



# **The Actor-Document: traits of a poetics that challenges the limits between presence and representation**

Denise Cobello<sup>1,II</sup>

<sup>I</sup>Universidad Nacional de las Artes – UNA, Buenos Aires, Argentina

<sup>II</sup>Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3, Paris, France

**ABSTRACT – The Actor-Document: traits of a poetics that challenges the limits between presence and representation** – During the 1960s and 1970s, Argentine theater experienced an almost simultaneous interest in the documentary and the political, as well as a experimental hybridization of forms. Later developments led to the autobiographical theater of the 1980s and 1990s and to the *biodrama* of the 2000s. *Mi vida después* [My life after] by Lola Arias is a renowned play derived from these traditions. By analyzing the model of acting of this work and study the figure of the actor-document and its contribution to contemporary theater. The actor in this model brings into crisis notions of illusion and mimesis and challenges the limits between fiction and reality by constantly oscillating amidst presence and representation.

Keywords: **Actor-Document. Presence. Representation. Documentary Theater. Performance.**

**RÉSUMÉ – L'Acteur-Document: des traces d'une poétique qui met en crise les limites entre présence et représentation** – Dans les années 1960 et 1970, le théâtre argentin montre un intérêt particulier par des aspect documentaires et politiques, mais aussi par l'expérimentation e l'hybridation des formes. Le développement de ces formes a mené, plus tard, au théâtre autobiographique de 1980-1990 et au *biodrame* des années 2000. Une pièce célèbre qui s'inscrit dans ces traditions est *Mi vida después*, de Lola Arias. L'étude du travail du comédien dans cette œuvre, nous permettra proposer et caractériser la figure d'acteur-document et réfléchir sur sa contribution au théâtre contemporain. Un acteur qui met en crise les notions d'illusion et mimesis au même temps qui explore les limites entre fiction et réalité pour évoluer dans une zone d'oscillation entre présence et représentation.

Mots-clés: **Acteur-document. Présence. Représentation. Théâtre documentaire. Performance.**

**RESUMEN – El Actor-Documento: rasgos de una poética que tensiona los límites entre presencia y representación** – En los años 1960 y 1970, el teatro argentino experimenta casi simultáneamente un interés por lo documental y lo político, como también por la experimentación e hibridación de las formas. Su desarrollo condujo más tarde al teatro autobiográfico de las décadas 1980-1990 y al *biodrama* de los 2000. Una obra destacada que se inscribe en esas tradiciones es *Mi vida después*, de Lola Arias. Analizando el modelo de actuación de esta obra, proponemos y estudiamos la figura del actor-documento y su aporte particular al teatro contemporáneo; un actor que pone en crisis las nociones de ilusión y mimesis y que tensiona los límites entre ficción y realidad al moverse en una zona de oscilación constante entre presencia y representación.

Palabras clave: **Actor-Documento. Presencia. Representación. Teatro Documental. Performance.**

## Introduction and Formulation of the Problem

To speak about documentary forms on stage we need to hark back to political theatre (Piscator, 1957) as the framework in which most documentary theatre has been inscribed. Piscator's work found continuity in other theatrical forms that developed in Europe at the time, especially in Bertolt Brecht's works (2004). In the 1960s, Peter Weiss (1976 [1968]) explored Piscator and Brecht's work and conceptualized these investigations in his book *Notes on documentary theatre*. Likewise, the proliferation of biographical or autobiographical forms during this period helped establish theoretical bases for the approach of these genres (Lejeune, 1975; De Man, 1991; Doubrovsky, 2001; among others). In contemporary studies on documentary theatre or autobiographical theatre (Kempf; Moguilevskaia, 2013; Barría Jara, 2018; Trastoy, 2002; 2018; Brownell, 2019), these categories are revisited in light of phenomena that force us to consider the stage from new aesthetic perspectives, such as the *performative turn* (Fischer-Lichte, 2011), postdramatic theatre (Lehmann, 2013) or the interaction of theatre and performance (Sagasetta, 2008; 2013; Féral, 2011).

In Latin America, the aesthetic principles of documentary theatre and political theatre became manifest in the 1960s with authors like Vicente Leñero<sup>1</sup>, an undeniable reference in the field (Freire, 2007); and, in Argentina specifically, through the work of Jorge Goldenberg<sup>2</sup>, one of the first dramatists to include in his theatrical texts procedures characteristic of documentary theatre. These plays are framed within a theatrical model that follows a text-centric paradigm and a classic conception of *mise-en-scène*. However, it must be noted that in this period an inescapable *performative turn* took place in Western art, which allowed the emergence of new forms, such as action art or performance. These transformations in the art world on a global scale found their echo in Argentina at the Center for Audiovisual Experimentation (*Centro de Experimentación Audiovisual – CEA*) of the Di Tella Institute (*Instituto Di Tella – INDT*), where theatre, dance, visual art and music began to expand their frontiers, allowing for different intersections and hybridizations among them, as well as with other disciplines and fields of knowledge (King, 2007 [1985]).

