

Stops and Starts

Krapp's Last Tape *and Post-Dictatorship Argentina*

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Abstract

This article examines Samuel Beckett's play *Krapp's Last Tape* in the context of Argentinian post-dictatorship theatre. I offer a brief history of Beckett's influence on theatre in Argentina together with a summary of the performance history of his plays, and I reflect on the ways in which they have been interpreted in Argentina's recent history. This contextualization enables me to focus on the figure of Krapp and discuss the stops and starts that Krapp performs while playing and recording his tapes. By examining Krapp's archive, the article engages in a discussion about individual and collective memory: I draw attention to the play's resonances in relation to the political processes unfolding in Argentina today, where archives are of vital importance in recovering from the social trauma of the last dictatorship.

Résumé

Cet article traite de la pièce de Samuel Beckett *La dernière bande* dans le contexte du théâtre argentin après la fin de la dictature. Je propose d'abord une brève histoire de l'influence de Beckett sur le théâtre en Argentine, ainsi qu'un résumé des représentations des pièces de Beckett en Argentine et une réflexion sur la façon dont elles ont été interprétées dans l'histoire récente du pays. Cette contextualisation ouvre la voie à une focalisation plus approfondie sur Krapp, en commençant par les arrêts et départs que Krapp effectue en écoutant et en enregistrant ses bandes magnétiques. Puis je m'engage dans une discussion sur la mémoire individuelle et collective, en reliant ces éléments aux archives de Krapp. L'article explore ensuite le lien entre cette pièce et les processus politiques en cours dans l'Argentine d'aujourd'hui, où les archives sont d'une importance vitale pour comprendre le traumatisme social causé par la dernière dictature.

Keywords

Krapp's Last Tape – Argentina – post-dictatorship – memory – archives – theatre

In 1956, when the young Jorge Petraglia and four students from the Buenos Aires School of Architecture staged *Waiting for Godot*, Argentina became the first Latin American country to experience the dramatic world of Samuel Beckett.

The arrival of Beckett's theatre in Buenos Aires (and in Mendoza province soon after) had a profound impact. At the time, the local progressive scene was dominated by the idea of theatre as a catalyst for social reform, a didactic means of changing society. The introduction of Beckett broke the accepted discourse around realism, enabling texts and trends in performance from 1950s Europe and the United States to become better known and accepted. *Waiting for Godot* was at first received with some hostility, mainly from critics, but it soon gained public acceptance. Beckett had an important influence on Argentinian playwrights committed to exposing the country's social and political realities, especially Eduardo Pavlovsky and Griselda Gambaro, who developed a "situated absurd" in which absurdist principles like language disintegration were used alongside references to everyday local realities, and opaque metaphors and polysemy were placed in an Argentinian context (Dubatti 1990).

By the late 1960s, Buenos Aires's Instituto Di Tella, host to some early performances of Beckett's plays, had become the nerve centre of avant-garde experimentation. Some of these experiments were accused of being frivolous, unpolitical and *extranjerizantes* (disseminating foreign influence). Avant-gardism was criticized both from the right and the left. In Mendoza, theatre director Clara Giol Bressan—trained by the creator of the very popular *Sainete Criollo*,¹ Armando Discepolo—made Beckett known to less elite audiences. The link with *Sainete Criollo* was probably one of the reasons that led Beckett's plays to be adopted in Argentina. This convergence of theatrical poetics occurred in a context of social instability; between 1966 and 1973, under a civil-military dictatorship, the social fabric was damaged by political violence, intense political disputes over the return of Juan Perón from exile, and the emergence of the right-wing paramilitary group Triple A, the Argentinian Anti-communist Alliance.

1 One-act plays, popular in Argentina in the 30s, that reflected life in the *conventillos* (immigrant housing) with a mix of humour, popular language and tragic elements.

