Oscar Masotta
Segunda Vez

Cahier No. 1

A research Project
led by Dora García
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To tell the truth, I don’t exactly remember when was the first time I heard Masotta’s name. And so I have decided that the name first came to me during a conversation I had with the much-admired Argentinian writer Ricardo Piglia, whom I met, after much anticipation, for a public conversation at the Universidad Torcuato Di Tella, Buenos Aires, in March 2014. Piglia mentioned Masotta in passing, as someone he thought might interest me since, like me, he was interested in performance, psychoanalysis, and politics.

A curious thing happened during that public conversation. As a token of admiration, I read to Piglia a passage from his novel *Artificial Respiration*, and he could not recognize his own writing. When I finished, he said something like: “Not bad what you just read. Did you write it?” The audience, overjoyed, clapped. Here’s the passage I read:

> “Those letters? They are not addressed to me. I am not sure, sometimes, whether I perhaps am not dictatorially dictating to them myself. Nevertheless,” he said, “there they are, on that table, don’t you see them?” That bundle is all to bring a website, translate some of Masotta’s texts … All to bring a website, translate some of Masotta’s texts … All to bring a website, translate some of Masotta’s texts … All to bring a website, translate some of Masotta’s texts … All to bring a website, translate some of Masotta’s texts …

And that is what we did.

In September 2015, we repeated *El helicóptero* as one of the opening events for Tabakalera, a new art center in San Sebastian, Spain. There was a real audience of about eighty to a hundred people, an actress, a helicopter pilot, stewards and stewards to lead the audience, a drum player, a theater, an open landscape. It happened.

Later on, when Cloe Masotta, Oscar Masotta’s daughter, found some original pictures of the happenings in Buenos Aires, it was uncanny to see how closely they resembled the images taken in San Sebastian almost fifty years later.

In June 2016, and with the support, advice and help of the Universidad Torcuato Di Tella, we repeated one of Masotta’s most controversial happenings, *Para inducir el espíritu de la imagen*. It consisted of confronting a contemporary art audience with a group of twenty *lumpen proletarians* who were played by actors and who stood—under a violent white light and the shrill sound of an electronic soundtrack—facing the audience for one hour. It was a real audience of about eighty to a hundred people, an actress, a helicopter pilot, stewards and stewards to lead the audience, a drum player, a theater, an open landscape. It happened—even if the electronic soundtrack was rather pleasant: composed for the occasion by artist Jan Mech, it resembled the images taken in San Sebastian almost fifty years later.

A few months later, when I learnt that Masotta had died in Barcelona, not far from my house, when I read some of his last happenings, I said, yes, Piglia was right, he was the perfect intersection between performance, politics and psychoanalysis; and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treated his last happenings (happening) as an act of transgression, and yes, when I learned that he treat...
immediately smacked of "art," in the sense that repetition "improved" a performance, and for him a happening/performance was, precisely, an action that could not be repeated or perfected. He said: "It is happening only once. Repeating it makes it stale, reminds you of theater and does the same thing as rehearsing: it forces you to think that it was some kind of rehearsal. Sometimes it'd be nearly impossible to repeat anyway—imagining try to get copies of your old love letters, in order to see the rain wash off of them, is how Kapor equates happening with reality. It is not fictional, and as such, cannot be repeated: reality does not repeat itself.

How about scripted actions? How about repetition in relation to a protocol or a score? Could we still speak of original and repetition then? We could say that all performances of a musical score are equal iterations of that piece, and no performance is more "real" or "authentic" than another piece: the piece only exists when it is performed, there is no original that is repeated. A score is written thinking of the end result, therefore, there is no such thing as repeated repetitions that never quite fully coincide with each other.

What about a text as a score? That is what we dealt with when we discussed the situation. Para\" induce el\" the \"situation\". In "A Happening in 6 Parts"

A situation, according to Guy Debord, is something that can be repeated and yet is also unique. "A situation is one in which the unexpected and the probable proceed and answers to events as follows: A definition contained in the first issue of the International Situationniste states that this is a moment in life, concretely and deliberately constructed through the collective organization of a unified milieu and through a play of events." Agamben disconnects the idea of "constructed situation" from the dialectic between art and life that governed avant-garde movements of the twentieth century, thus detaching "constructed situation" from the realm of "art," that is, of "aestheticism." He keeps using the two terms of the diacritic, art and life, construction and life, a diacritic that is also at play in the expression, "constructed situation," which combines two opposites: "construction" and "situation." We and art, fiction and reality, Debord's concept of situation, as described by Agamben, hints paradoxically to the concept of happening by Kapor: something that can be repeated and yet is also unique.

Following Agamben's discussion of Guy Debord, repetition is not the return of the identical, since it is not "the same as such that returns," rather "returns is "the possibility of what was.'' Repetition "restores the possibility of what was, renders it possible anew." Memory, Agamben suggests, is what restores possibility to the past: by making repetition possible, by allowing the perception of something present as past, and, inversely, the perception of the past as present: déjà vu and anachronism.

Similarly paradoxic is Kierkegaard's reflections in "Repetition" (1843), whose title in Danish, Gjentæget, literally means "the taking back." In Kierkegaard, repetition relates to movement. Repetition (taking back, movement) and recollection (amnesia, the recollection of past lives, memory, standstill) are the same movement, but in opposite directions, for what is recollected has been, is repeated backwards, whereas real repetition is recollected forward. Memory moves backward and recollection moves forward, the past of recollection and the now of repetition. Repetition is a paradoxical term: that "which is repeated has been, otherwise it could not be repeated; but precisely this, the fact that it has been, makes repetition something new." This means that the privileged now has always already been (past), and what is always already become (futures). Repetition is a nonconcept of "a strange instantaneous nature, it is this something patched between movement and standstill and that, following logic, does not exist in any given time."*4

Coming down to simpler language: a text as score. When we re-constitute a situation (call it repetition, re-enactment, activating, replaying, or, simply, performing), what kinds of tools do we use? Most probably, a written protocol, like a score or a script, which precedes perhaps the situation and guides it, or a description that is subsequent to the situation it describes. Sometimes, it is hard to tell what is what when it comes to this "historical" fund: famously, the most accurate and complete description of Kierkegaard's H\"appenings in 6 Parts is the work of someone who never saw the performance.