One of the main tasks of the Center was to explore strategies for renewing the dominant theatre of the time in dialogue with theories of the theatre of cruelty of Antonin Artaud (2005 [1938]) and the laboratory theatre of Jerzy Grotowski (2008 [1968]), but also with ideas from the field of performance. In one of the lectures that inaugurated the cycle of *Happenings* at the Di Tella Institute in 1967, artist and researcher Alicia Páez described the main characteristics of the genre and compared them to theatre, highlighting formal similarities (the inclusion of media, languages, and people's actions) and differences (a scenic art free from the literary dramatic tradition)<sup>3</sup>. María Fernanda Pinta analyzes this diagnosis and, using the idea of discontinuity (Masotta, 2004 [1967-1969]), observes the connection of these new forms with Artaud's ideas about a theatre of the senses that prioritizes visual and sonorous aspects, in which real objects appear resignified and the physical and affective values of the word are promoted, rather than logical and discursive ones (Artaud, 2005 [1938]).

This theoretical and practical interest in hybridization and discontinuity in art allowed questioning artistic conventions and traditions, while concomitantly exposing artists to new ways of producing encounters between spectators and the performance and approaching the relations between life and art, art and politics, and art and society<sup>4</sup>. This developed fertile ground for the creation of the cycle *Experiencias 68*, in which more artistically and politically radical works were presented, such as *La familia obrera*, by Oscar Bony, *Mensaje en el Di Tella*, by Roberto Jacoby and *El baño* by Roberto Plate (Pinta, 2013b). These works were conceived as experiential, unpredictable and ephemeral events that manifest a gesture of resistance to the political and social impositions of the time<sup>5</sup>.

Once the Di Tella Institute was closed in the 1970s, artists, working independently or in groups, continued this experimental tradition by accentuating the relations art/life and art/politics. In the case of theatre, a stronger commitment appeared in works that revived the theatrical proposals of Piscator and Brecht at a time of politicization of daily life and, therefore, of explosion of political theatre modes (Verzero, 2019). For example, the Libre Teatro Libre (LTL) group, from Córdoba, of whose works we can mention *El asesinato de X* (1970)<sup>6</sup> or *El fin del Camino* (1974)<sup>7</sup>, led a formal ex-

perimental search that was clearly oriented towards working with archival material, testimonies and documents related to current political issues.

In this study we examine characteristics of the procedures of actors/performers of contemporary documentary theater, understanding that these aesthetic investigations follow the line of an experimental artistic tradition that, in Argentina, originated in the 1960s and 1970s, continued with the autobiographical theatre of the 1980s and 1990s (Trastoy, 2002) and leading to the expansion in the last two decades of the documentary and the real on stage (Brownell, 2009)<sup>8</sup>.

A case study from this latter period is the work of Argentinian playwright, director and performer Lola Arias, who in the mid 2000s began to display particular interest in the (auto)biographical in theatre with plays like *Striptease* (2007), *Sueño con revólver* (2007) y *El amor es un francotirador* (2007). She simultaneously investigated the documentary on stage through creations in collaboration with Stefan Kaegi, a member of the German collective Rimini Protokoll. In 2009, that interest was strengthened by the premiere of *Mi vida después [My life after]* (2009). Although this proposal originated within the Ciclo Biodrama, created in 2002 by Vivi Tellas for the Sarmiento Theater of the Theatrical Complex of the City of Buenos Aires, the cycle officially concluded in 2008 and *Mi vida después* premiered the following year as an independent production of that same theatre. It ran for over ten years, with several seasons on both the official and independent circuit in Buenos Aires, and toured theatres and festivals around the world. Studied and analyzed in numerous works (Longoni; Verzero, 2012; Verzero 2011; Pinta, 2013a; Cobello, 2019; among others)<sup>9</sup>, the play was created from the biography of six artists who were born during Argentina's last civil-military dictatorship. These performers present themselves on stage from their autobiographical self, they show and interpret family documents and archives such as letters, photographs, voice recordings, and videos. They wear their parents' clothes and reveal dreams or personal fantasies to summon and recover, through their testimonies, the voice of their parents and of an entire generation that could not or would not speak. The *mise-en-scène* is built through accounts (including fragments of memories, comments on documents, and autobiographical references) that intertwine with

the handling of objects, actions and music made by the performers, composing a collage of the 1970s.

