—a wave of suicides. Le Roi du Tango triumphs in Paris only later to meet his most serious defeat in Colombia. Mussolini in Abyssinia, the obelisk. Joliot-Curie, the Kid Cabeza. And Guernica. And a serrated cross waving on black banners, covers the sky. And in Berlin, ein Kleiner Kanzler! [170]

The perversion of the list consists of its conflation of redemption and destruction, and of the individual/local and the worldly/collective. Also, the destructive power of fascism (in Spain, Italy, Argentina, and Germany), and the capitalist “Great Depression” are perversely counterbalanced by the worldwide triumphs of science (Joliot Curie and penicillin), architecture (le Corbusier and Buenos Aires' Obelisk), and Argentine mass entertainment (Gardel and tango). The significance of the list is its critical allusion to a worldwide “culture industry,” for which, according to Adorno, “the masses are not the measure but the ideology [...] even though the culture industry itself could scarcely exist without adapting to the masses.”⁹⁸ The traumatic experience of fascist politics and war, and of “historical” capitalist crises is somehow elided through the “principle of their [commodity] realization as value,” showing that “the entire

practice of the culture industry transfers the profit motive naked onto cultural forms.”⁹⁹ Penicillin, the “crisis” suicide of Buenos Aires and New York stockbrokers, and the Fascist-Nazi bombing of Guernica, when received as cultural forms (in Picasso’s painting or in Buenos Aires’ modern identity, for example), equally announce their redemptive value when they publicize the immunization of the “present” culture to death.

The combination of invention and death in the list reminds me of David Harvey’s suggestion that “the image of creative destruction is very important to understanding modernity precisely because it is derived from the practical dilemmas that faced the implementation of the modernist project. How could a new world be created after all, without destroying much that had gone before?”¹⁰⁰ Harvey locates the Nietzschean figure of Dionysus as the representative of this force, which opens up a place for a will that is individual, and at the same time relinquishes individuation in the act of creating civilization and/or culture. Harvey’s figure of a modern gestalt points to the power of culture to simulate the redemptive passage to de-individuation, since it manufactures consensus even as it celebrates the individual. We become cultural entities who, through the techniques of reproduction and circulation are “no longer *also* commodities, but are commodities through and through.”¹⁰¹ Thus the tango singer Carlos Gardel, whose public triumph is *also* commodified as a symbol of Buenos Aires culture, becomes “a commodity through and through” at the time of his untimely death in Medellín.

The Emcee’s list offers us an alternative version of the modernist paradox presented by Harvey: the space of modernity has the quality of a destiny that contradicts

the narrative of progress—it tends to become petrified in monumentality, speaking with the ambiguous tone of both lamentation and celebration: “the city without hope...the obelisk.” The contradiction lies between the space that the individual both creates for himself and “sets aside” for progress (monumentalizes) and the anticipation of a necessary failure as all things are destined to modernity’s creative destruction. Susan Stanford Friedman presents this contradiction in the form of “parataxis,” which she defines in part as “a mechanism of the ‘dream work’ in Freud’s grammar for the unconscious processes of disguised expression of the forbidden, indicating unresolved or conflicting desires.”¹⁰² Her “Parataxis 4” exemplifies the mixed space-time of individuation and de-individuation, of monumentality and destruction. Stanford Friedman’s parataxis consists of two quotes. The first is by Marshall Berman. It reads:

To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world--and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are. . . . To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, 'all that is solid melts into air.'¹⁰³

The second quote is from Scott Lash and Jonathan Friedman. It reads:

The paramount figure in modernism is that of the static and abstract model separated from the dynamic ebb and flow of reality. This figure is that of the Cartesian 'I,' of the abstract natural rights of the French Revolution, of Kantian reason, of the unsuccessful blueprints of the worst of orthodox Marxism, of city grids, of Corbusier's *machine à habiter*, of Habermas's ideal speech situation.¹⁰⁴

What we read in these quotes are two versions of the same object. Berman's is experiential, subjective, and sentimental; while Lash and Friedman's is philosophical, rational, and objectifying. Both are positioned, though, in a theatre of a persistent now or present—a present that washes over the privilege of individuality while reifying it at the same time. The individual finds himself “absent” from the space of history and then fetishized as the primary object of a totalizing fantasy. In relation to this space, the figure of individuality appears as absence and as fetish, revealing a forbidden desire for death. The Emcee's list shows that desire as a collective fantasy, in the iconic deaths of mass culture, and in the death banners of fascism. In both cases, death remains a fantasy, a simulation through culture, of a utopian connection to the future. That simulation, which is enacted by the presence of the group of dancers, somehow betrays a failure of the abject performance of dancing bodies, neutralized by the Emcee's description of history in the nearest-to-death, slogan-like language of a “present” world-culture-fascism.

The feeling of abjection in *Marathón* overcomes the screen of simulation when the performance coincides with its composite contemporariness (1980/time of performance, 1932). An abjection of modern absolutism (the space-time of individual redemption) can be enacted through an acknowledgement of Hitler's “final solution” and the horror of Auschwitz, (that *Marathón* ghosts in the enactment of myth Five—its “dream of stillness, a vast cemetery” and the collective cry of “Heil!” by the dancers) (171). The Holocaust horror, lying in the future of fascist slogans and in the future of the 1932 marathon setting is presented as the terminal point of its utopian impulse. At this precise moment the audience's awareness of historical reverberation reaches its greatest intensity since the enactment in the 1980 performance comments on the then occurring

ultra-nationalist “Dirty War” of the military government against its own citizens. The image of Nazi genocide allows *Marathón* to abject its modern present as well as its past, as when the Bouncer echoes the words of Argentine “Fascist” anti-immigrant writer of the early century, Leopoldo Lugones. In this perpetual reverberation of past, present, and future temporalities, individual redemptive “passage” within its own present becomes impossible; therefore abjection becomes a utopian necessity. The short dialogue between Man and Woman expresses this with exquisite theatricality:

Man: Ma soeur, let’s get out of here.

Woman: Impossible, mon frère.

Man: Mais pourquoi?

Woman (*with a giggle*): Because we’re trapped. Don’t you see our bodies there, in front of us? They’re dancing. And where would we go without our bodies? [172]

The separation of self and body in the Woman’s expression is a metaphor for the difference between two temporalities, one synchronic, produced by the modern self and the other, utopian, acknowledging the body’s reach unto the past and future (and leaving the synchronic “self” at the margins of a tectonic, corporeal theatre).

Marathón’s ethics of the tectonic theatre, or the utopian vs. reality.

The dancers’ identification of death as a utopian horizon becomes an occasion, I believe, for experiencing the corporeality of their own history, even if this means enacting their confrontation with death. The newly found agency of the characters is not devoid of tectonic tension since they have to negotiate their performance with the

demands of the marathon “competition.” In other words, the characters are finally able to act out an ethical positioning by choosing to stay in the tectonic theatre constructed by Monti’s play and its performance. In relation to the characters’ performance, the marathon competition is metaphorical only in the sense that it represents the scenographic perspective that *Marathón*’s tectonics has moved away from. One might say that *Marathón*’s tectonics is in tension with the scenographic perspective that dominates our perception of “the real.” Therefore, Monti’s own motivation for the play becomes more transparent: *Marathón*, Monti tells us “depicts a group of beings who are trapped by the real, by time, and who try to transcend time and, in some way, death, through various dreams.”¹⁰⁵ The emphasis on the characters’ performance also means that the intrusion of the Emcee and the Bouncer comes from their now liminal position between the tectonic and the “real.”

The temporality of *Marathón* leaves few choices of action for the characters: they *must* confront their own deaths in some way or another. The manner of this confrontation will reflect an ethical stance. NN, for example, accuses Vespucci of contaminating the group with his tuberculosis, an attitude that Vespucci sees as a denial of death that conditions the group’s participation in the marathon. Meanwhile, Homero, who is the first to die (or let himself die), produces his last “new poem.” This poem actually reproduces his earlier poem: in the new poem it’s no the bride but the poet himself who welcomes the embrace of the Lord. Homero’s artistic redemption somehow fails to mourn historical loss, something that is intuited by Héctor, who examines Homero’s body and cannot ascertain that he is definitely dead. The Emcee finally sees here an opportunity to affirm the moral “significance” of the competition by using the event as a

metaphor of the *poet*'s destiny. He declares that Homero "gave us his very best [...] and that is his prize: the part of him that remains behind with us" (173). The Emcee's suggestion, that this theatre is *only* a metaphor of their own "reality," is enacted by the men who fight for the right to deal with the corpse and remind Héctor that the prize corresponds to individual desires to "pay off the mortgage, "or "save [oneself] from bankruptcy," for example (178). The men's actions, inspired by the Emcee's evaluation, are a strategy of denying the tectonic theatre in favor of a scenographic realism that sees this theatre as a mere metaphor. The following sequence deals with another strategy of denial, which LaCapra explains in terms of the conversion of absence into loss, or loss into absence. LaCapra advises that

losses cannot be adequately addressed when they are enveloped in an overly generalized discourse of absence, including the absence of ultimate metaphysical foundations. Conversely, absence at a "foundational" level cannot simply be derived from particular historical losses, however much it may be suggested or its recognition prompted by their magnitude and the intensity of one's response to it.¹⁰⁶

For example, when Tom Mix refuses to dance, he converts the generalized absence of rationality, perceived in relation to his incorporeal stillness, into the loss of his pastoral dream of "immortal children." Here Tom Mix "increases the likelihood of misplaced nostalgia or utopian politics in quest of a new totality of fully unified community."¹⁰⁷

Héctor emulates Tom Mix's gesture by turning off the music, a gesture that, unlike the grounding of Tom Mix's stillness, increases his sense of loss. Héctor projects his loss into a deep sense of injustice, so that justice itself becomes an absence that should reappear in

this or another “world,” as some kind of Kantian categorical imperative or Hegelian absolute. Here Héctor “faces the impasse of endless melancholy, impossible mourning, and interminable aporia in which any process of working through the past and its historical losses is foreclosed or prematurely aborted.”¹⁰⁸

The Emcee takes a cue from Héctor and Tom Mix’s discourse of absence and asks them to “decide” for themselves whether to remain or stay in the marathon, since there seems to be nothing else to be done in this “theatre.” This is actually a trap set by the Emcee, based on a paradox produced by the discourse of absence itself, that is, the simultaneous sense of illusion and reality. In effect, if absence means that there is nothing to be done *here*, then, by staying, I must assume that either this environment is my “reality” which ultimately will reveal its significance, or, on the contrary, I must assume that reality in the form of truth is inaccessible and therefore live the illusion of *here*. Faced with this conundrum, the “kid” Tom Mix decides to take, so to speak, reality into his own hands, by attacking the bouncer and grabbing the revolver from him. Vespucci attempts to kill himself (opting for the second option which he finds unbearable), and the bouncer tries to save himself by reminding his attackers that it is all “a show, a device, a game!” and later calling himself a “thief of miseries” (178). The dancers, already invested in the reality/illusion paradox, turn around to attack the Emcee who has provoked in the men a phobic antitheatricality, which is like the symptom of their reality/illusion investment. In order to deny the “game” of the marathon, the dancers stop the Emcee from revealing the prize. This allows NN to champion reality by exclaiming: “there’s nothing more to know here! We’re here to win! That’s all! Each one of us knows exactly what we need to know! What we can win and what we can lose!” (179). This

“democratic” definition of reality teaches us something else. Reality has nothing absolute about it, it is rather very relative since it allows for myriad forms of identification; it is always equal to our desire. It is, in other words, impossible to deconstruct the notion of reality itself for just as death puts a limit on the value of the commodity, so does a repressed sense of the collectivity put a limit to our definition of reality so that it always falls short of encompassing the collectivity and its historical life.

We may see evidence of this shortcoming of (relative) reality in the fact that the notion of collectivity transgresses the boundaries of reality—it therefore becomes identity, imagined construct, or an effect of tradition, myth, ritual, primal impulse, performance, new social movements that add feelings of *communitas* and processes of intersubjectivity to a “lacking” reality. Reality, in this sense, is scenographic—a background which produces the democratic consensus via a negative dialectics—it is the site of a universal “private” lack: if we are here to win, then reality (our “here”) is private property and holds the secret of (hides) the profit logic of our actions. But as Žižek reminds us through Lenin, “reality” may well be the ideological space for democratic consensus and its political limits since...

Fidelity to the democratic consensus means acceptance of the present liberal-parliamentary consensus” which precludes any serious questioning of how this liberal-democratic order is complicitous in the phenomena it officially condemns and, of course, any serious attempt to imagine a society whose sociopolitical order would be different. In short, it means: say and write whatever you want-on condition that what you do does not effectively question or disturb the predominant political consensus.¹⁰⁹

The ideological force of democratic consensus is reflected in Tom Mix impotent anger towards NN, in the ease with which the Man resumes the dance with the slogan “time marches on,” and in Pipa’s reincorporation even as she now counts the hours owed to her.

I believe that a reference to Brecht will be useful in assessing the intriguing resolution of *Marathón*. In this respect I consider Brecht’s materialist “epic” theatre as an attempt to capture history as affect and therefore going beyond the coolly didactic dimensions generally attributed to his project. Epic theatre does not simply describe and/or foreground social relations, but places their historical dimension in a tectonic tension with our own familiar sense of a present. It is by tectonically reminding us of the temporal dislocation of our present with the “historical” that Brecht’s theatre produces a *gestus*. In this sense the *gestus* does not deconstruct or “historically” relativize social relations, but makes “historical” our own compulsion to enact our own specific social relations in our “present.” The “historical” here has an affective property that is the result of an “alienation effect” or our uneasy separation from the familiarity of our present.

In this respect, Žižek directs us to

turn round Marx's eleventh thesis [and Brecht’s more didactic impulses for his Epic theatre] . The first task today is precisely not to succumb to the temptation to act, to directly intervene and change things (which then inevitably ends in a cul-de-sac of debilitating impossibility: "what can one do against global capital?"). Rather, the task is to question the hegemonic ideological coordinates, or, as Brecht put it in his *Me Ti*, “Thought is something which precedes action and follows experience.”¹¹⁰

Marathón dramatizes these contrasting options (temptation to act *versus* a thought that follows or rides on the tail of experience) in the resolutions provided by Tom Mix's and Héctor's actions. While the group attacks the Emcee, the Bouncer still holds Tom Mix at gunpoint. Finally the tension is released when the Bouncer puts the gun away with a mouthed "bang!" Thus Tom Mix is saved from a dishonorable end and he can make his "decision" to leave the competition. Tom Mix's leaving stands for the drama of individual revolt "succumbing to the temptation to act." The gesture is performative in the sense of reasserting the currency of his dream in the background of a corrupt "reality."

Héctor's resistance to follow Tom Mix, after the latter presses him with an "are you going to stay?," comes in the form of a thought. He turns to his wife, inquiring "Emma [Ema]?" (180). In this reflexive moment, Héctor, I suggest, faces the emptiness of both NN's and Tom Mix's pretensions, which respectively embody conservative and liberal democratic consensus. Héctor doesn't properly decide but resumes the dance as his wife has done. Ema's dance also accompanies her thoughts about the "many things...that [she] never had" (181). I propose that it is the dance (and his own seamless in-corporation), not Ema's words, that ultimately "moves" Héctor towards the realization that he is in fact staying. The dance enacts a common corporeality, an experience before thought that colors his reception of Ema's speech or rather allows him to recognize its theatricality. She says: "Me? (*Pause.*) There are so many things...that I never had [...] I want to have servants! [...] I want to feel a mink coat against my skin! [...] No. I'm staying" (181). The theatricality consists in the mode in which the "future" of the marathon is invoked--in a tone that is felt without being triumphant and at the same time

is detached without being ironic. Ema's wishes are excessive and inadequate, to the extent that they mirror her experience of a historical loss. Therefore they are like mirage images that question the ideological coordinates of her actual sense of a future—as if the form of her wish is felt as a symptom of her loss.

The dance grounds both Ema and Héctor in the utopian mode of *Marathón*, it allows them to finally be able to touch their own “death” in the form of a missed opportunity. In that thought resides their capacity to access our complicit practice and collective historical life. Finally, to go back to our Brechtian reference, *Marathón*'s gestus, as perceived in the relationship between Héctor and Ema, is produced collaboratively by actor Ema and spectator Héctor. Ema as “character” offers the action of “staying” and Héctor as spectator theatricalizes Ema and feels tectonically linked to her with his love of “this poor unlucky woman” (181). It is Héctor's perception of Ema and the effect it has on him (he mechanically begins to dance) that makes Ema's action quotable, in the Brechtian sense—her gesture is now able to signify a collective mourning that includes all dancers and spectators. Monti himself has identified Héctor as the “hero” of the play based on the fact that he is the one who “stays.”¹¹¹ In this respect, my own emphasis in the Héctor/ Ema dynamic seeks to place the action of “staying” in a theatricalized tectonic space where the scenographic perspective directed by the Emcee has been overcome. In this sense, Héctor is the hero whose “love” saves Ema from the audience's entrapment of her own suffering and dreams in the “real” promoted by the Emcee. Together, Héctor and Ema, create a distance between us and our temptation to act in the “real” that a scenographic interpretation of *Marathón* might represent. Instead the audience is made to face the particular theatricality of the dancers, whose bodies are now

confronted with death as the limit of modern utopianism. The *gestus* thus retrieves the utopian impulse, in its historical “epic” magnitude, from neutralization by the “drama” of modernity. The tectonic space of modern/postmodern bodies in *Marathón* could be the condition for a “new utopia” as Monti once expressed it, that would transcend the pragmatic space of today’s politics where the practical options of “voting and choosing a government leader” are disconnected from the epic dimension of our own history, and therefore of politics itself.¹¹² At the conclusion of *Marathón*, whether we enter into the epic dimension of the utopian or not is a matter of choice—the ethical choice: between the scenographic theatre of the “real” promoted by the Emcee and destined to fruitless repetition (“If it weren’t ridiculous, it would be tragedy” as the Emcee says), and the tectonic perspective constructed by Monti, where theatre itself rescues the utopian impulse from neutralization.

Conclusion.

The tectonic ground of *Marathón* has been formulated in terms of the non-scenographic structuring of the play, which rests on the unstable modern/postmodern relationship between place and space. By pairing the notion of architectural tectonics to Ricoeur’s theory of metaphor, I analyzed how the play takes us, by way of an experience of the tectonic, through the “live” metaphors (of modernity/coloniality, capitalism and postmodernity), which are put in contrast to the “dead” metaphors of the Five “myths” enacted within the play. An understanding of the metaphorical process as the imaginative solution to the enigma of the metaphorical tension helped me read the tectonics of the play as a gradual resolution of the enigma that maintains nevertheless the tension inherent

in the metaphorical statement. The grasping of the initial schema of *Marathón*'s theatrical space/place, the transition to its machine-like function and its final projection of a utopian impulse are not stages that supersede each other through some kind of dialectics, but are moments that should be maintained "alive" for the metaphorical act to reach completion. I may conclude that the play resolves its metaphorical gestures with the following "definition" of the *Marathón* theatrical event: this marathon/theatre/machine/feeling-of-tomorrow is the place for our ethical choice of history as an epic dimension of our lives. The ethical consists here in a reflexion on the current state of our utopian impulse that has been neutralized by the immaterial-material state of commodities. The demands of performance allow characters to break neutralization when each recognizes death as its destined point of materialization. The tectonic theatre doesn't transform this destiny into a critical narrative but, on the contrary, grasps destiny as an affective dimension that must be appropriated if we are to channel our utopian impulse towards political action, or responsible praxis. In this respect, performance becomes an occasion to experience the terror towards materialization imposed by the absolutism of the present of commodities, or time of factory production. How can the current coordinates of the state of commodities or the present of production be changed becomes an ethical question with the potential of moving towards political action. This is an ethics that chooses theatre as a tectonic ground that Monti seems to invite us to occupy through his plays again and again.

My reading of the play, in this respect, has emphasized the materialist side, philosophically speaking, of Monti's theatrical impulse, because it is in its materiality, rather than ideality, that the work reveals most its "aliveness," as well as its politically

relevant message. In other words, if there is a philosophy to Monti's work it is, as Althusser would say, "tendentially" materialist.¹¹³ In Monti's plays, the "antagonistic contradiction" between idealist and materialist tendencies is expressed in the tension between the scenographic and the tectonic experience of performance. This is especially evident concerning the women characters, whose actions and gestures have been, in my analysis, best understood in the context of performance, or the contingency of the theatrical event itself. For instance, in *Marathón*, the words and gestures of the women are the ones that consistently shift the balance on the side of the tectonic as opposed to the scenographic.¹¹⁴ This is explained by the status of women's presence in our society as being predicated first on their bodies. This gives the women characters the opportunity to step out of their subject position favored by a male dominated order, and see what bodies are experiencing in the space/place of today. In the following chapter, I will explore the stagings of Monti's other plays in order to focus on the materiality of a gendered theatricality and its utopianism as it may manifest in performance and is made possible by a tectonic theatre.

¹ Throughout this Chapter, I will refer to Monti's play, *Marathón*, with its original Spanish title. Unless otherwise noted, the quotes from the play will be shown in English, in the translation by Jean Graham-Jones, titled *Marrathon*, in Ricardo Monti, *Reason Obscured: Nine Plays by Ricardo Monti*, ed. & trans. by Jean Graham-Jones (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2004), 133-83.

² Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1971), 201.

³ See Kenneth Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance," in *The Anti-aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. by Al Foster (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983), 25-26.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Ibid., 28.

⁷ See Chapter 1.

⁸ Hannah Arendt, quoted by Frampton, 24-25. See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 201.

⁹ Jean Graham-Jones, “‘A Broader Realism’: the Theater of Ricardo Monti,” in Ricardo Monti, *Reason Obscured*, 17.

¹⁰ The dance marathon setting was inspired by Horace McCoy’s novel (and later, movie) *They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?*

¹¹ See Celia Dosio, *El Payró: Cincuenta años de teatro independiente* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 2003), 95.

¹² Ricardo Monti recalls that he had randomly chosen the set date of the marathon, July 1932. He then learned that in September of that same year, a dance competition was organized in Luna Park by the daily paper *Crítica*. See Celia Dosio, 96.

¹³ See Ricardo Monti, “Entrevista,” in Juana A. Arancibia and Zulema Mirkin, eds., *Teatro argentino durante el Proceso (1976-1983)* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Vinciguerra), 249.

¹⁴ Jaime Kogan, cited by Olga Costa Viva, “Una ‘Marathón’ porteña en San Telmo. *La Prensa*, Buenos Aires, June 21, 1980.

¹⁵ Monti, 249.

¹⁶ Ricardo Monti, interview with R.G, “Con ‘Marathon’ vuelven Monti y Kogan,” *Clarín*, Buenos Aires, 18 June 1980. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the Spanish are mine.

¹⁷ From this point on I will refer to the Animador character in its translation as “Emcee.”

¹⁸ Ricardo Monti, note 89, *Marathón*, in Luís Ordaz, ed. *El Teatro Argentino. 16. Cierre de un ciclo* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1981), 130.

¹⁹ Frampton, 28.

²⁰ See Jaime Kogan, interview by Zully Ruiz Moreno, “Un teatro provocador” *La Opinión Cultural*, July 27, 1980.

²¹ I am agreeing with Graham-Jones’s objection to “the critical tendency to treat [the] three levels as separate,” and justifying a description of the shift between levels as surrealist (Podol 1980), Artaudian (Sagaceta 1989), or grotesque (Monteleone 1987). My discussion of tectonics seeks to ground what Graham-Jones sees as a the fusion of levels into “one, human experience,” in the experience of the site/setting itself. See Jean

Graham-Jones, *Exorcising History: Argentine Theatre Under Dictatorship* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2000), 78. See also Peter Podol, "Surrealism and the Grotesque in the Theatre of Ricardo Monti," *Latin American Theatre Review* 14.1 (fall 1980): 65-72; Julia Elena Sagaseta, "La dramaturgia de Ricardo Monti: la seducción de la escritura," in *Teatro argentino de los 60: polémica, continuidad y ruptura*, ed. by Osvaldo Pellettieri (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1989), 227-41; and Jorge Monteleone, "El teatro de Ricardo Monti," *Espacio de crítica e investigación teatral* 2.2 (April 1987): 63-74.

²² Kogan, "Un teatro provocador."

²³ Randy Martin, "Staging Crisis: Twin Tales in Moving Politics," in *The Ends of Performance*, ed. by Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 194.

²⁴ Kogan.

²⁵ Max Statkiewicz, "Live Metaphor in the Age of Cognitivist Reduction," *Monatshefte* 95.4 (2003): 558.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 548.

²⁷ Paul Ricoeur, "The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling," in *On Metaphor*, ed. by Sheldon Sacks (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 152.

²⁸ Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. by Robert Czerny (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 156-57.

²⁹ Ricoeur, "The Metaphorical Process," 144.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 153.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 156.

³² This kind of scenographic reading was not alien to some of the reviewers of the premiere performance. Olga Costa Viva, most notably, generalizes the play as [just] another metaphor of life that emphasizes the competitive aspect (rather than pleasure, duty, etc.). Her recurrence to "dead," that is, commonplace metaphors taken from colloquial proverbs like "life is a dance that we must know how to dance" is an example of the loss of specificity in scenographic readings. See Costa Viva, "Una 'Marathón' porteña." See also Gerardo Fernández, "Una pieza teatral parecida a un terrible viaje mental: Ricardo Monti y el alto nivel que logra 'Marathón,'" *La Opinión*, Buenos Aires, June 26, 1980.

³³ Eugene Moretta, "Reflexiones sobre la tiranía: tres obras del teatro argentino contemporáneo," *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos* 7.1 (Fall 1982): 141

³⁴ Ricoeur, "The Metaphorical Process," 157.

³⁵ See Fernández.

³⁶ Ricardo Monti, in interview with Celia Dosio, quoted in Celia Dosio, *El Payró: Cincuenta años the teatro independiente* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 2003), 95.

³⁷ See Costa Viva.

³⁸ Herbert Blau, *The Audience* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990), 27.

³⁹ Graham-Jones, *Exorcising History*, 76.

⁴⁰ See Celia Dosio, *El Payró*, 96.

⁴¹ See Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 1-20.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 10-11.

⁴³ See Dosio, *El Payró*, 96.

⁴⁴ The discrepancy between the "historical" dates and the dates referenced by the play is a way in which Monti signals his construction of the play as a tectonic site on top of what we could call a "historical" landscape.

⁴⁵ See "Revelations" 17:1-2 in King James' version of the Bible.

⁴⁶ Ricardo Monti, interview with Zully Ruiz Moreno, "Una gestación de dramaturgos," *La Opinión Cultural*, Buenos Aires, June 27, 1980.

⁴⁷ Walter D. Mignolo, "Enduring Enchantment (or the Epistemic Privilege of Modernity and Where to Go from Here)," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101.4 (2002): 953, note 24. See also Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality and Colonization* (Ann Arbor; University of Michigan Press, 1995).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 947.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 934.

⁵⁰ In the original Spanish version, *Marathón*, 72. Monti deleted this short scene in translated version.

⁵¹ Mignolo, 940.

⁵² Mignolo's assertion that the colonization of space consisted in "the expulsion of the Moors and the Jews from Christian Spain and the conquest of the Indias Occidentales on a 'discovery' of a New World" suggests that the "western" world became that open

space, forever moving, expanding, and kept at some original distance from the (Christian) subjects who brings civilization and religion to the world. See *ibid.*

⁵³ My translation. The original Spanish says “No estoy parado, señor. Me estoy cayendo.” See *Marathón*, 81. I base my argument on the short retort and matter of fact quality of Tom Mix’s words. These qualities are somehow diffused in Graham-Jones’s translation, which says, with irony: “I am barely standing, mister. I’m just about to fall down.” See *Marrathon*, 150.

⁵⁴ Mignolo, 943.

⁵⁵ Mignolo explains the relationship between geography and modern temporality with the fact that “it was during the eighteenth century and the European Enlightenment that people outside Europe began to be located in time. The secular idea of ‘primitives’ replaced that of the ‘infidels.’ By the time Hegel wrote his lessons in the philosophy of history, the east of the world with respect to Europe was situated in the past, where history began but where it was no longer dwelling. China and India and Japan no longer coexisted with Europe. They belonged to a different ‘time.’ The ‘present’ of History was located in Europe.” *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 947.

⁵⁷ Mignolo contrasts the temporal perception of modern history to the Christians, who “did not classify the world in terms of a point of arrival in time, the point of arrival in History, but in space. The point of arrival was the final judgment, not the present as in secular history. *Ibid.*, 933.