However, we could say that this written information is the spine of the repetition, the part that repeats (perhaps?) stays identical, and upon which we might practice an exegesis, an interpretation, an adaptation. This written information may be what Kierkegaard means by memory (standstill, recollection), which he distinguishes from repetition (action, forward movement).

And the act of interpreting this written information is already a "placing in the present," a "today," since we are interpreting now. This interpretation will inevitably be different from one we might have made five years ago and from that of others fifty years ago. But we are not repeating yet; we are just reading. As Borges used to say: if you tell me how people will read in the future, I will tell you what kind of literature will exist in the future. This is obvious, of course: by the act of reading (interpreting, understanding) we make present, and therefore we definitely modify that piece of memory that is the score, the protocol, or the description.

One could say, pushing it, that the act of interpretation/reading/processing makes the situation to-be-repeated in a non-time, an acrmonic moment, almost a mythical time. Where each act of interpretation/reading/adaptation makes everything present again, where death does not exist ... Except: this reading projected towards a repetition does not happen in a vacuum. Next to the written protocol (memory), and to interpretation (placing in the present time, we and now), we have the actual action of repetition, the action repeated (forward movement, according to Kierkegaard). And the action repeated happens within a historical and social frame, where author, participants, audience or captive audience, belong. This historical and social frame has something to do with class, economics, education, the current political state of things, language, place, and generally speaking, context. How much of this do we let into our repetition? Can we even control that?

And how does all this—past (memory), no-time-eternal present (reading), future (repetition)—affect the "original" piece, how does it modify the source? And is this good for "the source"?

One would guess it is good. As artists, we dream that our books will be read, our theater pieces and choreographies performed, our music played: we want to affect the future. And we want our work to be transformed by the future, that is to say, we want it to remain present. There is no greater compliment than what Fritz Saem said of Joyce's Finnegans Wake: "we are still trying to be Finnegans Wake's contemporaries." Maybe we are still trying to be Masotta's contemporaries.

To read Freud. In his 1914 text "Remembering, Repeating and Working Through," Freud argues that repeating happens instead of remembering. The purpose of the repetition is to make the traumatic event that we refuse to remember happen again and again, so that it exists in a protacted present.

Repeating is a form of making present, of making something happen again.

So repetition is a form of catharsis—this is well-known, of course. And also of atonement. Or of repair. How many thousands of years are behind this idea? A wrong happened and must be set straight. We re-play it on our mind, a moviola with which to repair the wound. Here we have haunted houses, ghosts, punishments, penalities, penances. Poetic justice too: the justice that did not happen in history can last all happen in fiction. Fiction can happen as a place of atonement for reality. Yes, fiction is a sort of heaven for the hell of reality.

This is all true, but the concept of psychoanalysis we are going through refers, rather, to a form of the return of the repressed. Yes, this wonderful concept. The more a memory is repressed, making its recol do impossible, the more aggressively it finds its way out by means of the compulsive repetition of an action. In this case as well, repeating is a form of making present, of making something happen again. The greater the resistance to remember, the more violent the compulsion to act out, so that repetition makes possible.

Nietzsche puts it this way in 1881: "And in every one of these cycles of human life there will be one hour where, for the first time one man, and then many, will perceive the mighty thought of the eternal recurrence of all things: and for mankind this is always the hour of Noon." But since, according to what we said when discussing psychoanalysis, the ritual acting out of the myth (the repetitive acting out of the forgotten memory) implies a reactualization of that primordial traumatic event, then it follows that the actor, the one who acts, is magically projected in toto tamopo: he or she becomes contemporary with the myth/the forgotten memory. It is not a return to the past but, rather, a projection into a moment of a strange instantaneous nature, patched between movement and standstill and that, following logic, does not exist in any given time.9

A suspension of time: that is how Masotta was repea
ted. This repetition—as we shall see in a future publica
tion—comes from a desire to make a memory that has been (a little) forgotten: Southern Conceptualisms in exile on the eve of a political catastrophe (Argentina 1976–1982).
Notes


2 In the framework of the exhibition *Moving Image Contours: Points for a Surrounding Movement*, curated by Soledad Güitelmez and Anna Marubio.

3 With the very notable exception of the excellent research work carried out by Ana Longoni.


8 Arne Melberg suggests that repetition is a "nonconcept," since it exists only in what Constantine Constantius (i.e., Kierkegaard) describes as a state of "nothingness," and that makes the link to the passage from Plato’s *Parmenides* just cited. See Arne Melberg, *Repetition (In the Kierkegaardian Sense of the Term)*, "in *Diacritics* 20/3 (Autumn 1990): 75.

9 I would like to thank Nora Joung for pointing out the relevance of Jorge Luis Borges’ short story, "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote," to this project. And I feel that the following passage is especially pertinent, in several senses, to the repetition of the happening "in order as we witness the image, and so deserves to be cited at length: "It is a revelation to compare the Don Quixote of Pierre Menard with that of Miguel de Cervantes. Cervantes, for example, wrote the following (Part I, Chapter 90): ‘. . . truth, whose mother is history, real of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future’s counsellor.’ This catalog of attributes, written in the seventeenth century, and written by the ‘ingenious layman’ Miguel de Cervantes, is mere eulogistic praise of history. Menard, on the other hand, writes: ‘. . . truth, whose mother is history, real of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future’s counsellor.’ History, the mother of truth!: the idea is staggering. Menard, a contemporary of William James, defines history not as a delving into reality but as the very fount of reality. Historical truth, for Menard, is not ‘what happened’; it is what we believe happened. The final phrases—exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future’s counsellor—are brazenly pragmatic. See Jorge Luis Borges, ‘Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote,’ in *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (London: Viking Press, 1996), p. 94.