Text is not used to focus on its mimetic value or to construct a fiction, but to highlight its material value (Danan, 2013). The play is composed of texts written by Arias in collaboration with the actors (texts based on biographical narrations of the protagonists) and other sources that existed prior to the show (letters, a family tree, fragments of a legal case file, etc.). The 1970s are thus reconstructed in a way that makes the limits between fiction and reality porous (Verzero, 2010). The play explored new relations between art and life through procedures like the use of performatic devices that help to shorten the distance between the scene and real life in two ways: through modifications the play suffers because of what happens in reality, and in how the play influences reality (Longoni; Verzero, 2012). It thus marks the development of a specific form that could be defined as *performative documentary theatre*<sup>10</sup>. According to Josette Féral (2011), performative theatre is founded on certain concepts of contemporary art, like the refutation of the notion of representation through the notion of real presence of the performer<sup>11</sup>, the questioning of the idea that the theatre is, necessarily an account, a narration, a fiction, and therefore, a carrier of meaning. It also gives greater priority to creative processes than to the observation of a completed work. The effect of art on the real, the rejection of any catharsis, and other ideas are also explored. *Mi vida después* contributes especially to debates about the performative, pushing these concepts to the extreme.

This study will pay particular attention to the work of the actor/performer that emerges from *Mi vida después* to characterize acting procedures and analyze the aesthetic-philosophical problems that arise from this poetic.

### **Characterization of a Performative and Documentary Acting Model**

Using as an example a play like *Mi vida después*, which presents traces of a heritage from German documentary theatre<sup>12</sup> and also dialogs with the tradition of Argentinian experimental and political theatre of the 1960s and 1970s, we can observe the emergence of a particular way of acting based on experimentation and the convergence of elements of these traditions which

adding a layer of complexity to the acting paradigm known until then as *documentary theatre*.

The German collective Rimini Protokoll uses the term *experts* to define its performers: “[...] experts in certain fields of knowledge, in certain experiences or skills [...] should not be measured by what they don’t know how to do (to act in particular) but from what their on stage presence originates” (Malzacher, 2007, online, our translation). Arias’ play makes this acting practice more complex by presenting a professional actor who knows how to interpret, masters techniques to use their voice in front of an audience, to manage their energy and presence. Although the use of professional actors to play themselves is not an innovation of this play<sup>13</sup>, the passage from performativity to theatricality that is accentuated in this proposal demands, in our opinion, thorough attention and study.

Another important element to consider when analyzing the acting in this play is the deconstruction of the theatrical illusion. As we mentioned before, it is a staging that proposes the crossing of languages, the use of different textual materialities and the creation of a fragmented map of scenes. Moreover, the documentary and autobiographical material is used to reinforce the friction between reality and fiction by challenging the very concept of theatrical illusion. In the same way, this deconstruction of illusion can be perceived at the level of acting. The actor offers a work about their presence with a degree of almost zero representation on stage, alternated with games of reconstruction and a noticeable theatricality. The tension between these two forms of presentation of the actors on stage allows deeply questioning the characteristics of a particular form of acting that clearly emerges from this scenic proposal and through the performers convoked for the project. In a recently published article, the work of the actor that can be observed in the play *Mi vida después* is identified and classified to propose an acting typology that will more precisely describe a specific poetic matrix (Cobello, 2019). To delve into these concepts, we will analyze the poetic-acting procedures that are put into practice in this play by focusing on the work on the *phenomenal body* (Merleau-Ponty, 1960) of actors and on the conformation of a *semiotic body*. This accounts for a cleavage provoked by the actor in *Mi vida después* that can be considered from two aspects that compose their game: the representation of theirself and its phenomenal

presence (Fischer-Lichte, 2011). This work of performative acting takes the actor to a threshold terrain that oscillates between these two states, between the actor and the document.

### **The Actor as Actor: representation**

The notion of representation in acting is associated with the concepts of mimesis, identification, illusion and embodiment. The latter, coined by Johann Jakob Engel in the second half of the 18th century, alludes to the idea of an actor who should transform their sensitive and phenomenal body into a *semiotic body* so that it could be a new carrier of signs, at the service of the expression of the linguistic meanings of the text and do so as a material sign (Fischer-Lichte, 2011).