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Eduardo “Tato” Pavlovsky, a doctor, psychoanalyst, actor and playwright, became a prominent theatre figure and political activist in the 1970s. He never directed or performed in a Beckett play—he only dealt with his own works—but he was deeply influenced by the Irish writer: “*Waiting for Godot* opened an existential landscape for me [...]. I found on stage a language that was mine. Godot didn’t speak about anguish like books, it gave me a new notion of anguish as identity. [...] I started diving in Beckett” (qtd. in Dubatti 2008, 51).^s In 1973 Pavlovsky premiered his play *El Señor Galíndez*, which denounced torture by paramilitary groups—one of the first plays in South America to address the subject. In 1977 Alberto Ure staged Pavlovsky’s play about violence and fascism in the family, *Telararañas* (*Spiderwebs*). After one or two shows, the play was banned and a bomb was hidden in the theatre. Soon after, Pavlovsky escaped a kidnapping attempt and sought exile abroad.^t

The influence of Beckett on Argentinian theatre is vast, and extends beyond the seminal works of the 1960s and 1970s. Beckett’s plays are staged frequently in the capital city and the provinces, and so are productions influenced by his poetry or referring to Beckettian subjects—like the 1984 show *Movitud Beckett* by Salas and Holcer, where the artists “tried to discover the movements, intensities and rhythms that populate Beckett’s works” (Hopkins, 33). The University of Buenos Aires publishes the academic journal *Beckettiana*. One of Buenos Aires’s theatres is named after Beckett, and between 2006 and 2015 the city hosted an annual Beckett Festival. At least 130 different productions of Beckett’s plays have been staged since 1956. Some of the most outstanding since the first production of *Waiting for Godot* in 1956 include a 1968 production of *Happy Days* directed by Petraglia with Luisa Vehil (translated as *Los días hermosos*, *Beautiful Days*, based on the French version); a 1991 production of *Endgame* (*Final de partida*) by Alfredo Alcón, one of Argentina’s most prominent actors; *Variaciones sobre Beckett* by Periférico de Objetos in 1991 (this highly-esteemed group applied Beckett’s aesthetics to puppets); a 1994 production of *Happy Days* (*Los días felices*) directed by Alfredo Alcón; a 1996 production of *Waiting for Godot* (*Esperando a Godot*) directed by Leonor Manso; a 2004 production of *Happy Days* (*Los días felices*) with Marilú Marini; a 2008 production of *Endgame* (*Final de partida*) with Lorenzo Quinteros and Pompeyo Audivert

2 All translations from texts originally in Spanish are mine.

3 About that time, his play *El Señor Galíndez* was shown at the Théâtre d’Orsay in Paris together with Beckett’s *Happy Days*. Pavlovsky left a note for Beckett expressing how important Beckett’s influence was on his work. Back in Argentina, Pavlovsky received a letter in which Beckett said he was surprised to have influenced anyone at all. The note ended as follows: “You learn something new everyday. At your disposal, Beckett” (Pavlovsky 2006, 74).

directing themselves; a 2013 production of *Endgame (Final de partida)* with Alfredo Alcón (his farewell to theatre); and several stagings by Miguel Guerberof, creator of the Beckett Theatre and Festival.

Beckett's plays in Argentina have frequently been understood through the lens of the country's changing politics. In 1971 and 1972, in the context of the proscription of Perón and his exile in Spain, *Waiting for Godot*, seen by large audiences, became "Waiting for Perón" (see Dubatti 1998). During Carlos Menem's two terms as President, a decade marked by increasing economic crisis, unemployment, poverty and the *farandulización* of politics, at least two performances of *Waiting for Godot* took on political meaning and a local dimension: Walter Neira's 1993 production in Mendoza was compared to Susan Sontag's in Sarajevo, and was seen as bringing forth the feeling of anguish of millions of marginalized people who, disillusioned by unfulfilled promises, were waiting for someone to save them (González de Díaz Araujo). In 1997, Estragon and Vladimir in Leonor Manso's production evoked the unemployed masses, and Godot was seen as a representative of the higher social class who had benefited from Menem's policies, all of which tinged the play with a sense of popular political dissatisfaction and an awareness of claims for social justice (Dubatti 2008). Alicia Berdaxagar, a female Lucky, commented on the emotional intensity of being directed to remain at the other characters' feet. In this production, Manso relied on *voseo* (Argentinian second person singular) and a vocabulary close to the orality of Buenos Aires; this was a first in the performance history of Beckett's plays in Argentina, and it added to audiences' sense of identification with it. Other plays, like the 1996 production of *Endgame*, were linked to the unspeakable, referencing the Holocaust and the terrorist bombing of the Jewish Community Center in Buenos Aires in 1994 (see Navarro-Verdejo).