10 "Menard has (perhaps unwittingly) enriched the slow and rudimentary art of reading by means of a new technique—the technique of deliberate anachronism and fallacious attribution. That technique, requiring infinite patience and concentration, encourages us to read the Odyssey as though it came after the Aesop, to read Mme. Henri Bachelier’s *Le jardins* as though they were written by Mme. Henri Bachelier. This technique fills the calmest book with adventure. Attributing the Immaculate Chris’ to Louis Ferdinand Calve or to James Joyce is that not sufficient renovation of those faint spiritual admonitions?” Borges, "Pierre Menard," p. 95.

11 The network Southern Conceptualisms is an international platform for collective production, reflection, and setting in common of a political position. It was founded in late 2007 by a group of researchers concerned with the need for a political intervention into those processes that have sought to neutralize the critical potential of a set of conceptual practices that had taken place in Latin America in the 1970s. See more at: https://redcsur.net

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Filmstills, El helicóptero, by Dora García, 2016, 23:10 min.
I recently reread Jorge Luis Borges short story “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote.” The text is styled as an appreciation for a French symbolist poet who set out to become the author of Cervantes’ novel: Menard “did not want to compose another Quixote, which is surely easy enough—’he wanted to compose the Quixote. Nor, surely, need one have to say that his goal was never a mechanical transcription of the original; he had no intentions of copy- ing it. His admirable ambition was to produce a number of pages which coincided—word for word and line for line—with those of Miguel de Cervantes.”

Menard’s “visible” oeuvre is listed in the first part of the text, and consists of an output dominated by paraphra- ses, translations, negotiations, a transposition into Alexan- dines of Valéry’s Cimitière marin, interpretations, and pas- tiches. The Frenchman’s “subterranean” work, on the other hand, was the undertaking of the task of authoring Don Quixote. By the end of his life, Menard had succeeded in writing two chapters of the Quixote as well as parts of a third. Menard’s initial method, which he eventually rejected as “too easy,” had been to learn “Spanish, return to Catholi- cism, fight against the Moor or Turk, forget European history as “too easy,” had been to learn “Spanish, return to Catholi- cism, fight against the Moor or Turk, forget European history as “too easy,” had been to learn "Spanish, return to Catholi- cism, fight against the Moor or Turk, forget European history as “too easy,” had been to learn "Spanish, return to Catholi- cism, fight against the Moor or Turk, forget European history as “too easy,” had been to learn "Spanish, return to Catholi- cism, fight against the Moor or Turk, forget European history as “too easy,” had been to learn "Spanish, return to Catholi- cism, fight against the Moor or Turk, forget European history as “too easy,” had been to learn "Spanish, return to Catholi- cism, fight against the Moor or Turk, forget European history as “too easy,” had been to learn "Spanish, return to Catholi- cism, fight 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Para inducir el espíritu de la imagen, a happening by Oscar Masotta (1966), repeated by Dora García in March 2017, as part of the exhibition Oscar Masotta: Theory as Action, at MUAC-UNAM, México DF. Photos: Periscopio, MUAC-UNAM. © Dora García.
Victoria Durnak

My son turned one in February 2017. I love being a mother, but I know that I am responsible for keeping the memories of these years, as research shows that mostly we don’t remember anything from before our third year. So I keep a diary. I make a memory book, documenting important events in my son’s life. Cold facts such as the headlines on the day he was born, the price of butter, flour, and gas. But also things that are up for interpretation, like his temperament, favorite objects, foods. Other things I just rely on my memory for, even though I am often confronted with my own fictional tendencies.

For a long time, I thought that my mother, my father, my sister, and my sister-in-law had all been to therapy without disclosing the reason to me. I planned to write a book where I figured out, through the conversations, what they didn’t want to share with me, and why. I approached them, one by one, and found out that my mother and sister-in-law were the only ones who had visited a therapist. For a moment I had mistaken Norway for Argentina (or New York?).

While staying at my in-laws’ in the days before my son’s first birthday, I came across Per-Oskar Læsø’s essay about his mother, “Kari Mette Læsø.” While I read, my in-law in-law was listening to old tunes and cover versions of them on YouTube. When you start thinking about remembering and repetition, you see it everywhere. Anyway, in the essay Læsø presents objects that belonged to his mother, who passed away when she was six and a half years old. These objects are now artworks. And here it is the son-and-his-art-that-function as the memory of the mother. He writes: “Being a keen gatherer of memories as well as things, I was disturbed to hear the nuts and bolts of recollection explained on a popular-science radio show. Apparently, when retrieving an event from the vault of the mind, the brain doesn’t recall so much as reimagine, taming the memory with a range of ingredients in the process: fragments of other occurrences, newly uncovered details, current thoughts, figments of the imagination.”

Throughout 2016, I lived in Norway’s seventh-largest city, Skien. I got a stipend to stay in the family home of playwright Henrik Ibsen. In January 2017, I exhibited two new works in a theater that I could remember from my stay. Drawing them felt like spring cleaning. Still, even though I ended up with eighty-eight portraits, there were a lot of people I forgot. I had not fallen off my horse, like Irene Funes in Jorge Luis Borges’ story “Funes the Memorious,” whose fall is suggested as the explanation for why he could suddenly remember absolutely everything. Forgetting a little bit is irritating, forgetting a lot is frustrating, and forgetting everything is … I don’t know. Sad, but somehow neutral. My grandmother has Alzheimer’s disease. She has been through stages of anger and confusion, but now that the disease has wiped her whole memory clean, she just sits, silent and passive, no longer expressing anything when we come to visit.

My grandmother being ill with this mysterious disease might play a role in my anxiety about remembering for my son. Especially since I am–due to the lack of sleep–hope–extremely forgetful these days. I forget where I put things, what I am about to say; I even forget simple words. “The therapist” is an archetypical character in popular culture. It is an impartial someone, often with glasses and a woolen sweater, who can rummage our minds and help us make sense of ourselves. It is a person who can get to know us and carry around our memories–like an external hard drive with analytical powers.