⁵⁸ Fernández.

⁵⁹ Chris Jenks, “Introduction: The Analytic Bases of Cultural Reproduction Theory,” in *Cultural Reproduction*, ed. Chris Jenks (New York: Routledge, 1993), 5.

⁶⁰ My translation. This scene does not appear in the version translated into English.

⁶¹ Héctor’s words are reminiscent of Pablo Neruda’s poem, “The Heights of Macchu Picchu,” his epic poem to the Ancient Incan city located in today’s Perú. See Pablo Neruda, *The Heights of Macchu Picchu* (Bilingual Edition), trans. by Nathaniel Tarn (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967).

⁶² See Kenneth Frampton, “Rappel à l’Ordre, The Case for the Tectonic,” in *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture*, ed. by K. Nesbitt (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), 516-29; quoted by Fredric Jameson in *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 197.

⁶³ The “contradiction” [between capital and labor in class formation], Althusser says, “is inseparable from the total structure of the social body in which it is found, inseparable from its formal *conditions* of existence, and from the *instances* it governs; it is radically

affected by them, determining, but also determined in one and the same movement, and determined by the various *levels* and *instances* of the social formation it animates; it might be called *over-determined in its principle*.” See Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. by Ben Brewster (London: Penguin Press, 1969), 101.

⁶⁴ I base the following analysis, of a relation between Homero’s subjectivity and Pipa’s body, on Peter Hitchcock’s discussion of Bakhtin’s architectonic thinking of “the axiological dependence between I and Other.” See “Discrepant Architectonics: Notes on a Materialist Genealogy of Bakhtin,” *Dialogism* 5, 6 (2001): 131.

⁶⁵ Hitchcock, 126.

⁶⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity,” in *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*, edited by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, trans. by Viadim Liapunov and Kenneth Brostrom (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 51. Quoted by Hitchcock, 132.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ From this point on I will keep the designation of Man and Woman, as in Graham-Jones’s translation, in order to emphasize the universalization of humanity and gender in the names.

⁶⁹ “Man” and “Woman” refer here to the universal Man/Woman of Enlightenment, but also to their modern originality.

⁷⁰ Fernando Coronil, “Towards a Critique of Globalcentrism: Speculations on Capitalism’s Nature,” *Public Culture* 12.2 (2000): 356-57.

⁷¹ Coronil calls this territorial relationship “nature intensive.” See *Ibid.*, 357.

⁷² Ernesto Shóó, “Obra maestra de un notable dramaturgo, nada benévolo habitante del infierno,” *Convicción*, Buenos Aires, June 18, 1980. Echeverría wrote the short story “El matadero” (c. 1838) as an allegory that accused the violent dictatorship of General Juan Manuel de Rosas.

⁷³ Fernández.

⁷⁴ Boaventura de Sousa Santos, “The Fall of the Angelus Novus: Beyond the Modern Game of Roots and Options,” *Current Sociology* 46.2 (April 1998): 86.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 87. De Sousa Santos borrows the expression “excessive memory” from Charles Maier, “A Surfeit of Memory? Reflections on History, Melancholy and Denial,” *History and Memory* 5.2 (1993): 137.

⁷⁶ Althusser, *For Marx*, 115. Emphases in the original.

⁷⁷ *Marathón*, 97. My translation. References to the “spectacle” are removed from the scene in the version translated into English.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ I borrow the term “radical positivism” from De Sousa Santos, who uses it to qualify “the social contract” as “the founding metaphor of a radical option—the option to leave the state of nature and to inaugurate the civil society—which turns into a root that makes everything possible, except to go back to the state of nature.” See De Sousa Santos, 7.

⁸⁰ The radical positivity of a kinetic inertia can be related to the development of systems theory where a simulation of nature consists in defining organizations as “flexible, dynamic ‘organisms.’” This allows the performance management of organizations under the premise that, like “nature,” they have “natural” tendencies characterized by feedback loops. Jon McKenzie marks the use of systems theory as a paradigm shift in performance management, from “Machine Thinking to Systems Thinking.” See Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 69-73.

⁸¹ Olga Cosentino, cited by Dosio, 96. See Olga Cosentino, “Misterio, poesía y tragedia de América Latina,” in various authors, *Teatro argentino contemporáneo: antología* (Madrid: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1992), 1015-22.

⁸² David Savran, *A Queer Sort of Materialism: Recontextualizing American Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 100.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 122-23.

⁸⁵ Fredric Jameson, “Of Islands and Trenches: Neutralization and the Production of Utopian Discourse” in *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986, vol 2* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 6. Originally in *Diacritics* 7 (1977): 2-21.

⁸⁶ Herbert Blau, *The Eye of Prey: Subversions of the Postmodern* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 170. Emphasis in the original.

⁸⁷ See Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, trans. by James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1965), 30.

⁸⁸ Tina Chanter, “Abjection, or Why Freud Introduces the Phallus: Identification, Castration Theory and the Logic of Fetishism,” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 27.supplement (2004): 155-56. Inside quotation marks are my own.

⁸⁹ Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 5.

⁹⁰ See Shóó.

⁹¹ Winfried Menninghaus, *Disgust: Theory and History of a Strong Sensation*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Joel Golb (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 385.

⁹² Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 48.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

⁹⁴ Chanter, 156.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ See Fernández.

⁹⁷ Shóó. Shóó quotes Borges's famous poem, "Buenos Aires" from *El otro, el mismo*, in Jorge Luis Borges, *Obras completas* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1974), 947.

⁹⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, "Culture Industry Reconsidered," trans. by Anson G. Rabinbach, *New German Critique* (1975): 12.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁰⁰ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, Ma.: Blackwell Publishing, 1990), 16.

¹⁰¹ Adorno, "Culture Industry," 13. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁰² Susan Stanford Friedman, "Definitional Excursions: The Meaning of Modern/Modernity/Modernism," *Modernism/modernity* 8.3 (2001): 495.

¹⁰³ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1988), 151. Cited by Stanford Friedman, 495.

¹⁰⁴ Scott Lash and Jonathan Friedman, "Introduction: Subjectivity and Modernity's Other," in *Modernity and Identity*, ed. by Scott Lash and Jonathan Friedman (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992), 1. Cited by Stanford Friedman, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Ricardo Monti, in interview with R.G., "Con 'Marathón,' en julio vuelven Monti y Kogan," *Clarín*, June 18, 1980.

¹⁰⁶ LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 46.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Slavoj Žižek, “Have Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri Rewritten the Communist Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century?,” in *Rethinking Marxism* 13.3/4 (2001): 190-198.

¹¹⁰ Žižek, *Ibid.* In the Eleventh thesis on Feuerbach Marx famously states that “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it.” See *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. by Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc, 1978), 145. Emphasis in the original.

¹¹¹ See Ricardo Monti, in Arancibia and Mirkin, 251.

¹¹² See Ricardo Monti, “Una nueva utopia,” in *Página/12*, June 28 (1992): 26. In this article Monti remembers that in the early 1970s, there existed a political epic that justified more outwardly political theatre like his *Historia tendenciosa de la clase media argentina...* (1971). He argues that the epic feeling cannot consist in recovering a past impulse because that would be historically anachronous. Instead we must first analyze and reflect on “what are the conditions for a new utopia.” See *Ibid.*

¹¹³ In “Philosophy and Marxism,” Althusser explains that “Contradiction in philosophy is not contradiction between A and non-A, or between Yes and No. It is tendential. Hence it is traversed by tendencies. In reality, every philosophy is only the realization—more or less complete—of one of the two antagonistic tendencies, the idealist tendency and the materialist tendency. Outside each philosophy, what is realized is not the tendency but the ‘antagonistic contradiction’ between the two tendencies.” Louis Althusser, “Philosophy and Marxism: Interviews with Fernanda Navarro, 1984-87,” in Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later writings 1978-1987* (New York: Verso, 2006), 269.

¹¹⁴ Monti and some critics have identified the role of women as redemptive. My analysis begins to critique that identity. This issue is further elaborated in the following chapters.

CHAPTER THREE

“The Problematization of Live Space in Ricardo Monti’s *Historia tendenciosa de la clase media argentina... and Visita.*”

This auto-affection, this conversion of far and near, will assume more and more importance by constructing an inside-space that will be completely co-present with the outside space on the line of the fold. --Gilles Deleuze.¹

Introduction: Visions of space, force, and the diagram.

My analysis of tectonics in chapter two was concerned with conceiving the historical ground and architectonic materiality of performance as it reproduces a historical space. The live metaphors developed by *Marathón* allowed us to describe the tectonic relationships between ground, materiality, and a particular affect of modernity.² Thus modernity is revealed as a state of bodies that parallels or simulates the state of commodities. I described this state as a running towards death because of the immediacy or speed of its manifestation of the utopian, while the manifestation hides death as being the very definition of its utopian destiny. In this respect, the goal of tectonics is to make us sensible to the affect produced by the space of modern history. *Marathón* suggests that the historicity of this affect cannot be detected if we do not consider its grounding in what, for modernity, is the mythical/material American shore. This chapter looks at two pre-*Marathón* plays to confirm Monti’s ongoing concern with the affect of space by examining how the characters, actors, and/or bodies recognize that space affects them *because* of the tension points of its construction.

The tectonic strategies of *Marathón* are an effort to distill the bodies of history from the narrative formations of modernity. On the other hand, the two plays studied in

this chapter, *Historia tendenciosa de la clase media argentina...*(1971) and *Visita* (1977), problematize the introduction of “live” bodies into the narrative space of theatre in order to re-conceptualize their location within the flow of history. These plays invoke a new perspective on space that can be partly elucidated by first briefly contrasting *Magnus*’s and *Marathón*’s spaces.³

The play *Magnus* was very much seen as producing an infinite inside space allowing for no outside of simulation. The sensing of archeologically layered surfaces in that space, though, was understood as an opportunity to reconfigure that space on a historical ground. For example, in *Magnus* I recognized both the context of the modern city and its demands for assimilation and the more abstract sense of space as a flexible site of condensation of value with respect to the circulation of capital. Such a layering challenges us to revisit this historical space as a site that is both local and global. This opportunity is taken up in *Marathón*, where an architectonic perspective focuses on the materiality of the built space and its relationship to an existing historical landscape. *Marathón*’s space, in this sense, contrasts with *Magnus* because it is experienced as an outside space with no inside—that is, the ballroom dancers have abandoned the notion of home as a spatial reference and metaphorically experience, instead, the vast landscape of history. This reference explains in part how I used the plays as tools of analysis in the first two chapters.

The “inside” position of *Magnus* allowed me to retrace the way history is built on allegorical visions of space. In contrast, the “outside” position of *Marathón* led to a metaphorical reading that describes the affect of that history’s space.⁴ In the present chapter I argue that the plays I consider in this and next chapters have features that allow

me to bring together the outside and inside perspectives, both the allegorical and metaphorical visions of space. This possibility is already implied by *Magnus* and *Marathón* in the way the characters experience a shifting of perspective at the end of both plays. The death of *Magnus*, for instance, leads to the possibility of finally perceiving the house of *Magnus* from the outside and seeing it for what it is. In *Marathón*, the dancers “objectively” use the workings of the dance contest only to discover that this “machine” is history itself and that all we can do is take this affect as part of our historical make-up “inside.” What is remarkable about these endings is that the characters move from the world of the play to the theatre itself. This is no coincidence since, when the plays are reaching their conclusion, the sons in *Magnus*, as well as the couple that “stays” in *Marathón*, demand a re-presentation of what is happening to them, based on the experience of a paradigmatic shift. In *Marathón* this happens more explicitly when the last couple decides to stay in the theatricalized space of the dance contest in order to “go to the very end” of its manifestation or event. The end, in the sense of ultimate goal, for Monti’s characters, is to use the theatrical space as a site where history can truly be felt in the affect of our human bodies.

I suggest that the decision to stay is a form of identification with the theatricalized space itself. This has the effect of movement and will. Going back to my reference to bodies, I might say that commodities and bodies decide to accompany, with their movements, the direction of a found vector—that is—the vector of force. This force is a set of relations, and that is how Deleuze defines Foucault’s notion of Power. In his study of Foucault, Deleuze asks: “What is Power?” and he offers the following definition:

Power is a relation between forces, or rather every relation between forces is a ‘power relation.’ In the first place we must understand that power is not a form, such as the State-form; and that the power relation does not lie between two forms, as does knowledge. In the second place, force is never singular but essentially exists in relation with other forces, such that any force is already a relation, that is to say power: force has no other object or subject than force.⁵

To accompany this force and feel its affect, like the dancers of *Marathón* do, is simply to recognize that force has a momentum and that such momentum produces them—they are the subjects of power. What we encounter in that play, as if traced by the bodies on the stage, is an expression of the commodity’s relation to a certain momentum that determines our perception of space/time. At the same time, because of the position of death as both destiny and limit of this movement, we are dealing with an affective valuation of this momentum. In effect, this momentum sends the commodity, as well as the body, closer to death while encountering the threshold of an unbridgeable distance from death itself. The introduction of death in relation to commodities subverts the priority that representations in space have had over representations in time, that is, “the domination of time by space.”⁶ The introduction of affect and the way the notion of commodity is given a temporal sense invite us to reassess our understanding of space and time. Elizabeth Grosz has remarked that our understanding of space and time is in some way determined by “the kinds of worlds we inhabit, and our understanding of our places in these worlds.”⁷ We may therefore recognize in Monti’s play an effort to make that

relationship more palpable by focusing on the intensity of a field of Power, in the Foucauldian sense.

The idea of bodies running in the same direction as commodities describes a physical relation that forces a rethinking of the notions involved (bodies and commodities). This description is therefore close to the Deleuzian diagram as a concept that forces a rethinking of existing notions by traveling through the points at which thinking is forced from the outside. In other words, “something in the world forces us to think” of bodies and commodities as physically independent, but the diagrammatic description, in turn, challenges that notion of independence.⁸ Deleuze, who takes Foucault’s panopticon schema as a model, conceives of “the diagram or abstract machine [as] the map of relations between forces, a map of destiny, or intensity, which proceeds by primary non-localizable relations and at every moment passes through every point, [...] and these relations take place 'not above' but within the very tissue of the assemblages they produce.”⁹ For instance, the tectonics of *Marathón* affect the bodies of the characters so that they feel the effect produced by a meeting of forces in the very tissue of their being. A remarkable example in *Marathón* is the signaling of holes as they are identified by Pipa and NN: Pipa points to her sex, and NN to his head.

Although these holes (of the sex and in the head) appear to be different, they may also metaphorically represent the same vector, as if they were marks left by the same force or conjunction of forces. The holes therefore allow for the identification of a vector that diagrams the intensity of a set of forces. I am interested in the tracing made by this vector because it indicates the possibility of using the diagram as a way to access not only the spatial confines of Monti’s plays, but also the way the characters identify with that

space in performance. In other words, the diagram allows for a different way of thinking of the “location” and “position” of the theatrical space itself by defining these in terms of the characters’ relation to forces.

The experiential journey willed by Monti’s characters—as in the call to go “to the very end”—may be conceived as an identification of the characters with a tectonic space that allows them to become aware of their relation to forces. The characters do not experience the tectonic passively but recognize in it forces that affect the space they themselves occupy. Recognition of forces, or of a Foucauldian field of Power, is a function that allows us to re-describe two relationships as one: a) the identification of the characters with other “powerful” persona(e) that structure Monti’s plays; and b) the relationship of the characters to space. The diagram, in this context, is the position or point of view necessary for the recognition of a field of power whose forces pass through our bodies. Thus power is depersonalized as a relation of forces. From this perspective there is no such thing as violence per se, since “violence [is] a concomitance or consequence of force, but not a constituent element.”¹⁰ With these terms Deleuze explains why “Foucault is closer to Nietzsche (and Marx), for whom the relation between forces greatly exceeds violence and cannot be defined by the latter.”¹¹ This is an important point that has consequences for the discussion of the “violent” elements in Monti’s plays.¹² I am guided in my reading of Monti’s plays by the way forces, not violence, are manifested. Unlike violence, forces are not inflicted or localized but are identifiable by their ever present traces. These traces are indicative of their relation rather than any identifiable origin because “force has no other object than that of other forces, and no being other than that of relation: it is ‘an action upon an action, on existing

actions, or on those which may arise in the present or future.’”¹³ When speaking of traces we are already referring to the diagrammatic in the figurative way. In this respect, the figure of the “hole” in *Marathón* serves me as a site where the tectonic translates into the diagrammatic.

In the scene in question the hole refers to the temporality of *Marathón* (the present of production), where NN tries to fill in the hole in his head while Pipa reopens the hole, which she places in her sex. In relation to these holes, Pipa and NN are occupying the same place, or more precisely, the same temporality, through the actions of re-filling by one and re-emptying by the other. In this relation of symmetry, opposition, and equivalence between continuing actions I recognize the diagram in its tracing of a non-hierarchical combination of forces. This absence of hierarchy constitutes, for Deleuze, the diagram’s difference from structure, “in so far as the alliances weave a supple and transversal network that is perpendicular to vertical structure; define a practice, proceeding or strategy distinct from any single combination; and form an unstable physical system that is in perpetual disequilibrium instead of a closed, exchangist cycle.”¹⁴

Like the actions of filling and emptying of the hole by NN and Pipa, the diagram can only be traced in time or rather *is* a tracing of time. In other words, the hole draws the vector of the force that causes force’s continuity in time, like a momentum that puts a whole in disequilibrium. This is indicative of the physical disequilibrium of the hole as “location.”

In short, *Marathón*’s tectonics help to decode the present (of production) as a meeting of forces. These consist of forces that project an immediate contact with death—

these are traced through the opening of the hole. These same forces create a buffer between the body and death—these are traced as a closing of the hole. Finally, the existence of both an opening and a closing of the hole is symptom of the momentum of this force in time.

Inasmuch as the diagram is a map of forces, we occupy it by *being* its instability, that is, we occupy it by appropriating the resistance felt at the points where forces meet. In this sense, Deleuze explains, “force displays potentialities with respect to the diagram containing it, or possesses a third power which presents itself as the possibility of ‘resistance.’”¹⁵ An example of such resistance in *Marathón* is the imperative to go “to the very end” expressed by the women. Here the impulse emanates from a desire to get acquainted with the forces that, in *Marathón*’s case, both require and interdict contact with death. The tracing of the diagram that results from such gesture makes manifest the very possibility of resistance.

The plays of Ricardo Monti all share an intuition of the diagram. In this chapter I will look at the texts and performances of *Historia tendenciosa...*(1971) and *Visita* (1977), in order to seek how this intuition is first thought, and then expressed and performed.¹⁶ These plays precede *Marathón* but were written after *Magnus* (the subject of the first chapter). The reason for discussing the earlier plays, before moving on to the later post-*Marathón* plays in the next chapter, is that both *Historia* and *Visita* seem to be exclusively concerned with the problem of the diagram per se. For instance, just in the way *Una Noche con el Sr. Magnus & hijos* was a problematization that established the need for a tectonic theatre, Monti’s second play, *Historia tendenciosa...*, is a problematization that establishes the need for a diagrammatic theatre of force. As for

Visita, it constitutes a useful case, for it is the first Monti play to explore a diagrammatic location as a site of resistance and emergence. The diagrammatic location presages the author's later concern, starting with *Marathón*, for establishing a historical tectonic site. The purpose of this procedure is not only to create a sense of a development in Monti's dramaturgy but to illuminate my understanding of the Deleuzian diagram and its usefulness for approaching Monti's theatre and performance in general.

Historia tendenciosa... and the need for a diagram.

Historia tendenciosa... was the result of a partially collaborative process involving Ricardo Monti, director Jaime Kogan, and the actors.¹⁷ The specific process of collaboration involved a sort of transferring of the intentions of the text into aesthetic or theatrical language. This process was then extended to the actors, who translated the theatrical vision onto their own experience.¹⁸ This process, I believe, allowed for a problematization of the theatrical space that would inspire Monti's future dramatic creation.

The play farcically allegorizes the history of Argentina's dependency on foreign interests and the complicity of national economic interests.¹⁹ The play has been presented by the author himself in the context of political theatre, whose message, arguably, preaches to the converted. But, as Jean Graham-Jones notes, the text and its performance deploy a "dynamic tension" that prefigures the complex structure of later plays.²⁰ The tension stems from the staging of middle-class complicity, Monti's ultimate target. The spectators are thus made witnesses to a middle class whose negative, often unconscious, participation in history needs some form of representation before it can be modified.

Monti's project therefore aims at the middle-class' (including intellectuals and artists) acquaintance with its own de-facto participation in history. Monti seems to be concerned with the implications of de-facto complicity in terms of an ethical relation to history. The allegorical space provides, in this context, an opportunity to explore the ways in which one sees oneself both within and without history, and the possibility of finding alternatives to this modern ethos.

For instance, Ricardo Monti faced a paradox in the making of the play. On one hand, he was writing political theatre that engaged a public already politicized by the crisis of dictatorship and the mobilization of pro-democratic as well as insurgent political forces. On the other hand, Monti wanted to address the middle class that comprises the theatre audience as well as the makers of theatre, and to speak in the most direct way about *their* role in the history that led to the present crisis. This double function has repercussions in the way he presents his critique. The character of Pola, we'll see, becomes the embodiment of the paradox by having two roles, one internal and another external to the narrative. An analysis of these roles will shed light on other structural functions like those of the character of Teatro and of the so called "implosions" expressed by the actors.

The critique enacted by the play reflected the political engagement in the artistic and intellectual culture of the early 70s.²¹ As Celia Dosio remarks, "From the social sciences to the arts, there was an effort to give account of the situation in terms that are very close to political practices per se. The *theory of dependence*, held from the point of view of sociology, was the predominant way of explaining the Latin American situation in the 1970s."²² Accordingly, the theme of dependency is represented by Pola, the

prostitute who is relayed from powerful national interests (the character of Boñi Garcia) to foreign ones (the *yanqui* gangster Mr. Peeg and the English Mr. Hawker). Pola is given an additional function in this allegory, that of representing the audience's relationship to this history as one of spectatorship. For this purpose, Pola has to be introduced by someone who stands outside the action, the character of Teatro. Teatro is "Theatre" and thus an allegorical character himself whose comments mirror the didactic and entertainment values that inform not only the spectacle but its very production. Teatro introduces Pola as the main attraction—that is, the very reason for having the performance. He presents Pola as the "the great vedette" and "the engine of history (7)."²³ The double function of Pola thus gives a double reference to the allegory of the play.

The allegory refers not only to Argentine history of dependency from the middle of late nineteenth century to the present, but also to the compromised role of a middle-class spectator as part of the engine that ends up consolidating the power of the elites and the dependency of the country to foreign economic power. Pola's stage presence is thus a source of tension in the reception of the play.

The satire as performance event cannot be merely digested and externally reflected upon, because it is compromising the audience. The duality of the message consists in the possibility of gaining knowledge of our history, but also the understanding that our very spectatorship makes us responsible for this history. This state of affairs demands a split reaction that is expressed at the conclusion of the play by the actors, who now play themselves, and speak of being "broken in two," with one struggle being "internal"—how I see history, and another "external"—what happens in history"(49).²⁴ The impossibility of being both in an interior and in an exterior is implied by this split.

The break reflects a distance, or separation, between the two in the very tissue of our thinking and perception. I argue that this very tension between an admission of alienation and a desire for reconnection or reparation of the split is an ethos that is problematized by the specific use of allegory in the play. In effect, with the introduction of Pola, the allegory becomes both a representation and the event of what it is representing. In other words, Pola introduces the very force that induces a certain representation of history and its particular critique.

Pola, as engine, reproduces her own partiality as to who is considered to be making history, that is, “certain public figures” and not those who “can only offer her sweat and sorrows” and live in the poor “suburbs” (9). Pola personifies the middle-class’s own idea of history as the entrusting of one’s destiny to leaders of higher social and economic rank. Pola also personifies the pull that this idea of history has exerted towards the specific historical destiny of Argentine society. This pull takes the form of ideology, whose content and persuasive force Pola summarizes with an exclamatory statement, saying: “the earthly paradise does exist!” (9). The play’s action thus moves on a vector that puts in tension the perspectives of theory and practice—the tension between history as object of study or perception (through the actions of its protagonists) and its materialization as meaning and event (through the production and reproduction of ideology). In this sense, Pola as “engine” problematizes the perspectives on history that take the form of a narrative and/or of a critique of a particular practice. Pola’s function seems to direct us towards the somewhat tautological notion of history as an effect of meaning “history.” This may be related to the Althusserian “absent” cause of history but a closer analysis will reveal that we are dealing with history as an absent effect, that is, a

perspective that resists the temptation of reifying the events of “history” as history. This is history taken as an infinitive of a proposition (“to history” as in “to die” or the “to happen” of something). In “Theatrum Philosophicum,” Foucault (commenting on Deleuze’s *The Logic of Sense*) describes this understanding of the event as “an incorporeal effect [...] a point without thickness or substance of which someone speaks and which roams the surface of things.”²⁵ The event of “meaning” history contradicts in a way the need to bring causal coherence to the presentation. Instead, it puts the “facts” of history into a neutral position, that is, the meaning “history” that is “always both the displacement of the present and the eternal repetition of the infinitive.”²⁶ To re-describe history as “to history” is to locate the event of history in “the thread of discourse,” that is, “the infinitive point of the present.”²⁷ From this perspective we could consider Pola’s statement “the earthly paradise does exist” as an expression of “to history.” In Pola’s expression the predicate “does exist” defines the subject “the earthly paradise” as an infinitive proposition. Thus we could rephrase Pola’s statement as the descriptive “to history” or “earthly paradising.” This rephrasing allows us to perceive how the repetition of the infinitive neutralizes intentionality by putting it outside, at a distance from the subject of intention. This level of the meaning-event, as we will see, is somehow linked to the concept of theatricality informing the process of collective creation that was used in the concretization of text and spectacle.

The Teatro Payró team, including Monti, worked under the premise of a separation or distance of theatricality from intentionality. A basic text, with a general structure, characters, and plot, had been more or less defined by the author. The teamwork centered on the elucidation of a fitting theatricality for the play. This fit was

understood by Monti and Kogan as a conscious joining together of two levels, one was a perception of the theatrical and the other an acting out of that perception. These levels were “researched” separately. The first level of discovery they called “training” and the second “approximation.”²⁸

As expressed by Monti and Kogan, “The first [level] included exercises that dealt with use of the senses, perception, and imagination. It also involved discussions and analyses of ideological aspects and aesthetic phenomena discovered in the work. The objective was to engage the creative force of individuals in function of the group.”²⁹ The theory behind this procedure was of a concept of a collective use of the theatrical in order to “capture part of [...] national reality and discuss it.”³⁰ There was a sense that a certain [collective] reality could be discovered when the actors, director, and author would coincide in the use of a particular aesthetic and a particular content. Monti and Kogan affirm that “the aesthetic cohesion achieved by the group was confirmed by the fact that the actors achieved, in their improvisations, results that were surprisingly similar to what the author had reached on his own.”³¹ A “theatrical” consensus, in this context, was a way of discovering reality. In the play this “discovering” unfolds in front of us as if pulled by the coincidence of this consensus. In this respect it is Pola who unfolds the action by being present in every scene and providing the occasion for those characters in the play who seek power, to take power. Pola, in other words, represents the theatrical aspect that gives visibility to the meaning-event, by enacting the performative of the infinitive form, that is, making visible Pola’s “earthly paradisising.”

The second level (approximation) entailed a practical engagement of elements discovered in the first level by fitting a general “intentionality” to a determinate theatrical language.³² This approximation thus provided the elements of coherence and of critique safeguarded by Teatro. But this intentionality is somehow forced upon its supposedly expressive effect, that is, upon the consensual theatricality arrived at on the level of “training.” In this context, the character of Teatro appears to compensate for theatricality’s resistance to intentionality by guarding the didactical intent of the allegory from the outside. Meanwhile, Pola compensates for the imposition of intentionality in performance by becoming both engine and *territory* for the action “inside.” What we have, with the intrusion of Teatro and Pola upon the allegory, is an exacerbation of a feeling of resistance that renders more obvious the tension between an outside and an inside. This tension pushes the allegory towards artifice when seen from the outside (by Teatro, for example) and towards a grotesque vision of destiny, when seen from inside (as through the perspective of Pola, for example). Such tension, pull, and resistance is illustrated in the short exchange between Teatro and Pola:

Teatro (*with a bow*): Distinguished lady, you are above time.

Pola: Don’t believe it, son. Times change. The image deteriorates. Keep count of time. There is so much make-up that sometimes I have the sensation of looking through two holes. Or that under the powder and the lipstick there is no skin left. (*Bitter laughter.*) Just a white and cold skull.