A few years after the 2001 economic debacle in Argentina, commenting on the production of *Los días felices* with Marilú Marini, Laura Cerrato observed:

Many theatregoers who were seeing Beckett for the first time suddenly became aware of the menacing subtext beneath Winnie's seemingly pointless and superficial babble. In the context of the self-questioning [...] that has recently marked the middle class in Argentina, this voice of a conventional woman who, while submerged in her closed universe, is beginning to get an inkling of a different reality, hit home.

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4 Converting politics into show business. Menem became famous for appearing on tv with top models, promoting a "pizza with champagne" culture, while his government brought about poverty and despair, leading up to the 2001 collapse.

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In 2006, Lucas Rimoldi emphasized how the founder of the Beckett Festival, Guerberof, had avoided elements that suggested political interpretations, which implies that political nuances in Argentinian productions of Beckett's plays were otherwise quite common.

Krapp's Last Tape was first staged in Buenos Aires in 1960, with Petraglia returning as director and actor, and performing it again in 1968 and 1971. In all of Petraglia's versions the play was entitled *Krapp o La Ultima cinta magnética*. Subsequent productions by other directors and actors, to the extent that tracing them is possible, include: *La Ultima cinta*, 1966 (Tucumán); *Krapp o La Ultima cinta magnética*, 1969 (La Plata city); performances of *La dernière bande*, 1974 (at the Alliance Française, Buenos Aires); *Krapp o La Última cinta magnética*, 1976 (Petraglia in Salta); *La Ultima cinta magnética*, 1988 and 2000 (Buenos Aires, by renowned director Ricardo Bartís); *La Ultima cinta de Krapp*, 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008 (Buenos Aires and San Luis, by Gustavo Durán); *Krapp, La Ultima cinta magnética*, 2009 (Juan Carlos Gené directing Walter Santa in one of Buenos Aires's major theatres, Teatro General San Martín); *La Ultima cinta de Krapp*, 2016 (three different productions bearing the same title, in Buenos Aires); *La Ultima cinta de Krapp*, 2019 (in three Northern provinces); *La Ultima cinta de Krapp*, 2022 (Buenos Aires).

Here, I suggest that, in an Argentinian context, many elements in Beckett's theatre come across as metaphors for prevalent social concerns, especially in the wake of the highly oppressive dictatorship during the years 1976–1983 that was part of Operation Condor, the United States-backed campaign of political repression and state terror in South America.⁵ With the advent of democracy, court trials were held for those responsible for the repression at different state levels, and increasing amounts of information about clandestine camps, disappearances, torture, assassination of opponents and appropriation of their children became public knowledge. Legal and social reparatory processes have been through several stages over the last forty-five years, with progressive governments enforcing policies that support justice and truth reconstruction, and reactionary governments deploying political actions to stop those processes. Trials continue in different parts of the country today.