According to Diderot and later to Luis Jovet, two great theorists who also focused their studies on the notion of embodiment, actors should disembody themselves to be able to embody a character.

For these two theorists of the art of acting, to embody a role meant to stop being oneself, to simulate, feign, pretend: “Actors influence the audience not when they are furious, but when they act the fury well” (Diderot, 1968, p. 381, our translation). Thus, it is due to observation that an actor can act a character. Copying attitudes, physical and emotional characteristics will allow him or her to create the character before acting it out.

We are a being of nature and another of imitation; the heart that we believe to have is not the one we have. What is, then, true talent? Knowing well the exterior symptoms of a borrowed soul, addressing the feeling of those who see us and hear us, fooling them through the imitation of those symptoms, due to an imitation that enlarges everything in their heads and becomes the rule for their judgement [...] He who best knows and perfectly conceives these exterior signs according to the ideal model is the great actor (Diderot, 1968, p. 358, our translation).

According to Diderot, the actor must disappear to leave space for the character. The issue of the feeling of detachment from oneself that Diderot refers to will later be developed by Luis Jovet in his notes and reflections on the disembodied actor, in this way: “One must begin with a long monograph describing the actor and his activity insisting on the tendency to dissociation that appears in him, on his ability to detach, to quickly perceive

himself different from himself” (Jouvet, 2009, p. 222, our translation). This fragment from Luis Jouvet’s text presents the foundation of his theory on the art of acting, through which he seeks to demonstrate that actors should detach themselves, establish a distance from their selves, from their emotions, thoughts, from their own bodies, to put themselves at the service of a character.

In diametric opposition to this understanding are Meyerhold’s experiences based on the biomechanics of Artaud and Grotowski, who promote the extreme commitment of the actor’s body and the supremacy of corporal expression. Through the study of these forms, the notion of embodiment can be conceived not as a practice that forces actors to step away from themselves, but as a practice of *corporealization* that proposes, to the contrary, “[...] putting in presence with the body or in the body something that exists only because of it” (Fischer-Lichte, 2011, p. 172, our translation). That is to say, to place oneself at the disposal of a material and what derives from the unique corporeality that the actor produces on stage. Meanwhile, the researcher Michel Bernard analyzes the expressive dimensions of corporeality and proposes to deconstruct the perception of a body as an essential and unchanging concept to regard the conformation of a body as an indefinite process that is constituted from “[...] certain bases, certain registers at the level of education, the first years of childhood, social relations, etc.” (Bernard, 1988, p. 6, our translation). We can find a case that allows us to exemplify this theory in the acting of *Mi vida después*. The actors of this play present themselves on stage to give testimony about the lives of their parents. Their bodies compose the play, a performative act that is deconstructed to be reconstructed in endless repetitions. A work in constant process of creation that claims the intention of never ceasing to be made.

The body is to the human being the phenomenological and practical measure of all things. Maurice Merleau-Ponty affirms that the body is the anchorage point of our experience of the world. An experience of the *flesh*, according to Merleau-Ponty, can take place in a context in which the line that connects body and spirit has been erased and life is seen as spiritual and corporal, always relying on the body. According to this author, “[...] for many thinkers at the end of the 19th century, the body was a piece of matter, a group of mechanisms. The 20th century has restored and deepened



the question of the flesh, that is, of the animated body” (Merleau-Ponty, 1960, p. 287, our translation). As an expressive space, and as the origin and receptacle of all sensations, the body is the source of perception and assimilation of information about the world (Merleau-Ponty, 2001 [1964], p. 175). That is why the philosopher goes beyond its carnal aspect and the merely organic and mechanical conception and understands it as a global entity: affective, subjective and symbolic.

The visible can fill me and occupy me only because, as I see it, I do not see it from the bottom of nothing, but from the middle of that very thing, me seeing it, I am also visible, what makes the weight, the density, the flesh of each color, of each sound, of each tactile texture, of the present and the world, is that he who perceives feels himself emerge from them in a sort of enrolment or redoubling, profoundly homogeneous to them, which is the sensitive itself returning to him and that, in its return is to his eyes a double or an extension of his flesh (Merleau-Ponty, 2001 [1964], p. 153, our translation).

If we reconsider these reflections from the field of theatre studies we can understand that when a character appears, this process takes place only through the body of an actor. This experience happens only once and is indissolubly bound to that particular body. As Pavis affirms (2014, p. 53) in his definition of body and corporeality, “[...] the actor *performs*, that is to say that he plays, embodies and develops different roles of a person in society”.

