



Storytelling as Survival: An Interview with Lola Arias

[00:00:19] INTRO

Duška Radosavljević: Hello and welcome to the Gallery!

Our guest today hardly needs any introduction. Her works are as famous in Europe as they are in her native Argentina and their significance reaches far beyond the confines of theatre itself. After an initial period of experimenting with playwriting, music-making and ensemble theatre, Lola Arias has since 2007 been committed to documentary theatre. She has made biographical work with non-professional theatre artists about living under dictatorship in Argentina, about depression, and about being a twin, and has created a work inspired by Brecht's *Threepenny Opera* in Bremen in 2015 with the city's real-life beggars, prostitutes and street musicians.

In 2016, she premiered two important works: *Minefield*, made at the Royal Court Theatre in London with the veterans of the Falklands/Malvinas war from both sides, and *The Atlas of Communism* at the Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin, made with women aged 8 to 84 with links to the GDR [German Democratic Republic]. In 2018, she made *What They Want to Hear*, a work with and about a migrant from Syria in Munich, and in 2019, she made *Futureland* in Berlin, with and about the unaccompanied minors fleeing war and poverty.

She has also launched her film career which includes multi-award winning *Theatre of War* (2018) based on the same material as *Minefield*. Since 2012, she has curated programmes of performance lectures in various places, including a Zoom edition during the Covid-19 lockdown.

This conversation focusing on Lola Arias' work with speech, sound and documentary materials, took place on Zoom on 4th June 2020.

[00:02:20] HELPING PEOPLE TELL THEIR STORIES

Duška Radosavljević: So Lola, you have such an amazingly rich practice, it's really almost difficult to decide where to start from in telling this story. And also I've just been looking at this wonderful book that Jean Graham-Jones has edited and co-written about your work, and have also read the interview that you've given to Richard Gough. So I don't want to ask you to repeat the various things that you've already said to other people, but I'm interested in how we might piece together a slightly different story around your way of working, which is present in this existing rendition. I just want to go a bit more deeply into understanding how you've developed this artistic idiom that you use in your work that is characterised by the use of speech in how you help other people tell their stories, how you also tell your own stories through your work, and also how you use music as a really integral part of this. I mean, when we look through this book, edited by Jean, there are a lot of images in it that are people playing instruments, there is a lot of rock iconography in it. I'm quite interested in how this has emerged. I know that not all of your work does that, but it is interesting that actually there is something distinctive about your aesthetic that exists in this space around music and verbal delivery. Normally with these conversations I ask people to go back to the beginning and we try and retrace the steps of how we arrived where we are now, but also I've just been looking at the works you've sent me that you've made more recently in Germany, specifically *Futureland*, which you made with the Gorki last year, and which you made with unaccompanied minors, refugees coming from various places, politically difficult places. And also *What They Want to Hear*, the piece you made in Munich in 2018, again with a refugee core and Open Border Ensemble. Also, I've seen *Atlas of Communism*. That's also very interesting to me personally as someone who has lived through a Communist past. What struck me in watching these works in preparation for this conversation is how your work is often about your helping other people tell the story of their lives in different ways. Maybe we can just begin this time with these more recent works and then go back. How has this come about, this work that you're doing in Germany with displaced people, the placing of their stories and the telling of their stories, Raaed Al Kour particularly? The subject seems to be the actual ways in which he tells his story and that story is mediated through a



number of different interpreters, administrative workers and so on, and then in the form of theatre itself.