Teatro: That’s too sinister, Pola. Your mission here is different.

Pola: (*She professionally changes her attitude.*) Then let the
entertainment begin. [7]

The problem of distance becomes paradoxically more evident when the inside and outside converge in the form of grotesque theatricality, precisely because our needed reference of inside and outside (even in our wish to make them connect) is confused. In this theatre built between Teatro and Pola, the problem of distance itself needs then to be reinstated, rearticulated in the performance. This is precisely what happens when the “implosions” are worked into the fabric of the performance. These implosions consist in a switching from an “external playing” to a focus on the actors themselves who abandon their characters and re-connect to the performance through “personal memories and the evocation of issues concerning the individual.”³³ The actors choose this theatre as a way to accept the split, but only as a condition of this theatre or space “inside.” For example, the first implosion comes after the allegory reaches the military coup that marks the beginning of the 30s, known in Argentina as the “infamous decade.” The speech of the General (representing General Uriburu) makes allusion to the “special” repressive and violent methods awaiting those that refuse to “collaborate” by assenting to its laws (20). Here, the actors, rather than connecting this history to the violence threatening Argentine society in the early 70s, try to enter the narrative through their own intimate connection to the 30s. Actress 1 speaks of her possible place of birth in Poland before her family immigrated to Argentina in 1928.³⁴ Actress 2 tries to retrieve vague childhood memories of “hard times” as she had been told by a father who used to work at the factories. But then, such memories find a clearer focus in old pictures of people, perhaps relatives, who stayed in Poland to later become victims of bombs at the break of WWII. This

nightmarish recollection is replaced at the end by the imagination of an uneasy peace in the image of snow “falling softly” on the Polish town of Brestlaw (20). This convoluted path of memory rejoins the allegory when this last places itself at the end of the war, with a struggle between Mr. Hawker (representing British colonial imperialism) and Mr. Peagg (American post-war imperialism; note the character name, corresponding to “pig,” when pronounced with a Spanish accent). The implosion and the allegorical “theatre” are thus stitched together in a somewhat continuous narrative. But the juxtaposition shows the paradox of memories and experiences telling stories where Argentine “history” appears in spite of the apparent distance of personal memories and British and American history. It is this “irrespective” or contingent relation between memory and “history” that demands a tracing of its existence at a distance, this time, of the stitched together narrative. This tracing, following Deleuze, is the diagram that maps the forces that separate the actors’ personal history from Argentine and World history. In their case, the forces are outside the representation but pass through it, as manifested in the memory of the actors. If the diagram maps forces in the form of a vector (of power), then it is possible to occupy its place by *being* the instability reflected in such a vector. This requires the work of some kind of sensory recognition of resistance as it is felt at the points where forces meet. This would be the site of potentialities of the Deleuzian diagram.

In *Historia...*, the “implosions” seem to travel in the vicinity of the diagram, as if in search of its trace. The first act concludes with the fall of Perón and the massacre of Peronist military and civilians on June 9, 1956, after a failed Peronist coup. At this point the actors come to the proscenium with a question: “Where were you on the night

of June 9th, 1956?" (32).³⁵ The actors answer by remembering their actions at the time of the event—walking, smoking, or copulating. Again, such memories serve as a way of focusing on experience and establish a sort of absolute distance of the actors' bodies from the other event. Therefore the question itself is reinstated as "Where were you *not*" at the time (33). In answering the question, the distance of the event is shortened, because it can be traveled between the "here" of my live body and "there" of the victims of the massacre. The interest here is in the juxtaposition of the positive and negative question, since they mimic our oscillation between the "real" (where I am) and the "theatrical" (where I am *not*).³⁶ It is telling, for example, that in this implosion the actors describe how they are not the ones to suffer the pain of the victims—as a condition of their empathy. In other words, the feeling of pain is still an experience that can be imagined in our bodies, aiding in our feeling of sympathy—this is the theatrical relation. On the other hand, when the actors have to face the fact of the victims' deaths, empathy no longer seems possible and leaves the actors knocking at the same wall that separates them from death, as they repeat "I was not dead, I was not dead, I was not dead" (33). Death is perceived here as the limit in relation to a closing of distance—this is the real relation. With the acknowledgement of death, an absolute "real" distance is therefore reinstated. From this perspective we may define the real as what appears at the limit of the theatrical while theatricality is the very movement of our approach to the real. This is not to confuse the real and the theatrical into some kind of continuum but to understand them as the relationship between the points of a vector, of a diagram that traces the points where forces press from an "outside." The thinking of the actors

occurs on this line or diagram where the theatrical and the real intersect or disjoin—thinking is here a Foucauldian experiment and a problematization.

From this perspective one may say that the problematization of thought, in Monti's plays, takes place in performance as both theatre *and* reality—in other words theatre and reality are the ways in which thinking is manifested and interlocked by the force of the “outside.” This is a crucial point with respect to Monti's theatre, because the “outside” in this case is not a spatial notion that is opposed to an inside, but a strategy for conceiving the diagram in relation to forces. The particular relationship of the characters to the confined spaces that serve as the setting of Monti's plays can therefore be understood in a similar manner, as a strategy for the plays diagrammatic deployment.

In Monti's plays in general, confinement may be considered as the limit encountered by an interlocking of theatre and reality. The limit becomes visible with the appearance of a necessity or a demand to stretch the limits of theatre and reality. It is an oedipal necessity in *Magnus* for the staging of its romance; and an architectonic necessity in *Marathón* for a staging of place/space. In *Historia*, as I have already suggested, it is a political/critical need for staging a specific theatricality of event and intention. At the end of the plays, though, the stretching of limits itself creates a tension, a feeling of resistance that translates into the thought of an “outside.” In *Magnus*, this “outside” was vaguely implied in the challenge to rethink place in relation to our own production of space—in this sense the “outside” is what has remained unthought but is considered nevertheless thinkable through spatial practice. In *Marathón* the “outside” is more clearly implied by the realization of a temporal affect

characterizing our own present. In this case, the utopian dimension of thinking the “outside” is defined by the relationship of “present” affect to the “outside” past and future of our own history. *Historia*... somewhat prefigures later plays, including *Marathón*, by making the theatre itself the space where a feeling of resistance to this “outside” is first experienced. The end of the play illustrates this point.

The implosion that concludes the play is immediately preceded by circus music that, from the perspective of the actors, trivializes the spectacle as a mere act. The gravity of its message is thus demoted to a repetition of actions performed in a circus. This moment may be understood as a provocation coming from Teatro, who is pushing theatricality to an alienating extreme. A reaction from the actors is felt as soon as the circus music stops (turned off by a performer?) and the actors find themselves still onstage and somewhat disoriented (50). As the implosion begins, the actors contest the frivolity of representing their own complicity as mere “buffoonery” (51). They argue that a certain “arrow question” has not been asked. It is in fact the question of the split between an inside and an outside that cannot be resolved by the seduction of *Historia*’s own theatricality. The actors nevertheless find positive elements in the theatre, like the sense of collectivity, as well as the opportunity of a face to face encounter with their mirror image in the audience, and the possibility of an ethical choice with full awareness of the split. The final prescription by the actors, to “listen, listen, listen,” suggests the image of the theatre as a resonating box where the internal conflictive voices—some siding with the proposed critique like Teatro, others oblivious like Pola, and the actors themselves filling an irreconcilable split between the two. The actors are the ones capable of transforming these voices into some kind of “univocity.” This

resonance, whose vibrations may be felt in a tactile manner, are evidence of a folding, in the sense that the question of the split rebounds on the walls that separate this theatre from the “outside” and comes back to touch us, to produce a form of relation of self to self, that is, of self-affection within a virtual sound-box.

The concepts of univocity and of the fold are both borrowed from the philosophy of Deleuze, who develops these terms, especially in *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*. It is important to note that these terms are related to how Deleuze draws philosophical questions from the work of Foucault. Alain Badiou expresses this connection as follows:

Foucault’s great merit (but Deleuze, in using the free indirect style, makes [them] his own) is to have constructed configurations that have nothing to do with the couple formed by structural objectivity and constitutive subjectivity. The “epochs,” the historical formations, and the *epistemes*, which are the great unities constructed by Foucault, “escape from both the reign of the subject and the empire of structure” ([Deleuze, *Foucault*, 14; translation modified by Badiou]).³⁷

In this respect, Badiou, explains, “the diagram of forces—pure inscription of the outside—does not entail any interiority, [...] it rests characterized by exteriority, but now activated by its ‘forceful’ seizure.”³⁸ The concepts of univocity and the fold can be understood as a passage “from a simple disjunctive logic of exteriority to a topology of the outside as the locus of the inscription of forces that, in their reciprocal action and without communicating between themselves in any way, produce singular exteriorities as a local figure of the outside.”³⁹ The “arrow question” that the actors are looking to find is

therefore best understood as a search for a projection that remains aware of the distance between inside and outside. The tactile relationship to internal voices expressed in the prescription to “listen,” for example, is a step towards finding a positive use of our own awareness of a split. Univocity becomes a sign of resistance, because within the theatre we find ourselves united by the same state of a division that nevertheless “touches” us, so that, as expressed by Deleuze, “the univocity of being merges with the positive use of the disjunctive synthesis which is the highest affirmation.”⁴⁰ Univocity is therefore an emergent affirmation that chooses, in this case, the split—as the event of our “nonbeing,” neither inside nor outside. “This nonbeing, however,” in the words of Deleuze, “is not the being of the negative; it is rather the being of the problematic, that we should perhaps write as (non)-being or ?-being.”⁴¹ Thus theatre ends up as the site where the condition of a split can be experienced. The theatre thus helps the Deleuzian “movement,” as Badiou indicates,

of the intuition [that] involves topological concepts—concepts that *profoundly* think the outside as space of forces. The intuitive identification of thinking and Being is realized, for Deleuze, as the topological densification of the outside, which, as such, is carried up to the point that the outside proves to envelop and inside. It is at this moment that thought [...] is the fold of Being.⁴²

The injunction to “listen” from within the theatre in *Historia* prefigures the choice of a real or metaphorical theatre as a fold of the Being of the characters. In this context, it is the actor who chooses the theatre so that the character may meet the audience, for with the audience the actor/character will encounter his own univocity.

***Visita* as diagrammatic place.**

I'd like to link *Visita* to *Historia* with a metatheatrical parable: An actor enters the theatre at the end of a performance of *Historia*, not to see a spectacle but to listen to the murmur of the audience's internal voices, to understand its univocity: What are these voices saying? How do they talk to each other? How does it feel like to listen to these voices? Is there a way to resist the voices, or not? What do they make me do? Who am I? Why do I want to know who I am? Can I learn from them about who I am? How am I related to them? This hypothetical listening actor is thus confronted with the depth of his possible kinship with the audience, one that is partly proved by his choice to occupy the stage.

Following this parable, which I construct here for the sake of entering into the world of *Visita*, I introduce the character of Equis. His name means X in Spanish. Although the text itself never specifies that Equis is an actor, I put forward this interpretation while taking as my reference the "split" experience of the actors at the end of *Historia*.... Equis would thus be the anonymous actor in search of an experience of himself as that point of resistance to the forces that set in motion his oscillation between the real and the theatrical, that is, his confused relation to distance. There must be a feeling of trepidation and daring in the thought that we may resist those forces as we enter what Deleuze describes as the "fold of the outside." Deleuze relates this fold to Blanchot's "'interiority of expectations' from which the subject, in different ways, hopes for immortality, eternity, salvation, freedom or death or detachment."⁴³ These hopes, though, I see as ways of objectifying our own resistance to an "outside" by projecting it towards a future of nonresistance. The lack of resistance is thought to be

achieved in an absolute inside or outside of eternity and/or freedom. These absolutes reproduce the split through a strategy of denial—of a forgetting of resistance. This forgetting could be seen as the sine-qua-non of all processes of subjectivation that result in our belief in universal or existential “self,” subject, or citizen.⁴⁴ Subjectivation may well be a necessary process in our re-discovery of resistance, not by transcending the subject but by recognizing it as both an effect of power and of our resistance to resistance. Perhaps we can only enter the field of resistance as a subject, but in this case, it is in order to proceed with a Foucauldian-Nietzschean gesture of “genealogy, [that] “seeks to reestablish the various systems of subjection: not the anticipatory power of meaning, but the hazardous play of domination.”⁴⁵ The subject in this endeavor is hypothetical and brings with it a body as “the locus of a dissociated Self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration.”⁴⁶ To enter the “fold” is therefore to treat one’s self as hypothetical, and, like Equis/the “actor” in *Visita*, we suspend identity in order to see it reconstituted within the fold.

When Equis enters the world of *Visita*, he has already suspended his identity. His entrance creates symmetry between him and the suspension of disbelief of the audience who has also relaxed its own identity in favor of the fictional world. The play, from this point of view, is an actor’s “visit” to the theatre for the sake of sharing the same “space” as the audience with the hope of re-orienting and finding himself. The play thus uses theatre in order to render evident the very force that makes us suspend the certainty of our own identity in favor of a theatrical one: the apparent presence of the character/actor.⁴⁷

Equis stumbles onto a strange household, inhabited by an old couple, Lali and Perla, and Gaspar, a cipher in his own right, referred by the old couple as their adoptive son and/or servant. The grotesque aspects of this household play with our refusal to identify with it. Like the audience, Equis is still unable to reconstitute his identity in relation to the “theatrical” household in front of him. Therefore the audience becomes dependent on Equis’s own ability to recognize or identify with the household. The coincidence of Equis and the audience’s relationship to the space of the household was addressed in the scenic design for the New Perspectives Theatre production of the play I directed in New York City in 2004.⁴⁸ The interior walls of the household extended to all the walls including stage and audience in the same space. Still, this environmental scenographic choice had to work in conjunction with the hermeneutic process in which the play engages us: Where are we? Who are these people? Why this strange air of familiarity, as in the way Perla and later Lali address Equis? The location and identity of place elude us, yet the play, as we’ll see, forces us to accept some form of recognition in spite of ourselves.

The old woman, Perla, engages in a hide-and-seek game with the “intruder,” while sustaining the ambiguity of her own identity. When Equis appears, the main dynamic of her relationship to Equis is quickly established—that of a playfulness with one who could well be her son. The melodramatic narrative of blood relation soon appears to be a decoy for the absence of identity. For unlike Pola in *Historia*, Perla’s class identity is negative in the sense that she can only recognize what she is not. This affects the way she categorizes Equis: he is not the underclass or working-class thief for whom she first misrecognizes him. In the absence of reliable mirrors, Perla imagines

them; but they are false mirrors, as when in her daydreamings she sees herself as one of the ladies depicted in the tapestries of an upper-floor apartment (97). The ambiguity of misrecognition expresses her “negative identity” as part of a middle class that knows itself from what it is not: not quite upper-class (like her neighbors “upstairs”), not under-class (like the imaginary thief), not quite lower-middle class (like the foundling Gaspar).⁴⁹ Faced with the negative identity of Perla, the audience chooses Equis as the target of his identification, which as we said is based for the time being on his mere presence.

In *Visita*, the tension between the need of stable identity position and the virtual absence of identity produces a space that we can call diagrammatical. The presence of Equis means the threat of discovery, of coming to the uncomfortable knowledge of the void on which Perla’s “identity” and ours rides. In the absence of identity, the theatrical presence of Perla is a paradox that forces an effect of masquerade. Perla is a mask that hides an underlying void. From this perspective we can read *through* Perla’s anxiety when she asks Equis *how* he found her house (109). This “finding” constitutes, I think, the main irony of the play, for what Equis has found is precisely what cannot be found as a positive place but only as the trace of our own fear of a void identity. This fear cannot be named, prompting Perla to create a strange narrative that gives a certain contour to the place. She says:

Sometimes someone comes here, for some reason. Generally, they come around asking for something. But people, you know, ask for the impossible. We don’t have that much. Sometimes they come to rob us. Sometimes too, they come and leave us provisions at our door....where

they rot. They've never asked us to pay...They must think that we're very rich and that we'll settle up the entire account at the end...But it could also be that they're offerings...For something that they think, anyway, for some obscure reason that escapes us...In general it's very difficult to discover why people do things, don't you think? [109]

According to our proposition, we can read this speech as a description of the theatrical space itself---a space that is ritually produced by the audience in order to summon presence. But what is the location of presence itself, that is, the location occupied by Equis? In this speech it is impossible to pinpoint a stable position of inside or outside, for while Perla seems to refer to her house as an inside, her own realm seems to locate a world for which her own is an outside. On the other hand, Perla's explanation privileges the figure of a wall as a threshold. Perla's discourse thus fails in its function of reproducing inside and outside positions, but at the same time it hints at the unbridgeable distance separating an inside from an outside. This seeming contradiction of a distance without any form of positioning actually gives expression to the spaceless points that form the diagram at the points where the masquerade is forced from the "outside." In relation to this diagrammatical space, her mere visibility betrays her masquerade.

The masquerade, in turn, risks exposing the redundant presence of Equis, for he is a "present" presence invented by the audience. In this respect, the actions and relationships in the household seem to be there as strategies for deflecting and deferring the "truth" of the masquerade by allowing the audience to produce "truths" about Gaspar's "real" status. Gaspar is talked of as an adoptive son, a foundling, a boy, while he is more obviously shown as a servant and an adult lover to Perla and to Lali. The

make-believe thus exasperates the tension between masquerade and presence, for the goal of make-believe is to make the masquerade the equivalent of presence, an equivalence that is already made impossible by the difference between our acceptance of Equis as truly present and the apparent falsity of make-believe. This tension can be said to occur on the line of the diagram because it expresses the forcing of presence from the “outside.” We’ll see that the faked deaths in the play manage to give a spatial dimension to this diagram.

The fake deaths produce a spatial metaphor of the diagram—a space that is nevertheless “real” in the sense that it allows us to access the “reality” of the diagram through a tactile experience. The farce of Perla’s “secret” relationship to Gaspar keeps the game of discovery away from the masquerade. But the game is threatened by Equis’ touch, as if Perla’s make-believe were dependent on an exclusively visual experience. This is shown at the conclusion of Act One, when Perla, feeling threatened by Equis’ touch, calls attention to the presence of “the boy” (109). Lali accuses Equis for his lack of decorum, but Equis “unveils” the fact that Gaspar is no boy but a grown man. Now Perla, rather than admitting her lie, goes to Gaspar to double-check his authenticity. “Finding” hairs under Gaspar’s nose, she collapses and “dies.” This fake death (in the second act she comes to life in the middle of her funeral) is the perfect decoy for her masquerade because in death her masquerade is doubled into the pure visibility given by an outer body with a soul or inside no longer to be found—this new visibility produces another inside which is outside of her body, the space of death occupied by the characters of *Visita*, who find in this household their “natural” habitat.

In this new space of visibility touching is allowed, because it has the neutrality allowed by the distance of death. The masquerade, in other words, becomes touchable when it ceases to reveal the void of identity by projecting, with death, a neutral space of permanence. This is the theatrical space produced so that it can accommodate presence (that of Equis, in the play) without the redundancy of presence made evident by the masquerade. With Perla's fake death, the stakes of the characters' performance change since the space does not accommodate identity but the need to maintain spatial permanence through routine. This space of routine I call a metaphor of the diagram in the sense that we can designate the diagram as a "place." The metaphor translates the forcing of presence as a (routine) struggle between uncertainty and permanence.

Routine, or what we call the "everyday," seeks to replace the certainty of identity with the certainty of an immutable outside. It helps to delimit the space of action, and separate it from the forces of the outside. This configuration of space is enforced by Lali, for example, when his regular "reading hour" demands the preservation of an immutable "order" (disturbed by Equis moving of the axe from its "correct" angled position on the wall). More absurd is Lali's choice to read newspapers that are "at least half a century old" (99). This allows him to replace the threat of historical uncertainty, presented by daily events, with the posthumous certainty of a known and done history.

Lali's desire for the young Equis tempts him to show Equis "that abyss known as space/ Where centuries are mere bubbles" while Equis rides on his back, in order to give room to his desire (102). But Lali is forced to make his desire stop when Equis insists on seeing more of this "abyss" within the reach of vision, that is, while remaining "inside." Here Lali has to admit that this was just another "routine" and that they "never left" the

reduced confines of the room. Lali thus denies his own desire in favor of spatial permanence. But the power of the routine to hold space together is deflated in the process, because Lali has been caught performing. Significantly, Lali later recuperates his bearings by using ritual—performance as routine—as a way to disguise his performance as an actual *desire* for ritual. The funeral provides Lali the opportunity to do this precisely. In the words of Lali, “It’s like when you’re walking absentmindedly along and you trip. You suddenly realize that you were walking” (111). Here the spectacular moment of this walking as “theatre” serves to restore our walking as “behavior” through a gesture of self-affection that denies any form of witnessing.⁵⁰ This means that both theatre and performance contribute to Lali’s “restored behavior” and that, in the process, a contingent relation to visibility escapes our radar. In this respect, Perla’s masquerade functions as a counterpoint to Lali’s ritual.

In Perla’s masquerade, unlike Lali’s “performance” strategies, the spectacle is never properly seen or recycled, because spectacle is the engine of visibility/presence---in a sense Perla is what Pola represented theatrically in *Historia* (hence the similarity in names). The masquerade is cinematic rather than theatrical or performative. Like in cinema, the action that is produced by visibility is a make-believe that empties space of all presence and summons a narrative, or a speaking from absence. As Christian Metz notes in his essay “The Imaginary Signifier,” “what unfolds [in the cinematic screen] may [...] be more or less fictional, but the unfolding itself is fictive: the actor, the ‘décor,’ the words one hears are all absent [...] it is the signifier itself[...] that is absence.”⁵¹ In giving the spectacle a privileged position, the masquerade makes visible “the virtual,” which here designates not Lali’s virtual space of ritual/ performance/

behavior but what Deleuze “considered in its chaotic form, [its] absolute pre-predicative givenness [...] The virtual is here the ground as the ‘there is’ preceding all thoughts.”⁵² The virtual is therefore the plane of immanence of the masquerade, before the masquerade reaches its plane of consistency or actualization in the “reality” of her body’s presence.

The distance that Perla travels from a state of virtuality to one of presence was made wonderfully palpable in the Payró theatre production (1977-78). The director, Jaime Kogan, placed the character of Gaspar on the stage as a medium for our perception of the distance in question. Gaspar was “present” from the beginning, yet he was not integrated into the action as a person but as an object, still like a statue on a piece of furniture. Ricardo Monti remembers that the actor, Rubén Szuchmacher, “was completely still [...] and people wondered for a long moment if it was a doll or an actor. Then they would stop paying attention until at a specific moment the doll would jump on the stage. At this point there would be startled cries and jumps because people had integrated him [to the scenery] as a porcelain doll.”⁵³ The body of Gaspar was thus an analog to Perla’s masquerading, giving it three moments, one of virtuality, another of a presence integrated to the action and amenable to narrative, and the third moment of make-believe inserted in between. It is indeed, in the company of Gaspar, as accomplice to her make-believe, that Perla integrates herself in the routine of the household—this routine is the marker of her achieved presence by the end of the first act.

When I directed the New York production of the play (2004), I looked for ways to engage with these discreet “moments” (virtuality, make-believe, presence) in the

context of the actors' characterization. In early rehearsals I experimented with bringing out a grotesque presence. To this end I designed exercises that layered the embodiment of material base images to more lofty or sublime ones. This was an exercise in self-consciousness, therefore its justification had to be acted out also. I told the actors that the point was to bring something that was distant (the sublime image of oneself) closer to us by transforming it into something material or base. I wanted thus the actors to feel a separation, within the character, between "who" they were and "how" they had to appear—"I am a bird and I appear as a broken branch," for example. In this process the actors had to be aware that their self-presentation put forward two contradictory images layered upon each other. This appearance was somehow summoned by the necessity of appearing in front of a spectator in their theatrical manifestation as a "being seen." The implication is that the characters may also be "absent" and that their presence, as well as the spectators', is summoned by the "grotesque" effort to respond to simultaneous demands of seeing and being seen. The use of a grotesque aesthetic was concordant to the aspect that the characters and place would have in performance, as indicated by the text: whitish faces, excessive make up, old clothes and furniture, etc. But, more importantly, the grotesque was recognized as an aesthetic of the event understood as a phenomenon of layering and simultaneity. As in the *grotesco criollo* and *Magnus*, the layering puts in evidence a metaphysical conceit. The American dream of the immigrant (in *grotesco criollo*) or the apparent power of the father in *Magnus* fails to appear in the practical context of modern habitus and postmodern performance.

In the grotesque, the irony is found through the performer's self-consciousness. It points towards the fact that we seek in the theatre an expression of our metaphysical

“belief that things are most precious and essential at the moment of birth.”⁵⁴ As Foucault points out, “the origin always precedes the Fall,” therefore a “metaphysical” theatre, that brings to the present a distant original past, would arrive “onstage” only in its fallen material form. This irony is materialized in the character of Gaspar, who is made to have the identity of a boy, potentially “close” to his origin yet somehow fallen, separated from a true kinship to Perla and Lali in his condition of foundling and servant. His true kinship to us as spectators is confirmed by the fact that being a dwarf barely masks his condition of being a grown man. In this grown man, we are given the grotesque example of a metaphysical dream lived to the “end.”

In spite of seeing “time go by,” Gaspar dreams about the gift of origin as a compensation for his services. He tells Perla: “It would be so beautiful. The three of us together. Forever. And I would serve you both just as always, only better. We wouldn’t even have to talk. We’d use signs to communicate” (107). Thus Gaspar shows us that there is no path leading to an origin, but only twisted and discontinuous routes to our belief in its truth—in other words, all roads lead to theatre as a system of gestures. The grotesque elements are therefore an apt aesthetic for a play that comments on our metaphysical habits and point thus to an original absence. Yet, even in the grotesque, absence is theoretical, hiding behind the phenomenon of visibility. During the rehearsal of the play I was able to bring about a highly theatrical effect that manifested the way absence brings about visibility through a process of seduction. The impact of that effect, we’ll see, resided in the ability of the actor to engage with absence as a palpable element.

In the directing process I was faced with the fact that in the context of American realism, actor training often puts excessive emphasis on the sense of agency of the character (another origin). This translates in the characteristic rhythm of naturalistic acting, where there is always a moment where the actor is focusing his attention on a target in space, as if he were pointing and focusing before his action projects him with intention. Retrospectively I can now assert that for the naturalistic actor the space is always already filled with targets. This way of protecting the image of a Cartesian ego that “thinks, therefore is...” seemed to be in the way of producing the desired effect for the character of Perla. For Perla has to suck us in into her “appearance” along with Equis, not by coming from the distance of the past or the interiority of subjectivity, nor towards the fullness of its target, but from the immediacy of a visibility that comes to replace absence. In other words, we have to feel the force of her virtuality. Speed became for me, as a director, a means to break the naturalistic relationship to space. The final run-throughs allowed me to challenge the actress’s resistance to speed up her delivery. I explained to her that her “intentions” as a character could now trail behind her gestures and movements, which in our blocking were broad and involved frantic displacements. The speed-through became the perfect opportunity for justifying the exercise to the actress, Charlotte Hampdem. The experiment produced the results I had wished for. Perla launched into the long opening monologue, and her gestures and speedy delivery forced Equis to react with both amazement and caution while Perla, by moving from one gesture to another, from one emplacement to the next, seemed to be anticipating Equis’ reactions, not with the precision of her intentions but with the tactility of her inhabiting of space—as if she were enveloping him with space. The

tactility of space enacted the sort of colonization of time by space through a kind of regurgitation of time as dead matter—Perla suggests some of this dynamic as she describes a transformation of memory into a sensual oblivion. She states:

In general, my memories last exactly one minute. Why? Because I speak. It would be unbearable to keep so many memories locked up inside. One must empty oneself out, evacuate...For example, how did it happen that we are talking? I don't know, I don't remember. I don't remember, either, what you said your name was. I swim, as they say, in oblivion, between reflections and fleeting sensations... [95]

At the end of the scene, we too have been seduced—the space of *Visita* has been established as one where we have been trapped by visibility. But visibility in fact excludes us, and that is the irony that the speedy performance of the actress made evident. At the end of the scene Perla leaves for the rest of the (first) act, while inviting the other characters to enter because, Perla explains, they “feel excluded” (97). We may conclude that Perla performs the inclusion of Equis by the act of leaving the stage. Her gesture is a double negation, for the space she leaves is produced as that which is not absence. Similarly, the other characters and the audience may now feel included by identifying with Equis’s “presence” in this new space.