Critic and theatre historian Jorge Dubatti has coined the term “post-dictatorship theatre”, to refer not only to drama produced in the years following the restoration of Argentinian democracy in 1983 but also to theatre impacted by right-wing control and terror. This choice of historical-cultural periodization

5 The names for the events that unfolded in those years are still subject to dispute: genocide, dirty war, crimes against humanity, all of them carry different interpretations of history and consequences in the present (see Feierstein 2012).



figure 1 Pablo Seijo in *La Última cinta magnética*, Buenos Aires, Argentina
courtesy of Andrés Barragán, ©andrés barragán,

demonstrates that the country is continuing to come to terms with the consequences of the last dictatorship (Dubatti 2015). It also suggests “the feeling that nothing can be the same after the aberrant military dictatorship of 1976–1983, added to the actions of the Triple A between 1973 and 1976” (Dubatti 2015, 2). It acknowledges Argentina as a country that saw the disappearances of 30,000 people, concentration camps, torture, assassination, exile, censorship (and self-censorship), terror, normative right-wing subjectivity and civil complicity with the repressive state apparatus. Today, a vast number of plays and performances work to represent this historic horror through the reconstruction of past memories and the denunciation of crimes committed, and by making audiences alert to what still remains from the dictatorship. At some point, Argentina will recover from the dictatorship, but not in the immediate future. Mourning processes are impossible in the face of disappearance, owing to the lack of bodies to mourn over (Dubatti 2015).

Post-dictatorship theatre has seen an increase and diversification of performances linked to Beckett (Dubatti 2008). *Krapp’s Last Tape* has become a powerful reflection on memory in the context of a traumatic collective past and debates about that past, as the dozen or more productions of the play that have been made during this period reveal. Even before the last dictatorship, collective identity for Argentina as a nation was always complex. Argentina’s pop-

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ulation comprizes people descended from various indigenous native groups (most of whom were killed or conquered during successive historical periods), followed by the first Spanish settlers and, successively, African people initially brought in as slaves, several waves of immigration from Western and Eastern Europe, immigrants from other Latin American countries and, in fewer numbers, immigrants from Lebanon and Syria. Although conflicts over religion or ethnicity are not common nowadays, some groups that inhabited the land prior to colonization continue to ask for their culture to be recognized and make legitimate claims to their ancestral territory that often turn into violent disputes due to heavy-handed state intervention.

The clandestine methods used by the repressive state, including disappearances, state terror and the violation of identity during the dictatorship of 1976–1983 left wounds from which it is difficult to recover. History is still being revealed, and reparations are always needed, but the judicial system is slow and subject to legal reversals; for instance, some perpetrators have been jailed and later granted the benefit of home arrest, causing anxiety for local communities. Then, as new testimonies emerge, some of them return to prison, and the cycle continues. The Argentinian sociologist Daniel Feierstein has reflected on these issues in light of global histories of genocide and authoritarianism, and his perspective on memory, which acknowledges absence as a mode of *presence*, offers a useful frame for thinking about the historical and political dimensions that Beckett's drama has gained in Argentina. As part of a wider analysis of genocide, authoritarianism and social relations, Feierstein seeks to account for those processes of memory and representation which can become extensions of terror, but can also contribute to processing or working through trauma. Two of his concepts are key here: memory as a creative non-reproductive act, and the contiguous or metonymic relationship between individual and collective memory. Engaging with current neuroscientific theories as well as Freud's notions of representation and repression, Feierstein posits a notion of memory as "a reconstruction of disparate sensations, sensory stimuli, motor routines, learnt reactions" that "[allows] for an eminently creative act"; he presents the process of remembering as a radically innovative activity that provides an imaginative and creative way to construct a sense of the past within the present: memory is, he argues, "a set of fragmentary and disordered experiences, to which meaning is provided through a story. [...] Every remembered scene is actually an imagined 're-construction'" (127). Memory hence adapts to circumstance, and allows the emergence of renewable versions of the past, to construct the future. Memory creates meaning within the chaos of perceptions; it creates a *presente recordado* (remembered present) through the construction of *escenas* (scenes). A 'scene' in this context is a reconstruction which associates clusters

of perceptions and stimuli, and attaches a meaning to them. Therefore, meaning is neither contained in reality nor in the perception itself, but it is *imagined* in order to articulate all those perceptions and connect them to the present through action (53). When we remember a scene we also construct it, and when we revisit our recollection, we go back to the last act of remembering, not to its original elements (56). At the same time, to build one's memory is also to build one's identity, as that of a conscious individual who relates to disparate elements from the past through a remembered present and through self-narration (59).