Lola Arias: The topic of migration and how do we tell the story of people who are coming from wars, from hunger, from all kind of political persecution is something that I'm very interested in, in terms of: what are the narrations that are around these immense amounts of people that are arriving and are dying in the sea and are trying to find a way to have a future. In these particular last two pieces that I did in 2018 and 2019, for me it was very important to make the focus on the way we are interpreting and translating and de-codifying and assimilating these stories. The title of the piece is *What They Want to Hear*, so it's really about the story someone tells and the story the other hears. Because specifically in the asylum cases it's so difficult to prove someone's story, that's the main thing: so how do we give asylum to someone when this person has only his story or her story to tell? There are no proofs. And regarding the law, you can get asylum if you are being persecuted because of political reasons, because of your sexuality, or because of religion, and to be able to prove these reasons you need certain things. Some people don't have anything, they just have their stories. The art of storytelling becomes so relevant because your life depends on your capacity of telling your story in the way it fits for the bureaucratic purposes of getting asylum. So basically if you are a good storyteller, maybe you get asylum, and if you're not – then you're lost. It's all based on the art of storytelling. Specifically for this piece, *What They Want to Hear*, we worked with the transcription of their interviews. So how this person's story has been interpreted by a translator first and then transformed into a text by a bureaucrat, 'der Entscheider' in the German system, which means 'the decider'. I mean in all these processes from him telling the story to the translator translating the story to the bureaucrat writing the story, what is left of the story is really different from when it was told in the beginning. For me it was very interesting to make Raaed come on stage to reconstruct word by word the transcriptions of his interviews that were used to deny him asylum, because he was denied asylum. He was told he has to go back to Syria when he was coming from Daraa, which was one of the worst – the whole revolution started in Daraa. He was an archaeologist working in the university. There was a lot of reasons to give this person asylum: because he was politically active, because he was part of the revolution, and because he was also running away from the military army, because he was supposed to enter the army when he finished the university and he didn't want to kill or let himself die. So there were a lot of reasons to give him asylum and he was denied the asylum. And in the case of *Futureland*, I was working with a group of unaccompanied minors. They were coming from different parts of the world: some come from Syria, there were Afghanis, there was also a girl from Guinea, there was another young girl from Bangladesh. It was a very mixed group and basically the only thing that they had in common was that they crossed the world by themselves – 11, 12, 13, 14 years old, looking for a future. And in this case I was of course interested in the process of what is called in Germany 'integration' – the different steps that they have to go through to be accepted because the difference with unaccompanied minors to adults is that they cannot be deported. They have to be integrated, they have to be allowed to study and learn the language and get a home and be taken care of until they are 18, but of course afterwards nothing is for certain. In a way I was interested in how do you grow up going through all these constant auditions without knowing what your future looks like, because you don't know if you will be able to stay at the end of this long journey or not. So how do you grow up with this fear of becoming 18, when every other kid is looking forward to be 18 and be independent and free, these kids grow up with the fear of growing up, basically.

DR: Yes. And you also made an interesting aesthetic choice in terms of the world you've created for these kids, in *Futureland* specifically, of how they're actually interacting with these disembodied voices of AI-generated characters that stand for both some sort of a sci-fi utopian idea of future, but also these authority figures that they are contending with through this.

LA: This was really a discovery from working with them – during the workshops I discovered that all the kids were playing this game called PUBG [PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds], which is a game of surviving. In this game there is a person arriving in a plane and landing on an island, and this person has to survive in this island, basically has to avoid being killed and kill to be able to survive. And I thought: 'Wow, these kids who have survived these crazy journeys that lasted months and



sometimes years, crossing borders, crossing situations with a lot of violence, police, going into boats in the Mediterranean, and now they've arrived to Germany and they are playing this game of surviving in an island.' I thought: 'Wow, the survivor is playing the surviving game.' And then I thought: 'Maybe that's the way to represent how they feel now in Germany: the journey is over, but in a way they feel like they've landed in this island and they have to still survive this permanent truce, and they know that not all of them will be able to stay.' So basically they have to be the strongest one. And then we started to develop together with two video artists, Mikko Gaestel and Luis [August] Krawen, this whole idea of avatars playing the roles of the bureaucrats and social workers and their tutors, and somehow to represent this whole world of adults and authorities through avatars. And I think that was very challenging because, of course, you have to consider that in this piece I have eight performers who are humans and there are a lot of other performers who are avatars, but they still have to play the role and they have to be in time, and if the machine and the person don't get together it doesn't work. So it was also quite a challenge.

[00:13:54 to 00:15:50] Excerpt from *What They Want to Hear* (2018)

DR: How did you meet Raaed? How did you become aware of his story in the first place? Was it that it started with the fact that you wanted to do his story or was he already a member of the ensemble and then you discovered his story?