The grotesque elements of the play indicate through irony that there is no metaphysical origin to our presence since they make their appearance in absence and end in the repeated gestures of make-believe. The opening scene of the play provided an opportunity to make manifest Perla’s virtuality. In this respect, the introduction of a speed that is independent from intention made evident a certain technology in her

masquerade, whose function is to mimic Perla's own "absence" of identity. Speed allows Perla to reproduce herself mechanically and occupy space by virtue of her very absence. She thus establishes a relation of contingency between her absent being and the space she comes to inhabit. Paradoxically, by leaving this space she forces the projection of a temporal continuum as a "spatial" necessity, that is, as a "spatial" duration. In effect, her absence from the stage transfers the realm of necessity from visibility to space. Duration, understood here as a persistence of space, is a quality that will now give "meaning" to those who come into this space. We may contrast this new content of being to the Cartesian cogito whereas the "I think therefore I am" is replaced by "there is (in an enduring space), therefore I am." It is worth considering now this duration, this new content of "being" as a result of a crisis of the Cartesian ego. The ego, now defined by the "there is" appears overwhelmed by visibility and spatial implosion. As a result it is now space, not thinking, that makes us accept our place in the visible world.

Perla's masquerade and abandonment of the stage shows how enduring space is mechanically reproduced and in this process "being" loses its "aura" in the Benjaminian sense. Yet enduring space is here shown in the positive gain of what Mary Ann Doane, speaking about photography and film, terms "a technological assurance of indexicality."⁵⁵ In her study of modern temporality and its relation to cinema, Doane defines indexicality as "the ability to register contingency."⁵⁶ The problem of contingency in modernity is more properly speaking a problem of excess of contingency—as Doane remarks, "contingency introduces the element of life and the concrete, but *too much* contingency threatens the crucial representational concept of

totality, wholeness.”⁵⁷ This excess is produced, Doane argues, because of the increased rationalization of time in the monetary system of capitalism. She explains that “as time becomes a value it begins to share the logic of the monetary system—a logic of pure differentiation, quantifiability, and articulation into discrete units [...] The pressure of time’s rationalization in the public sphere, and the corresponding atomization [...] ruptures the sense of time as exemplary continuum.”⁵⁸ This tension gives rise to the cultural imperative to give representability to modern contingent time. More important in Doane’s argument is that the registering of contingency which she sees reflected in new technologies of representation constitutes a threat as well as a lure. In effect,

the promise of indexicality is [...] the promise of the rematerialization of time—the restoration of a continuum of space in photography, of time in the cinema. Here, time appears to be free in its indeterminacy, reducible to no system or hierarchy (any moment can be the subject of a photograph; any event can be filmed). The technological assurance of indexicality is the guarantee of a privileged relation to chance and the contingent, whose lure would be the escape from the grasp of rationalization and its systems.⁵⁹

Thus the promise of indexicality reflects forces that come from opposite directions: on one side there is the force of rationalization that produces modern contingency and the cultural imperative of representability; on the other side there is the force of representability through indexicality that appears to escape rationalization. Perla’s masquerade and the space with which she envelops *Equis* can be seen in the context of a diagrammatical meeting of such forces.

The speed of Perla's performance forces a visibility of force in the form of its trace--the extra effort of Perla's performance as well as Equis's attentiveness and need to know where he is. Their behavior is in this case forced from the outside, that is, by the production of an excess of contingency under the capitalist monetary system *and* the cultural imperatives of representability. The energy spent by Perla and Equis can therefore be understood as a resistance to this "outside" force that acts as a doubling of power. In order to account for the double function of reproduction of power and a resistance to it, I take Doane's suggestion that what is reproduced through indexicality is the experience and parrying of the "shock" of contingency.⁶⁰ Doane takes her cue from Benjamin, who draws on Freud's claim that memory and consciousness are incompatible since consciousness' function is "rather to protect the organism against excessive stimuli," or shock.⁶¹ In order to register the shock of contingency, the meaningful experience that is fixed by memory is in turn elided in favor of a rationalization of space-time as a surface phenomenon that simply "slips away." This ephemeral "moment" is what photography, according to Benjamin, is able to capture. The capture of the ephemeral moment is the function of indexicality as defined by Doane. But technology also reproduces new gestures that become part of the mechanism of capture and parrying of shock. In this respect Benjamin notes: "A touch of the finger now sufficed to fix an event for an unlimited period of time. The camera gave the moment a posthumous shock, as it were."⁶² What interests me in Benjamin's remark is that the technology also invents, justifies, or incorporates particular gestures that go with it. These gestures form the very tissue of a mechanized appearance that mimics social mechanisms. As an example, Benjamin tells us that

the invention of the match around the middle of the nineteenth century brought forth a number of innovations which have one thing in common: one abrupt movement of the hand triggers a process of many steps [as in the factory machine]. This development is taking place in many areas. One case in point is the telephone, where the lifting of a receiver has taken the place of the steady movement that used to be required to crank the older models.⁶³

Benjamin's remark can be used to locate the gestural elements of performance in the diagrammatical "inside" of forces. There, we can place a number of "surreal" elements in *Visita*, and understand the mimicry of its mechanized gestures. For example, Perla's masquerade is then echoed in Equis's frantic gestures as he tries to open drawers after Perla has left. Abrupt movements are seen also in the effects of Lali's teaching or disciplining of Equis. For example, Equis frantically switches the position of the axe hanging on the wall, while he tries to find the proper angle demanded by Lali. And as in the touching of the camera's button evoked by Benjamin, in *Visita*, the abrupt gestures trigger a particular relation to space that emphasizes the tactile. The masquerade produces an enveloping space or space in-movement, reflected in Equis's displacements along the walls of the room (in the New York production). Equis's moving of the axe and his inability to put it back in its proper place triggers Lali's need to affix his body to chair and pouf. These abrupt movements and tactile relations are the first signals of shock, as if the friction of surfaces provided an instantaneous anchor to a present that we can *then* let slip away. This anchoring is followed by the appearance of a new space and different actions. Perla's masquerade becomes a game

of make-believe, and Lali's demands later become ritual. The differentiation of two moments in these characters' performances allows us to see the moments of shock and parrying in relation to contingency.

Benjamin's description of the effect of photography as "posthumous death" gives us a clue to the relationship between the repeated faked deaths in *Visita* and the parrying of shock. Lali's seduction of Equis leads to the old man's strangling and "death" by Equis, giving a cue for Perla re-entrance, this time with Gaspar. Lali's "death" is followed by Perla's: she "faints" at her discovery of Gaspar's "manhood." Finally, Equis collapses at the sight of the old woman's "resurrection." The repeated deaths make tangible the shock of contingency through a sort of delayed reaction, allowing us to experience and register the experience as described by Benjamin. The traumatic reaction is confirmed by the fact that there is no place for mourning, even in the funeral, as if the "photographic" space takes precedence in our perception over the experience of memory—memory, in other words, is overwhelmed by our "mechanical" fixing of the moment in the "stillness" of a photographic space.

A certain functional affinity between memory and photography facilitates this process. For as John Berger remarks, "[b]oth the photograph and the remembered depend upon and equally oppose the passing of time. Both preserve moments, and propose their own form of simultaneity, in which all their images can coexist."⁶⁴ But the photographic seduces because it is simpler in the way it "relate[s] the particular to the general [...] even in a single picture. When it happens across a number of pictures, the nexus of relative affinities, contrasts and comparisons can be much wider and more complex."⁶⁵ Thus the photographic colonizes our perception of space in the present.

The result of this process is the absolute separation of memory from an instantaneous perception already loaded with its own “memory.” In this context death appears with a delay, that is, “posthumously,” as the fact of this separation. The sequence showing Lali’s death illustrates this delay quite vividly. Here Perla has entered with Gaspar at the moment that Equis is strangling Lali. While commenting on the struggle Perla orders Gaspar to cut her nails. The rest of the sequence is best shown in the following dialogue:

Perla: [...] Trim the cuticle again, child. (*Thinking it over.*) But I’ll be left a widow! During the best years of my life! [...] What does destiny hold in store for us? No one knows. Life is uncertain, at the mercy of any kind of strange accident. Ow! (*She slaps the dwarf*) You almost cut my fingertip, you son of a bitch! [...]

Lali (*in a whisper*): Je suis mort.

(*Equis lets go of Lali, who collapses like a rag. Pause.*)

Perla: What did he say? (*Gaspar gets down and goes over to the body.*)

Is he breathing?

Gaspar (*after probing Lali’s body with his foot.*): No.

Perla: Well then, it’s all over. [105]

With Gaspar’s probing of the body, death *finally* appears, but only as an afterthought to a sequence that is paradoxically mediated by its “liveness.”

The liveness effect is produced by the simultaneous and disconnected actions of the Perla/Gaspar couple and Equis/Lali.⁶⁶ While Equis struggles with Lali, Gaspar does Perla’s manicure while she anticipates the death of Lali as a “strange accident” (105).

These actions seem to be happening in two different places. These “places” are nevertheless contiguous—they touch each other “by accident” and don’t communicate, so to speak. Liveness is therefore shown here as an effect of contingency, which produces a third space from which Perla volunteers her “live” commentary on the event of Lali’s death, and Lali utters his “Je suis mort” [I am dead] (105). These utterances, in turn, perform a fixing of the moment in the new space. Liveness, then, is the product of our delayed reaction to contingency, because our reaction has to go through a realization that we have become, like Equis, accidental witnesses (in the case of Lali, a witness of his own death that he then ritualizes in Perla’s funeral). Our witnessing within a “fixed” live space produces the accidental—in other words, the accidental is an erasing of our memory in the process of fixing space. What is erased is the “accident” in the post-positivist sense given by Virilio of “the advent of something in what seems to happen unexpectedly.”⁶⁷ For this reason, the action finishes prematurely, dies, is “all over” before we can give it meaning—the accident is thus transformed into an “it has already happened.”

The deaths in *Visita* can be seen as what is left over by this forgetting: the “accidental” victim, or the victim of accident, who is like the remainder of a liveness where the accident is virtually non-existent.⁶⁸ The deaths are temporary because they are mimicking the “already-happened-before-this-liveness-happens” of the accident fixed by the photographic. In this fixed space, death’s terminal nature cannot be remembered because liveness always “resumes” in the present, in a movement of perpetual contingency. In the liveness effect we may thus recognize the “technological assurance of indexicality” which Doane attributes to photography and film. But in

Visita, the effect does not stem from technology per se but first and foremost as a reaction, and one might add, resistance, to contingency.

This account of liveness radicalizes Phillip Auslander's proposition that "historically the live is actually an effect of mediatization, not the other way around;" and that "it was the development of recording technologies that made it possible to perceive existing [theatrical] representations as 'live.'"⁶⁹ In fact, when liveness is attributed to our very construction of perception, we are closer to Baudrillard's dictum, cited by Auslander, that "the very definition of the real is *that of which it is possible to give an equivalent in reproduction.*"⁷⁰ Technologies of reproduction and recording are, in this sense, accessories that facilitate a process already at work in our dealing with modern excess of contingency—technology helps us fix the accidental in space. The question of what reality would be without that technology is therefore an empty "philosophical" question.

In the play, a philosophical wrestling between Equis and Lali is provoked by Equis's urgent desire to leave, to be outside—"out there," Equis explains, "an act, even if it's minimal, even if it's useless, moving a finger, for example, that can contain me. It's enough. That's where life is" (124). These words are like the wish for the return of a lost reality. Equis's subsequent invocation of his own presence, though, betrays the fact that that reality is not recoverable. He says "Out there, I'm in risk of dying at any moment. Just by my mere presence" (124). This is a paradox, because Equis is already "present" inside and there is no guarantee that his presence will be any different outside. The invocation of presence therefore serves to bring in "risk" as a condition of existence. In other words, it is Equis's investment in "presence," not in reality, that

produces the idea of risk. The desire of risk, in this context, can only exist as a desire—it is not possible—because it is a wish for the return of what has been repressed in our production of liveness: excessive contingency.

At this point the play seems to critique this kind of existential hubris with respect to modern contingency, when such rationalization ends up exhausting itself. In effect, Equis's philosophical conversation deteriorates into a wrestling. Equis is finally contained out of his own exhaustion, unable to face up to the contingent. At the conclusion of the play, it is the old couple that offers Equis a way out of his existential perspective by giving him an identity. The mole “discovered” on Equis's neck becomes proof of his kinship to the couple—he is their prodigal son. Like in Monti's other plays, the scene of recognition already occurs in a different space than the one the narrative refers to. Here the truthfulness of Equis's identity is no longer relevant (even as make-believe). What matters is the kind of spatial exploration that it facilitates. In Equis, it stimulates his effort at remembering, which being frustrated is converted into a kind of faith in “seeing” and “believing” that Perla is the mother. This is equivalent to the moment of choosing, or of affirmation, that we have seen at the end of *Historia tendenciosa*.... Equis's choice to see and believe is simply a relation to space that “has no other object than itself: I choose to choose, and by that means I exclude every choice made according to the mode of having no choice.”⁷¹ Equis's choice is more than a mere acknowledgement of contingency that would convert his “accidental” encounter into “luck.” Indeed, Equis counters contingency with a choosing that doubles the movement of the contingent from the accident to the inevitable (or accidental). The choosing is therefore a retracing of the movement through which we forget, made in order to

recuperate a lost memory. And like the sensing of univocity in *Historia...*, in *Visita* the acknowledgment of a loss of memory justifies a moving towards the tactile, as when Perla suggests that “the thing that would confirm that you’re my son is your weight in my lap” (129).

In this tactile relationship Equis recovers the memory of the traumatic confrontation with the contingent. Its imagery is appropriately photographic in its stillness, and also cinematic in its fragmentation. Equis sees “a face, a color [...] In an old, dirty bar...” (129). The traumatic moment is personified in the image of “a yellowish old man...[who] smiled at [him] hatefully and then disappeared” (129). This image is also accompanied by the sense of pressure (echoing the pressure of his weight on Perla) as Equis sees himself “flattened [...] against the front window” (129). The continuous tactile relationship thus gives Equis a sense of his mediation in the production of images—as if the very pressure against the window brought out the vision of the old man. Similarly the final image of a cloud stopping over him is mediated by the feeling of “the straw” on which he lies, of the “warm earth,” etc. The cloud points to a different moment, of clarity, of the luminous logic of the photography itself—a clarity or fixity that fades (slips away) once liveness—this forced witnessing—resumes in this new space.⁷² The effect of touching on this sequence of shock-clarity-fading is of bringing them together to a single point or intersection. In this sense the touching is a remembrance of the trauma as a diagrammatic site where the forces of power and resistance meet. The final image of the play, with Equis lying on Perla’s lap in a position that “reproduce[s] somewhat the Pietá” indicates how, through touching, they both produce the site of the diagram. The image is itself a transformation

of the metaphysics of origin/being, reflected in the narrative of identity disclosure, into a physics of becoming—that is, through the genealogical gesture of remembering the trauma that initiates our “live” present, it recuperates the trauma as a diagrammatic site of emergence.⁷³ The traumatic “memory,” in other words, is not a recuperation of the “real,” but a form of myth-making that establishes the traumatic as the site of birth or becoming.

Finally, the site of emergence can be thought of as the site of maximum resistance that is able to stop time (the moment of fixed clarity) and release it again. This stop-and-release sequence transforms our relationship to the accidental by choosing and recognizing it as a site of potential resistance. Again, Monti’s play leaves us with an end-point that serves as a starting point for later plays.

Conclusion.

In chapter two, an analysis of tectonics in *Marathón* gave us access to the play as an unstable site reflecting the very affect of history. In the present chapter, I have argued that two previous plays, *Historia* (1971) and *Visita* (1977), already deal with the question of affect by problematizing the way we negate history even as we critique it. *Historia*’s allegory uses theatre to “affectively” resolve our relation to history. The Deleuzian diagram of “force relations” allowed us to make a connection between the instability of the tectonic site of *Marathón* and an affective constant in our relation to history. I showed that the politico-critical allegory of dependency and complicity constructed in *Historia*... is used as a site that problematizes the tension between the representation and the event of history. The performance of the play includes

“implosions” allowing the actors’ insertion in the allegorical world. This effectively places the actors’ experience at the point where a split between an inside and an outside of history is forced from the “outside.” Thus Monti’s theatre is seen as drawing a diagram that traces the location of a meeting of forces. The diagrammatic location can be potentially recognized as points of historical emergence. At the end of the play the actors manage to transform its allegorical world by effectively turning the representation of history and middle class tendencies into a sound box of conflicting voices united by the enclosure of the theatre. The metaphor of univocity helped turn the split between a being outside and a being inside into a positive tactile space of emergence through “listening.”

Visita, in turn, allegorizes the “univocity” metaphor in order to re-enter this theatre from the perspective of an actor’s presence, this last represented by Equis, who intrudes into the diagrammatic sound-box of a household/theatre. This “actor’s presence” explains why the stakes in *Visita*’s metaphysical, absurdist, and grotesque world are related to a spatial metaphorization of the diagram, where presence itself appears to be redundant. The strategies of make-believe and performance by the characters are, in effect, an effort to accommodate the “presence of presence” that Equis represents. Therefore, the “truth” that theatrical visibility in *Visita* reveals is not the identity of the characters but the cinematic quality of masquerade. The setting and actions of the play are therefore in the realm of “indexicality” that Mary-Ann Doane attributes to photography and film. I described both director Kogan and my own intuitive ways of dealing with the problem of masquerade in the theatre. In this respect,

the use of grotesque elements and the introduction of speed are related to the need to make the absence, from where masquerade comes forth, palpable.

Since indexicality is, according to Doane, a phenomenon that reflects our encounter with modern contingency, the body of Equis is recognized as a potential site where the contingent is problematized. Doane's and Benjamin's discussions of technology's relationship to modern contingency provide theoretical links for taking Equis's memory and touch as a theatrical means of mapping our emergence from the "accidents" of modernity. This suggests that the body of the actor matters to Monti's theatre, not because it represents, not even because it is "live," but because "it" has a "touching" that links the memory of a past trauma to both modern contingency and to a future that it chooses. Thus Monti invents a myth of the actor's body as able to take a distance from both the drama and liveness of theatre while still trapped inside theatre. The value of the myth is not the telling of the body's origin but its relationship to trauma which, in turn, is related to today's tendency to take the accidental nature of our world for granted.

In *Historia...*, the actor's implosion create the myth of univocity, and in *Visita*, Equis creates the myth of a painful but visionary encounter with the contingent. After having written *Marathón*, Monti finds these myths within the history of Argentina and Latin America and places his actor/characters on the tectonic site he found in *Marathón*, that is, on the [South] American shore. Those later plays are the subject of the next and final chapter.

¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. by Seán Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 118.

² I use the terms affect and affection to refer to a certain pathos or feeling in our collective attitude towards the future—a feeling that, in this analysis is contingent to our experience of space. In this sense, affect is related to Jameson’s notion of a utopian impulse, which he sees as taking various historical forms and emotional tones. Jameson understands the utopian impulse as a political unconscious. “In this sense,” he explains, “to project an imperative to thought in which the ideological would be grasped as somehow at one with the Utopian, and the Utopian at one with the ideological, is to formulate a question to which a collective dialectic is the only conceivable answer.” See Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative As a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 286-87.

³ My contrast of these plays relies on the analyses made in the first two chapters.

⁴ It is worth noting here that my readings go against the grain of the metaphorical “house” of *Magnus* and the allegorical “journey” in *Marathón*. My point is that the plays invite the question (by cutting the metaphor with allegory and allegory with metaphor) of how and why such narrative “spaces” are being produced.

⁵ Deleuze, *Foucault*, 70.

⁶ See *Ibid.*

⁷ Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 97.

⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. by Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 139.

⁹ Deleuze, *Foucault*, 37-38.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Depictions of violence can be found in all of Monti’s plays. We may mention the scenes of murder (in *Magnus* and *La oscuridad de la razón*; and scenes of apparent torture (in *Visita* and *Una pasión sudamericana*). In the next chapter (Four) I will discuss the most notable example, from *Una Pasión Sudamericana*: the decision of the Brigadier to execute the young lovers.

¹³ Deleuze, *Foucault*, 38.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁶ The complete title of the play is *Historia tendenciosa de la clase media argentina, de los extraños sucesos en que se vieron envueltos algunos hombres públicos, su completa dilucidación y otras escandalosas revelaciones* [A biased history of the Argentinean middle class: About the strange events in which certain public figures found themselves involved, the complete elucidation of these events, and other scandalous revelations]. The play will be referred to as *Historia tendenciosa...*

¹⁷ Kogan later successfully premiered three more of Monti's plays (*Visita*, *Marathón*, and *La oscuridad de la razón*), all productions of the Payró Theatre of which Kogan was a founder. For an account of this artistic pairing see Celia Dosio, *El Payró: Cincuenta años de teatro independiente* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2003). For biographical information on Kogan see Perla Zayas de Lima, *Diccionario de directores y escenógrafos del teatro argentino* (Buenos Aires: Galerna, 1990), 167-68.

¹⁸ See Ricardo Monti and Jaime Kogan, "Nacimiento y vida," preface to Ricardo Monti, *Historia tendenciosa...*, 5.

¹⁹ The second version of the play has the subtitle "Moralidad en un acto," further underscoring its medieval allegorical thrust. See Ricardo Monti, *Teatro, tomo 2*, ed. by Osvaldo Pellettieri (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 2000), 147.

²⁰ See Jean Graham-Jones, "El teatro de Ricardo Monti o lo moderno visto desde lo postmoderno," in *Estrategias postmodernas y postcoloniales en el teatro latinoamericano actual*, ed. by Alfonso de Toro (Madrid/Frankfurt/Main: Vervuert, 2004), 112-14.

²¹ For a detailed report on the interrelation between the politics of the early 1970s (fewer than three years of democracy between two dictatorships), intellectual production, and theatrical expression see Stella Martini and Nora Mazziotti, "El teatro político en la década del setenta" in *El teatro latinoamericano de los setenta*, ed. by Osvaldo Pellettieri (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1995), 135-45.

²² Dosio, 71.

²³ All quotes from *Historia tendenciosa...* are my own translation of the original version of the text in Ricardo Monti, *Historia...* (Buenos Aires: Talía, 1972). A later version of the play has a shorter title: *Historia tendenciosa* (Ottawa: Girol, 1993).

²⁴ These actor interventions in the performance of the play are scripted in the original text, which reflects the original production. In the later published version (1993) the actors are not made to appear as themselves.

²⁵ Michel Foucault, "Theatrum Philosophicum," in *Mimesis, Masochism and Mime: the Politics of Theatricality in Contemporary French Thought*, ed. by Timothy Murray (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 222. Originally in Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interview*, ed. by Donald Bouchard, trans. by Donald Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 165-98. Foucault summarizes his definition of the event thus: "at the limit

of dense bodies, and event is incorporeal (a metaphysical surface); on the surface of words and things, an incorporeal event is the meaning of a proposition (its logical dimension); in the thread of discourse, an incorporeal meaning-event is fastened to the verb (the infinitive point of the present).” See Foucault, *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Monti and Kogan, “Nacimiento y vida,” 5.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁴ The actress mentions the city of Breslaw in today’s Poland, but in 1928 it was part of Germany.

³⁵ This particular implosion was written by the director Jaime Kogan. For this section of the play, the Payró team had also very much in mind the work of Rodolfo Walsh about the massacre, *Operación: masacre*, which they had rehearsed but abandoned its production with the news of Uriburu’s assassination by Peronist guerillas (los montoneros). See Dosio, 67-70.

³⁶ It may be argued here that the phenomenon of liveness, facilitated by mediatization (as argued by Philip Auslander), in a way masks the theatrical relation by creating the illusion of no distance.

³⁷ Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, trans. by Louise Burchill (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 81.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 86.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. by Mark Lester with Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 179.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁴² Badiou, *Deleuze*, 86.

⁴³ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 104.

⁴⁴ For a discussion of modern processes of subjectivation and its relation to the slippage between the meaning of the subject as being inalienably “free,” and being necessarily subjected to a higher authority, see Etienne Balibar, “Subjection and Subjectivation,” in *Supposing the Subject*, ed. by Joan Copjec (New York: Verso, 1994), 1-15.

⁴⁵ Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-memory, Practice*, 148.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ In the metaphorical reading being rehearsed here, there is no separation between the character and actor (and, as I will argue, the audience), hence the statement that the presence of both is “apparent.”

⁴⁸ Produced in the English translation, at the New Perspectives Theatre, New York, 2004. The first English production of the play, directed by Jean Graham-Jones, was in Tallahassee, Florida State University, Conradi University Theatre, 1995.

⁴⁹ I borrow this notion of negative identity from Rita Felski, who gives the attribute of “negative” to lower-middle-class identity because of its pejorative connotation compared to simply “middle-class.” I believe that “middle-class” is more properly a negative identity precisely because of its neutral positioning of “neither.. nor” and “either...or.” See Rita Felski, *Doing Time: Feminist Theory and Postmodern Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 33-54.

⁵⁰ See Richard Schechner, *Theatre and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 35.

⁵¹ Christian Metz, “The Imaginary Signifier,” trans. by Ben Brewster, in *Film and Theory: An Anthology*, ed. by Robert Stam and Toby Miller (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 409. First appeared in *Screen* 16.2 (Summer 1975).

⁵² Badiou, *Deleuze*, 45.

⁵³ See Dosio, 84.

⁵⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, “The Wanderer and His Shadow,” 9. Quoted by Foucault in *Language, Counter-memory Practice*, 143.

⁵⁵ Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, The Archive* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 22.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 14.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 8-9.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 9.

⁶⁰ See *Ibid.*, 12-16. Doane refers to Walter Benjamin's "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 155-94. Benjamin draws his ideas about shock experience from Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, specifically Freud's speculative proposition, in section IV of that work, that "consciousness arises instead of a memory trace" and the consequent account of traumatic neurosis.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁶² Benjamin, "On Some Motifs," 175. Cited by Doane, 15.

⁶³ Benjamin, 175.

⁶⁴ John Berger and Jean Mohr, *Another Way of Telling* (New York: Pantheon, 1982), 280.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Monti has marked two other simultaneous actions in the play with the letters A and B in order to indicate the overlapping of dialogues and actions. See *Visit*, 121, 125.

⁶⁷ Paul Virilio, *Un paysage d'évènements* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1996), 115. Cited in English by Patrick Crogan, in "The Tendency, the Accident and the Untimely: Paul Virilio's Engagement with the Future," *Theory, Culture and Society* 16.5/6 (Oct/Dec 1999): 172.

⁶⁸ I am contrasting here the two perspectives of the accidental and the repressed "accident" as understood by Virilio.

⁶⁹ Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 51.

⁷⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. by Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), 146. Cited by Auslander, 51.

⁷¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1; the Movement Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 114.

⁷² Jean Graham-Jones pointed out to me the similarities between the description (most notably of clouds) by Equis and the one by the protagonist at the conclusion of Julio Cortázar's story "Las babas del diablo." The story, translated into English as "Blow-up," is the source of Antonioni's celebrated film of the same title. Relevant to my reading of *Visita* is the fact that Cortázar's story is precisely about the experience of a photographer: The poster-size enlargement of a picture the protagonist has taken makes him reconsider the imagined contingencies of the seemingly banal Parisian street scene he had photographed. His quite routine involvement with the "liveness" of the event shows its dark side when the enlarged picture suddenly begins to move. What had seemed like an "accidental" confluence of a woman, a young man, another man reading a paper inside a

nearby car, and a photographer, is revealed as involving a contract in which none of the parts were “innocent.” The terrible fact of an ongoing “contract” that has been transformed into daily “accidents” locked inside the phantasmal reality of the picture has no other referent, in the end, than the mysterious clouds. In Cortázar’s story, as well as in Monti’s play, the clouds are the only trace of an inaccessible and traumatic accident that is un-representable in itself. This suggests that a comparison of both Monti’s and Cortázar’s diagrammatical imagination is potentially productive of valuable insights. For example, we may deduce that Cortázar’s photographer, in some way, touches a diagrammatical point that makes him emerge from the picture itself. See Julio Cortázar, *Blow-up and Other Stories*, trans. by Paul Blackburn (New York: Collier, 1968), 100-15.

⁷³ Monti had written an ending that extended beyond the final Pietà sequence and breaks the moment with a dramatic and somewhat didactic sequence. The ending was rejected for being anticlimactic, considering the emotive tension of Equis’s “memory.” The rejected ending basically does not contradict the logic found in our analysis of the play, although some nuances are worth pointing out. In that ending Equis wakes up and, finding himself being made over with boy clothes and make-up, literally comes back to “reality” with a vengeance: he pursues his captors and kills the old couple—this time “for real.” The apparent recuperation of the “real” does not last for long when Gaspar discovers that the entry door is locked and “someone” is looking through the key hole, making them actors with a redundant presence again. The figuration of a physical outside, though, undermines our conceptual grasp of the diagram (This is possibly another, albeit intuitive, reason for Monti’s revised ending).