If Feierstein, following current trends, understands memory as closer to imagination than to storage (as previously defined, for instance, by classical cognitive psychology), he conceptualizes collective memory in much the same way. Quoting Maurice Halbwachs's notion of collective memory, he asserts that we always remember with others: hence, the opposition between individual and collective memory becomes meaningless because every memory is, ultimately, a historic-social memory and, therefore, in some ways collective (96). His discussions of the continuity between collective and individual memory in light of Argentina's history foreground two processes: *pactos denegativos* and *ideologías del sinsentido*. *Pactos denegativos* (pacts of negation), a concept originally proposed by René Kaës, accounts for "an unconscious social agreement to exclude every reference to the traumatic event" (79). *Ideología del sinsentido* (ideology of nonsense) involves abandoning any attempt to give identity a structure, in a conscious and ideologically justified way that can involve cynicism, nihilism, satire or mockery (81).

In order to reflect on why *Krapp's Last Tape*, with its specific focus on memory, became so powerful and poignant in Argentina, I propose firstly to look more closely at the play itself, emphasising the importance of taped archives and tape recorders, and then at the meanings that certain productions take on once examined in light of Feierstein's ideas. With his recollections stored on tape, Krapp's is a reproductive memory, played repeatedly through the recording machine. The play's model departs from the idea that memories are created through successive recollections: Krapp revisits a fixed description of lived events, which remains unaltered by his return to it. The only 'editing' Krapp can do is by fast-forwarding and rewinding the tapes in 'creative' ways that respond to his present (this is not 'real' editing since the original taped version remains the same). For Feierstein, the layered process of remembering—whereby we create a new scene and then recreate it again by returning to it—enables the construction of one's sense of self. But Krapp goes back to the same material 'rock', the recorded voice that, as it tells a story, generates gaps and a feeling of estrangement. As James Knowlson observes,

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[B]y adopting the mechanical device of the tape-recorder and giving to Krapp the power of instant recall of his own past, Beckett has created a stark confrontation between man's various selves in which decline, loss, failure, disillusionment and discontinuity are shown concretely. More- over, in this way, the spectator has become the active agent, listening, observing, and able himself to assess the width of the chasm that separates Krapp from his former self and judge the strength of his obsession with a portion of his own past that he had earlier rejected as being unworthy of him.

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Krapp's lack of self-recognition is not surprising if we consider Feierstein's notion of memory as identity builder, since Krapp's memories are fixed and anchored to external decades-old descriptions. As Paul Lawley remarks, "Krapp cannot shape his experience definitively because he has no unmediated access to the past [...] The tape recorder is a necessity for him, but it serves ultimately to confirm precisely the split in identity which it was meant to close" (94). And Lior Zylberman, reviewing metaphors of memory present in the play, asserts that in going through his archive, Krapp does not recognize himself and has trouble understanding what his past self is talking about; therefore, paradoxically, what was archived is preserved but at the same time loses meaning.

Krapp's manipulation of the tape is an attempt to control the 'flow' of memories. On three occasions, he stops the tape, then rewinds it. At the very beginning something accidentally falls down on the floor, he is annoyed, throws other things in disgust, and then needs to rewind the tape in order to listen again. The second time he winds back to listen to the word 'viduity' again, and the third time to listen to the scene in the punt once more. There are three stops followed by fast forward (Krapp skips these, one after the other): when young Krapp on tape mentions the belief that guided all his life; the part where he mentions darkness as his best friend; and the scene where he had come to understand the association between light and dark, between storm and the light of understanding and fire. Finally, there are three stops as he records the new tape: after "The eyes she had!" (222), when he realizes he is recording his own silence, and is lingering on the memory of Bianca again; after "Take his mind off his homework! Jesus! [Pause. Weary] Ah well, maybe he was right. [Pause.] Maybe he was right" (222), when he realizes he is recording his silence again, and finally to stop recording, switch back to the recording of himself as a thirty-nine-year-old, and listen to the scene in the punt for a third time.