Today we trust our gadgets to remember for us. There are smartphones apps to remind you to buy milk, keep track of passwords, birthdays, and so on. Some apps even play the role of “surrogate therapists.” Life OCD Free, for example, is a tool for people with obsessive-compulsive disorder. Let’s say you cannot leave the house without locking the door multiple times. Now you can exit your front door, open the app, and a countdown timer appears. If you keep yourself from locking the door multiple times, you receive a reward; if you press the “Just gave in” button. Either way, you generate charts for yourself, and for your actual therapist–if you have one–to evaluate.

Having a small child can feel like locking the door multiple times, out of necessity rather than compulsion. Endless repetition is healthy for my son’s brain. He eats at approximately the same intervals. He sleeps at approximately the same intervals. We play with the same things. We build a tower, tear it down, build a tower, tear it down. Are you thirsty? Should we go outside? There are so many things for him to learn. I repeat, and when he understands he laughs out loud.

In “The Aetiology of Hysteria,” Freud discuss screen memories, a recollection from early childhood that may be false and that masks another deeply emotional memory, like childhood sexual trauma. I don’t think that false memories have to come out of repression, but it is intriguing to consider how our imagination adds to our memory, especially in art.

In Oscar Maestú’s El helicóptero, two groups mingle after experiencing two kinds of happenings: one group has been to a small theater, the other group has seen a helicopter fly by with a famous actress sitting next to the pilot. The artwork is partly based on the conversation among the attendants about what they saw, or what they remember. While staying at my in-laws’ in the days before my son’s first birthday, I came across Per-Oskar Læsø’s essay about his mother, “Kari Mette Læsø.” While I read, my in-law in-law was listening to old tunes and cover versions of them on YouTube. When you start thinking about remembering and repetition, you see it everywhere. Anyway, in the essay Læsø presents objects that belonged to his mother, who passed away when she was six and a half years old. These objects are now artworks. And here it is the son-and-his-art-that-function as the memory of the mother. He writes: “Being a keen gatherer of memories as well as things, I was disturbed to hear the nuts and bolts of recollection explained on a popular-science radio show. Apparently, when retrieving an event from the vault of the mind, the brain doesn’t recall so much as reimagine, taming the memory with a range of ingredients in the process: fragments of other occurrences, newly uncovered details, current thoughts, figments of the imagination.”

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Filmstills, La Éterna, by Dora García, 2017, 45 min.
“Maybe tomorrow, when we’ll be impatiently thinking about the day after tomorrow, we’ll know. We go to the Colón Theater, to the Opera, the to Palacio de los Deportes, to the Olímpia Londinense, to Covent Garden, to the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, we see Boca play River, we learn from the seats at the zoo. We’ll have fun, kill time or let it kill us with an orange pip, we shuffle in our seats, we pay to be subjected to unjust aggression, to have a premeditated desire to laugh, cry, jump, eat some Laponian food or chocolate with almonds, yawn, stay frozen in place, or exalted, but, most importantly, we don’t miss the date. Out of curiosity, our friends the Greeks, and the Romans too, and all the generations that have preceded us, would go to see what was happening at such and such a place or in such and such a time, that is to say, a spectacle organized, by one or many people, who confessed publicly so as to be judged under various avatars. But what one is only half-conscious of are the spectacles that are not organized, the ones that exist on their own and are part of daily life, living cells that nourish the organized spectacles and that obligate us to be spectators and actors at one and the same time. Society has invented a lot of disturbing things, but these are in their own way useful and they fulfill their ‘social function: it invented those big boxes called theaters, within which things happen. It gives you pause to think that, sometimes, we leave an organized spectacle and, later, on the street, we come upon a manifestation of orangutans that excites us a lot more than the theatrical function: the spectacle has taken place outside, and not inside, a box. (...) When we hear an actor read lines he has learned by heart for the umpteenth time, we think—and this does not require a prodigious imagination—that there is a false note in there somewhere, and so we end up not listening to the text but to how the actor declaims it, or we attend to how he moves. What is more, the text isn’t his, but a writer’s. The logical thing, then, would be for the writer to play it on the stage, either solo or accompanied by the rest of the cast, which in their turn try to express the ideas of someone else. The world of interpreters/performers is a fading testament to another era.”

These lines were written over forty years ago, and their author now asks me if she put on too much make-up. Her name is Graciela Martínez and I invite her to sit down while the others around us change between vast numbers of plastic chairs.

Where Are We Going, and Why? (Shooting Notes)

Andrea Valdés
The cast is quite mixed. There are about twenty actors of varying ages. Most of them already know each other. What I hear a lot of is yawns. Now and then some footsteps.

—A scene— as happens in the original story, where a number of “They don’t ask anything about your family?”

“Because I spoke too much in class.”

“Why?”

“They've been like that for two years.”

“No. And put your apron on or they'll bitch us out.”

“Why aren’t there fictions with different structures?” I don’t mean stories with a structure that is not linear or that doesn’t have a beginning, middle, and end. I mean stories with different structures than the ones we have been used to. What I ask is, how come there aren’t more fictions about the good. “Most plots are paranoid. Why aren’t there fictions with different structures?” I don’t know what to tell her. Now I think that maybe the blame falls to Roberto Arlt, the subject of an important text by Oscar Masotta, though it was not through Arlt that I found my way to Masotta.

2

Fate had it so that, just at that moment, I was involved in one not one but two Masotta operations: the one led by Dora García as she repeated his actions, documented them, and the other that provided the title for a 1991 book by Carlos Correas, La operación Masotta. That text is the autobiography of a friendship and its era, but it is also the intellectual biography of a figure whose memory helps us to reconstruct that way he found Masotta.}

I had to cover my mouth to suppress a laugh—a laugh that echoes the sound of a coin dropped on the hardwood floor. As we eat, I mention to Rita (Pauls) that it must be odd to be born with the word “raro” in the second day of shooting and the protagonist scrutinizes the room with her gaze while the camera keeps rolling. The questions continue.