CHAPTER FOUR

“Staging Diagrammatic Myths: *Una pasión sudamericana* and *La oscuridad de la razón in Performance.*”¹

Myths have an analytical capacity that cannot be denied. By comparison sociology seems a surface effect. What interests me is tendency. --Paul Virilio.²

The diagrammatic or abstract machine does not function to represent something real, but rather construct a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality. --Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.³

It's preferable to dream about love than suffer through it. And it's from these nightmares that dreams are born. --Ricardo Monti.⁴

Introduction.

When looking at the plays Monti wrote after the end of military dictatorship, both *Marathón*'s “tectonic location” (chapter two) and the diagrammatic model analyzed in *Visita* (chapter three) need consideration. Starting with *Una pasión sudamericana* (1989), Monti's works center on chosen “historical” protagonists who are seen in relation to a “mythical” Latin American origin. While *Marathón* can inform us on the way the latter plays locate history, *Visita* gives us a diagrammatic model of its mythical aspect.

Through a series of metaphorical gestures, *Marathón* layers the intercontinental map of the modern journey from Europe to the Americas over the narrative of a journey through historical myths.⁵ This allowed Monti to ground the play's allegory of Argentine history in modern world history, with the latter seen as event. The map is a guide to a modern unconscious that anchors itself, in the case of *Marathón*'s performance, to the American shore. In the plays written after *Marathón* we see Monti exploring this site in

various versions of an encounter between the new and the old worlds. In *Una pasión*, a local caudillo, the Brigadier, confronts a Europeanizing “Madman” during Argentina’s nineteenth-century civil war. In *Asunción*, the destinies of a Spanish concubine (Blanca) and a native woman (Asunción) intersect during the early colonization of America. In *La oscuridad de la razón*, it is the inheritance of post-revolutionary French ideas that is disputed during Argentina’s independence movement. Both America and Europe form the unstable tectonic site of these plays, and, as in *Marathón*, the stakes are heightened by a conjunction of past, present, and future.⁶ In other words, the plays locate themselves at the origin of some of the myths that *Marathón* translated into tectonic tension. This gives the characters the opportunity to make a choice of or about the myth. The moment of origin is mythologized in this way. I will use my analysis of *Visita* to help unravel this process.

In the previous chapter I showed how, at the end of *Visita*, Equis matches the contingency of his situation with a touching that connects him to both a past trauma and a future that he chooses. This process allows Equis to recognize his presence as redundant in relation to the masquerade produced in the strange household in which he finds himself. I viewed this acknowledged redundancy as an alternative perspective on the situation of the actor in a theatre. In fact, Equis provides a diagrammatic model of the “meaning” of the actor’s presence. In this chapter I return to this model to analyze the main characters in post-*Marathón* plays. I argue that, like Equis, the protagonists of these plays recognize themselves as “diagrammatic” actors by encountering an excessively contingent world. In *Visita*, Equis recognizes his diagrammatic location when his kinship to the old couple is accepted as a tactile revisiting of a past trauma that initiated his

“accidental” life. Likewise, in the plays considered in the present chapter, the protagonists put themselves inside myths of an original “accident” that they themselves choose. The historical location of these mythical “moments” creates a sort of equivalence between the diagrammatic site of *Visita*’s meeting of forces and the tectonic site of *Marathón*. Thus *Una pasión sudamericana* mythologizes the “accidental” encounter of civilization and barbarism in the political warfare of nineteenth-century Argentina.⁷ In *La oscuridad de la razón*, the author turns to the “accidental” interiorization of modern European reason (represented by the murdering of a local leader by a Europeanized urban creole) within the body of the colonized (represented by the avenging impulses of the murdered leader’s daughter, Alma). In *Asunción*, we have the “accidental” interracial coupling of a conquistador and a native during the early colonization of the continent, seen through the traumatic intercontinental journey of a Spanish concubine. Like *Equis*, the characters come to recognize these moments as the very site of a traumatic encounter with an excess of contingency. They are, in this sense, encounters with space which result in the redundancy of the protagonist’s presence. *La oscuridad* suggests this more specifically with its narrative of return. Mariano is a young poet who returns to his homeland after spending time in France only to find himself alienated from the inter-generational battle being fought at home.

The encountered space thus transforms the characters into actors who are forced to find their role or place in an ongoing “play.” In *Una pasión*, the Brigadier uses a troupe of Buffoons to mediate, through various enactments, his relationship to his political and military adversary. In *Asunción*, the character of Blanca desperately uses an indigenous woman in labor as audience for her melodramatic declamation of pain and

betrayal by an aloof conquistador. Taking my cue from *Visita*, I suggest that the function of these performances is the diagrammatic retracing of memory that transforms the accidental into a mythical moment of choice. The payoff for transforming the accidental into self-chosen myth is the ability of using the diagrammatic points as a launching pad for an ethical and historical projection into the future. In what follows I will examine these instances of mythologizing in relation to the tactile elements of the performance. The tactile relationships, which I analyzed in *Visita* as ways of remembering trauma, will be now explored in relation to specific Buenos Aires productions of *Una pasión* and *La oscuridad*.

Ana Alvarado's 2005 production of *Una pasión sudamericana*.

In *Una pasión sudamericana* Monti somewhat returns to the cartographic and tectonic imagination he deployed in *Marathón*. The setting in Monti's text is "the hall of what remains of a ranch, located on the plains outside Buenos Aires" (208). The main characters are based on nineteenth-century historical figures involving dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas and the clandestine lovers, Camila O'Gorman and the priest Ladislao Gutiérrez, both of whom Rosas orders to be killed.⁸ Within this setting, the Brigadier is the sole protagonist. The group of "crazies," the clerks, the Aide-de-Camp, and the jailed Barrabás are inside, while the Madman and the fugitive lovers (whose story is told through the crazies' enactments) remain outside. The inside and outside placements of these characters establish the physics, so to speak, in terms of the tracing and manifestation of a relation of forces that we saw in *Visita*. For instance, the actor Daniel Fanego, who played the character of the Brigadier, describes in an interview how the text

“seals” the character’s passion with the relationships of the inside and outside of the setting.⁹ He says:

Everything is there: content and form. The passion for power that my character experiences is equivalent to the one that is lived by Camila O’Gorman and the priest Ladislao Gutiérrez, who do not appear but are mentioned. That same night the Brigadier will have to decide what to do with those lovers who dared to break codes. The passion of this leader is also the one of a people that needs to organize itself as a nation.¹⁰

Thus Fanego suggests a physical unity linking the inside and outside as if by some gravitational force(s). I will analyze this confluence of force from the perspective of the physical elements as they are manifested in performance, specifically in the 2005 production, directed by Ana Alvarado.¹¹

The 2005 production, presented at the Teatro Nacional Cervantes in Buenos Aires, was the only one since the play’s premiere in 1989.¹² Ana Alvarado changed the setting for the more diagrammatic concept of an abandoned theatre stage and auditorium.¹³ This choice can be partly justified by the play’s inclusion of enactments by a band of five Italian buffoons or “crazies” who play for the Brigadier’s entertainment. More significantly, the Brigadier is also re-acting with his leader personae to the provocations of “the Madman,” the leader of the opposing army scheduled to fight the Brigadier’s soldiers at dawn.¹⁴ This translates in the Brigadier’s engagement into a battle of words, shown in his declamatory dictations (of letters) to his clerks. The diagrammatic nature of this theatre is most evident in the Brigadier’s visualization of his relationship to the Madman. In a letter to his friend Flores, he

dictates, as if writing for posterity: “I answer each movement of that assassin, that Madman, with one of my own, just like in a mirror. Because now we see through the glass, darkly...” (220). The mirror image thus performs the coincidence of the two enemy faces—“when I see my own assassin’s face in that looking glass,” the Brigadier continues, “behind that stony mask, I see only the grimaces of anguish and remorse” (220). Against this mirror, the Brigadier can feel a force from the outside folded in the inside scene. This is the site of the trauma, echoing Equis’s vision through the window pane in *Visita*. The flat surface of this “mirror” where the Brigadier’s face and the enemy’s “mask” rub against each other across a distance is, I suggest, the diagrammatic scene of the play. Alvarado’s setting, we’ll see, gives dimensions to the flat diagrammatic mirror.

The mirror vision is reproduced in Alvarado’s setting for her production. Here the stage that faces the audience is doubled, as if by an imaginary mirror on the upstage area. As a result, we see an auditorium in what would be the backstage area of the theatre. Therefore, not only two stages, but also two auditoriums, are mirroring each other. This is no attempt at illusionism, since the stage has been moved from the existing proscenium so that part of the actual theatre auditorium (but without spectators) serves as the “mirrored” one. The mirror is then a physical space where Alvarado places the crazies, who often sit in the “other” auditorium when not asked to enact a specific “scene” by the Brigadier. This double theatre corresponds to the play’s dramaturgy, which puts the character of the Brigadier as witness to his own movements. Thus the Brigadier sees his movements as reactions to the movements of the Madman “outside,” beyond the mirror’s visible field, so to speak. Alvarado’s

setting therefore emphasizes the performance of the Brigadier as he seems to fashion the very theatre of perception for his political and military acts. Finally, this theatre is also fashioned by the audience, since, like for the Brigadier, the mirrored auditorium does not “reflect” their presence.

This fashioning occurs very much as a reaction to the Brigadier’s own mirrored reflection. This occurs because the discourse of the confrontation is in part written by the side of the Madman, who represents the ideology of Argentine intellectual and statesman Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, author of *Civilization and Barbary*, as well as that of Juan Bautista Alberdi, who was a political theorist, diplomat, and a vocal opponent to Rosas’s regime.¹⁵ Cast as the barbarian, the Brigadier has ironically baptized his enemy as the Madman like in a play of mirrors. Similarly the Brigadier’s “reactions” have a dynamic of self-affection. This becomes evident in the dictations of the Brigadier to the clerks, where, after hearing himself and imagining the reaction of “posterity,” he corrects his “speech” by asking the clerks to scratch over what he had just said, before proceeding to “re-write” the speech. The Brigadier is thus not able to see himself clearly as if his self-image were vanishing beyond the visible field onto and outside that forces the constitution of self. Accordingly, in Alvarado’s setting, the Brigadier faces an empty theatre, inhabited only by buffoons.

One may compare and contrast this reading with one offered by critic Camilo Sánchez, who, thinking about the irrelevant discourse of Argentine politicians around the time of the performance, imagines the voice of the actor/Brigadier vanishing along with the discourse.¹⁶ Sánchez writes: “the voice vanishes, diffuse, nobody seems to listen to it, perhaps not even the Brigadier.”¹⁷ My reading, which considers the diagrammatic setting,

asserts it is the image, not the voice, that vanishes. What happens to the voice is again informed by the setting— this “emptying mirror” that affects, as we’ll see, the actor’s characterization of the Brigadier.

Daniel Fanego is an experienced actor and director who, as of 2005, had appeared on Buenos Aires stages (as well as television and film) for the previous twenty-five years. According to the actor, the director’s concept of putting the Brigadier inside a theatre affected his characterization. He said tellingly that “a military cowboy standing in the middle of a theatre is special: it’s like a woman in spiked heels standing in the snow.”¹⁸ This comment, I suspect, means that Fanego had to work harder at maintaining the super-masculine image of the Brigadier he had built for himself—as if the actor were facing the same type of ghostly mirror-images as his character.¹⁹ And much in the way the Brigadier recuperates his image through his dictations, Fanego first finds his character through his voice. In Fanego’s powerful performance there is no hint of self-consciousness as could have been expected from his comment. The actor’s vocal work and his relationship to space contributed to the effectiveness of Fanego’s performance. The actor himself recognizes this and puts it in the context of a journey, which he initiated with each rehearsal—he states: “In this journey it was useful to start working with the Rosas [characterization] through the voice, Rosas’s voice was the first thing that I found—the tone for giving orders. And then, the fever that envelops him and the mystery that seems to be threatening him.”²⁰ The actor’s discovery of the Brigadier’s voice seems to happen also in performance, where the doubled theatres of the setting function as sonic mirrors.

In the performance, Fanego’s voice asserts itself not so much because of the focus of his address to the other characters but by its production of the theatrical space as an

echo chamber where his voice reverberates and comes back as if to touch him. Fanego projects his voice from one theatre to the other, as if across a mirror—in the end, his voice makes the positioning of each theatre virtually interchangeable and multiplies its reference through reflexivity. It is as if the actor ends up hearing his own voice doubling as the voice of the Brigadier so that he is also hearing the very voice that, as an actor, he has found as being the Brigadier's. This echoing reflexivity ends up including yet another theatre where the audience is the protagonist who does not listen to but “hears” the actor's voice and accepts it, in the sense of condoning, as the Brigadier's voice. The echo produces the performer's character voice much in the way the voice of the Brigadier is produced as an echo of the Madman's “heard” discourse. The voice is thus produced at the mirroring points of resistance to outside voices. The mirror is therefore the inside limit from where the Brigadier's resistance to the outside is finally manifested. In other words, resistance is manifested as energy feedback to an invisible outside.

The kinetic energy of the performance follows the echoing trajectory of Fanego's voice. The gestures of the clerks and crazies seem animated by excess energy or feedback produced by the voice's projection to the limits of the spatial confines—that is, to a certain extent, the characters are animated by the Brigadier's own feedback energy. Said energy is manifested in the tics and repetitive violent gestures, the constant pacing, striking of the floor, and acts of wrestling. The space becomes a forced theatre, wherein the fact of an imminent encounter between the troops of the Brigadier and the Madman seems almost an afterthought. The director Alvarado renders this comically when the Brigadier asks “what has happened to the Madman? Why won't he fight? He came to devour the world and now he wants to dance a minuet?” (209). At this point the Brigadier

effectively orders the clerks to perform a minuet for all present. Thus the military strategies of the Madman, in the “real” outside, cannot match the force felt at the location of a diagrammatic mirror “inside.” It is as if the energy of this reactive theatre takes over the very sense of a limiting mirror and asserts itself with a dance that mocks the very existence of an outside.

In relation to this theatre, the character of the aide-de-camp, played by Fernando Llosa, is stiff, soft spoken, and has a marginal position. In fact, this theatre being made by all, each taking the roles of performers and spectators at different moments, appears to resist the Aide-de-camp’s wish that the plot be clearly and neatly written. Nevertheless, he himself provides the plot in the form of reports about the whereabouts of the Madman. He also reminds the Brigadier about the young couple, Camila and her lover priest Ladislao. The transgressive lovers have been arrested and brought to the Brigadier so he can decide of their fate. The Aide-de-camp insinuates his wish that the Brigadier let the lovers go, but the Brigadier resists this rushed resolution of the plot. In the performance, this wish for a “neat” writing is ironically mocked by the clerks who, while the Aide-de-camp dozes off, proceed to “write” in the air, with neat calligraphy, the imaginary “dreams” of the old man.

Instead of rushing towards a plot resolution, the inside will be more concerned in re-presenting the story of the lovers. By virtually bringing the lovers inside, the characters perform a folding that collapses the outside and inside into two parallel sheets or surfaces that touch each other. More precisely, the crazies’ embodiment of the lovers through their performance changes the perspective of the inside by converting it into a surface that effectively makes the outside accessible to touch (much in the way a mirror’s

surface allows a touching of the reflected image). This “touching” produces a parallel between the Brigadier and Camila’s passion. It allows the Brigadier to further mediate his relationship to the outside by acting, “on” his body, the outside of the fold, so to speak.

The crazies’ enactments provide alternative representations of the affair, going from the obscene and blasphemous, to the seductive, the erotic, and, finally, the poetic and mystical. This inverted Divine Comedy, journeying through “Hell,” “the World,” “Purgatory,” and “Paradise,” is a vehicle for the Brigadier’s gradual identification with the lovers, and more specifically with their passion. Identification helps to draw a parallel between the Brigadier/Madman conflict and the Camila/Ladislao affair. For instance, the enactments focus on the seduction taking place across the division of the confessional, much in the way the Brigadier responds to the seduction of a battle across the divide of civilization and barbarism. The director Alvarado emphasized this parallel in production by having the crazies use a flat with an enormous hole punched through it in their enactment. The flat thus effectively folds the “mirror” of the theatre onto the materiality of the flat—mimicking the folded embodiment of the Brigadier’s “passion” in Camila’s. The hole in the flat reinscribed the spatial dimension of the theatre as a tactile space itself.

The flat served as the separation of the confessional between the character of Camila and the Priest. It is Camila, though, who receives a painted “set” on the face of the flat folded behind her—this gives the effect of Camila being inside the theatre and the Priest “outside,” just like the Brigadier and the Madman’s positions. The flat reproduces the pun of the play’s title, which makes the equation of the Brigadier’s political passion, inspired by “civilization’s” challenge to “build a world,” and Camila’s

love, inspired by the “spiritual” call of the priest. This suggests that Camila and the Brigadier’s “passions” occur in a theatricalized space where they are “actors” whose passion is forced from the outside. This force, we’ll see, provokes the characters’ transgendered performances, which are in turn related to the tectonic ground of this theatre.

The gendering of the performance is insinuated by the territorial positioning of the Brigadier, who has been interpellated as part of the untamed continent targeted by the Madman. The continent is thus feminized the way Camila’s body is through the priest’s desire. Therefore, when Fanego/the Brigadier embodies his masculinity within this theatre, it is to differentiate himself from the feminized continent. Similarly, one of the Buffoons, Estanislao, must perform a cross-gender embodiment in order to play Camila, indicating that in order to fulfill her carnal desire for the priest, Camila must become feminine again, that is, a fallen woman.

The Fanego/Brigadier’s hypermasculinity and Estanislao/Camila’s “fallen woman” appear as trans-gendered performances that respond to the gendering pressures of civilization and religion. The staging makes these pressures palpable and rehearses a theory of the performative as a repetition of repetition (that is, not of something external but of itself). For the actor Fanego, the theatrical space itself was a mirror that resisted the masculinity of the character of the Brigadier and its model, Rosas. For that same reason, Fanego’s performance had to use the mirrored theatre in order to reaffirm the masculinity of the character. This dynamic shows a performance that occupies the two sides of the mirror that, as we have seen, were reproduced in Alvarado’s set. This mirror is also a site of tension, where forces push at its diagrammatic points for the

(hyperbolic) appearance of *one* gender in performance—that is, there is never a choice between genders, and whatever is normative is manifested in the performative repetition. Therefore, when the enactment of the seduction of Camila by the priest demands a gendered performance, the Brigadier brings a flat onstage to separate Camila and the Priest. This stage-confessionary emphasizes a spiritual affinity between the lovers because both Camila and the Priest (played by the buffoon Saint Benedict) are fully visible to the audience. The flat as mirror, on the other hand, relates the gendered performances to the spiritual and hierarchical separation symbolized by the flat/confessionary. The flat puts pressure towards a gendered performance by Estanislao/Camila because she must compensate for her symbolic separation from the priest by repeating or performing gender. This shows that gender is a performance of normativity that unconsciously negates hierarchies and the effect of power on our subjectivity. In other words, gender (or normativity) is ideological negation, and, in that sense, it is performative.

The flat then facilitates an understanding of gender as a reflexive repetition of subjection that, as Foucault says, “‘tells the truth’ about myself [--] I constitute myself as subject by a certain number of relationships of power, which weigh upon me, and which weigh upon others.’”²¹ In this respect, Foucault’s theorization of subjection, starting in the 80’s, leads Judith Butler to suggest (much later than the 80s)

that we might understand Foucault as implicitly theorizing a kind of passion when he queried how the body becomes the nexus for the redirection of power. In this context, it seems, we have another implicit theorization of passion, since the subject is not produced in a simply

mechanical way, but power “attaches” a subject to its own identity. Subjects appear to require this self-attachment, this process by which one becomes attached to one’s own subjecthood [...] But for Foucault, it is clear that one attaches to oneself through a norm, and so self-attachment is socially mediated: it is no immediate and transparent relation to the self. It is also contingent: we will become attached to ourselves through mediating norms, norms that give us back a sense of who we are, norms that will cultivate our investment in ourselves.²²

In this context, the flat/confessionary as diagrammatic mirror, helps situate the contingency of Camila and the Brigadier’s passions. We may ask, for example, what complex confluence of forces has informed the romantic entanglement of a society girl with a catholic priest. Certain normative forces are in effect in the spiritual bond between the future lovers. Both Camila O’Gorman and Ladislao Gutiérrez were part of elite families with strong political connections. They were both from federalist families. Camila’s father, in Buenos Aires, was a wealthy supporter of Dictator Rosas, while Ladislao’s uncle was a governor in the province of Tucumán. Moreover, the confessionary was a place where the elite class would model the tie between government and church according to the “civilizing” designs of Rosas. The spiritual bond thus complied with family, class, and political pressures while challenging the possibility of a sexual expression. The decision of the lovers to escape from their present environment and go abroad was then a sort of mediated self-attachment that affirmed the sexual prohibition. In this sense, the escape created the possibility of recognizing themselves as man and woman *again and according to the norm*, that is, by

re-identifying Ladislao as a secular man and Camila as a woman who submits to the man's desire. Butler's speculation about the paradox of "attachment" and resistance can be applied here:

[T]he moment of resistance, of opposition, emerges precisely when we find ourselves attached to our constraint, and so constrained in our very attachment. To the extent that we question the promise of those norms that constrain our recognizability, we open the way for attachment itself to live in some less constrained way. But for attachment to live in a less constrained way is for it to risk unrecognizability, and the various punishments that await those who do not conform to the social order.²³

The risk of unrecognizability appears at the passionate moment of acting out of norm. Both lovers have to transgress the established gender roles of the time. Camila asks Ladislao to consider (in fact or appearance) *her* desire for a couple's life as determinant of their actions, while Ladislao similarly must appear to *submit* to the woman's wishes. Transgression, in other words, theatricalizes their gender attachment by making them dangerously unrecognizable to themselves. These possibilities suggest that the confessional-mirror stages attachment and constraint as a forming and deforming function that occurs as an uncomfortable and temporary passage through the transgressive. This, we'll see, is reflected in the grotesque enactments by the buffoons.

In the enactments there is a narrative deformation that consists in presenting the bond between Camila and Ladislao as a purely sexual seduction. This narrative simplification does not explain the violence of the ritual with which Estanislao (one of the buffoons) is brought into his "feminine" side in order to play Camila. In the

enactment of the ritual, Alvarado had the buffoons use a bucket of water in order for Estanislao to “see,” in it, the woman in him. The procedure is a form of torture involving the forced dipping of Estanislao’s head in the water, and reminiscent of dictatorship-era torture technique known as the “submarine.” This forced the confession of the buffoon’s womanish identity. Here the water functioned as a mirror where Estanislao sees “the mother” naked, whom he kisses “in the water as it falls apart” (224).²⁴ As the image of the mother dissolves, the gendered identification is thus achieved as a forced appearance with no other referent than the tactile, sensual feeling of a face that was dipped in water. The sequence thus deconstructs the possible reception of the sexualized narration as being necessarily and violently gendered. Violence instead became a form of representational deformation of the event of gender.

The contrast between the torture and the enactment presented power relations “through the antagonism of strategies” that Foucault suggests as “another way to go further towards a new economy of power relations.”²⁵ In effect, the performance of gender is rather a form of self-affection or attachment that Estanislao seemed to maintain during the enactment. This fragile sensuality was reflected in the stillness of the performer’s posture and in the production of a quiet but bodily felt feminine voice. There was no trace left of the violence of the ritual—as if the performance were now positioned at the point where the pressure to be “woman” and a resistance to gendering balanced each other. Notably, this balancing act was reflected in the stillness and ambiguously gendered representation of the priest by Saint Benedict on the other side of the flat. The flat device thus put in evidence the process of resistance and emergence

of a passion that confronts the limits of its own narration—this confrontation took the form of a physicalized attachment to gender, enacted from the inside.

The “gendering” scene also models the Brigadier-Madman parallel “passion.” Crucial to these mirror identifications, enacted through theatrical sets and characterizations, is the fact that both Camila and the Brigadier respond to the transgression of the other with their own transgression, in a kind of mimicry. In order to act on her passion, Camila overcomes the guilt of her love for the priest whom she must desire above god and the higher rank of her class. Meanwhile the Brigadier has to paradoxically tame his own casting on the side of “barbarism” in order to participate in the building of nation. Camila’s love and the Brigadier’s encounter with the Madman are thus indicated as sites of historical emergence in the embattled creole politics of nineteenth-century Argentina. This struggle is seen from the side of the Brigadier because he is the one who is placed “inside” in the *mise-en-scène* performed by a civilization-versus-barbarism discourse.

In this inside, the Brigadier is capable of sensing the diagrammatic points of pressure coming from “outside.” The enactments, in turn, are like an affective barometer that locates the diagram at the points where the pressure from the outside is equated by a force of resistance from inside (without which we cannot speak of History.) Alvarado’s production effectively shows this moment of maximum pressure and tactility in a sequence of simultaneous actions, where the enactment of the “Purgatory” version of the seduction is matched with the Brigadier’s struggle with Barrabás, while one of the clerks reads the police report informing the Brigadier of the

details of the lovers' escape and arrest. The Brigadier-Barrabás struggle occurs at the liminal space that separates the two sides of the mirror.²⁶

Barrabás is an imposing and threatening gaucho, the very embodiment of the barbarism feared by the Madman. The gaucho has until now remained in the shadows on the side of the rear theatre created for Alvarado's production. The two men confront each other with mirroring, threatening gestures, before making contact and wrestling with each other. In this process the Brigadier can be said to be fighting himself, since Barrabás is the image of barbarism that the Madman has of the Brigadier as the enemy of civilization. In a way, the Brigadier is also identifying with the Madman, so that the struggle ultimately enacts the meeting of forces at a point where they seem to fuse with each other. This diagrammatic intersection, aptly played at the limit of mirroring theatres, is paralleled by the enactment labeled "the Purgatory" where the crazies simply sit facing the audience and recite the words of Camila and Ladislao indiscriminately. Since the buffoons take turns saying the words of either one of the lovers, the uttering of the erotic imagery appears to effectively fuse the lovers' bodies into one single identity where the lovers erotically "devour each other and drink each other up" (235). The reading of the report, meanwhile, adds a temporal element to the conjunction of forces, as if the report's description called for the moment of a face-to-face encounter with the real fugitive lovers who have remained outside. In relation to the tactile aspect of the diagram, temporality points to its disequilibrium as a physical system, that is, to its expression of emergence by the energy of resistance. In other words, temporality within the diagram is the experience of the diagram as vector, its

moving in the direction we call History. Emergence is thus a rejoining of History from the inside of resistance, and for this reason, in *Una pasión*, we stay inside the theatre.

The enactment of “Paradise” in the play is best understood through this understanding of a diagrammatic emergence. Here, historical time pushes forth from within the intersection of forces meeting from “outside.” For example, it explains the fact that, this time, the Brigadier takes part in the buffoons’ enactment, as if finally recognizing the value of his positioning inside. In Alvarado’s production the Buffoon Farfarello seems to perform a ritual of Baptism on the Brigadier (echoing the torture-ritual performed on Estanislao), while the other Buffoons observe and utter the Camila/Ladislao dialogue. The dialogue has now a mystical tone that takes the lovers on a journey back to the immemorial seed of desire where the bodies are “remains, Genesis undone [...] nothing” (241). This diagrammatic space of emergence is also represented by the theatre space which is now put under a reddish light and seems to animate itself, with stage curtains coming down and up again. This stage effect suggests that we do not emerge in space or onto space, but with space. When the Paradise sequence ends, we are at the resolution of the play, at the moment where the battle plans must be executed and the final decision about the fate of the lovers be taken.