For Erika Fischer-Lichte (2011), the character finds its reason and conditions of existence through the actor’s physical-being-in-the-world. When we study the acting procedures used in *Mi vida después*, we see that the actors do not seek to interpret a character and that, in spite of reading their presence *a priori* as a representation of themselves, this does not necessarily mean that they build a character of themselves. This can be clearly seen when they present and describe to the audience the documents and objects that had belonged to their parents. Through speech, enunciation and corporeality they are seen presenting part of their life stories. The concept of *embodiment-corporealization* consists, to the contrary, in considering that if there is an idea of character, it is due to the perception of the spectator during the representation and not because it was originated through an *a priori* construction of the actor. Characters don’t exist beyond the *phenome-*

*nal body* of the actor. Thus, the body of an actor can be viewed as material that carries signs that are discovered during a representation. It is the spectator who, in front of this actor, generates the dramatic quality necessary to read those signs as part of a construction that is indissolubly linked to the body that carries out the action.

### **The Actor as Document: presence**

In the introduction to *The Instruction* (1965), Peter Weiss (2000) affirmed that the role of the actor consisted of issuing facts. However, from the moment that words become alive in the mouth of an actor, it is no longer possible to think of the process as a simple diffusion or transmission of facts, since the actor carries the bodily presence and the subjectivity of the person who transmits them.

The figure of the *witness* (Brownell, 2013; Cobello, 2019), *living-document* or *expert* (Malzacher, 2007) on the contemporary stage is, in part, heir to the German documentary theatre of Peter Weiss and, as we mentioned, a key element in the works of the Rimini Protokoll group. According to Hélène Kuntz (2010, p. 89), the presence of actual witnesses on stage exudes an exceptional potential:

In Piscator's *In spite of everything*, the projection of cinematographic images of World War I gave the illusion of a direct irruption of the real on the theatre stage, thus producing violent emotions [...]. In today's theatre, the on-stage presence of real witnesses produces an effect just as gripping as the images of World War I shown to the spectators in *In spite of everything* and allows an emotional experience of comparable intensity.

Beyond the objects, there are bodies on stage that document. They are bodies that carry signs, marks, traces of lived experiences: *phenomenal bodies*. The term *phenomenal* refers to the idea of an empirical body, its physical being-in-the-world. The physical proximity of actors in different contemporary creations, the direct contact with them, cause spectators to focus their attention on actors, on their bodies and their particular physical characteristics. All the physical characteristics of an actor become signs when they are presented on stage. This is perceived and interpreted by spectators in interaction with the rest of the elements that compose a staging. Along

this line, Arnaud Rykner states, using as an example the play *Rwanda 94* (2000) of the Groupov collective:

The testimony is nothing other (this ‘other’ is neither pejorative nor dismissive) than a theatrical word, and Yolande Mukagasana is no longer only Yolande Mukagasana: she also becomes the character of Yolande Mukagasana, who gives testimony in the name of that who she no longer is and in the name of that which she has been (Rykner, 2011, p. 167, our translation).

Spectators thus find themselves in the presence of a document or *living archive* (Pinta, 2013a), a body that is presented as the witness of a fact, an element of the real that comes to account for its life marks in the context of a representational frame.

Hence, it is crucial to reflect on the presence of the actor. Aesthetic theories that have addressed the subject of presence have approached the notion from the idea of an intense energy, a force that captures the audience’s attention. This force is linked to the actor’s body, a captivating body that with no apparent effort controls its work and its energy in time and space. For Eugenio Barba, the presence is a living body, that is “[...] a body [that] dilates the presence of the actor and the perception of the spectator” (Barba; Savarese, 1995, p. 34). According to Barba, every physical action changes something inside the actor’s body. That is why he considers physical and vocal training as key elements in the formation of actors. He affirms that it is through training that actors can develop their presence and make it more powerful and intense.

However, today we know that all physical or vocal actions are also mental. The processes of *corporealization* mentioned above allow understanding this difference more clearly. The actor’s presence would thus be the ability to simultaneously present their technique and their nature. In line with these ideas, Béatrice Picon-Vallin (2001, p. 236) states that “[...] presence seems to be a dynamic in action, [since] it is connected to the actor’s constant behaviour modifications, more or less visible, destined to constantly adapt to changing scenic situations”. Presence thus implies an interplay of fluctuations between what it is and what it provokes, but is always associated with the *phenomenal bodies* of actors, their physical beings-in-the-world – and also their absence. The absence of the parents in *Mi vida después* is completed by the presences of their children. Their bodies and

their testimonies let us see the traces that their parents left, hereditary traits that some claim, as do Carla Crespo and Lisa Casullo, and which some decry, as do Vanina Falco and Blas Arrese Igor.