If we draw on the classic distinction established by Endel Tulving between episodic and semantic systems of memory, we might say that the events Krapp

revisits belong to autobiographical/episodic memory; however, he stores and retrieves them semantically. From this perspective, the characteristics of episodic memory—transformation and loss of information, independence from semantic systems, reconstruction according to the present (aspects also discussed by Feierstein elsewhere)—do not apply to Krapp’s memory, as he retains his memories externally, in linguistic form. Krapp keeps his memories stored like an archive. To keep an archive of one’s memories entails the decision to undertake, over time, a deliberate and conscious selection process that includes the task of labelling and storage—in sum, great discipline. And that is what Krapp has: a whole archive. He has recorded, on every birthday for at least forty years, or forty-two years, a tape containing the main events and reflections of his life at that moment. His archive consists of one type of item: oral accounts. That is quite different from the ways in which most people store personal memories, even externally, even in the digital era. Archives are organized, indexed systems, and in *Krapp’s Last Tape* the index anticipates much of what the character and the audience will hear over the course of the play: “Mother at rest at last”; “The black ball” (at first he cannot remember what this refers to); “The dark nurse”; “Slight improvement in bowel condition”; “Equinox, memorable equinox”; (another subject Krapp fails to remember); and, finally, “Farewell to . . . love” (217). References are a key component of archives, and as Sue Wilson points out, “Krapp remembers the correct reference to his tape-recording about an experience, not the experience itself” (5). The way Krapp elicits his memories, by mechanical and oral reproduction, and through its fixed nature and immutability, forces him to control the flow by stopping, rewinding and fast-forwarding. However, as Lois Gordon reflects, “Krapp deludes himself in thinking that he has any control over the associations and memories they unleash. He fails to realize that voluntary memory falls easy prey to involuntary memory, and the storehouse of mind can release a limitless reservoir of unwelcome material” (98–99).

The archival aspect of Krapp’s memory becomes, in the context of post-dictatorship Argentina, where archives are of utmost importance, a key element of the play. In 2003, the National Archive for Memory was created, under the Human Rights Secretariat, with the purpose of obtaining, analysing, classifying, duplicating, digitising and archiving testimonies and documents about the violations of human rights and basic freedoms that involved the responsibility of the Argentinian State, and about social and institutional responses to those violations.

After the 2001 crisis, memory institutions and public monuments were created to remember the disappeared. With the arrival of Nestor Kirchner to the presidency, the state and human rights movements worked together to insti-

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figure 2
Building of the Archivo Nacional de la Memoria, Buenos Aires, Argentina
courtesy of Natalia Buch,
© natalia buch

tutionalize memory, policies representing the victims of state terrorism were implemented and a period of monumental memories began, with the creation of archives, memorials and cultural centres about the years of state terrorism. Underground memories became dominant memories. But the creation of museums, archives, and memory sites has stirred up endless debates about the nature and form of these spaces and how the stories should be told. Ludmila DaSilva Catela, an anthropologist and the former director of one of Argentina's provinces' human rights archive, asserts that, at the request of the Catholic Church, 400 names were erased from the first list of disappeared people created by a State commission upon the return of democracy in 1983, due to the victims' sexual orientation. The LGBTQ+ community are currently using the slogan "30,400 disappeared" and campaigning in the public realm for the creation of an archive of disappeared gay and transgender people.

Although collective archives, one of the most significant repositories of social memory, are subject to interpretation and struggles for power, legitimacy and meaning, the registry of events—albeit in diverse formats—needs to remain unaltered; that is the archive's *raison d'être*. Highlighting the connection between *Krapp's Last Tape* and archives in Argentina, Juan Facundo Araujo describes Krapp as a model archivist in our present time of crisis: "Krapp can be thought as a mirror reflecting of problems related with the silent montage of object-memory" (82). For Araujo, Beckett's play highlights "all these matters that are still intensely resonating for people who work professionally with archives [...] Krapp can be thought of as a model of an archivist of our present in crisis, closer to trauma than passivity" (85).