To the great dismay of the Aide-de-camp, the Brigadier orders the execution of the lovers. The Brigadier is compelled to explain this cruel decision—he says: “What do you think they expect of me, waiting over there, so immense, so calm? How could you possibly think that I wouldn’t give a response worthy of their bravery? They’re the ones I love! But I have to create a world!” (243). With this the Brigadier expresses the paradox of his commitment to modern historical emergence. It is the paradox of power

and political action in the modern age, involving the trauma of the distance of its utopian goal. The Utopian impulse to “civilize” puts us in history, and within history the utopia of “civilization” itself runs the risk of becoming a distant memory because historical action never leads to absolute utopia. The political always engages in a symbolic killing of what is about to emerge—in this case, of a passion free of the very codes that move the political leaders. The Brigadier therefore encounters a dilemma: if he saves the couple from death, the symbolic power of the couple’s passion will be wasted and the couple forgotten, while his “compassion” will be misinterpreted as weakness. On the other hand, by sending the lovers to death, the trauma involved in his own historical emergence will gain a powerful, though negative, symbol in the sacrificed lovers. Therefore, for the Brigadier, the decision to murder the fugitives is informed by a will to locate himself at the intersection of forces. The lovers’ death, in other words, allows the Brigadier to become acquainted with the civilizing process at its diagrammatic points, at the point where civilizing forces “overcome” the un-civilized, for this is the point where he can see the “progress” of civilization emerge. In this respect, one should remember that the Brigadier, even though he has been cast as the barbarian, has chosen to play the civilizing game by making, in his own words, “a world.” For instance, the forces of civilization have put him on a battle for regional or national identity as source of future progress.

The Brigadier’s positioning at the same points of emergence occupied by his political and military adversary transforms his view on the lovers’ situation. It influences his final decision to “own” the lovers’ passion, rather than letting the symbolic value of their adventure be appropriated by his enemies. After all, their

release would only weaken the location of his agency by surrendering to the logic of an adversary already marked as the “more civilized.” The perception of this irony provokes his own deeply ironic response: to order the lovers’ execution. The devastating logic of this move functions as a counter-theory to the “theory” of progress. It is an example of what Walter Mignolo terms a barbarian theorizing, understood as “a self-restitution of barbarism as a theoretical locus [...] redressing and implementing long-lasting forces, sensibilities, and rationalities repressed by the one-sided ideology of the civilizing mission/process.”²⁷ It is apt to call the Brigadier’s move theoretical because he appears to assume the risk of misunderstanding that such a move entails. Moreover, it is theoretical in the sense that it constructs the unstable irony of his solitude.

The Brigadier provokes the sense of his power as being disconnected from the comfort of a moralizing society, a “world [that] is nothing more than an infinite web of petty cowardices,” in the Brigadier’s words (243). This society will be incapable of identifying the import of his actions, but instead will be seduced by the spectacle of the lovers’ martyrdom. They will be accidental witnesses compelled to “write sentimental little verses [...] for the poor, star-crossed lovers” (244). The moral comfort of society constitutes the great accident provoked by the events---this comfort is tragic because it throws a whole people into a historical void, disconnected from historical emergence. This irony defines the passion, in the Christian sense of a seemingly futile sacrifice, of the Brigadier. His is a utopian power that ends up sacrificing itself to a society ignorant of the forces of an emergent, South American history. In a sense, the Brigadier is alone

in his acquaintance with these forces, and that loneliness constitutes the madness of this theatre inhabited by Buffoons.

In the end, the Buffoons would also like to believe in a “utopian” reality that is outside of the theatre, “resplendent, eternal, [lying] behind this painted world” (244). But that is not the wish of the Brigadier, who keeps Estanislao from speaking and leaving by pushing him to the floor. The Brigadier, as well as Monti, I presume, would rather have us join him in the utopian experience offered by a diagrammatic theatre that works from the inside. There is no redemption visible from the inside, and therein lies the difference between the Brigadier’s passion and a Christian Passion. Then, one is prone to ask, how can a space produced as by the assassination of the lovers allow for a “utopian” experience? The answer lies in the diagrammatic folding performed by the Brigadier.

The theoretical move consists in voiding the symbolic place occupied by the lovers after having effectively brought the forces represented by the Madman to the inside. It is not the Madman that created the Brigadier—this monster—but the Brigadier who created the Madman. Alvarado’s double theatre is the only theatre there is. Therefore the Brigadier can change, in the end, the configuration of his diagrammatic theatre by folding the sides of the mirror onto each other. This move is consistent with the diagrammatic perspective, for once the Brigadier positions himself on the points of the diagram, there is no more absolute inside or outside but a clear view on a utopian void. This “void” is not the unknown but a sense of an unfolding of events that fuses the future, the present, and the past. It is as if the very sense of a linear time recedes before us, becomes distant while remaining linked like by an umbilical cord. The

temporal and affective ambiguity of this attachment is felt, for example, in Equis's vision, in *Visita*, when he seems to recount an "afternoon [...] dying," while the very remembrance of that moment leaves an aftertaste of loss—Equis continues by saying: "a yellowish old man with malignant eyes appeared. And he smiled at me...A dirty and tattered old man...He smiled at me hatefully and then disappeared...Now I don't even remember why I suffered so much that afternoon" (129). The image never fades, nor does the bad taste left by the Brigadier's actions. He too smiles at us "with malignant eyes" and he confidently takes his leave knowing that we are attached to him (if for an instant) as much as to the murdered lovers symbolizing now a future that is already receding. In this context it is our very attachment to time that is never felt with absolute correctness and fullness since we tend to separate temporalities.

The folding of the inside and outside in the Brigadier's diagrammatic move allows a full sense of our temporal attachment. His act is a repetition, in the Deleuzian sense, that "no longer bears (hypothetically) upon a first time which escapes it, and in any case remains external to it."²⁸ In this respect the Brigadier is not concerned with the first "sin" of a civilizing process but with the type of repetitions enacted by and through the symbolic force of sacrifice like that of the lovers. The sacrifice has in this case a redemptive power that splits time into the then and now, and the Brigadier's difference (from sacrifice and redemption) is that he *repeats the repetition* of the sacrifice.

"Repetition bears upon repetitions,"—Deleuze continues—

upon modes and types of repetition, in an imperative manner. The frontier or 'difference' is therefore singularly displaced: it is no longer between the first time and the others, between the repeated and the repetition, but

between these types of repetition. It is repetition itself that is repeated. Furthermore, 'once and for all' no longer qualifies a first time which would escape repetition, but on the contrary a type of repetition which opposes another type operating an infinity of times (in this manner Christian repetition is opposed to atheist repetition and Kierkegaardian to Nietzschean, for in the case of Kierkegaard it is repetition itself which takes place once and for all, whereas according to Nietzsche it operates for all times.) Nor is this simply a numerical difference; it is, rather, a fundamental difference between these two kinds of repetition.²⁹

In Deleuze's linking of difference and repetition we find clues to Monti's use of seemingly Christian redemptive narrative.³⁰ I argue that in Monti there are no redemptive acts per se but diagrammatic emplacements that have an effect of repetition and folding. The fold, Deleuze explains, is a "carnal or vital typology [that] far from showing up in space, frees a time that condenses the past in the inside, brings about the future in the outside, and brings the two into confrontation at the limit of the living present."³¹ The Brigadier's words, when he says to himself "[t]ime. I need more time," can be grasped then as a need to prolong the diagrammatic experience, now interrupted by an imminent battle (245). But it is also, in spite of its impatient tone, a welcoming of time as the site of diagrammatic repetitions that no battle can interrupt.

The beginning of the battle suggests yet another reading of these lines when we consider the confrontation as an effect of modern contingency. In this respect, I return to my introduction of Monti's mythologizing in relation to the repressed "accident" in modern contingency. *Una pasión* stages contingency as liveness. Liveness is manifested

in various ways. It consists in the various forms of low-tech mediations (typewriters in Alvarado's production) evident in the Brigadier's dictations, the reading of reports, or the announcements by the Aide-de-camp about the situation of the lovers. The staging of the Brigadier's encounter with the Madman is in fact a "live" conception whereas the "presence" of the Madman in the Brigadier's conscience produces the contingent separation of space into the "Barbarian's space" and "civilization's space." As a consequence we have the separation of the Brigadier's theatre from the outside. The contingency of these two spaces is emphasized by a contrast in temporality. In effect, from the point of view of the Madman, the encounter has already occurred, if we understand it from the perspective of a civilizing discourse. For the Brigadier, on the other hand, it is about to occur—in other words, there is a time lapse, or duration that also allows for the enactments and the development of a diagrammatic strategy as we have explained it. The time lapse creates a temporal tension, between the inside and outside, that results in the forceful release of contingency in the end: The Brigadier finds himself in need of more time as if the events have caught up with him. In this way liveness is presented as a problem of the speed of the events accompanying the encounter of the civilized with the barbarian. Here liveness is related to a historical discourse that functions as a producer of speed in relation to the slowness of the uncivilized. This critique is akin to Paul Virilio's engagement with the problem of speed. Patrick Crogan comments that for Virilio, speed is "a crucial if neglected factor in all historical and political developments."³² In this case we see, as Virilio does, speed as "not a phenomenon but, indeed, the relationship between phenomena (relativity itself), [...] the question raised of the observation distance of phenomena comes down to the question of

the power of perception (mental or instrumental).”³³ Thus the civilizing vision of progress has the perceptual effect of bringing the world up to speed onto “live” space. This liveness is therefore a race with time—it is, in Virilio’s terms, “dromological.”³⁴

Important to Virilio’s argument is the linking of the problem of speed to military and technological developments into complex and global war machines. These machines, he specifies, are “machines in reverse—they produce accidents.”³⁵ By focusing on the historical technologies of war, Virilio brings back the repressed notion of accident, not in order to appropriate its affect (like Equis in his existential moment), but to redefine our relation to technology, specifically to technology’s “negative side.”³⁶ In *Una pasión*, we see Virilio’s thinking paralleled by the staging, as accident, of the symbolic violence by which the destiny of the lovers came to be defined. The lovers die, because the Brigadier and the Madman are engaged in a dromological civil war—a race that the context of the play defines as “making a world.” The destiny of the lovers is not tragic but accidental, something that just “shouldn’t have happened.” The production of the accidental *is* the accident proper, produced by war and the technical/communication means of their conductions—suffice to mention the role of missives or letters sent and received by the Brigadier, and the role of media in the dissemination of the scandal of the lovers’ affair. The line “I need more time” carries thus the tension of the utopian and dystopian readings developed above. The uneasiness of this relation to time is perhaps not surprising when we consider the period in which the text was written, during the difficult process of democratization after years of brutal dictatorship.³⁷

From the early 80s well into the 90s the country had to deal with the national trauma caused by the disappearing of people during the “Proceso” years. During the

presidency of Raúl Alfonsín (1983-89), a long process of judging those responsible for the crimes was initiated by CONADEP, the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons. The civil trials that followed led to the sentencing of the main members of the military government, but in 1986, in the face of widespread prosecutions and court cases against the military, the congress passed the Law of Final Termination [Punto Final], which established a “cut-off date for all trials related to the Dirty War.”³⁸ The tension between justice and the pressure to assuage the guilt of the military within the new space of democracy, grew with the Law of Due Obedience (1987) which exonerated those that acted out of obedience to superiors. This trend continued under the leadership of Carlos Menem, who gave general pardons in 1989 and 1990.³⁹ These measures reflected the fragile consensus built by politicians as they dealt with the issue of a “symbolic break with the past.”⁴⁰

The passage between brutal dictatorship and democracy mirrored in some way the discourse of civilization and barbarism: the political class in charge of the transition countered the illegality of persecutions during the military regime with the utopian impulse of beginning new democratic life through the legality of an *estado de derecho*.⁴¹ Carina Perelli argues that the transition carried a number of “metajuridical problems” that could not be resolved in the context of a pure theory of law. These problems included “civilian-military relations, the symbolic end of the de facto regime, the new demands of a society severely traumatized by the authoritarian experience, and the profound changes within the military institutions [from the constitution of 1853 to the present].”⁴² The process of democratization somehow mirrored the military’s autolegitimation of its actions on the grounds of protecting the nation from immoral “subversion”; now (in the

advent of democracy), legal action protected the nation from the military's and, implicitly, the government's unethical use of its power. In both cases, the population's behavior is subjected by a political ethics or ethical politics of consensus that did not allow room for negotiation.⁴³ In this respect, Perelli states that

the restoration of the constitution of [...] 1853 in Argentina presupposes the fiction of a presumed basic consensus regarding the nonexistence of an armed corporation as a political actor. It also implies a second fiction: the acceptance by everyone involved in a single definition of the limits that are to prevail in societal life. In other words, underlying such isotopic norms is the idea of a consensus regarding the liberal framework and its liminalities.⁴⁴

The scandal of revealed military crimes somehow led to a dystopian vision as “the march of justice [...] provokes a series of chain reactions that ends up undermining, to a large extent, the credibility and legitimacy of the democratic regime so enthusiastically inaugurated.”⁴⁵ In a way similar to the Brigadier's world in Monti's play, in post-Proceso Argentina the speed of politics challenges the slowness of recovery from trauma and of the symbolic manifestation of an emergent national space.

There were in that period, though, utopian moments, in the diagrammatic sense of emergence. One early example was the March of Resistance in 1986, when for “the first time [...] surviving *desaparecidos* and political prisoners identified themselves in a mass demonstration [...] The group of survivors wore white plastic masks that covered all of their faces (except for their eyes) and most of their heads.”⁴⁶ Susana Barrios, one of the procession members, recalls: “the masks [...] gave us some psychic protection which,

speaking for myself, I know I needed. And some of the onlookers needed it, too.”⁴⁷ The masks’ “protection” repeated for marchers and onlookers the state of surveillance and terror that permeated all public spaces during the dictatorship. The maskers also made evident that the emergent space of democracy both exerted pressure toward and resisted a lifting of the mask. The lifting of the mask would be an acknowledgement of complicity by the wider population in a subjection to Power that, in the case of the military, was further veiled by the principle of subordination. The power of the masks was its mirroring of the invisible predator who, had since the years of the Proceso chosen the anonymity of civilian clothes. The procession of masked men had thus potentially produced a kind of univocal space for survivors and their ex-torturers that powerfully repeated the affect of an emergent democratic space. This diagrammatic emergence counters, for example, the symbolic violence of the law of Punto Final, enacted later that year.

The conclusion of the *Una pasión* finds an antidote to symbolic violence in the figure of birthing as an anti-symbol that cannot be appropriated. At the end, the Aide-de-camp brings in the new-born child of Camila, as if providing relief to the Brigadier’s ambiguity about needing “more time.” The child, in effect, materializes a utopian promise but also (and this is not the same thing) ups the stakes of history, since when a new body comes into the world, it enters into human history as it is submitted to forces or power. In other words, in a world of contingency, giving birth to a child seems to be a great opportunity “to choose to choose.” And here we meet the final parallel between the Brigadier and Camila—they have both have given birth to a world (the Brigadier says he is “making a world”), although the Brigadier is tragically the only one to witness it. Now,

let me attempt to understand this giving birth in terms of the diagram, for this image certainly becomes crucial to Monti's later plays where it occupies a more central place.

In effect, doesn't this giving birth, this pushing forth of life occur at the diagrammatic conjunction of historical forces? Here it would be useful to remember what Marx says about the "first premise of all human existence and, therefore, of all history, the premise, namely, that men must be in a position to live in order to be able to 'make history.'"⁴⁸ In a marginal note of *The German Ideology*, Marx is more precise: "Men have history because they must produce their life, and because they must produce it moreover in a certain way: this is determined by their physical organization; their consciousness is determined in just the same way."⁴⁹ In this context, giving birth is a historical act that reproduces existing needs as well as new needs that will be satisfied by society's means of production/reproduction.

What is of interest in relation to the diagram is that, in giving birth, the forces of the past and the future converge and are felt from the inside, in the sense that the act of birthing occurs to a body with no reference of the outside. In the process, the body becomes a theatre where the forces of the outside materialize in the child. The child being born has a relation of both sameness and difference, closeness and distance to the parents, who are the first link to the outside. This difference encompasses also a simultaneous renewal of the past, present, and future, that forces a different mapping of temporality. When the birth takes place, it is the pull of time, of becoming, of difference that has prevailed. At this moment, if we are to put ourselves at the point of the diagram, we must choose to choose (with the new child) a past, a present, and a future that we didn't know before. In this becoming we lose, like the Brigadier, the

belief in our own innocence since our perception of the destiny of the child will always be, to a certain extent, an imposition of our own history on a being whose history *we* have already recognized as different than ours. In other words, we are never indifferent to the difference of the new-born. The juxtaposition of the execution and the birth mimics in a way the shift in the diagrammatic configuration. The utopian gain allowed by the shift is the effect of a loss of innocence that we can this time choose. Monti's next play, as we'll see, stages this loss of innocence in direct relation to the birth of a child.

Monti's *Asunción* (1992) is a play in which we are actually made witnesses of a birthing through the mediation of another character, Doña Blanca.⁵⁰ The subtitle describes the circumstances as such: "The mystical delirium, passion, and death of Doña Blanca, who, once the concubine of Don Pedro de Mendoza and now ill with syphilis, agonizes in the still Paraguayan night, while at her side, Asunción, an Indian girl, gives birth to the land's first mestizo" (247). This mythical South American birthing of early colonization is thus experienced through the bodies of two women, who together make visible the historical import of an event that would be usually understood as either "natural" or accidental.⁵¹ The vehicle of visibility is the pain felt by both women who, in some way, produce a kind of univocity as the moans and prayers of Asunción are mixed with the melodramatic agony of Blanca. Blanca's monologue reveals how each of the two women is somehow responsible for the other's fate. Doña Blanca tells us how she contracted syphilis while taking care of the ill Pedro de Mendoza, first founder of Buenos Aires, who died from the disease. Blanca then has pursued a Conquistador of lesser rank, Irala, who rejects her. Having followed Irala in

his incursion inland through the river, Blanca is now dying while witnessing Irala's taking of the indigenous slave Asunción as lover.

Blanca does not only lose love, but in her very pursuit she finds herself in a strange land with no anchor other than Asunción, who was also her slave and cannot understand her language. The agonizing monologue of Blanca is also an enactment of her own pains of labor—that is, she gives birth to her own death by naming her pain a birthing of her “shroud” and dissolution. Therefore Blanca defines this birthing as sterile, with no future or becoming, as opposed to Asunción's. This justifies her passion, because she is left empty, without bearing fruit, and her disease becomes a means of purification. Yet, as Blanca suggests at the very end of her monologue, she might belong more to history, to its becoming, than to the grace of God. She says: “Asunción,/ when you return to the light/ with our lord,/ will you remember/ me? Will you remember/ this thief/ of grace?” (263). The suggestion that she might be stealing a grace that she does not deserve indicates that something's been left out of the equation. In effect, the relationship of Blanca to Asunción implies that she participates in the racist relations of colonization that made Asunción available to Irala. In this historical sense she is also giving birth to Asunción's progeny, in whom she also projects a future that concerns her—as when she says: “I know that you'll give back/ also/ a mystery/ that will praise him [Irala]/ or condemn him/ what will come forth?” (262). This concern, felt from the diagrammatic inside of her pain, resisting the indifference of Irala, contrasts with Irala's “*Coldly curious*” wondering about the progeny in the last words of the play. He asks: “What will it be?” (263). For Irala, then, the birth is a fait-accompli, even before it actually occurs. He (Irala) is the accidental witness with no

sense or recognized need of a utopian emergence. Unlike Blanca, he remains trapped in the belief of his own innocence and in ignorance of history.

Birth in *La oscuridad de la razón* (1993).

The narrative of *Asunción* can serve as an introduction to the problematic presented by *La oscuridad de la razón* (1993). In this later play, the concept of birthing as site of historical emergence is allegorized in a drama set in the nineteenth century. The play concerns an emergent creole identity that is negotiated under the influence of European post-enlightenment culture. In an interview, Monti describes the play's historical moment as "the birth of modernity," occurring around 1830.⁵² This suggests that the "birthing" of modernity is somehow allegorized through the figure of Mariano, a character reminiscent of the Argentinean independence hero Mariano Moreno. In the prologue, we witness the return of Mariano, who is mentioned as "the shipwrecked," to his South American homeland (135).⁵³ This image, which places Mariano as an enigmatic figure to be embraced or rejected by those who receive him, mimics in some way the enigmas of the birth of the mestizo in *Asunción*, of Camila's child in *Una Pasión*, and of Equis's suspended identity in *Visita*.

In three acts, the play shows Mariano facing rejection and then forced by his sister into complicity in an Oresteian plot of vengeance against the local caudillo, Dalmacio, who has murdered Mariano's father. Mariano is finally taken out of the plot in a Deus-ex-machina facilitated by an enigmatic character, the Woman, who, in the prologue, had initiated Mariano on this journey through this tragic plot.

The prologue introduces the play more precisely as a site of birthing with a dialogue between the young Woman and Mariano. Like a mother to the infant about to be born, the Woman is the one that “knows him even if he doesn’t know her,” and who will “guide him to himself” (136). Through the image of birthing, the play stages the coming of age of Mariano from “the solid land of childhood,” that Mariano seeks with his return, to a more mature sense of his national and creole identity (as well as of his relationship to modernity). With respect to this narrative of birthing, the Oresteian plot functions as its *mise-en-scène*. In this sense Mariano arrives to unravel the plot while being vulnerable to the others’ seductions and manipulations Mariano is the diagrammatic inside, or the body, meeting the outside for the first time, yet this meeting is already a repetition since it is a re-encounter with the old Oresteian myth The sense of repetition is traced with what Mirta Arlt calls an “intertextuality of roles” that defines the Aeschylean/Shakespearean characters: “Mariano/ Orestes, Alma/ Electra, María/ Clytemnestra/ Gertrude/ Lady Macbeth, [and] Dalmacio/ Egistus/ Claudio/ Macbeth.”⁵⁴

The site of Modernity is the plot itself, involving a conflict of generations. It develops during Dalmacio’s reign, which has been witness to fast and radical modernization. This is reflected in an architecture that is a product of both rationality and chaos. Thus we have the description of the set in the text: “A building under either construction or demolition [...] a monstrous grab bag of styles [...] Taken as a whole, it is absurd, the product of some mad architect’s dream or delirium” (266).⁵⁵ Dalmacio expresses his concept of historical change as one of a power transfer from the hands of the rural landowners to the urban champions of industry and science. Significantly, Mariano perceives war as a common denominator in the old and new orders, something

that Dalmacio admits with a significant qualification when he says that “before there was peace in war/ now there is war in peace” (295). This phrase functions as a hermeneutical signal, indicating that the sides of the generational conflict function, overall, on a common and, in the end, destructive paradigm.

Dalmacio has taken power by killing his brother with the complicity of the brother’s wife, María. Now, Alma, the daughter of María and the murdered father, seeks to avenge her father and reinstitute the old order. The Woman of the prologue thus makes Mariano enter the site of modernity as through the experience of a theatrical plot. At the end of his journey the Woman appears again (in the third act) to save Mariano from a destructive plot. The Woman in fact immerses Mariano to then pull him out of the plot as if to submit him to its forces as a means of birthing.

The disconnection of the Woman figure from the plot reveals a possible premise of the play: that whatever happens within its Oresteian plot misses the point regarding what constitutes a birth. This interpretation finds support in the fact that the other women, Alma and María, are actually contesting the birthing of Mariano in the context of the plot. María is the biological mother, and as such her main function is the oedipal procreation of masculine/male legitimacy. On the other hand, Alma is Mariano’s sister and is determined in assuring that Mariano reproduce, through some kind of rebirth, the patriarchal power of the dead father.

The multiplicity of views on the “birthing” of Mariano by the Woman, María, and Alma, suggests that the play stages a diagrammatic birth in a space that has already folded the inside and outside like at the end of *Una pasión*. There are no mirrors left, no echoing walls, only an inside containing infinite repetitions within the moment of

emergence. The diagrammatic position of birthing in *Una pasión* invites a diagrammatic interpretation of the motif of birthing in *La oscuridad*. Like the Brigadier, Mariano is a figure of South American historical emergence, but in him we have the vulnerability of the child or newborn like Camila and Asunción's newborns. This aspect of the character is rendered through his romantic identification with childhood and play, his infantilization by the other characters, and the significance of the toy saber that Mariano carries along after finding it on the shore. The moment of his "historical" birthing coincides then with his return to the homeland. The movement of return indicates repetition, but the birthing motif suggests that this repetition is a passing through that helps the audience situate his historical emergence. In this sense, the play is a secular mystery-play with a didactic intent. For this purpose, Mariano is imagined as the innocent newborn who can only emerge historically through a repetition of modernity. The play attempts to look at this repetition from the perspective of birthing.

La oscuridad de la razón at the Payró (1993).

I will elaborate on this reading of the play (as birthing) in relation to Jaime Kogan's 1993 production at the Payró theatre. This production is considered by many the culmination of the Monti/Kogan theatrical collaboration. This was recognized in the many awards accorded text and production.⁵⁶ The scenography departed from the illusionistic architecture suggested by Monti, but responded, in my view, to the dramatic architecture of the play. Tito Egurza's design put the audience on two longer sides of the stage which in turn was flanked by two stage walls on each end. The audience was very close to the stage but separated from it by a depression that linked to canals affecting the

topology of the stage. This arrangement allowed a foregrounding of two major axes articulating the play: the axle of a ritual repetition of the Oresteian myth that takes the audience as its witness; and the axle of the journey taken by Mariano from his arrival to his withdrawing from the mythical space—the concrete limits of this journey could be visualized by the walls. In her discussion of Kogan’s scenic “writing” Laura Mogliani has also remarked the symbolic density of the costumes. For example the differentiation of Mariano, costumed in light colors, from all the other characters, wearing dark and grey tones, effectively rendered him the protagonist of the mystery. More interesting is the fact that, except for Mariano and the Woman, all wore some kind of fishnet as part of their outfit. This detail, in my opinion, isolated Mariano as a targeted prey, to be caught like a fish. The fishnets also made the characters part of a general spatial texture that emphasized the sense of a passing through by Mariano.

The mythical aspect of the play was foregrounded by a major structural element: a large gap at the center of the stage forming a square angle. The size of the gap made it the only visible architectural feature of the set, besides some steps and columns. The opening led to a subterranean space from where emerged the female chorus, like telluric and perhaps oppressed creatures. This chorus had its counterpart in a male chorus who appeared mostly above ground. The positioning of the female and male chorus marked yet a third axle that contrasted the archaic female chorus of “Weeping Women,” closer to the tragic ethos, and the modern male chorus of “Top Hats” closer to a modern jury. The chorus thus represented an archeological view of the generational conflict of the play, which is a function of a world in which men still remain, quite literally, on top.

María's identity, as mother, widow, and wife, makes of her a link in the generational conflict between Dalmacio and his nephew Mariano, as well as the historical transition signified by the change of power from the Father to Dalmacio. María is, in this respect, the character that metaphorically gives birth to the "history" unfolding in the play. María has some structural affinity with the role of Pola in *Una Historia...* in the sense of being inescapably inside the plot. As arbiter of her own desires, she professes (to the ghost of her dead husband) her sexual preference for Dalmacio. At the same time she seeks to tame Alma's influence on Mariano by putting brakes on Mariano's sense of (sexual) maturity. Her María is, in this respect, the character that metaphorically gives birth to the "history" unfolding in the play. As Rebecca Schneider conjectures, "Oedipus's crime was/is that he saw/sees his mother's sexual pleasure—or that *his* mother knows the power of her own pleasure."⁵⁷ Even in the scene where María playfully celebrates her son's sex as "the hopeful desire of women," Mariano interprets it as a mocking (291). María thus exploits men's oedipal economy in order to guard her desire for Dalmacio.

Mariano's Oedipal complex is finally revealed when he is compelled to transfer his sexual impulse by debating with Dalmacio his own maturity and superiority on the level of ideas. Here the men also reveal a "sexual" politics where France is the father that impregnates Argentina with its ideas while the "sons" contest the legitimacy of their ideological inheritance. María's dealing with his son is a figure of the "anguished sweetness" of her desire for men, because men's impulse has been to escape her desire (118). In relation to this desire, it is only guilt that differentiates the rational impulse of

modern man (Dalmacio) from the epic impulse of the ancient patriarch (the Father).

This, María expresses to the ghost of the Father with the following word:

You only wanted to fall,
and the farther into the world you went,
the more the distance exacerbated you
and the more urgent and rabid
your falling
on top of me.

A brief and brutal jolt.

But he [Dalmacio],

because he's about to leave,

he holds back,

and I,

because he's already leaving,

I want to hold him back. [317-18]⁵⁸

María's perspective on the men surrounding her can be read as a diagrammatic tracing of her function of birthing men, literally and figuratively. María resists with her desire but cannot avoid the appropriation of her body by an ideology of motherhood as vehicle for the reproduction of male power and virtue. Her sexuality and desire cannot help but incite male competitiveness, but the Oedipal impulse is tamed to a certain extent by the felt presence of María's desire.