According to Frédéric Maurin (2001, p. 221), “[...] presence means that the actor is more than his image or his character”. The actor does not transform, does not embody, there is no line of action, thought or purpose to convey. The actor’s body is the epitome of presence. Its dynamic nature makes it alternate between its phenomenal presence and the representation of itself that appears because of the command of the scene (of the rhythm, the projection, the necessary muscle tone, the quality of the voice, the control of emotion, etc.). This work with actors who are called on to play themselves can resemble the execution that non-actors have on stage. However, actors add a deeper layer of complexity to the acting due to their ability to handle a scene using acting techniques and the special command that their presence has. It is a phenomenon of expanding irradiation or of a minimal retraction that necessarily causes a deep resonance in the spectator.

### **The Actor-Document: a place between representation and presence**

These reflections allow us to identify a particular type of actor or acting matrix that we call *actor-document*. This type of actor is convoked to display their presence and personal marks from their life. This means that, on one hand, we observe them as actors and, on the other, we see the representational work that they perform on themselves. To look into the acting procedures that are set in motion when an actor gives testimony about their own life, it is critical to observe their presence. It is the actor who brings their nature to the stage, their physical materiality, their body and their voice as documents of their autobiography. A *material body* that documents, that carries signs, marks, traces of life: a *phenomenal body*. However, when speaking about an actor, we immediately think of a stage professional that masters acting techniques that allow them to control their voice, tone, weight, balance, movements, the rhythm of the scene and the emotion that may arise from it. In sum, we think of an actor capable of managing certain elements that compose their expression, thus building their own acting dramaturgy. Indeed, in 2013 the actress Carla Crespo explained in an interview that, during the creative process of the play, the actors worked on

emotion as something private, something that should not be on display on stage.

It was very clear to everyone that this was not going to be a cathartic work, that there had to be a certain control over that. We worked with the idea that emotion and venting are a private thing. The idea was not to bring it on stage. It wasn't a part of the language that we wanted to work with. [...] I knew up to what point I could connect with the material, so I cooled down a bit. The first shows were a little colder. As I relaxed into the material I was able to allow myself to be moved because I knew that I was not going to break (Crespo, 2013 apud Cobello, 2015, p. 139).

This statement gives a clear idea about the work that the actors were conducting and confirms that it is through the use of different acting techniques and an extensive training in theater that the domain of emotions on stage can be achieved.

Jean-Pierre Sarrazac (2011), in his book dedicated to the gesture of giving testimony on stage, explains that the witnesses that are presented “[...] are not characters that act in an Aristotelian sense, characters with objectives of action, as Hegel specifies. In them one can observe, on the contrary, a certain *passivity*” (Sarrazac, 2011, p. 9, our translation). This passivity that Sarrazac describes alludes directly to the figure of the non-actor, called upon for numerous autobiographical scenic experiences to accentuate the possible *truthful* character of the facts that the play documents. This non-actor experiences a certain passiveness, since she is not generally aware of the production of meaning of their presence and simply limited to following the indications of the director who called on them.

The *actor-document* would be, to the contrary, a witness capable of managing their presence at the same time as they build an acting dramaturgy, their own production of meaning in dialogue with the *mise-en-scène* and the occasional directions. The act then becomes double: the material and the symbolic intertwine, hybridize. In this regard, Michel Bernard's reflections on *expression* as a game of tensions between body and language are relevant. In opposition to the Hegelian thought that conceives expression as a sensitive manifestation of an interior subjectivity, Bernard (1988, p. 7) affirms that “[...] there is only one way of ‘saving’ the expression and it is by returning to what constitutes the matrix, that is, to its original binary structure, to verify of which order is that rejection (‘ex-’) and on what the belief