LA: I was invited to work with the Open Border Ensemble, which was a group that was working at the Kammerspiele – it was a group of actors coming from Syria that were invited to be part of the ensemble in the state theatre of Munich. Basically I was invited to work with this group of Syrian actors and German actors together, so I started to think what was the story I wanted to tell with these actors. Because I wanted to tell one asylum story I started to look for a person. So I interviewed, in fact, many, many refugees from different ages and backgrounds and I heard the most horrifying stories that I've heard in my life. I felt myself like an 'Entscheider' in a way, just sitting there and hearing all these crazy stories of people escaping war, violence, hunger, and all. I was specifically looking for someone who had also the capacity to reflect on this – what it means to tell a story, and who could stand there and be able to defend his or her story. Considering that it was going to be also very challenging for this person to be on stage, especially if this case was not solved. Or if the case, as in Raaed's case, got a negative answer. And so he was the only one who really had this situation, and the rest were professional actors but some from Syria who already had the same background and who also had similar stories. But it was also very difficult to decide with whom to work and what it means for this person. I felt Raaed was prepared for this situation; even if we didn't manage to get him asylum because the theatre cannot change the law, but it changed a lot of things in his life, so I felt that it also made an impact. Not that we made the impact, but he himself did by committing into this piece and telling his story and getting in contact with theatre and documentary theatre. He changed his whole life because now he's studying documentary film-making in a very prestigious school in Munich where only a few people manage to get accepted. And he got a scholarship because someone saw the piece and said: 'I want to support you', and even if his legal situation is not solved, he found a new way, a new horizon for him.

DR: God, that's so moving, actually. So there is still no ending to his story. That piece ends with this statement: 'There's no end to this story', and it's still not resolved.

LA: Yes. And this is also crazy, because he has been for six years now in Germany, without asylum. He's making a career in documentary film-making and he's still not a legally recognised citizen of Germany. There are so many people in these conditions also all over the world. People with no status, people that are citizens of nowhere, and this is something that is insane.

DR: And the kids in Berlin, the unaccompanied minors, were they already part of some sort of a group that was using theatre as a way of coping, or did you actually facilitate that contact with theatre for them?

LA: I think only one of them had made theatre at school, but all the rest discovered theatre with us, through the workshops. In fact it was quite difficult to get the young kids and teenagers to come to the theatre. I was going to institutions who work with young unaccompanied minors, I was talking to social workers and I was going everywhere saying: 'Look, we want to do a project about unaccompanied



minors and we want to make a theatre piece.’ But it wasn’t easy to convince them to come, in fact. It was not that they were all looking for the new theatre production that is for the next season of Gorki Theater, they were more struggling with many other, bigger problems. So in fact the theatre group is still much more than a theatre group – beside doing art there are a lot of people involved in taking care of them and giving them support. There is a psychologist from an institution called XENION that works with unaccompanied minors. There is also the group of artists like Viviana Mendes and Laura Jiménez who are keeping regular contact with them and helping them with their homework or finding an apartment for their families when they managed to bring their families and so on. Basically it’s a big commitment to decide to work with people who are in these specific situations.

DR: And was this your impetus, that you wanted to make a piece about unaccompanied minors, and what was the invitation from the Gorki? Because you had worked with the theatre before, making *Atlas of Communism* in 2016. Was this your second, or maybe you’ve had other collaborations with the Gorki?

LA: Yes. I had another production called *Audition for a Demonstration*. So it was the third collaboration with the theatre. The institution that invites me knows that it’s difficult to tell me: ‘I have this *Hamlet*’, or: ‘You have to work with this ensemble’, or: ‘We want to make a piece about these certain topics’, because the way I work, first of all, I don’t usually work with actors. I usually make a whole research on something and when I’m doing research on something that means one year of work. So it has to be something that I’m somehow very passionate about, otherwise it doesn’t work. I can’t do like other theatre directors do that they do, I don’t know, three pieces a year – and in fact they told me: ‘We want to make a production with you’, and then I proposed them to work with the unaccompanied minors. And they supported it – and that’s already a lot because when a theatre commits to something like this, that means that they have to work also in an unusual way.

[00:23:09] ALTERNATIVES TO INSTITUTIONAL THEATRE

DR: Thank you for introducing this aspect of your work that is really about an alternative to the conventional institutional theatre approach, which is something I’m quite interested in as part of this interview too, and in relation to your journey, your developmental journey as an artist. As I said, usually in these conversations I try and understand by revisiting the early beginnings how people have then started to discover a way of making theatre that’s not about taking a text and doing it in a conventional kind of way. What’s interesting about your early beginnings that you’ve already explained in other interviews you’ve given is that there are, I would say, several formative influences that have somehow influenced your journey. And that’s your study of literature, your work with Ricardo Bartis, who was an underground theatre-maker in Argentina, and whose theatre group you attended, and also your interest that maybe emerged slightly later in music-making, working in a way that’s almost like working in a band with your creative collaborators. So if you wouldn’t mind, I’d like to go back there again, just to piece this together. Was Argentinian theatre also primarily this text-based, doing plays, like the conventional city theatre format? Was that a dominant way or was there another set of traditions that formed the mainstream of Argentinian theatre into which you grew up?