Ruby Cohn's view that *Krapp's Last Tape* plays against its genre by using the techniques of another medium, the tape recorder, as a stage metaphor for time past (1976, 165) is compelling, especially in light of the explanation Pablo Dema and Luis Abraham offer for the current obsession with the past, linking it to the impact of new technologies on perception and temporality. The mass use of portable technological and online devices may contribute to the

erosion of stable, long-lasting life experiences: “As the speed of technological innovation increases, there is a feeling of contracted present, and the paradox is that the longer capitalism absorbs past and future time, the weaker the present is itself, the more fragile individuals’ identity” (Dema and Abraham, 27). *Krapp’s Last Tape* was written at a time of transition, which anticipated the conversion of everyday life into digital formats. The tape recorder has become an anachronism in the twenty-first century, a fact that Beckett possibly anticipated because of his close involvement in broadcasting media during the 1960s and 1970s, when he was able to witness the development of video technology. The reel-to-reel tape recorder is now a historic object—an object of nostalgia for some, but also a form of technology that was from the 1970s also used in the collection of archives bringing together memories of important historic events such as the Holocaust and World War II.

The tape recorder, symbol of past times, connects *Krapp’s Last Tape* to the Argentinian present. Recording was evoked again as a symbol recently, in publicity relating to another key aspect of the reparatory processes after the restoration of democracy: the slow but constant search for children of the disappeared, stolen as babies by the regime. This has been and continues to be a complex process, since those children are now adults and it is their decision whether or not to submit themselves to genetic analyses when they have doubts about their origins. The campaign to identify children of the disappeared—illegally adopted and raised with false identities—has been carried out since 1977 by the organization Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo (Plaza de Mayo Grandmothers). 132 people have recovered their identity so far (at the time of writing in early 2023), out of a total estimated number of 400. In October 2021, on the Día Nacional del Derecho a la Identidad (National Day for the Right to Identity), a compelling image was released as part of a new campaign to identify and restore identity to missing grandchildren. The image shows a cassette tape with a pen going through one of its winding holes. Under the image features a caption: “If you understand this image, you were probably born between 1975 and 1983. And you could be one of the grandchildren missing” (Secretaría de Derechos Humanos de la República Argentina). The image of the cassette is used here as a mark of the identity of a generation. But it is also interesting to note how, when cassette tapes were widely used, pens were often used to disentangle or repair tapes. Intentionally or not, this image also acts as a metaphor for repairing something faulty, wrong or broken. That is precisely what analog recording affords: the tape stores memories in material form, and makes it possible, in a creative way, to repair some of the past and look at the future. The process bears some resemblance with Krapp’s own memory, who also tries to disentangle his own identity and past.

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Taperecorders play a significant role in the acclaimed piece of post-dictatorship theatre *Mi vida después* (*My life after*), premiered in 2009. This piece belongs to the Argentinian genre of 'biodrama', in which one's own biography is used as material, and a spectacle is built from the experiences of living people with personal narratives, objects and documents. As part of the *Biodrama Project*, Lola Arias directed this piece, wherein a group of actors—playing themselves, not impersonating characters—born in Argentina in the 1970s and early 1980s and with close links to the traumatic past (some are children of the disappeared or of perpetrators), review their parents' youth based on pictures, letters, tapes and clothes. In a particularly moving scene, the son of a disappeared man abducted by the regime comes on stage with his four-year-old child and an old reel-to-reel tape recorder. The man plays the tape for his child, on which his father is talking to the now adult actor when he was a child, helping him pronounce words. The man on stage does not remember his father, since he was only three years old when the regime abducted him (the audience knows this from earlier in the performance), and this fragment of recorded voice is the only way to pass on his childhood memories to his own child.