The independent force of María's desire effectively resists male domination, but in the end the influence of Alma on Mariano catches up with her. This results in the

paradox of self-sacrifice, when María kills herself in front of Mariano, after the latter has killed Dalmacio. With this final gesture, performed onstage in front of Mariano, María rejects the generational bind to his son while reaffirming the force of her desire (for Dalmacio). She explicitly announces the flowing of her blood as a symbolic abortion—a sacrificial separation from her son and a denegation of her role in the reproduction of patriarchal lineage. With this self-sacrifice María refuses to take part in the tragedy and the regeneration of male power. In this respect, she significantly makes emphasis in her pardoning of Alma, who had influenced Mariano in the killing. Alma is a woman, and as such María cannot condemn her because of the potential of her desire and sexuality to resist a tragic Oedipal cycle. The death of María is therefore a passion that cuts the tragic line of the play and diffuses its force. The ghost of the father can then only admit that he has been symbolically killed once again. His last words, though, resonate with both an admission of defeat and a threat. He says he is now condemned to “repeat [his] death, and [her] death and all death until eternity [...like] an actor’s routine” (341-42). These words give in evidence the idea of power as a relation of forces that are never defeated but remain latent like an invisible motor or theatre—in a kind of inverted Platonism where an “original” and meaningless theatre precedes reality. In effect, after María’s death, we are left with Alma, as the new point of conversion of forces and new site of birthing.

The force of María’s presence in the play suggests that *La oscuridad* is to a great extent about our witnessing of María’s desire and the contrast of that desire with Alma’s rational fixation on retribution for the murder of her father. This contrast constitutes the main enigma of the play for it apparently contradicts the chronology of the generational conflict. For instance, does Alma’s allegiance to the Father really mean that she wants to

go backwards, as in a retreat from modernity? Or is she the effect of a post-oedipal era that has effectively repressed the provocations of female desire (this event signaled by María's suicide)? A closer look at Alma would confirm this second reading.

Like Blanca with respect to the native woman, in *Asunción*, Alma contests her birthing (of Mariano) role with the biological mother, María. She expresses this with a challenge to "give birth to her own father" (139). Later Alma seems to achieve this through incest, when he seduces Mariano and is impregnated by him. Alma's transgressive will-- her sexual politics, one might say-- seeks to bring the old leader back to life. Her hubris encompasses the tragic action of the play, and leads to the killing of Dalmacio and the death of María. In contrast to María, whose desire is acceptable in spite of her lack of decorum, Alma very much feels like a constructed character and is presented as unnatural in her taking up the cause of patriarchal lineage. This *mise-en-scène* has an ironic function of foregrounding, through her very impotence, the fact that the appeal of tragedy and drama resides in the appeal of power, now in the hands of men. Alma's designs also show that, in the diagrammatic conjunction of existing forces, woman denies her own desire in the production of a future. In order to ensure the patriarchal lineage, Alma needs Mariano, and she uses him in two ways. First she enlists Mariano in the killing of Dalmacio, and then she takes his (Mariano's) body for the procreation of a child (hopefully male) that would replace her indecisive brother in carrying on the "father's work" (352). Her last gesture in the play is effectively to offer a weapon for Mariano to kill himself. These dealings with her brother constitute, in part, a negation of her sex, because she is exclusively committed to bringing a male child.

Alma also negates her own generation by refusing Mariano as brother. For this reason the offer of the weapon for Mariano to kill himself and Mariano's apparent acquiescence produce an extreme tension in the narrative that is like the appearance of an insurmountable gap. This gap represents the absurd imagination of a world with no women, and more importantly without a function for female desire in the production of the future. Alma paradoxically comes to represent the antithesis of that desire as if patriarchal power were effectively keeping it in check. This is therefore a didactic moment in the play, indicating that the journey has gone to the "very end" and beyond the cathartic resolution of tragedy. It signals the necessity of the Woman of the prologue to reappear, as if to bring to a close Mariano's witnessing of the "tragic" work of patriarchy.

The conclusion of the play shows the symbolic birth of Mariano, beyond the tragic trappings of the father. As in *Visita* and *Una pasión*, *La oscuridad* reaches a point where time is effectively stopped by maximum resistance and then released into a space of emergence, protected now by the "eternally luminous bosom of the mother" (364). The play thus implies that the re-affirmation, or witnessing of a female desire, is a condition for accessing the diagrammatic points of emergence in a world still dominated by men. But the enigma of Alma is not resolved; what is the root of Alma's obstinacy? In order to rehearse an answer we need to conceive of the play's diagrammatic space as a field of forces. Aspects of the scenic design actually help us in this conception and lead to another line of reasoning.

Tito Egurza's scenic and lighting design manages to create space as force-field. The scenography consisted in a topological structure made of platforms of various

levels, leaving gaps or canals in between. The lighting design played with gaps of darkness, as parallel structure: both complementing and in tension with the topological gaps separating the characters from each other. These dark gaps, punctuated by pools of light following the characters, were successful in forcing a tracing of diagrammatic vectors, crossing from body to body through the various generations represented by the characters.

The design also affected the logistics of performance. The uneven ground limited the mobility of the actors across the stage. But more importantly it forced the characters to be separated most of the time by either holes or the difference of level. These separations also produced a tension between proximity and distance when the positioning of the characters across gaps and levels suggested the possibility of one of the characters joining the other by crossing over to the other's side. This tension corresponds to the dynamic between characters, in particular the way María and Alma both want Mariano to "jump" and stay on their side. On the other hand, the topological fitted María's overall situation vis-à-vis men, of wanting them close *while* having to keep them at a distance. The set thus made concrete the potential of resistance within the circumstance of a space created by men while being used strategically by the women.

Another relevant impression of the set is the transformation of the stage into a war field with trenches, and where a war is actually being fought "in peace," as Dalmacio suggests. This point is relevant to the accompanying image with which Monti, through his description of the setting, imagines modernity to be the result of an architect gone mad. This image is suggestive of the unpredictable consequences of

modern techno-science, a phenomenon discussed by Gilbert Hottois in *Le signe et la technique* (1984), where he argues that “there is a curious movement proper to technics: its causally autonomous growth tends to produce the illusion of progress towards ends which are only justifications after the fact of a blind proliferation.”⁵⁹ Following Hottois, Patrick Crogan explains that “the impulse to effect a retroactive legitimation of techno-science is the desperate measure of the predictive Enlightenment discourses of progress in the face of their increasing irrelevance today” (163).⁶⁰ Therefore Egurza’s design produced marked associations between the state of war described by Dalmacio, the topology of space, and the rational narrative of modern progress. These associations established a balance between the contemporary relevance of the play’s argument against patriarchal power and the more mythologized conflict of genders and generations.

The scenographic allusions to science, technology, and war keep the spectator away from an essential identification of the women with the earthly and closer to political and bellic strategies. The battle over the “birthing” of Mariano and/or intercourse with him, for example, calls to mind Paul Virilio’s remark that

Man is the passenger of woman, not only at birth but also in their sexual relations...Paraphrasing Samuel Butler [Virilio adds], we could say that the female is the means the male has found to reproduce himself, in other words to come into the world. In this sense, woman is the species’ first means of transport, its very first vehicle.⁶¹

In *Speed and Politics*, Virilio argues that the bodies of women have historically been used to produce a mass of bodies that end up being degraded, put in a condition of slow death by modern's assault on the environment. Virilio states:

[...] Progress, by imposing the idea of two types of body, dependent on their situation in space, also imposes the idea of two types of soul: one weak, indecisive and vulnerable because it is dependent on its environment; the other powerful because it has put its "mana," its will, out of reach thanks to its deterritorialization, to the sophistication of its economy and viewpoint.⁶²

In this context, woman is territorialized, she becomes part of "nature," the body-vehicle common to a whole mass of wandering bodies destined to labor and/or the battlefield. Here we find the connection to *La oscuridad's* generational conflict, centered in the status of Mariano's weak or strong soul transmigrating in time through the women's bodies, but also through his back-and-forth voyage to Europe. The debate between Mariano and Dalmacio, for instance, is about who carries in him the authentic soul of current (modern) French culture.

As for the status of the women as "body-vehicles," we find a crucial difference between María and Alma. María is the effective body-vehicle for Mariano, defined as a container of strong or weak soul, power or lack of power. Hence we have María's emphasis on Mariano's immaturity. Alma has a different design for Mariano, rooted in her rationalization of the father's power. Here the character of Dalmacio functions as an intermediary, since while he represents reason, his is an inefficient reason. Dalmacio, for example, has had to order the "mad" architect responsible for the geometric disorder

of their habitat to be killed. Reason becomes thus self-referential and unstable, wherefore the objects of reason are either evident in their reasonableness or they turn “unreasonable” as well as the subjects that fashion them. This leads to the paradoxical contention by Alma that “So much out of order/ only a greater disorder/ Could order it out” (270).

Dalmacio’s inefficiency is like a marking of his displacement of the father—as if his reason/unreason carried with it the sign of a fall into illegitimacy. Similarly, Alma’s wish to avenge the father is the result of a displacement indicated by her name. In Spanish *alma* means “soul,” that is, the patriarchal soul now displaced onto the wrong body, because she is a woman. Thus Alma’s “identity” mimics the displacement performed by Dalmacio when he took the place of the Father.⁶³ This “accident” is actually a figure of democratic “power” that is now a right or potential power rather than power itself. Virilio states:

With the coming of democratic power, we see a perversion of primitive transmigration: the soul, by becoming individual, has become Reason, in other words the seat of prescriptive rule of our actions, our movements, even the totality of our destinies [...] The soul neither preexists nor survives the disappearance of its body-vehicle or machine; but as potential Reason, and especially scientific Reason, it can act on foreign bodies which are distant in time and space. Animal, territorial, vegetable bodies, bodies without will, bodies not yet born become technical bodies or technological objects.⁶⁴

In contrasting María and Alma, the play enacts the disappearance of the body-vehicle, carrier of the soul but also of Woman's desire. Having been denied her own desire (with the killing of Dalmacio), María kills herself. Alma, who ironically represents the loss of soul and the advent of democratic Reason, also has a different relation to her body, now a technical body distanced from her own self. This new relationship characterizes the use of her body as "scientific" site of conception. She conceives by having intercourse with her brother, an act that serves to conflate or confuse past, present, and future as she "technically" identifies the unborn baby with the dead father. Thus the unborn represents potential Reason, neither dead nor alive, but ever present.⁶⁵

The "technicalities" that result from Alma's impulse for revenge suggest that "revenge" is a euphemism for something having little to do with justice. Alma is strangely acted upon in her designs, allegedly by the memory of her father, while she similarly treats Mariano like a puppet. The urgency of her concern with the technicalities of conception indicates that her impulse is related to a new temporal experience that Virilio links to the tendentious speed of modern technology and to a new form of war that is logistical rather than strategic. In the same work, Virilio offers a basic example of speed as logistics from the French Revolutionary war. He relates that

Carnot, as a good member of the Corps of Engineers, channels his fleet far from the communal fortress, towards the "army zones." [In the battlefield] one had to charge the enemy artillery, and the only way was for the infantryman to rush toward the cannons, to kill its servants on the spot. But to reach them, he had an extremely limited amount of time: the

time it took the enemy artillery to reload. As soon as the shot had been fired, therefore, the infantryman had to rush toward the enemy cannons. His life then depended on his running speed; if he was too slow, he died literally disintegrated point blank by the firing end...”⁶⁶

In *La oscuridad*, Mariano has landed in a similar war zone and Alma wants in a way to use Mariano as her assault infantryman against Dalmacio. But Mariano is too slow in developing as a will and a force. Therefore Alma conceives (no pun intended) of her ultimate weapon as a potential force represented by the unborn baby.

The symbolic force of the unborn is related to the transformation of war into an economy of preparation for war or war potential. In this respect, Virilio argues that the relationship between technology, speed, and war encompasses a present condition of “pure war,” which he describes as a “death machine lurking behind the technological adventure.”⁶⁷ The death machine seems to have been perfected by nuclear weapons and the doctrine of deterrence. This doctrine is “a belief in salvation—in peace—by means of the ultimate weapon, [...] believing that the fact that weapon doesn’t explode is a good thing.”⁶⁸ In fact the “running towards his death” of the infantryman has been assured today at the level of society by economic depletion caused by the military needs for speedy technological development.⁶⁹ These issues, as we’ll see, are reflected in the staging of *La oscuridad*. The problem of speed is particularly relevant to the lighting design.

The lighting design consisted of a general illumination grid and lighting from below –the canals—as well as colored washes. A critical aspect of the design and execution consisted in putting the characters under the spotlight while leaving in the

dark the space separating the characters. The distance/nearness tension could be further emphasized in this way. But the major effect was the presentation of the characters as spots of intensity that somehow entered in relation across darkness. As a result, the action provoked the tracing (by the audience) of an imaginary line connecting the characters across the distance marked by darkness. Darkness, in other words, became the conduit for forces that did not originate in the characters but crossed their bodies and confronted the forces coming from the other's direction. Darkness, a quality that refers to the title of the play, became thus the very stage of the generational battle over the future. Furthermore, the structural contradiction between the obstacles of topology/underground/place and the conduit of darkness/surface/space provided an additional context to the dramatic conflict and mythical elements. More specifically, this contradiction brought to the fore the theme of war by presenting it as a condition of space. Darkness, in effect, foregrounds the function of space as the fastest conduit of force, mass, or light, across the path going from one character to another. This is particularly relevant to the scenes involving Alma, who is often (self) isolated and appears to speak at a considerable distance from the other characters.

In Scene 2 of the first act, for instance, Mariano enters the play under the vigilant eye of Alma. The space is soon revealed to be a war-zone when Alma threatens the "stranger" Mariano with the knife she carries on her belt. Meanwhile, Mariano, who has found an old toy sword, is transported back to his childhood. This creates the odd effect of two contrasting visions of the same space. The space and gaps of darkness separating the characters are meanwhile unified by the threat voiced by Alma. Consequently, of the two visions, Mariano's is the one that appears to be the product of

self-deception or naiveté, since he remains isolated by the circle of light around him. Meanwhile, Mariano's words, uttered in a foreign French, travel across darkness, and reach Alma (and most of the audience), not as words but as menacing "barbaric gibberish" (276). The specific lighting thus helps us realize that there is much more going on than a mere scene of (mis)recognition. We are indeed inserted in a space of war. The romantic "sensibility" of Mariano, who sees in his sister "his other half," masks an ongoing war where gendering takes a major role.

Alma is the one to reveal that they are defined by gendering more than by an idealized childhood. Alma is given the female role by "barely holding on to her reality" while Mariano's role is to "be brave/ to keep a hold on this reality" (276). In the same scene she tries to bring Mariano out of his deluded innocence by reminding him that their childhood game was war (282). If the scene is a battle over the vision of space, Alma's vision wins at the moment her knife effectively wounds Mariano, making his hand bleed. Alma's act arrives as if without premeditation, while the wounding is the result of Mariano's instinctual reaction of lifting his hands. This "accident" makes manifest, in Virilio's words, not the "phoney [...] space of things so much as time, the present time of military objects that, in the end, serve more to threaten than actually to fight."⁷⁰ Virilio is referring to the virtual war of deterrence, promoted by a televisual control and display of missiles. There is a parallel between this form of war mediation and the sequence following the wounding of Mariano. This sequence mixes a sort of mediated "real time" of the event of bleeding and a "delayed time of [its] perception." This effect is produced verbally with the contrast of utterances coming from Mariano and Alma--the words "real" and "finally" betraying mediated perception:

Alma: Your blood,
your *real* blood!

Mariano: *Finally*, my blood! [277-78]⁷¹

Virilio links such mediation to the logistics of deterrence. For example, “when a missile threatening in ‘real time’ is picked up on a radar or video, the present as mediatized by the display console already contains the future of the missile’s arrival at its target.”⁷²

Thus, for Alma, Mariano’s blood corresponds to the mediated image of Mariano as an effective “technical” avenger.

The delayed vision of Mariano, on the other hand, reflects a loss of power because it is already representation. Virilio explains that “for ‘delayed time’ perception, the past of the representation contain[s] a bit of this media present, of this real-time ‘telepresence’, the ‘live’ recording preserving, like an echo, the real presence of the event.”⁷³ This “echo” is paradoxically expressed by Mariano as a gain when he says that “[this blood] has finally fled my dreams / and I am real” (278). This suggests, that once caught in the zone of a technologically mediated war, the speed of “real time” makes the real space of objects inaccessible (like Mariano’s space of childhood), leaving us in a dimension of simulation—one *becomes* ‘real.’” Some of this dimension was translated onstage with a mix of realistic acting and theatricalist devices like the use of a red handkerchief to represent Mariano’s blood. This representation was repeated for María’s suicide scene where a very long red scarf was used. The similarity of the devices creates a direct link between the wounding of Mariano and the suicide of María, as if she had been the target of “deterrence” from the beginning.

The context of nuclear deterrence thus gives new meaning to the death of the father in the play, for the father as executor of war disappears behind the speed of logistical war, leaving Alma's technique as sole tactician. The words of Alma and Mariano express this well, with the various denotations of the word "real" being lost in the new horizon of "real time," as defined by Virilio. The dialogue goes like this:

Alma: [...]

With this blade's reality,
our father sliced open
the world we live in.

Mariano: Still faithful to your condition,

You use real things for your games.

Alma: And you, Mariano, you still believe
that your games are real. [283]

This exchange of words could well serve as an articulation of a certain aesthetics that we might call postmodern in its confusion of play and reality. Meanwhile, the context of a horizon of "real time" allows us to infer that "reality" survives only to become a tool "playfully" servicing the production of such "real time," simulation and/or speed. In this system all things move in circles like in the cycle reality-play-reality expressed in the dialogue, in such a way that centripetal and centrifugal forces, produced by incredibly speedy movements, finally cohere in the energetic field of "real time." In this field, our knowledge of the "being" of reality and play is altered by the new-found purity of these concepts, within the energetic field. There is no such thing as reality but something more pure like "hyperreality," in the same way than we have pure play and "pure war."

In Jaime Kogan's staging, space itself seemed to be the protagonist, while the characters assumed their spatial condition of "war." A sort of telepresence was created by an accompanying incidental music and noises, some of it played live.⁷⁴ This "soundtrack" produced an atmosphere of synchronicity rather than a mood, by punctuating the characters' gestures as well their appearance from the darkness of the canals, gaps or enveloping fog and light.

This field of energy enacted in the performance of *La oscuridad* leads us to qualify the staging of birthing in the play. In Kogan's staging, Mariano was made prey to a production of "real time" as a modern spatial condition. I suggest that this condition cannot be transcended by historical emergence and therefore this reading is in tension with the narrative of redemption implied by the re-appearance of the Woman who saves Mariano from (self)destruction. Such tension is tantamount to an aesthetic contradiction that is more marked in the text where clues of an energy field are far from obvious. This tension has often been defined, including by the author, as a crossing of the tragic narrative by mystery.⁷⁵ Our analysis of the play as a staging of birthing, reinforced by Kogan's staging, shows that Mariano is made prey to a specific production of (modern) space in "real time." This space belongs to the tactician, Alma, who by the end of the second act has virtually reached her targets: María is dead and Alma is pregnant with her brother's child. But this is a symbolic pregnancy representing potential Reason, the modern "soul" as a weapon of deterrence. In act three, Alma herself uses the symbolic power/deterrence of her pregnancy to threaten Mariano when she says, "Take the blade,/ Father!/ because now it's not your father/ but your son/ who condemns you!" (357). From this perspective, the third act increases the stakes in the battle of birthing, because it is

Alma who is asserting her own birth as soul/Alma through an identification with the child in his condition of “not yet born.”

The redeeming value of this symbolic birth (of Alma) is the imagination of the world from the perspective of potential reason. In this sense the world exists only in relation to an interiority that defines the outside as a potential realization of reason. The symbolic birth is therefore of a redeeming interiority that opens onto an always new world--a blank slate offered to Reason, itself forever trapped in its own interiority. This world is threatened, though, because it also re-produces a redundant and repressed guilt, represented by the “guilty father/brother,” Mariano, who has inadvertently created this post-oedipal economy. Killing Alma and the unborn child would be a denial of Reason and the future. If Mariano kills himself, on the other hand, he would be reverting to an Oedipal economy by tragically admitting his complicity in acting against the law of the father. Therefore, the moment when Alma offers the knife to Mariano expresses not only her hubris in testing the deterrence power of the “unborn,” but allows her to transform guilt into a tactical self-denial (mediated by a denial of her generation/brother).⁷⁶ In Alma’s tactics we perceive an origin of the modern ethos and its ultimate inability to give birth. Tactics rely on a willed schism between the inner self and the outer world—a schism that produces a universal “other-than-self” who mediates the presence of innocent bodies in a world open to the “new” and the illusions of progress. This “other,” this innocence, and even the outer world remain alien to potential Reason because of reason’s need to come back to itself (to remain a potential).

Alma’s “self” cannot come into existence without its other, Mariano. Therefore the interruption of the plot by Woman can be interpreted as a freezing of time in the

moment of modern becoming. This moment is the site of repetition that breaks the linear perspective of the plot at the diagrammatical point of emergence or birth. The Woman performs a reversal of perspective that parallels the switch from darkness to light in the textual imagery and scenic lighting. Whereas Mariano had been presented as a point of luminosity in a dark space, at the end of the play-text the stage is bathed in intense light while Alma identifies herself as a persistent dark spot.

This inversion suggests that we are not in a different space but are looking at the same space from a different viewpoint. Before Woman re-appears, the play has shown that historical emergence is not accessible from the point of view of Reason. The appearance of the Woman produces a sort of trinity—composed by Alma, Mariano and Woman herself—that breaks the dramatic binary Alma/Mariano. The three characters belong to the same generation and Woman places herself in between the brother and sister as if to indicate that the self and its “other” must emerge together, into the light. We re-encounter here an instance of univocity, like in *Historia*, where the split itself is the location of truth. Coming into the world is a movement of no return into this “truth,” therefore this light is an anti-reason signifying the “impossib[ility]/ for the shadows to return” if we remain at the diagrammatic point of emergence (364).

The light is theatre itself, or its capacity to locate the split. It would be worth to recount, in this respect, the relationship that darkness and light have in Monti’s own discovery of the theatre in his childhood. Monti recounts:

When I was 8 or 9, they took me to see a play in the commercial theatre Variedades de Constitution. My first surprise was to know total darkness. And then this darkness split itself with the opening of the curtain and a

space intensively lit appeared. Truly, this was for me something unforgettable. It was reality, a sort of more illuminated reality, an over-reality [sobre-realidad] that captivated me right away. This fascination remained always, and has even determined the type of theatre that I pretend to achieve—not in the sense of its content but in the sense of over-reality, that intensified reality.⁷⁷

In *La oscuridad*, the new viewpoint (of an intensified reality), opening into light, seems to be facilitated by the tactile relationship between Mariano and Woman who, like in *Visita*, together form a Pietà tableau.

In the Payró performance, Mariano is led by the Woman to the same spot where he is discovered at the start of the play, as to emphasize the didactic logic of the representation as a birthing that is “not that, but this.” This Brechtian layout is reinforced by the fact that, in the performance, Woman never leaves the representational space altogether unlike in the text where she appears exclusively in the prologue and at the conclusion. Kogan thus transforms the character into a Brechtian hybrid—a distant spectator who stays to witness and study the action while she smokes, and an actor/narrator who emphasizes the presentational perspective by handing-out props to the characters (while her enigmatic presence was punctuated by a distinctive sound effect).

Kogan’s Brechtian presentation of Woman is a counterbalance to the symbolic weight given to the Woman character in the text. There, Woman’s words are highly performative, pointing towards the arriving light of an “incorruptible creation” that brings Mariano to a new life (362). The dramatic text’s Pietà figure, not reproduced in the performance, reinforces the religious connotation of the play’s resolution, which suggests

a theological (and teleological) reading.⁷⁸ Some diagrammatic elements are nevertheless present. For instance, the remark made by Woman that “the cross is in place./ Now destiny/ belongs to everyone” (360). The cross has multiple meanings, one of them indicating a movement or passage as in birthing, but also an intervention as when Woman says “but I crossed the stage” to indicate that Mariano’s destiny is not individual (as in tragedy) but collective (as in history). The suggestion that this intervention occurs onstage or is *of* the stage takes us back to the idea that this light is theatrical and has redemptive value insofar that it emerges from inside an ongoing history or theatre.

In the performance, a subliminal effect was produced by the presence of Woman in her dark attire. Graham-Jones has called attention to the fact that the clothes and chignon were suggestive of Evita Perón.⁷⁹ Yet she is not overwhelmingly iconically Evita –“no blond hair, no vocal or physical mimicry, etc. Indeed, many Argentinean spectators didn’t make the connection.”⁸⁰ The performance thus resisted both symbolic and iconic projection as if Woman were allowing the audience to focus instead on the concluding words of the play and their transformative power as they instruct: “See/ how the light/ laughingly/ transfixes everything./ Come and play in her light./ Come, / dissolve yourself in light./ [...] Laugh/ in transparent mountains/ of light./ Newborn light” (364-65). I believe that the Woman in Kogan’s production effectively kept the audience anchored in the theatrical space as a place of birthing and kept the theological imagery anchored in the diagrammatic perspective. Kogan’s staging, in this respect, is close to achieving a synthesis of Monti’s project--a synthesis that Monti himself attains in *Hotel Columbus* (2003), a play that I would like to treat as a manifesto, in the conclusion of this dissertation.

Una pasión sudamericana and *La oscuridad de la razón* are texts that have assured their place in the canon of Argentine dramatic literature. They are complex plays that nevertheless have attracted the imagination of theatergoers and readers because of their mythical treatment of recognizable moments of Argentine and South American history. I have shown that the mythical aspects of the play are related to Monti's problematization of space in all his works. Such problematization is the source of a diagrammatic imagination which has an antecedent in *Visita*. In the previous chapter, the analysis of two plays and their performances revealed a concern with our relation to space as historical space. In this chapter the diagrammatic space was used as a conceptual given in order to read the text of later plays in conjunction with their performances. Ana Alvarado's set of "mirroring" theatres and Kogan's topological set not only translate Monti's diagrammatic vision but reveal the capacity of the theatrical space to locate the diagrammatic in its materiality and map the "invisible" relations of the characters with historical forces.⁸¹

The links made between *Una pasión*, *Asunción*, and *La oscuridad* further put in evidence the way Monti's works build upon each other as if each were responding to the challenges presented by the previous ones. Both gender and engendering appear in these plays as points of diagrammatic tension. In *Una pasión*, these tensions were fittingly analyzed by looking at the acting process and the enactments within the play in the context of the "mirror" and flats of the set. In *La oscuridad*, the set and light design served to better articulate the mythical retelling in terms of a modern space of war. The writings of Virilio, in turn, allowed me to revise the reading of gender relations in the

play, more clearly in relation to space and the diagrammatic understanding of its “birthing.”

¹ All quotes from these plays will be taken from the Jean Graham-Jones translations—*A South American Passion Play* and *The Obscurity of Reason*, in Ricardo Monti, *Reason Obscured: The Plays of Ricardo Monti*, trans. by Jean Graham-Jones (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2004).

² Paul Virilio and Sylvère Lotringer, *Pure War*, trans. by Mark Polizotti (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), 19.

³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 142.

⁴ Ricardo Monti, *A South American Passion Play*, 244.

⁵ I refer to a notion of the American continent, built through the myths and metaphorical shifts of *Marathón*, as the destiny of a historical journey from Europe. See chapter two.

⁶ This conjunction is part of the definition of the tectonic. See chapter two.

⁷ The uses of the words “accident” and “accidental” reflect here a tension between the traumatic and forgotten experience of the accident and the modern experience of the accidental as a “fact” of contingency. See chapter three.

⁸ Both the lovers’ elopement and their execution were a source of scandal when they occurred in 1847-48. The tragic romance has been the subject of poems, novels, and films, including María Luisa Bemberg’s Oscar-nominated film *Camila* (Buenos Aires, 1984).

⁹ Daniel Fanego describes the text as a “sealed unity.” See Daniel Fanego, “Este es un ser brutal, un villano come de Shakespeare,” interview by Hilda Cabrera, *Página/12*, September 24, 2005.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ana Alvarado is a performer, director, and author based in Buenos Aires. She is also a founding member of the internationally known theatre group Periférico de Objetos. For biographical information on Ana Alvarado, see her web site: analvarado.com.

¹² There was a failed attempt to produce the play in 1986. The play finally premiered in 1989 at the Teatro San Martín, directed by Monti himself, and had an uneven reception. Monti had taken the role of director after he and Jaime Kogan entered in disagreement. See Ricardo Monti, “‘Una pasión sudamericana:’ Una tragedia masculina.” Interview with Alejandro Cruz, *Clarín*, September 24, 2005.