“Do you live far?”

“I didn’t finish it yet.”

I hear all this on the headphones, since I’m now tucked away behind a partition, in the first room, the waiting room, where a mere few minutes earlier Nathalie had answered her phone and started speaking in Swedish, an odd occurrence in a story where strange details are not in short supply, like this woman with dirty hands or the poster no one notices. She has been so busy that day and the one that provides the title for a 1991 book by Carlos Correas, La operación Masotta. That text is the autobiography of a friendship and its era, but it is also the intellectual biography of a figure whose memory helps us to reconstruct that way he found Masotta.
A month later I went back to that building. I walked up to the first floor and knocked on the door. A man with bad teeth opened the door. I explained that not long ago I had been here, in that space, as part of a film shoot. The space was less cluttered, and cleaner, than the last time, but the tables were still there, as was the red clothes hanger and the poster that had been splashed with coffee to make it look like it was old and stained with cigarette smoke.

DO NOT ENTER
Staff only

The man told me then that the building belonged to the Administración de Infraestructuras Ferroviarias (ADIF), but that the government had granted its total use to a cooperative. For the last ten years, it has been the headquarters of Mutual Sentimiento, an association founded in 1999 by former political prisoners and exiles, to mitigate not so much the abuses of the state, but the effects of its abandonment. Inside there is a community radio station and a space for workshops; on the paved area outside, where I saw an abandoned train car, there is a storehouse for locally produced vegetables. But the greatest accomplishment is on the third floor: a pharmacy that sells only generic drugs. Now and then the place is rented for film shoots.

After our chat I ask him if I can have a look at the place, but there is no trace of Rocco. Or of Rita and Raúl, who in the film wonder why they had been summoned. All but one leave the way they had come. I keep going. In the back room, the interrogation room, I do feel a presence.

"Don’t be scared," the man with broken teeth tells me when he opens the door. In front of me now I see a dog that barks at me then licks my hand, as if he remembered me.

"I’m sorry, I have to get going, I’m already late for an appointment at seven," I tell the man.

"Federico will be here in a couple of days. If you come back he can explain everything you, and better too. He has all the data."

Notes
1 Graciela Martínez, Primera Plana, 2 April 1968.
Three Works of Explicit Import

Inês Katzenstein

1

Defining a position, towards the world and oneself, has been one of the more permanent, and coarse, obsessions of Argentinean art. As Luis Felipe Nol put it, the issue has hung like “the sword of Damocles over the head of every artist in this part of the world.” Referring to the regional dimension in Latin-American art, Cuban curator Gerardo Mosquera writes: “Latin America has not cured itself of its identity neurosis.” There are multiple alternatives to this self-definition, but the most extreme of them, simply by virtue of the polemics they generate, are the ones that succeed in putting the item on the agenda time and again: either an openness to the world through a relationship of fluid dialogue with the “outside,” or a celebration of specificity in search for our own authentic language.

In our globalized contemporaneity, these positions not only persist, but are pushed to extremes, regardless of how hackneyed they sound. In either case, we need to examine the political dimensions of those positions. The dominant logic today is based on the open circulation of information (a reticular logic of immediacy capable of dissolving the abysses that yesterday kept the borders of national cultures in place and clearly defined), and this means that the play of forces between the two arguments has changed radically. What I would like to suggest is that, perhaps, the most progressive voices today are not necessarily those that defined an internationalist argument and the existence of a global zeitgeist. On this issue, Suely Rolnik writes: “It was clear by then that, in order to respond to industrial capitalism (with its disciplinary society and its identitarian logic), it was necessary to oppose a fluid, flexible, and hybrid logic that had been appropriated from the 1960s and 70s. It has now become a mistake to take the latter as a value in itself came to constitute the dominant logic of neoliberalism and its society of control.” We know that, even if the dynamics of cultural exchanges have intensified and diversified exponentially, the circuits of exchange remain strongly conditioned by power structures that determine the valuation of certain languages and the exclusion of others, and also that these power structures imply, more importantly, differing levels of access to the resources needed to produce and maintain the vital cultural practice of artists, and to develop powerful and sustainable institutional structures. We know as well that, in the last decades, the dominance of a transnational imaginary has acquired certain emphases—nationalist, localist, protectionist—that function as a countermovement against the conception promoted by globalization of a generic, common, consumerist, and de-territorialized culture. Against this background, the integration of art and context, production and dwelling, advanced by these arguments has acquired a new relevance.

Despite the changes brought about over the past twenty years thanks to internet access, the free circulation of capital, the lower price of travel, and the intensification of migrations, the relation Argentinean artists entertain to external referents (which they influence through lectures, images, and ideas), remains, as a general rule, beset by guilt. Except for those periods when one’s training and formation as an artist or intellectual was explicitly based on learning to handle and appropriate from a foreign culture, the importance of external referents has tended to disappear from the discourse of the artist, as if they had become taboo. Nothing is considered lower than the art based on the acentual mimics of foreign models, something the Argentinean artist Kenneth Kemble defined in 1968 as the “dictatorship of the tardy fad” – the artist who imports, trafﬁcs, or repeats continues to be regarded as synonymous with inauthenticity, speculation, and mediocrity.

We have not had our Oswald de Andrade in Argentina. And although we did have Borges—who makes the case for the right of Argentineans to the entire Western tradition in his famous essay, “The Argentinean Writer and the Tradition”–his ideas don’t seem to have had an impact on the guilt I just mentioned, perhaps because, in contrast to Andrade, Borges assumes a position that pretends to dissolve the political drama implicit in the problem of nationality and influence by defining it as nothing more than a mistake. That said, what I would like to do is present three works by Argentinean artists based on the sacriligious practice of working by repeating foreign model. These are three works that, at the outset, present themselves as politically incorrect: Oscar Masotta’s cover of multiple Happenings; Marta Minujín’s explicit cultural import; and a simulated international ﬁliation by Leopoldo Estol and Diego Bianchi. By analyzing the temporalities implicit to each of these cases, we shall be able to distinguish between procedures that are based on the acentual enthrallment for the other, and those that use repetition as a procedure that, paradoxically, enables both self-deﬁnition and critical resistance.