Tape recorders and the idea of storing memory on tape also make appearances in productions by Grupo Krapp, a performance ensemble that takes its name from Beckett's character. Founded in 1998 by Luis Biasotto and Luciana Acuña, the ensemble define themselves as a group that explores the problems of representation and the limits of language (Biasotto and Acuña). They perform nationally and internationally, and their work is interwoven with echoes of *Krapp's Last Tape*, especially in some of their productions. In *Adonde van los muertos (lado a)* (*Where Deadmen Go (A Side)*) premiered in 2011, "the group confronts the impossibility of answering the dilemma of death on stage" (Biasotto and Acuña). The performance is a series of responses to pre-recorded answers by well-known artists from the Buenos Aires performance scene to the question, "How would you represent death on stage?" Their answers, prompted by a separate pre-recorded voice, are projected onto a screen. A scene inspired by these answers follows, with a combination of live bodies, projection and music. Lola Arias is one of the artists taking part in this production. As Ignacio González observes, her intervention is a turning point and makes the play painfully autobiographical: "This play does not talk about death in general, it talks about the death of one of the members of the group; it talks about the death of the lighting technician [*iluminador*]" (*Adonde van los muertos (lado a)*), qtd. in González 2015, 193). Arias reflects on the lighting technician's absence from the group in terms of darkness, and ponders the power of the voice by invoking Beckett's play: "*Krapp's Last Tape* (which is also the name of your

group) has to do with that. With what voice does, with the register of the voice of a dead person, with time, with losing that voice” (*Adonde van los muertos (lado a)*, qtd. in González 2015, 181).

There is another variation around this theme: *Adonde van los muertos (lado b)* (*Where Deadmen Go (B Side)*), a kind of essay about the (at the time) future *Adonde van los muertos (lado a)*. *Adonde van los muertos (lado b)* consists of a series of scenes composed of raw materials, which have not undergone any editing, and discusses the possible ways to address death on stage, exposing the group’s construction mechanisms and revealing their tools, doubts, innermost questions, and their complete failure (Biasotto and Acuña). The constant presence of an acousmatic voice in both *Adonde van los muertos (lado a)* and *Adonde van los muertos (lado b)*, and the dialogue between that voice and on-stage voices, echo Krapp’s two voices. *Adonde van los muertos (lado b)* and *Adonde van los muertos (lado a)*, originally performed in that order, were revisited as part of Grupo Krapp’s 2013 spectacle, *Retrocedida Krapp*. This was a retrospective of some of the group’s pieces, mostly fragments. The title was not *Retrospectiva* but *Retrocedida*, which means to rewind, but also both to go back and to stop before an obstacle, a menace, a difficulty or a doubt. This show revisits the past, full of doubts, much like Krapp revisits his own recorded past. In October 2021, the group staged another related piece: *Réquiem: La Última cinta del Grupo Krapp*, in homage to Luis Biasotto, who died in 2021. This show originated in an audio file with Biasotto’s voice that Acuña found in her computer after his death. In *Réquiem*, the members of the group maintain a dialogue with Luis on screen, in a moving and eerie scene.

It seems possible, then, that the fractured memories intimately familiar to so many Argentinians have mediated Beckett’s influence, encouraging audiences to think of our collective past and identity in an oblique, slanted way, resembling the way Krapp thinks of his personal archive. As one critic commented in a review in 2016, “The re-staging of *Krapp’s Last Tape* at this time shows that, beyond World War ii [...] eye-witness testimonies are still valid [...]. The fact that the character records himself in a testimonial way on a technical device suggests [...] the endlessness of narration. In this way (this performance) manages to revive Beckettian spirit and poetry, burying the idea of empty repetition” (Lino 2016). Seeing *Krapp’s Last Tape*, Argentinian audiences are invited to think of the dilemmas of our collective memory, and the play resonates with the ways in which our theatre seeks to work through our absences and traumas. The title of one critical review of the 2022 performance in Buenos Aires reads, “La última cinta de Krapp, que nunca es la última”: in other words, “*Krapp’s Last Tape* is never the last”. No doubt the play will continue to provoke thought, writing and remembrance.

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