in the interiority of a subject can be based”. His theory holds that all of theatre rests on those differentiation-unification and disjunction-conjunction matrixes and that this dual foundation lies mainly in the voice, the bodily organ that conveys speech, that is, all vocal emissions. The voice is the only part of the body where expressive theatricality is registered; all the rest, according to Bernard (1988, p. 8, our translation) “[...] is from the order of projection, of extrapolation from the vocal process, that which I have called *transvocalization*”. The voice can be considered in a divided way, as sound material and as support for language. It is, consequently, a vehicle of meaning, a vector of the symbolic. Thus, the actor’s voice allows spectators to differentiate body and language and to establish their conviviality, to separate or fuse the form of the expression and the form of the content. The voice also plays a role of spectacularity, given that it is expressed through a permanent self-reflexivity. At the very moment of the emission of a gesture, each subject is also their own spectator. The gesture is visible not only for the exterior gaze – it is also perceived by the actor, who conducts a sort of *pre-spectacularity*. This dual process of separation and union that Michel Bernard describes is similar to the oscillation between representation and presence that originates in the *actor-document*. In this sense, Fischer-Lichte (2011) proposes to no longer conceive of certain concepts such as presence and representation as dichotomous pairs, antagonistically interwoven, and to approach them from the logic of processes of *corporealization* that we previously covered. Thus, what is perceived in a given moment as presence, as the body of the actor through their physical being-in-the-world, can be perceived, immediately after, in a semiotic way as a sign of a character. The actor’s situation (and we could also see the spectator’s situation in this way) is therefore divided into two temporalities or two states in constant dialogue – representation and presence – thus entering a situation of permanent instability.

## Conclusions

This work presents clues and sketches hypotheses that will contribute to the reflection on new theatre forms, mainly those that question the use of documents on stage. Lola Arias’ *Mi vida después*, which was discussed in this study, offered a useful empirical model for sketching a descriptive map

that allowed us to define and propose an original modality in the field of acting. As we noted, this play is inscribed in a tradition of documentary theatre and Latin American political theatre, but also presents aesthetic marks that interact with contemporary German documentary theatre, particularly with the works of the Rimini Protokoll group. One of the marks that showcase that dialogue is the work with *witnesses* on stage or *experts* who, as we saw in the case of *Mi vida después*, are witnesses of their parents' lives as well as the biological continuation of their parents' absence. These witnesses are pure presence. At the same time, being able to resort to acting – at all times, but mainly in the reconstruction scenes – highlights and denounces the theatricality that defines them.

Through these reflections, we sought to shed light on the questions that emerge when we ponder the self-referentiality of the body and the particular presence that it gains on stage. We spoke of an actor who works on their own life stories as artistic material through a distanced interplay that allows us to see the theatricality of the frame of presentation as we simultaneously enter a space of intimacy and contact with the real of each performer. We examined the work of acting that consists in a constant oscillation between a state of presence and a state of representation. But what happens in the moment when the actor goes from one state to the other? Following the reflections developed in this work we reach the conclusion that, in the moment of passage, the actor enters a threshold space, a space of instability. The *actor-document* is expressed in a constant becoming, in an oscillating energy that circulates endlessly. This dual interplay between presence and representation in the *actor-document* provokes an expanded perception in the spectator; a state of *perceptive multi-stability* (Fischer-Lichte, 2011, p. 299) in which the body of the actor, their physical being-in-the-world is perceived – that is a phenomenal approach to the body. Yet the actor's body is also perceived as a sign of a character. A fertile ground for exploration would be an in-depth and detailed analysis of the place of the spectator before this *actor-document*.

We can thus state that the acting experiences that arise from the exploration of the documentary on stage from a performative quest create an unprecedented crisis in the limits between presence and representation and, therefore, in the limits of the scenic fiction and its traditional system of

meaning and communication, allowing a reconfiguration of the actor-spectator relation.

Over the course of this study we were able to observe that the procedures described as particular to this new acting model that we have defined under the theoretical figure of *actor-document* also appear in other contemporary Argentinean and international productions. This is the case of Argentinean plays like *Recordar 30 años para vivir 65 minutos* (2015), by Marina Otero, *Mi vida sin Victoria* (2016), by Rodrigo Arena and *Imprenteros* (2019), by Lorena Vega; and of *Schublanden* (2012) and *Frühlingsopfer* (2014), by the German group She She Pop; and of *Véronique Doisneau* (2004), *Lutz Förster* (2009), *Cédric Andrieux* (2009) and *Disabled Theater* (2012), by the French director Jérôme Bel; among others. Although these plays are especially interested in the documentary, it is also possible to find this modality of acting in plays whose main focus does not necessarily revolve around that theme, but also seek to create friction between the real and the fictional. This may be the case of the Argentine productions *Todo piola* (2015), by Gustavo Tarrío and *Las ideas* (2015), by Federico León; and of *My dinner with André* (2014) by the Belgian company TG STAN among others. Could we then affirm that the *actor-document* also appears in other theatrical forms other than documentary theatre or *biodrama*? Of course we have only mentioned a few plays as examples, but we believe that these issues could lead to the formulation of other examinations of the work of actors that results from new contemporary forms that question the notion of drama and are immersed in contemporary aesthetic quests.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> We support these affirmations mainly with plays such as *Pueblo rechazado* (1968), *Los albañiles* (1969) y *El juicio* (1972).
- <sup>2</sup> We use as a reference the plays *Argentine Quebracho Company* (1973) and *Relevo 1923* (1975).
- <sup>3</sup> *Acerca (de): Happenings*. Cycle of two conferences and three happenings presented by Oscar Masotta in 1966 at the ITDT-CEA. See ITDTCEA Archive, Library of the Torcuato Di Tella University.