LA: Yes. I think I’m part of a generation that grew up already knowing that the state theatre was not open for us. We were not studying theatre acting or playwriting, thinking: ‘When are we going to be called by the state theatre to make this text, or this piece?’ We were more growing up thinking that the state theatre was already dead and that the only way to do theatre was to invent our own ways of doing it. I mean, we were all very independent in a deep way: we did our own projects, we produced them, we staged them, we found the place to do it, we built the scenographies ourselves, we did everything ourselves. Because there was no state support for that and there was no money for that, we had to find a way to do it in another way. And there is also a big tradition, if you can call it this, of actors who are also playwrights and directors. I was not the only one writing and directing and performing. We were a bunch of people doing that. So basically, I remember the first piece I did was called *The Squalid Family*. We did it in the cultural centre of the university, Cultural Centre Rojas, and because we had no money for the set design, I took some things from my parents’ house and some old clothes from my mother, and I remember my mother came to the opening and my father said: ‘What the hell have you



done with our stuff from home?!' So we were doing things with whatever we had, no budget, no support.

DR: Just to put this on a timeline, this was presumably something like the mid to late '90s?

LA: 2000 – 2001, yes. I was 24.

DR: So did you know at that time that you were going to have a career in theatre?

LA: I don't know. I was very much interested in writing, and then making theatre came a bit later. I always knew I wanted to write, and then started to be interested in theatre and performing, and music was also very important for me. I studied music since I was little so, in a way, when I started doing theatre for me it was also clear that theatre was a mixture of forms. It wasn't about the text and the actors, but it was about the whole visuals of it and the sound of it and the music. And I always worked with live music and I collaborated with musicians, and not just telling them: 'I want this kind of music here', but we really – sometimes we compose together, we think about the ideas together, we develop the lyrics of the songs together. So it was pretty much a collaborative process.

DR: In fact in your 'workography', if I can call it that, there is also an album that you–

LA: There are two albums!

DR: Two albums. Yes, and I'm just trying to remember the dates of when they came out.

LA: It's 2007 and 2011. One is called *Love is a Sniper* and the other one *Those Who Do Not Sleep*.

DR: So that much-quoted statement about you saying on some occasion that if you hadn't had a career in theatre you would have had a career as a popstar did come true in some ways! So what were the musical influences that were formative for you growing up in Argentina? Was there a local Argentinian rock and pop scene or was there more of an American and international scene that you all kind of–

LA: No. There is a lot of popular music in Argentina like, I don't know, from Charly García to Los Redonditos de Ricota to – I mean, there are so many bands, and Viuda e Hijas del Roque Enroll and bands that were, like, Andrés Calamaro or Luis Alberto Spinetta. But I think I was always very much influenced also by the people I work with. For example, I worked for several years – and I still work sometimes now though we are living very far from each other – with Ulises Conti, who is a musician from Argentina. I did these two albums together with him and he did the music for most of my projects in Argentina. He did, for example, the training and the composing of the music for *Minefield* together with the veterans. So these also were the people that influenced me the most, the people that I worked together with.

DR: There was a kind of ensemble you had at one point called The Postnuclear Ensemble, that Ulises Conti and a number of other people were members of. You selected a number of artists from different disciplines relevant to theatre-making and worked with them, which is an interesting model. Was that a moment at which your initial impulse to work as a playwright might have started to transform in some way? That maybe you were seeing your role as a theatre-maker and author as a more collaborative thing?

LA: I think I always saw it as a collaborative thing even when I wrote the text before and I wanted to put it on stage. I always understood theatre as a collaborative thing, as something that you do together with other artists. Even now if somebody works with me, they know that I can be very demanding, very chaotic, but also very open, so that everybody has a voice in the rehearsal room, meaning that every decision – and it doesn't matter if it's about the music or about the set or about the scene – everybody has the possibility to say: 'I don't like this text', or: 'I don't like this scene'. Even if it's the musician having an opinion on the set or the set designer talking about the songs. I don't see these divided territories and then people only working on their field: I like teams that work together and think about a complete work of art. That's why people feel very encouraged to talk and to be part of the discussion and not just to take care of one thing. But it can also be very demanding for people that are used to doing their thing and then go out. I don't let them go out! I lock them in the room: 'And now you will stay with us until we solve this!'