¹³ My discussion of Alvarado's production is mainly based on the videorecording of one performance. See personal copy of Ana Alvarado's production of *Una pasión sudamericana*, videocassette.

¹⁴ The opposition between the Brigadier and the Madman corresponds to the opposition between federalists and unitarians in nineteenth-century Argentina. See note 15.

¹⁵ Parts of the Madman's letters paraphrase the texts of these Argentinean "generation of '37'" intellectuals. See Graham-Jones (2004), note 8, in *A South American Passion Play*, 245.

¹⁶ From 2001 to 2003 Argentina suffered (and still suffers) a deep economic and political crisis. President Kirchner, who was elected by default in 2003, had by 2005 successfully led Argentina towards economic recovery. Still, in view of persistent poverty and unemployment and a long history of recovery/crisis cycles, many Argentines remain distrustful of the political class.

¹⁷ Camilo Sánchez, "Un brigadier en su laberinto," *Clarín*, 5 October 2005. My translation.

¹⁸ Daniel Fanego, "La voz de Rosas fue lo primero que encontré." Interview with Camilo Sánchez, *Clarín*, 15 October 2005.

¹⁹ Fanego based his characterization on the first person biographical work *El Farmer*, by Andrés Rivera. See *ibid.*, and Andrés Rivera, *El Farmer* (Buenos Aires: Aguilar, 1996).

²⁰ See Fanego, "La voz de Rosas."

²¹ Michel Foucault, *Foucault Live*, trans. by Mia Foret and Marion Martius (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), 254.

²² Judith Butler, "Bodies and Power Revisited," in *Feminism and the Final Foucault*, ed. by Dianna Taylor and Karen Vintges (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 190.

²³ *Ibid.*, 191-92

²⁴ All quotes, unless otherwise noted, are from Graham-Jones's translation (2004), *A South American Passion Play*. Alvarado, though, uses the original 1989 version, not the 1999 version translated by Graham-Jones. Differences between the versions will be noted when necessary.

²⁵ Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 210-11.

²⁶ The character of Barrabás, as well as the struggle, were eliminated in the version translated by Graham-Jones (even though Graham-Jones lobbied to keep Barrabás in the English translation).

²⁷ Walter Mignolo, "Globalization, Civilization Processes, and the Relocation of Languages and Cultures," in *The Cultures of Globalization*, edited by Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 51.

²⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. by Paul Patton (New York: Columbia university Press, 1994), 295.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Scholars have noted the ambiguity of Monti's redemptive narratives. Mirta Arlt, for example, argues that the Brigadier's epiphany is inconclusive because it is rooted in the Brigadier's reflexive irony. See Mirta Arlt, "Ricardo Monti: hacia un teatro epifánico," in *Teatro Argentino del 2000*, ed. by Osvaldo Pellettieri (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 2001), 49-52.

³¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. by Seán Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 119.

³² Patrick Crogan, "The Tendency, the Accident, and the Untimely: Paul Virilio's Engagement with the Future," *Theory, Culture and Society* 16.5/6 (Oct/Dec 99): 161.

³³ Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 74.

³⁴ See Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics: an Essay on Dromology*, trans. by Mark Polizzotti (New York: Columbia University, 1986).

³⁵ Chris Dercon, "An Interview with Paul Virilio," trans. by Paul Daphne, *Impulse* 4.12 (1986): 36.

³⁶ See Florian Rötzer, *Conversations with French Philosophers*, trans. by Gary E. Aylesworth (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1995), 100.

³⁷ Monti started writing the play before the end of the dictatorship of 1976-83. See Jean Graham-Jones, "'A Broader Realism': The Plays of Ricardo Monti," in *Reason Obscured: Nine Plays by Ricardo Monti*, translated by Jean Graham-Jones (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2004), 22.

³⁸ Marguerite Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture* (New York/ Oxford: Oxford University Press), 14.

³⁹ Iain S. Maclean, "Hope for the Nations or Only as Much as is Possible?," in *Reconciliation, Nations and Churches in Latin America*, ed. by Iain S. Maclean (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 8.

⁴⁰ Carina Perelli, “The Legacies of Transitions to Democracy in Argentina and Uruguay,” in *The Military and Democracy: The Future Civil-Military Relations in Latin America*, ed. by Louis W. Goodman, Johana S.R. Mendelson and Juan Rial (Toronto: Lexington Books, 1990), 40.

⁴¹ See *Ibid.*, 41-42.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 49.

⁴³ See *Ibid.*, 48-51.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁴⁶ Marguerite Feilowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror*, 192.

⁴⁷ Susana Barros, quoted by Feilowitz, *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Karl Marx, “The German Ideology, Part I,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*; Second edition, ed. by Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 155-56.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, note 4, 158.

⁵⁰ *Asunción*’s original 1992 production in Buenos Aires was directed by Laura Yusem, as part of the series “Voces con la misma sangre” [Voices with the same blood], in the Alvear Municipal Theatre.

⁵¹ The characters of Blanca, Don Pedro de Mendoza, and Irala (who appears at the end of the play) are historical, while *Asunción* quite likely refers to the Virgin Mary’s Assumption as well as the Paraguayan capital. See Graham-Jones’s note in *Asunción*, 247.

⁵² Ricardo Monti, “Ricardo Monti y el sueño de un Orestes moderno,” interview with Susana Freire, *La Nación*, September 8, 1993.

⁵³ The qualification of “shipwrecked” is also reminiscent of the character of Vespucci in *Marathón*.

⁵⁴ See Arlt, 52.

⁵⁵ The fact that the event of modernity is defined architectonically is relevant, as we’ll see, to the scenographic interpretation in Kogan’s production.

⁵⁶ The awards included the municipal award for outstanding contribution to the theatre, and the Association of Theatre Critics awards for best director, music, and dramatic play.

⁵⁷ Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 183.

⁵⁸ In the same vein, we can read this contrasting view of the men as representing a *willed* original sin (the Father's fall) and its (un)comfortable repetition by a *willed* guilt (Dalmacio's departures).

⁵⁹ Gilbert Hottois, *Le Signe et la technique: la philosophie à l'épreuve de la technique* (Paris: Aubier, 1984), 123. Quoted and trans. by Crogan, 163.

⁶⁰ Crogan, *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics*, note 2, 159.

⁶² Virilio, *Ibid.*, 75-76. We may connect Virilio's notions of will and deterritorialization to the modern gain through a deterritorialization of nature in the factory (see chapter Two).

⁶³ The connection between Alma and Dalmacio is marked in the names: "alma" spells part of "Dalmacio." I am indebted to Jean Graham-Jones for this observation.

⁶⁴ Virilio, *Speed and Politics*, 87.

⁶⁵ We may find here an argument for linking the advocacy of "pro-lifers," in the abortion issue, to an investment in potential Reason.

⁶⁶ Virilio, *Speed and Politics*, 21-22.

⁶⁷ Virilio, *Pure War*, 57-58.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁶⁹ See *Pure War*, 58, and *Speed and Politics*, 22. In my discussion of *Marathón*, I described the state of bodies as a running towards death while death is avoided. This was related to the state of commodities (see chapter two). "Running towards one's death" is also Virilio's description of the infantryman. This may suggest a relation between the production of commodities and the state of deterrence, terror and/or actual death in our militarized society. Deleuze, for example, in his comment on Andy Warhol and pop art, suggests that his art reveals "underneath the consumption a schizophrenic clattering of the jaws, and underneath the most ignorant destructions of war, still more processes of consumption." Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 292.

⁷⁰ Virilio, *The Vision Machine*, 66.

⁷¹ The emphases are mine.

⁷² Virilio, *The Vision Machine*, 66-67.

⁷³ Ibid., 67.

⁷⁴ The music/sound design was created and performed by Chango Gómez who, together with Rubén “Mono” Izarrualde, sat in a balcony area.

⁷⁵ See, for example, Julia Elena Sagasetta, “El placer del texto,” in *Teatro* 23.4 (July 1993): 20-2; and Liliana López, “Poéticas refuncionalizadas. Mito e Historia en *La oscuridad de la razón*, de Ricardo Monti,” in *El teatro y los días*, ed. Osvaldo Pellettieri (Buenos Aires: Galerna), 101-9. Monti has said that the play is “a tragedy framed by mystery.” See Graham-Jones, “A Broader Realism,” 30.

⁷⁶ The text does not make clear who is the intended victim of the knife. This ambiguity mimics the work of deterrence. In the performance, Mariano acts as if the only possible or reasonable choice is suicide—this, in fact, proves the effectiveness of deterrence.

⁷⁷ Ricardo Monti, in a conversation published in *Narradores y dramaturgos*, ed. by Juan José Saer (Santa Fe, Argentina: Centro de Publicaciones, Universidad Nacional del Litoral, 2002), 51.

⁷⁸ Monti has retrospectively likened the redemptive figure of Woman and the general critique of patriarchy in his play to the Virgin-Mary-focused argument made by prominent Brazilian liberation theologian Leonardo Boff in *The Maternal Face of God: the Feminine and its Religious Expressions*, trans. by Robert R. Barr and John W. Dierksmeyer (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987). Boff gives a prominent role to the Virgin Mary in infusing humanity with the Spirit’s presence “on its journey toward kingdom, a journey through change and liberation processes that make creation progressively more like its ultimate goal of communion in the Trinity.” See Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, trans. by Paul Burns (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 212.

⁷⁹ See Graham-Jones, in personal printed copy of “Staging as Translation: An analysis of Jaime Kogan’s production of *La oscuridad de la razón*,” paper presented at the IFTR/FIRT Conference, St. Petersburg 2005.

⁸⁰ Graham-Jones, in personal email conversation, February 2007.

⁸¹ The play *Asunción* had two major productions in Buenos Aires, the first directed by Laura Yusem and the second by Monica Viñao. Since I wasn’t able to acquire videos of these performances I chose not to discuss these productions.

CONCLUSION

“Building the Blueprint of Monti’s Theatre: A Crossing Through Woman?”

In the course of four chapters I have shown how the plays of Ricardo Monti give continued relevance to the (Latin) American (and therefore also Argentine) origin of modernity.¹ The American continent rises in his theatre as the imaginary stage of modernity. In chapter one, this aspect of the work is given a sharper dimension when seen in the context of the River Plate tradition of Grotesco Criollo. For it is there that the theatre of modernity somehow finds a site where it can identify itself as such. *Una noche con Sr. Magnus & hijos* is a play that reflects an earlier generation’s impatience and desperation towards this (modern) theatrical space, which it seeks to explode or implode. The play in some way is about the father Magnus wanting to bring his sons into that same desperate state with him. If he succeeds it is only to reveal that his desperation was a function of a space already layered by simulation in tension with modern habitus. The fact that this tension reveals an affective continuum between modernity and postmodernity allowed me to draw a nexus between the more or less expressionistic mode of this play and Monti’s more “historical” plays.

The first chapter also creates a model of analysis that parallels Monti’s own tactics for establishing a relationship between affect and the production of space. This tactic could be described as the imposition of a feigned negation of the theatrical. Magnus apparently manages to move from the place of performance that is his household to the non-theatrical outside by using Julia as a kind of prop and making her pass for what is real outside—and so does Monti use Julia in order to feign a belief in the outside. It is in this feigning, I believe, where the trickiness of Monti’s dramaturgy resides for it plays

with the seduction of that belief to the point of making it the engine of the action.

Admirably, it is precisely through that feigning that Monti gains confidence in grounding the action in a theatrical environment without the need or even the reference of outside “reality.” That confidence is reflected in the way he loosely plays with historical dates and texts, not with the detachment of postmodern irony but rather with a sense of full investment, or belief, in their theatrical location. Likewise, my analysis also feigns a belief in the non-theatrical in order to introduce the “context” of the plays but only to produce along with Monti the space that is affecting the characters on stage.

In my reading of *Marathón*, in chapter two, it is the metaphorical gesture that allows me to reconstruct the space architectonically in such a way that an added structure is capable of transforming the relationship of the whole to its ground or environment, as a way to better perceive and define that environment. Here too I tried to keep up with Monti’s intuitions by recurring to a number of theories about the myths of modernity, which he stages site-specifically in a 1930s Buenos Aires ballroom. I believe that there is a valuable gain in my procedure (and I must admit that not only the structure of the play but also Monti’s brilliant text facilitated the task). First of all, the tectonic analysis is an object that functions as a kind of blueprint of the play, but visualized architectonically in relationship to the environment. This tectonic blueprint should not be confused with a structuralist analysis for what it reflects is the affect of that space. This affective map helps us find our own location in space. For instance, it tells us that we are somehow in kinship with commodities inasmuch as we defy death while having lost the horizon of death. It also tells us that the dream of the American shore remains in our vision as a deferred future. Such metaphoric descriptions conflate the who-I-am and the where-I-am

as a live state, like in Ricoeur's live metaphors. Here it is space, not the individual, or the body, that is personified, and therefore the description is radically non-performative. This spatial evaluation of the play serves in turn to contextualize the modes of reception of the 1980 Buenos Aires production.

Monti presents us with a problematic space to be in, yet I've argued that his point is that only in this space are we able to rescue our utopian potential because this space is, in fact, our history—presented in a most urgent form.

The issue of how to own our history is at the center of Monti's concern, and Monti tries to put to positive use the discovery that history has spatial coordinates that can be explored in the theatre. An additional strategy is suggested here, where Monti deals with his own authorial tactic of feigning a belief in the outside—for this feigning marks the difference between him, as an author who “chooses to choose” theatre, and an audience who is allowed to maintain its belief in the outside. For instance, *Magnus* and *Marathón* are, in this respect, visions of space for its audience; but these visions are still ones that the actors and the audience cannot willfully occupy because the visions remain in the realm of representation. In other words, the representational space recedes or vanishes once we leave behind the stage, which has become, by the end of the plays, *the* world that the characters inhabit. In a sense it is the very presence of bodies and/or characters on a stage that are in the way of appropriation because we do not or refuse to understand presence onstage and presence in the auditorium in the same way. This happens because the auditorium is taken as a liminal space where our suspension of disbelief in the “reality” of the stage-fiction does not actually relinquish belief in the outside. In fact, our belief in the fiction is usually supported by our belief in “reality.” My third chapter

demonstrates that Monti is intuitively aware of this problem and tackles it in his own practice.

I have argued that Monti engages the problem of space appropriation by thinking more precisely about the condition of performance. In chapter three, I showed how, in *Historia...*, the play's implied message of the middle-class audience being complicit with history did not allow room for feigning. The collaborative process of creation at the Payró theatre actually showed a commitment to be true to the event of performance by projecting and reflecting on its own limitations. Unlike *Marathón*, where an undisclosed prize implied a belief in the outside, in *Historia* the character of Pola is made to represent everybody's choice of the historical theatre of Argentine economic dependency. Pola thus pushes the audience to the limit of this scene's (dramatic) narrative in maximum tension with our persistent belief in an outside of the stage and theatre. I argued that in the implosion sections of the play, the actors reenact that tension, which allows the audience to identify themselves in the split rather than try to locate their own belief or disbelief. This is the experience of univocity where all bodies identify themselves as being crossed by a split that divides an inside from an outside.

Marathón's tectonic instability allowed me to make the connection between this dividing line and the Deleuzian diagram, which crosses bodies and affects our thinking. More precisely, the Pipa-NN contract in *Marathón* shows the need to borrow bodies for capitalist economic ends, while the sex of woman (in Pipa's body) is a symbolic promise of the continuous availability of bodies in time. Both are driving our history forward while being in logical tension. Thus the holes of sex and of NN's death-wish are linked by the same vector of forces that organizes our relation to history and the future. This

vector is a diagrammatic historical location here occupied by two symbolic actors: NN and Pipa.

Visita was analyzed as a restaging of the problem of the actor once the diagrammatic location has been intuited. In this play Monti radicalizes his tactic by placing Equis as a surrogate of the univocal actor/audience (of the end of *Historia...*). In other words Equis is like a transitional object mediating the audience's identification with a diagrammatic Perla. This procedure allows Monti to dispense with the need to feign belief in the outside and use Perla's "insidedness" as a way to problematize the actor-like presence of Equis.

An understanding of the phenomenological freedom with which Monti constructs *Visita* allowed me to read the text with a kind of theatrical literalness. Thus I identify the masquerade, the make believe, and the cinematic, as well as the diagrammatic quality of tactile elements, as aspects of the performance itself. I relate directorial choices in two different productions (one by Jaime Kogan and the other by myself) as intuitive stage translations of a phenomenological text. Meanwhile, the context of my analysis, that is, Monti's staging of the affect of history, demanded that I historicize this phenomenology and relate it --via Benjamin, Doane, and Virilio-- to modern contingency and an ethos in our relationship to time. This ethos is characterized by a blind-spot that prevents us from recognizing our production of accidents.

With *Visita* Monti reaches a model for the appropriation of the space of history through theatre. It involves an actor/character who, in identifying (with) his diagrammatic location, confronts the fact of an accident as originating the very sense of his (modern) presence.

The first three chapters construct a kind of genealogy for Monti's later plays. Chapters one and two explain the local/global, modern/postmodern, and capitalist/post-colonial location of the plays while chapter three shows how Monti's diagrammatic theatre dispenses with the need to refer to an outside "scene."

I've also tried to suggest a different genealogy, in the course of this concluding summary, that has to do with the function of the female characters. In this respect I think it is worth considering the female character(s) as a cipher of Woman that is moved—changed in location—from play to play. I will try to sketch this journey in what follows.

Julia, in *Magnus*, is brought from the outside as proof of a new inside—she is thus transformed into the promise of a future—very much in the fetishistic fashion of the commodity. In *Historia...*, Pola is placed inside the allegory as a sign of the unconscious inside of history that contrasts with the outside location of Teatro and the audience's critical will. In *Visita*, Perla erases the trace of outside critical position by placing (as a matter of principle) all of us inside her theatre/household, while Equis becomes the enigmatic sign of an impossible outside position. This is like a transference of the fetishism of the feminine character onto the mere presence of the anonymous character or actor onstage. Here Monti uses stage presence and the theatre in order to go inside the enigma or fetish and begin to deconstruct it. In *Marathón*, Pipa along with other female characters helps to deconstruct the outsideness of the American continent, reflected in the myths and the presence of the dancers' bodies, as the inside of modernity.

This genealogy suggests two major relations. The first is an equivalence between the commodity, Woman, and the American continent as the gendered feminine enigmas

or fetishes that need to be deconstructed.² The second is that Monti takes this enigmatic trinity as somehow secretly containing the affect (in our bodies) of modern history.

My tectonic reading of *Marathón* reveals that secret as related to the economic value of a present (of global capitalist production). The present is the main value that we reproduce—it is therefore our main commodity. At this point I believe that we can extrapolate Monti's ethical intention in the form of an ethical judgment: this affect, being trapped in the present, doesn't go far enough in sensing its utopian impulse and therefore truncates our capacity to fully engage history (as past, present, and future). This judgment helps us understand the function of the diagrammatic location in Monti's theatre. It could be introduced with a paradox: the present of production is the "double scene" of modernity/ postmodernity since it determines both its inside (the theatre) and outside (the context), but it is itself not the scene of history. In order to access the scene of history we must go to the limits of the present, "to the very end," in the Woman's [Hermana] words—where the present touches past and future, precisely what Monti does in *Marathón*.

In the diagrammatic constructions of Monti's later plays, explored in chapter four, the American continent is not used as fetish but as a shortcut to the past, so that the theatrical/contemporary present touches the past as the origin or producer of that same present. Meanwhile, it is significant that in *Una Pasión* Monti, for the first time, places the female character (Camila) outside of his theatre. Thus Monti refuses (through the Brigadier character) to fetishize Woman and places her at the utopian limit, like a link to a still unknown future. The Brigadier's utopian dream collapses because his *present* modern battle of civilization vs. barbarism takes over and re-fetishizes Camila. But I also

showed through an analysis of Alvarado's production, that the Brigadier has access to a diagrammatic location because it is a repetition of repeated utopian failure performed at the limit where two theatres meet. In the play, the lovers' story is also itself already a re-enactment, but the onstage appearance of their newborn progeny on the stage is like a reminder that the Brigadier has reached the limit location. With the newborn a temporal attachment to our past and present history is stressed (put in tension) by the choice we must make on its behalf when it enters our theatre as if to signal our own historical emergence.

The diagrammatic scene of history is perceived by Monti in the abyss, or line where the making of a world (through civilization, war, capitalism, etc) and birthing meet or coincide. But isn't this definition, as any other that finds a limit and meeting, also a sign of tension and contradiction? In other words, doesn't birthing appear as utopian origin precisely because death has become our horizon? Monti actually constructs *Asunción* as a contradictory, albeit emergent, site by putting two woman protagonists on stage, each giving birth and dying in her own way.

While we might say that while Blanca and Asunción are performing the history of conquest travels and *mestizaje*, their performance is non-performative in the sense that they are merely showing their bodies as vehicles (for death and birthing) of that history. I could radicalize this view by saying that in *Asunción* Woman (as in feminine) disappears. In this respect, Blanca's performance in particular may be thought of as an instance of history's transvestism inasmuch as her excessive attire, make-up, and jewelry are relics of the fetishism with which men hold or perhaps fashion Woman.

La oscuridad de la razón is a play that explores the options of non-fetishizing representations of Woman. I analyzed Maria as a representation of female desire for Man, and Alma as a representation of loyalty to the father. I showed how Kogan's production was quite effective in avoiding a reification of the feminine. Alma and Maria are therefore means of criticizing modern notions of birthing, be it in the biological sense (Maria's motherhood) or the techno-cultural sense (Alma's legitimizing intercourse). Through the indications given by the character of the Woman, in a prologue and epilogue, Monti shows a diagrammatic model of birthing. It is a passing-through or crossing of today's historical space that intervenes by going to the utopian limit of that space in a kind of diagrammatic repetition that results in emergence. Kogan's production made these limits palpable with a staging that played with both topology and lights, and I argued that these were suggestive of a condition of war in the real time of modern deterrence.

The above sketch doesn't thoroughly answer, of course, the question of the status of the feminine in Monti's plays. I believe, though, that issues of gender, which were approached throughout this dissertation, gain a valuable perspective in the context of a production of space. The problematic description of a redemptive feminine, which would fall into the trap of commodification and fetishism, can be replaced by the notion of a historical transvestism, which I used above, in relation to Blanca. The use of the term is also informed by a need to relate to the indeed performative aspects in the staging of Monti's plays, especially when his plays rely more on personification (as in the later plays). My diagrammatic analysis serves in part to allay the tendency to see these plays as a move towards realism. I'd like to conclude with a brief look at the play *No te soltaré*

hasta que me bendigas (*Hotel Columbus*) (2003) and rehearse the notion of historical transvestism.³

In *Hotel Columbus* there are no women, but Woman is ghosted in the figure of the transvestite Sarah. The transvestite's name solicits her own identification with Sarah Bernhardt as she mysteriously appears in the presidential suite of a five-star hotel, allegedly situated in the middle of a ghetto of an unnamed Latin American city. The suite becomes his/her stage in a performance that ends up involving the presidential guard (Roca) who was there at the moment. A parallel between Roca and *Visita's* Equis character can be established here, for Roca's "accidental" proximity to power (as torturer, guard, and carrier of the Roca name) has put him in a theatre that, as he himself recognizes, threatens to make him redundant.

Sarah appears after Roca has inadvertently left his gun out of his immediate reach. What ensues is a make-believe where both (re)enact a "historical" encounter between Sarah Bernhardt and nineteenth-century Argentine president Roca.⁴ The encounter involves a remembering of their story of passion. I believe that much of the tension in the play is created by the different way in which the characters are invested in the play-acting and remembering. Sarah's Bernhardt is already a part of theatre and she draws Roca in by actually feigning a belief in the reality of her "story." For example, she explains: "Yes, perhaps all that business with the Indians was just playacting, especially since what I remember best are some lines in verse [...] Nevertheless, I think that the part about my son was true" (377). Roca, on the other hand, is still struggling in his effort to believe in their theatre. Something that is reflected in his "theatrical" clumsiness: "*Sarah silently*

sobs. Pause. Suddenly [Roca] leaps on top of the revolver and puts it in his mouth as if he were going to shoot himself (377).

This tension drives the simulation towards its final effect, which is Roca's "success" in matching Sarah's theatrical investment. What interests me in this effect is that "success" here is equivalent to a disappearance of the feminine. "Sarah Bernhardt" is the feminine fetish that disappears in the irreality of Sarah's performance. Roca finally rejoins Sarah's theatre by enacting his own (and not president Roca's) personal memory of turbulent and violent reactions that had an origin in fetishization. One instance is the story of his passion for a woman who had "no breasts" (a desire to fetishize). The other concerns his cross-dressing son (a threat to needed fetishization).

I wonder if fetishization disappears when Roca's memory is understood as inspired by the theatricalization of Sarah's transvestism, because that memory increases his belief in the theatre being proposed by Sarah. In other words, If Sarah ends up simultaneously playing Roca's lover as well as his son (as she does in a final sequence where she, like the lover and the son, dies), isn't the fetishism being repeated in such way that it disappears in the form a theatrical equivalence between the Sarah's Bernhardt, Roca's lover, and his son? Sarah the transvestite, the one who exploits the feminine fetishism projected onto and through him/her to construct this theatre, actually disappears in the historical transvestism of the play. Her theatre gives birth to an image of embrace and death at the diagrammatic point of historical emergence where the feminine or the fetish is already otherwise.

Hotel Columbus may well be perceived as a manifesto that summarizes Monti's vision of theatre, whose potential appropriation of today's historical space is best

reflected in the play's use of a seemingly realist play in order to occupy its theatre. Sarah, in effect, is quite deliberate in expressing her choice of theatre as the only possible place of a historical recognition, with no belief in or reference to the outside. Sarah also seems to succeed in bringing Roca to abandon belief in reality. They both use theatre as a place where recognition of historical loss (the repetition of forced death), resistance (the diagrammatic performance itself), and historical emergence (the suspension of fetishism) fuse in a single moment. In this trinity where each element helps to define the others, Monti's theatre appears to dissolve the stage, scene, or representational space, and recognize itself as a utopian practice within history. This movement of dissolution reveals that the production of space in Monti's plays is a representational project that seeks to map history as the place of praxis, and tells us that history loses its utopian dimension outside of the map.

¹ In the course of four chapters I analyze seven of Monti's plays. In chronological order, the plays are *Una noche con el sr. Magnus & hijos* (1970) [*An Evening with Mr. Magnus & Sons*], *Historia tendenciosa de la clase media argentina...* (1971) [*A Biased History of the Argentine Middle Class...*], *Visita* (1977) [*Visit*], *Marathón* (1980) [*Marrathon*], *Una pasión sudamericana* (1989) [*A South American Passion Play*], *Asunción* (1992) and *La oscuridad de la razón* (1993) [*The Obscurity of Reason*]. All plays except *Historia...* are translated into English. See Ricardo Monti, *Reason Obscured: Nine Plays by Ricardo Monti*, trans. by Jean Graham-Jones (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2004); and Ricardo Monti, *Historia tendenciosa de la clase media argentina...*, (Buenos Aires: Talía, 1972).

² In reading *La cortina de abalorios* [*The Beaded Curtain*], Monti's contribution to Teatro Abierto in 1981, Diana Taylor has critiqued the fact that in that play the process of colonial/neo-colonial exchange and sell-out of the land's resources is represented as a degrading use of a madam's body by male owners or bosses as well as by the male spectators. The "misogyny" of the representation, though, is mediated by the self-abjection of the madam (Mama) who presents herself as a deathly ghost. She thus repeats, in a way similar to the women in *Marathón*, the desiring of the men. The spectator is therefore forced to look through the mirror of Mama's sex and beyond in order to confront the death-bound direction of his desire. See Diana Taylor, "Staging Battles of Gender and Nationness: Teatro Abierto 1981," in *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's Dirty War* (Durham: Duke

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³ See Ricardo Monti, *No te soltaré hasta que me bendigas (Hotel Columbus)* in *Teatro, tomo 2* (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 2003) and Ricardo Monti, *Hotel Columbus*, in *Reason Obscured*, 371-94.

⁴ General Julio Argentino Roca was president from 1880 to 1886 and from 1898 to 1904. He is also known as a hero of the “Conquest of the desert” that displaced and killed gauchos and indigenous people to make way for white settlers and investors. See Graham-Jones, in Ricardo Monti, *Reason Obscured*, note 1, 393.

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