We are at the heart of the happening boom in Buenos Aires, in 1967. Jean François Label had recently visited Buenos Aires and talked about the topic at the Instituto Di Tella. Marta Minujín had already produced a few happenings, like the ambitious Simultaneidad en Simultaneidad (Simultaneity in Simultaneity), which consisted not only of sixty TV monitors projecting back to the public its own image, but also of simultaneous live actions from an Allan Kaprow happening in New York and another from Wolf Vostell in Berlin, both of which had been scheduled to coincide with Minujín’s. Also, a group of artists with links to theory had organized a false happening to provoke repercussions in the press and thus give entity to the work as a new “art of communication media” capable both of showing the obsolescence of the ritualism inherent to the accion happenista, and of signaling a new and uninhibited definition of the artist as a media operator of his or her own image. In the midst of this boom we find Oscar Masotta, a fundamental ﬁgure of the 1960s in Argentina: a brilliant theoretician, a pioneer of the concept of the “diasemioticization” of art in the 60s, and, later, a key ﬁgure in the introduction of Lacanism to the
What was Oscar Masotta doing at the Instituto Di Tella?
After writing a book about Roberto Arlt and publishing an essay about Pop Art, Masotta, who had a marginal relation to the university institution, befriended some of the younger, and more intellectually-inclined, artists then working at the Instituto Di Tella. He became their interlocutor as well as an influential and heterodox art critic.

To put it in the briefest of terms: Masotta theorized about, and against, happenings (he distrusted the role of the auratic and the ritual presence of bodies in them), and he proposed instead a more contemporary way of working, one that consists of using communication media itself as the object, and material, of the work. But to artistically improve the happening (improve is Masotta's word), it had to be installed, deployed, in the local scene through the concrete existence of the happening as a material of study.

"The more information we gathered," Masotta writes, "the stronger grew the impression that the possibilities—and ideas—had been exhausted. The idea not to do an original Happening, then, and instead collect various Happenings that had already happened into one Happening suddenly seemed more important to us." Masotta wanted to put himself “beyond” or “after” the happening as a historically closed genre. “We would be didactic,” he says. The didactic part consisted of the production of a cycle that would include two conferences, a happening by Masotta himself, another by the architect Mario Gandelsonas, and the montage of a series of successive Happenings entitled About Happenings. This is the work I want to present here as the first case of “import” (importación).

Since what interested Masotta were the circuits of communication (more on a semiotic than a geopolitical key), he decided to work using the information about the genre that he had at hand: the script for Carolee Schneemann’s Meat Joy, which had been published in the magazine Some/Thing, in New York; the description of a happening by Claes Oldenburg, whose title Masotta did not know, but which he had read about in Art News; an account, published in Michael Kirby’s Happenings, of Oldenburg’s Autobodies; and, lastly, a description of a happening by Kirby, title also unknown, but which Masotta had seen during a trip to New York. As is well known, this sort of relation to works—mediated by photos and accounts published in languages one has no command of (Masotta didn’t speak or read English)—is one of the most decisive sources influencing and shaping Argentinean, and indeed Latin American, art. That is why Ricardo Piglia talks about Argentinean culture as a “second-hand” culture. But if, in general, the relation to these sources is experienced as an embarrassing scene, and consequently hidden, in this case the literal repetition of works known only through spurious sources constitutes itself publicly, and for the first time, as a type of art—an art of media—that manifests the historical overcoming of the arts based on the immediacy of contacts. While “the Happening is an art of the immediate,” the art of “mass media” is an “art of mediations, given that mass communication implies spatial distance between those who receive and the things themselves, the objects, situations, or events to which the information refers.”

With a group of artists, Masotta decided to combine all the happenings he had read about and assemble them into a single Happening—a sort of anticipation of postmodern pastiche or, as Masotta himself defines it, as a “colony of Happenings and a history of the Happening.” The success of Happenings took place at the Instituto Di Tella to an audience of two hundred people while a voice over the loudspeaker could be heard saying “that it didn’t believe much in Happenings, that the genre was dead or out of date.” Masotta explains that they were excited “by the idea of an artistic activity put onto the ‘media’ and not onto things, information about events and not the events themselves.” The repetition, based on the information, is the work.

2

Marta Minujín’s Importación-Exportación. Lo más en onda (Import-Export: What’s Really Hip) is the height of treachery in what concerns the traffic of information from the center to the periphery: the aim of the project is a cultural actualization and the establishment of a fade (in the case, hippism) hailing from the US. The export phase of the work never took place. The text that presents the work says: “Information obliges us to adopt actions, ideas, and fads in total disregard to their nationality. The economic factor (country of origin) does not confer nationally onto the product. Importing is an interpretation of the materiality of information.”

With funds she received from the Instituto Di Tella, Marta Minujín brought back from the US all the hippy paraphernalia she could find. In the first room, the public came across a pair of glasses that distorted reality into surprising specters; on the floor were painted fluorescent flowers and arabesques that shone under a black light. There was smoke, colored lights, strange smells, psychedelic music, and Hare Krishna chants. In a second room there were strobe lights, as well as projections of homemade slides and of short films by Gerard Malanga, Ira Schneider, and Yud Yakuft. Lastly, Minujín set up a stand, operated by underage kids who had been recruited via an ad in the paper, that sold hippie products.

In a classic trade-operation between North and South, mobilized by the artist as the agent who imports and updates, Minujín wanted to bring to Buenos Aires all the elements that constituted the psychedelic experience she had discovered in the US. It isn’t as if there were no hippies in Buenos Aires before 1967, but it’s certainly true that there weren’t many. The setting was supposed to influence young people, to promote, simultaneously, an altered vision and peaceful, laid back ambiance in order to mobilize the porous who had to get with “what’s hip.”