[00:32:01 to 00:33:43] 'It's My Party' from *Atlas des Kommunismus* (2016)

DR: How was it – I'm sorry, I don't know how you'll feel about this question – but what was it like for you being a woman and carving out a way for yourself in Argentinian and later international theatre?



I'm asking also because in looking at all of these key influences that have been cited in relation to your work, like Ricardo Bartis and Pompeyo Audivert and so on. It's usually men, right? It's usually men we hear about and also these musicians you've just mentioned. How was it for you finding a voice as a female artist in that environment?

LA: One thing that I want to say is that I also work a lot with women, and my main collaborators in Argentina, Luz Algranti and Sofía Medici who are dramaturgs and producers of my work, are very, very important. And there is a bunch of female artists that I work together with like Mariana Tirantte who's a set designer for many of my works, Luciana Acuña who's choreographer of many of my works. So there is not – I'm not surrounded by men, so to say. But of course being a female director wasn't easy. I think especially when I was younger, I used to get really mad and really angry and really sad when I felt I was not recognised just because I was a woman. It was also this transition from being a local artist in Argentina and making my own works with Postnuclear Company and I did several works starting in 2001 until 2007. In 2007 I did a trilogy of three pieces that were under this label *Love Is a Sniper*, and [the trilogy] was the first piece that I started to travel with, and from then on, from 2007 I started to have a career abroad. And also to collaborate with my former husband, Stefan Kaegi, in several projects. I think that was the worst moment in terms of recognition was when I was working together with my partner, because then people would think that you are just 'the wife of'.

DR: Because Stefan Kaegi had a fame of his own as Rimini Protokoll.

LA: And of course people didn't know me because I was coming from Argentina. So basically I was sitting in theatres all over the world and I was facing once and again this situation of, I don't know, technical directors, directors of festivals, producers, whoever, talking to Stefan and I was just that person standing next to him. So in fact, we didn't collaborate that much because for me it was very hard! I mean, even if the artistic collaboration was great I think it was hard for me. We did – I don't know how many projects but [for] three years we collaborated and then, even if we continued together a couple of years more, we were, like – we said: 'No I have to do my own work otherwise I will die under your arm.' You know what I mean? It's the worst thing you can do as a woman, to work together with your husband or partner or whatever because then people won't see you anymore.

DR: How did your work change as a result of that collaboration, if at all? And how did you manage to reclaim your own place in the theatre-making world after those collaborations?

LA: I met Stefan in the moment where I was also starting to do work that was less text-based and more performative. I met him already in a moment where I did this trilogy where there was a baby on stage, and there was another piece which was based on the biographies of the actors and on certain documents. So I was already in this way, and we met and then I started to also see how a documentary approach could be like. Also getting to know his method of working and researching and so on. And that was very interesting for me and I learnt a lot from it and then, of course, there was a time when I had to adapt and say: 'Okay, this is how you work, but I also need other conditions. I need other things and I'm more interested in this and that.' But I always felt a writer, which is something that not a lot of people recognise in my work. I feel like I'm basically the writer of all the pieces I did, even if some of them were written at a desk outside of the rehearsal room and were fictions, and some of them were written based on interviews and improvisations with the performers in the rehearsal room. This was always for me very important: the quality of the text, the images, the impact of words.

[00:39:18] DOCUMENTARY THEATRE

DR: What is the relationship between the documentary material and the artistic framework that theatre makes available? I'm asking this because of the trend of documentary theatre that we witnessed here in the UK in the early 2000s, which was very much concerned with being extremely faithful to the stories of real-life people that it was telling, almost to the extent that it was really just trying to put those testimonies on stage, in front of audiences, as some form of mediated journalism. And, you know, these works were often very powerful and very well received as works of theatre. But it seems to me that in your work there are other layers to this process, which is about putting real-life testimony on stage. It's not just that literal level. There are levels of artistry that are involved. So what is your approach to mediating fact and real-life material that then transforms it into a work of art in theatre?