- <sup>4</sup> Some of the most noted Argentinian productions that were presented at the Di Tella Institute were Marta Minujín's happenings: *La Menesunda*, in collaboration with Ruben Santantonin, and *El Batacazo*, both presented in 1965, and *Simultaneidad en Simultaneidad* (1966). For the latter, the artist worked with photographs, filmings and interviews with characters from the play invited for the occasion after being exposed to different sensory stimuli (King, 2007 [1985]). Also, the *Anti happening* by Roberto Jacoby, Eduardo Costa and Raul Escari (1966), as well as works presented outside of the Di Tella Institute, such as Alberto Greco's *Vivo-Dito*, performed in Argentina and abroad in the early 1960s, or the *Microsucesos*, by Carlos Squirru, Delia Puzzovio and Edgardo Anaya, presented at the Teatro de la Recova in 1965 (Pinta, 2013b) (King, 2007 [1985]).
- <sup>5</sup> Edgardo Vigo discussed in an interview his experience watching the exhibition *Experiencias 68*. He highlights the unpredictable and ephemeral character of the works in the show, since he found that *La familia obrera* by O. Bony was not presented (due to the indisposition of one of its members); the teleprinter in R. Jacoby's *Mensaje en el Di Tella* did not work; and *El baño*, by R. Plate, was shut down by the police (Vigo, 1968 apud Pinta, 2013b, p. 163).
- <sup>6</sup> Play based on *El asesinato de Malcom X*, by the Uruguayan author Iber Conterris, that draws attention to the problems of black people as an expression of the oppression of capitalism. LTL's work consisted in updating the play to the Cordoban context based on the life of a union member that, although not explicitly, alludes to Tosco (Verzero, 2019).
- <sup>7</sup> This play was the last that the group produced. The title is a Spanish translation of *tucma*, a Quechua word from which the name of the province of Tucumán is derived. LTL uses this play to denounce the social situation of the province, in an intersection between "[...] documentation and aestheticization, between work with archive material and scenic creation" (Verzero, 2019, p. 8, our translation).
- <sup>8</sup> In the last twenty years, we can observe a particular development of theatre, intersecting with documentary and autobiography especially since the *Ciclo Biodrama*, created by Vivi Tellas in Buenos Aires in 2002.
- <sup>9</sup> For reasons of space we preferred to not conduct a detailed analysis of the play but to focus on the theoretical problem that this investigation raises.

- <sup>10</sup> For a more detailed description of this play, see Verzero (2010) and Longoni and Verzero (2012).
- <sup>11</sup> For more on this issue see the chapter *La irrupción de lo real* [The irruption of the real] (Sánchez, 2008, p. 95-160) and the article *Biodrama: sobre el teatro de la vida y la vida del teatro* [Biodrama: about the theatre of life and the life of theatre], by Oscar Cornago (2005).
- <sup>12</sup> The numerous collaborative works between Lola Arias and Stefan Kaegi, member of the German theatre collective Rimini Protokoll, address this.
- <sup>13</sup> Within the *Ciclo Biodrama*, in *Los 8 de julio* (2002), directed by Beatriz Catani and Mariano Pensotti, the actor Alfredo Martín played himself and, in *Squash, escenas de la vida de un actor* (2004), directed by Edgardo Cozarinsky in the same cycle, Rafael Ferro portrayed his life as a squash player up to the age of 25, when he became a full-time professional theatre actor.

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Denise Cobello has a Master's degree in Theater Studies from the Sorbonne Nouvelle University - Paris 3, France. She performed her degree studies in Acting at the National University of the Arts (UNA), Argentina. As a current CIN and INT Doctoral Fellow, she is currently doing her Doctorate in Arts at UNA in co-direction with Sorbonne Nouvelle.



ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5631-2260>

E-mail: [denise.cobello@gmail.com](mailto:denise.cobello@gmail.com)

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