As I see it, the most radical aspect of this work is the substitution of the artistic object for the presence, in the artistic space, of a social group. And even if the rhetoric of the piece was more semiotic than relational, what the work proposed was a sociological art that presented youth culture as a new, vital paradigm and as a consumer niche. We should recall that this work took place in a context in which there was an enormous interest in the social transformations that were taking place as a result of the emergence of a mass society: new ways of dressing, new ways of behaving, new habits. The intention, in this sense, was to make the relation between the public and the imported information (in this instance, the young and hippism) the work. As Roberto Jacoby, a colleague of Minujín’s in Argentina, wrote that same year: “art and life have become so confused as to become inseparable. All of the phenomena of social life have been converted into aesthetic material;
Lastly, I want to discuss La Escuelita Thomas Hirschhorn (The Thomas Hirschhorn School House), a work co-authored by Diego Bianchi and Leopoldo Estol that took place at the Belleza y Felicidad Gallery in Buenos Aires in 2005. A first and essential piece of information necessary to analyze this piece is to mention that it was conceived as a formal, a division that exacted a heavy price from Argentinian art, which is those years was transitioning from an eminently aesthetic paradigm that governed art in the 1990s to the militant art of new artistic collectives that were working in relation to the crisis.

In this sense, La Escuelita is, like About Happenings, a pedagogical work (a work-school) that uses the model to underscore a preexisting local situation and to redirect attention from the outside to the inside.

### 4

The differences among these works are essentially manifest in the different modes of temporality implicit to each: Minujín aspires to a classical movement of actualization; in Masotta, the aim is to provoke a gesture of anticipation with regards to the model, achieved through a copy that establishes a new genre that “improves” the model; Bianchi-Estol, for their part, create a situation of synchronicity with the model.

But we see that, in these three cases, the explicit, scandalous mimics of a foreign referent is a strategy to create a polenic with the local scene through a questioning of two ideas: the notion of a heroic origin and a passive repudiation, and the idea of o neilrio invention. Hirschhorn defines as “the paradoxical anti-colonial resistance that Latin-American culture expresses through its inclination to copy.” And they lay bare, publicly, the scene that tends to remain hidden: repetition as the radical demonstration of the connection between scenes. They are Argentinean examples of an anthropophagic approximation, of an “opening to the Other, the elsewhere, and the beyond.”

Notes

4. For both, see “Thomas Hirschhorn: Philosophical Battery.”
5. For both, see “Comité en arte latinoamericano.”
I Committed a Happening (1967)

When, in the December 16th edition of the newspaper La Razón, I read Professor Klimovsky’s condemnation of intellectuals who “concocted” Happenings, I felt directly and personally implicated. If I am not mistaken, the number of persons in Buenos Aires who fulfill such conditions can be found only on the fingers of one hand. And since Klimovsky very reasonably “abandoned” from Happenings and “investing” the powers of the imagination in lessening this feeling, I committed a Happening, to quell this feeling.

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And, on the contrary, sensible matter can only convey an aesthetic image on the condition of not encompassing the condition of its existence, i.e., the human body between the Happening and the concern with hunger (excuse me for this combination of words). Given that the Happening is nothing other than a manifestation of the artistic genre, the surest and easiest way of answering, using words in their proper meaning, is to say that by extension this choice would also include painters, musicians, and poets. Must one then look in Klimovsky’s words for indications of his totalitarian vocation? I do not think so. Professor Klimovsky is simply a liberal spirit, of whom, I am sure, one could say the same as Sartre once said of Bertrand Russell: “Expelled some years ago: that in truth, for him, intellectuals and science are all that exist. But what must have certainly occurred is much simpler: Professor Klimovsky was caught in a roadblock by the phenomenon of the increasing use of the word “Happening” that Madela Ezcurra has discussed. This mistake—whether intentional or not—in itself is revealing.

The growing connotation of the word “Happening” in the mass media originates in certain presuppositions conveyed by those messages, that when not analyzed, tend to determine their contents. In truth, the words Hap penings are nothing other than “ideas of communication,” as Jacoby writes; that is, ideas concerning society as a whole, as there are ideas concerning the “other” in society to which every sphere of activity should belong. Now, it is certain that no journalist, whatever his level of information, can ignore the fact that the word is associated with artistic taste: thus a certain apparently positive ambivalence in the degree to which the word means serious or not is to be found. This is the case because it is real: the word is a capital “A” carries a lot of weight for these journalists. What comes to pass—and the whole matter is not much more complicated than this—is that that through its conservative groups, society has established, at the moment when Klimovsky wrote this prologue, any preponderance in the teaching of the “Marxist tendency” in Argentine lecture halls.