LA: I think there is a lot of prejudice and also ignorance about what it means to work with documentary material. There are a lot of people that think that you're just doing copy/paste of interviews, or you're just like: 'Ah, you just did a piece with testimonies!', as if testimony was something that is just like: you record it and then you put it on and that's it. But I think this is just ignorance. I think that there is always an immense amount of work in trying to make art with documents, with stories of real people, with interviews. So basically, the way I work, I do a lot of interviews with people, personal interviews where I'm sharing time and spending time talking to them. And there are a lot of experiments on how to tell the story that we do on stage. So basically, encouraging them to improvise through materials or stories or re-enactments of situations where they are put back into those situations that they experienced and they have to try to remember how it was and what they told and how it... And based on these experiments I write texts that then go back to them and then we try it again, and then sometimes there are huge discussions on how to tell the story and what words to use and why. I think that's the most interesting part of it because it is a very collaborative process. Then sometimes they also have the final word because sometimes they say: 'No way. I'm not going to say this text like this!', and there is no way to convince them and then you have to find a solution. This is a lot of work. This is really a lot of work. I think some people really think that I'm just with the people and they just came to the rehearsal and spoke the text the way they say it on the last day in the opening and I'm just putting things together and making a frame for it.

DR: Great, so there is a process that's an interactive process that happens in the rehearsal room. How long does this rehearsal period ideally last for you?

LA: I mean, there is research that takes one year, there are some phases of workshops that could take some weeks, and usually – it depends on the conditions I have – but I usually ask for three months if I can. Like on *Futureland* we had 12 weeks. Sometimes they give me less and I add some other instances to have more time. But yes, that's more or less how long it takes.

DR: Having mentioned *Minefield/Campo Minado*, which was a piece about the Falklands veterans and with the Falklands veterans, how did that come about? Obviously there are so many factors in that particular choice that in a way made that particular project more complex than maybe some other projects that you've done, in the sense that there was this international aspect to it where you worked with performers, subjects – I'm not sure what you called them because they're both sources of material and collaborators and then end up being performers – from two different countries. But also people who had fought each other in that war, who were on opposite sides, who might have been carrying traumas. And then also there is a process that is evident in the dramaturgy of that piece whereby music brings them together in some ways. How long did that process take and how did it come about, that particular project for you?

LA: I think this was the longest project that I did. It took five years but it also had several outcomings. First I started in 2013 interviewing veterans for a video installation where I wanted them to re-enact a memory of the war in the places where they work or places that they attend regularly. In this case I was only interviewing Argentine veterans – this was because I was invited to be part of an exhibition that was done in 2014 for the 100 years of the First World War that was called *After the War*. When I was invited to this exhibition I started to think about working with veterans of the Malvinas/Falklands war in Argentina. And after this exhibition that happened in 2014 I started to think that it could be interesting to bring together Argentine and British veterans to reconstruct their memories of the war. And then I started a new process of interviewing British veterans and also shooting, thinking about making a theatre play and a film. That started in 2014/15 and then we had the opening in 2016. Then I still worked on a lot of material that I recorded during this whole process. I came out with a movie in 2018 that was called *Theatre of War*, which opened at Berlinale. So it was the whole process from 2013 to 2018 of working on the same subject. In the meantime I also did other things but it was really intense.

[00:46:08 to 00:46:51] Excerpt from *Minefield* (2017)

LA: The fact that the piece brought together these former enemies was also a very challenging thing because I had to convince people – I mean former military people – to get involved in an artistic project in Argentina with their former enemies. It was not something easy to do. Some were curious and



interested, some were suspicious and reluctant. At the end it was only the ones I really found interesting and courageous enough to go to the end of the world. Three months in a very precarious venue that we had invented, because we had no state theatre that supported us, rehearsing six hours a day. It was a crazy thing to do. They are still touring with the piece and they love the piece.

DR: And the music element of it. You mentioned earlier that your collaborator from Postnuclear Ensemble, Ulises Conti, was a significant part of this process. How did you work with the musical element on this piece?

LA: From the beginning I knew I wanted to make a band with former soldiers of both countries. So basically, I chose some people thinking that they were already musicians like Rubén [Otero], for example, he's a drummer and he has a Beatles tribute band. There were some British who were already musicians like David Jackson who had also a band in Cromwell. I was already thinking that I wanted to make this band so I chose some who were musicians and the other ones had to learn. I mean Gabriel [Sagastume] also played the guitar, Marcelo [Vallejo] had to learn how to play the bass, and Lou was mainly singing. And Sukrim [Rai], because he's from another culture, he's from Nepal and he wasn't related to this rock music at all, he had other moments of singing but his own songs, which were beautiful. For me this musical part was very important, also considering the fact that they didn't speak the language of the other. We were always the mediators, the translators, in between them. So I think it was very important that they had something to do with each other that is not language-based.