I said that the two choices are of the same kind: in both, one of the opposing terms does not belong to the same level of facts as the other. Analytical philosophy (the philosophy of science + modern logic + the analytic study of the problem of meaning) does not include any assertion of machines (the material is considered only as labor, i.e., as a social condition). Neither Marxism inclusivist proposals concerning the origin, value, and scope of ideas, for example, it includes analytic philosophy, while the reverse is impossible. Marxism can certainly integrate the results of the analytic study of propositions and strengthen it through its logical and philosophical support. It is methodology with the contributions of analytic philosophy, and whether the results of the analytic study of propositions are of a historical method of inquiry, is the case. And since Klimovsky very reasonably “abandoned” from Happenings and “investing” the powers of the imagination in lessening this feeling, I committed a Happening, in order to quell this feeling.
one had to go by public standways that led to shore-apartments like the final one, but totally empty. Only in certain corners, set discreetly on certain walls, one could distin-
guish to the ear, the whispers of Larry Poons. After climbing the last staircase, one was assaulted and enveloped in a continuous, deafening noise, compo-
ned of a million blats and barks, to which were added indecipherable but equally constant noises. Some-
ting, I don’t know what, something Oriental, was burning somewhere, and a sort of coals washed and filled the atmosphere of the space. The lights were turned out; only the front wall was illuminated by a blue or reddish light, and I don’t remember if the lights changed perhaps they did, according to the effects of LSD. Beneath the light, and almost against the wall, facing the room and facing the audience, which was seated and arranged throughout the length of the floor, there was one of them, a woman, in yoga position, dressed in what was certainly Oriental clothing, and each of them holding a microphone. One of them played a violin, while, seen from my position, not much more than five yards distant, the other four remained as though paralyzed, with the only movements of their open mouths. The very high-
pitched and totally homogeneous sound had at first kept me from seeing the cause of these open mouths, which was that the four, stopping only to breathe, were adding a continuous guttural sound to the sum of the electronic sounds. The violinist slowly moved the bow up and down, to draw a single sound from the strings, also continuous. Before them, between these five and the public, could be seen the naked spectacle of a tape recorder playing a tape loop and the cables of an amplifier device. There was in this sum of deafening sounds, in this exasperating ele-
tronism, and to me, no sounds, no words, no movements could be distinguished as a continuous sound, the light illuminating the motley-colored down trodden-looking group on the platform. And I would also say that the entire situation had been carefully designed by myself, and that in this sense there was an intellectual control over each one of its parts. That the people of the audience could proceed according to the laws of the game, the situation was thus defined, almost like an "analogue" of the perceptual changes produced by hallucinogens. But the interesting thing, in my opinion, was to see hanging from the walls will work or not. And, on the other, for the aesthetic side of the question, because the dis.

When I returned to Buenos Aires in April of ’66, I had already resolved to do a Happening myself. I had one in mind. And its title, Para inducir el espíritu de la imagen (To induce the Spirit of the Image). Another reason was that I had written a dissertation on what I had learned from La Monte Young. On disordered shaps of paper, and on the edges of my habitable ("intel-
lectual") work, I noted both the general action and its reactions and their details. From La Monte Young I retained, unaltered, the idea of "putting on" a continuous sound, the product of a sum of electronic sounds, a sound high volume, for two hours (three hours less than the). As the arrangement of the performers and the audience, the performers were seated as a continuous sound, at the first row, the audience facing the performers, in the shadows, occupying all the rest of the space. Thus the audience would be obliged to see and indeed to look at the performers bathed in light, for the duration of the listening experience. I, however, would not have five performers, but thirty or forty; and they would be sitting in a yoga position, but seated motioness in a motley array, on a platform. I then thought that I would recruit them among the downtrodden proletarian: shoe shine, beggars, cripples, beggars with a strange look, a misshapen body, a hope that was a mistake, which reveals, in a way, certain idealist connotations. It was only recently, in November, at the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella (ITT), that I would indeed execute carry out my Happening. The imminence of the date pushed me to act. In my mind, I thought I knew that other had of me and about the idea I had about this idea. Something would change: from a critic or an essayist to an actual happening. And almost everything had been foreseen, and even designed or controlled, I myself would discharge a fire extinguisher immediately. And I would do it for two additional motives. On one hand, to induce the Spirit of the Image, was an experience. It was a kind of a confrontation of a piece of a downtrodden condition, it would use actors. But you will see, this was not too great a compromise, nor a mere desire to impose my idea on the public. I can see hanging from the walls will work or not. And, on the other, for the aesthetic side of the question, because the disquieting presence of the museum was enough. And it was important for me to exploit this beauty. Once the fire extinguisher had been discharged, the electronic sound would begin, the lights illuminating the motley-colored down trodden-looking group on the platform. And I thought that I would recruit them among the downtrodden proletarian: shoe shine, beggars, cripples, beggars with a strange look, a misshapen body, a hope. And even the idea of La Monte Young, who brought this concreteness to the very physical and physiological limits of the body.) In April, I pthread from New York to the museum for the most part, to plan a happening of Oscar Palacio, Leopoldo Maier, David Lamiello, Roberto Jacoby, Eduardo Costi, among others. But I was as though I was interested in a series of successful set of Happenings, in a relatively limited space of time. They accepted; we then agreed that various art gal-

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about different kinds of fire extinguishers to cover the pos-
sibility of various dangers. I would use one that produces
a dense white smoke. When I tried it out, before the Hap-
pening, I also realized that it produced a quite deafening
noise. I would use it as a bridge between my words and
the electronic sound. At five in the afternoon on October
26, the first of the twenty hired persons began to arrive. By
six all twenty had arrived. Men and women aged between
forty-five to sixty years old (there was only one younger
person, a man of thirty to thirty-five). These people came
to “work” for four hundred pesos; it was temporary work, and
even supposed—though it was impossible—that they obtai-
ned something similar every day, they would not succeed in
pulling in more than twelve thousand pesos a month.
I had already understood that the normal job of almost all
of them was to be hawkers of cheap jewelry, leather goods,
and “variety articles” in those shops that are always on the
verge of closing and that you find along Corrientes Street,
or in some areas of Rivadavia or Cabildo. I imagined that
with this work they must earn even less than I was going to
teach them. I was not wrong.

I gathered them together and explained what they were
to do. I told them that instead of four hundred I would
pay them six hundred pesos; from that point on they gave
me their full attention. I felt a bit cynical; but neither did
I wish to have too many illusions. I wasn’t going to demo-
nize myself for this social act of manipulation that happens
every day in real society. I then explained to them that
what we were going to do was not exactly theater. That they had
nothing to do other than to remain still for an hour, motion-
less, shoulders against the wall of the room; and that the “play”
would not be carried out in the normal theater, but in a
large storage room that I had expressly prepared. I also
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“Segunda Vez” is a film and research project centered around the figure of Oscar Masotta (Buenos Aires, 1930, Barcelona, 1979), an author, psychoanalyst, and happenista. “Segunda Vez” uses the figure and work of Masotta to explore the intersections between performance, psychoanalysis, and politics, paying special attention to narrative strategies such as repetition and metafiction.

“One Year ago, Allan Kaprow referred to us as a country of ‘happenistas,’ even though, up to that date, expressions manifestations of the genre had barely existed in Argentina.” – Oscar Masotta