DR: You just mentioned that you were developing this piece in Argentina outside of the structures of funded theatre. Did it ever get recognised by the Argentinian theatre scene?

LA: Yes. Yes. I mean of course but it also took a long time. I think last year, 2019, we made a third season in Buenos Aires and they gave us the biggest venue in the state theatre in Buenos Aires, which was 800 seats, and the piece was sold out for one month and a half. It was amazing but it took a long time until they recognised: 'Oh, there is this thing. We should have it in our repertory because it's good.' But I was knocking on doors when I had the project in a folder and nobody was opening the doors. So—

DR: Did your parents get to see what you did in the end? [*Laughter.*]

LA: I think they were happy that there was no more furniture again! No more clothes being stolen, and that somehow it got more professional.

DR: Yes, great. And about *My Documents* series, that you're currently curating as part of the Covid lockdown but which has had this precedent that you'd done in 2012 to 2017 in Buenos Aires. What's the significance of this sort of work with other artists for you? It's a curation process, you curate it but it's obviously a different kind of output – lecture performance. What's the significance of this sort of work for you?

LA: First of all I think it's not easy to understand what it means, 'curating', in this case, and I think it's very different also depending on the artist, because I usually invite an artist to develop a lecture performance on a personal archive. And then they bring ideas and then we discuss about the ideas and then we come together to the conclusion of which idea is the best idea to develop. And depending on the artist I am very involved or not so involved. This depends on the artist itself. So for example, the last lecture performance was with Zhang Mengqi, a Chinese – amazing – artist, who is a dancer and documentary film-maker, and she had an incredible archive of work that she's doing in a small village in China. She had been interviewing elderly people on their memories of the famine and she also had been doing amazing work with the children of this village. And we had to get together, me and Viviana Mendes, the dramaturg, to go through all of this material and think about what made sense and why and how to put it together. It was a very collaborative thing. While with other artists like Rabih Mroué it was an already existing work that he adapted to the format of *My Documents*. That was very exceptional, I never did it before. So it depends on each of the artists, how much they want to collaborate.

DR: And what was the impulse originally when you did it in Buenos Aires? What made you want to give this sort of a platform to other artists?

LA: For me it was interesting to think about the performativity of an archive: how can we perform an archive, how can we bring an archive onto a stage, whatever this archive might be? This was for me



one of the main interests. And also the possibility to collaborate with other artists from different disciplines. That was for me very interesting, and to see how I can support them more than putting myself as a director of a project – it's more being the person that facilitates the work of others. And also to learn from others because I think it has been an amazing experience to work with so many different artists coming from so many different fields and to try to understand how they work and how they develop their ideas. Yes, it has been very, very inspiring for me and it still is now with Covid.

DR: Great. And what next for you, Lola? I mean what do you have in the pipeline when the theatres reopen, hopefully?

LA: I'm preparing a project about motherhood and it's called *Lingua Madre*. I'm doing it in Italy, in Bologna, and now it's supposed to go back to rehearsals in September. But it's a project about reproductive rights, autonomy of mothers or women or people who want to procreate. What are all the tensions between the way you want to procreate or to give life to others and the law and the state regulations and the control of the politics regarding our own bodies and our own desire. It's a bit about these tensions and also about the new fertility techniques that are changing the whole panorama and all the questions there are around in vitro treatments, surrogacy, adoption and so on. Basically we reflect on these topics with them. Now we are going to finally meet, I hope, in September.

DR: Great. Thanks so much. This has been really, really insightful.

LA: Thank you. I hope you enjoyed it.

Transcription by Tom Colley

Clips Summary

[00:13:54 to 00:15:50] *What They Want to Hear* (2018)

[00:32:01 to 00:33:43] 'It's My Party' from *Atlas des Kommunismus* (2016)

[00:46:08 to 00:46:51] *Minefield* (2017)

Works Cited

Graham-Jones, Jean (2019) *Lola Arias: Re-Enacting Life*, Aberyswyth: Performance Research Books.

Audio available at www.auralia.space/gallery2-lolaarias/.

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