



*Routledge Advances in Theatre & Performance Studies*

# PERFORMANCES THAT CHANGE THE AMERICAS

Edited by  
Stuart A. Day



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# **Performances that Change the Americas**

**Edited by Stuart A. Day**

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## 10 The queer/*muxe* performance of disappearance: Lukas Avendaño's butterfly utopia

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The following pages move from loss and outrage to solidarity and hope against all odds. These emotions inform the recent struggle undertaken by indigenous artist Lukas Avendaño in the search for his brother Bruno Alonso, who vanished on May 10, 2018, joining more than 70,000 people who have been forcibly disappeared in Mexico during the past couple of decades. Since then, Avendaño has used his skills as a *muxe* (or “two-spirit”) performance artist to raise awareness of this plight and literally hold hands with those who wish to silently join him in a queer refusal to accept disappearance.

Avendaño's work is part of the ongoing drama faced by thousands of families in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America, as well as the ways conceptual and performance artists have been addressing the crisis of murdered or disappeared people since the dirty wars of the Cold War era. For example, Mexican groups of politically informed conceptual artists, like Proceso Pentágono and Taller de Investigación Plástica, addressed the problem of the disappeared through a variety of public actions carried out between 1973 and 1979. What is notable about Avendaño's performance is the way he queers the repertoire of activist demonstrations to demand justice for the families of the disappeared. His work ties in with the recent work by other young queer artists<sup>1</sup> in Mexico, notably Felipe Osornio (aka “Lechedevirgen Trimegisto”) and Lía García, who denounce crimes against women and queer people. As Diana Taylor notes regarding the Argentinian Madres de la Plaza de Mayo (Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo), these artists are transitioning from identity politics to coalition politics (Taylor 1994, 301), a move that marks a turn in relation to international LGBTQ+ performance strategies. In Mexico, queer artists and activists are now building alliances with diverse grassroots organizations demanding an end to gender violence and the impunity of organized crime.

### **The political performance of *muxeidad***

Lukas Avendaño was born in 1977 into the Zapotec community of Oaxaca, Mexico, and has recently gained international recognition for work that

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addresses issues of queerness, class, and ethnicity. Elsewhere, I argue how in *Réquiem para un alcaraván* (Requiem for a curlew, 2012), Avendaño articulates a queer performative intervention of gendered nationalistic representations (such as the Tehuana dresses worn by Frida Kahlo) and simultaneously embodies/interrogates the identity of muxes from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (Prieto Stambaugh, 2014). Muxes are often referred to as the “indigenous third sex,” but Avendaño is quick to point out that they have a much more complex subject position: “The *muxe* only exists within a collective, cultural ecosystem that embraces femininity and masculinity in a series of interrelated practices” (Avendaño 2020b). The artist prefers to speak about *muxeidad* (muxeity) as a way of carrying oneself in relation to the community, gracefully participating in social and ritual life. The muxe notion of grace is expressed as *guenda*, a Zapotec concept that alludes not only to a personal esthesis of everyday life but also to specific commitments with the larger social body (Avendaño, 2019) (Figure 10.1).

In 2018, Avendaño’s community was shattered by the forceful disappearance of his brother Bruno Alonso, who was visiting his hometown in Tehuantepec and scheduled to attend a Mother’s Day gathering on the evening of May 10. Bruno never showed up, and for over two years, his family experienced the nightmare that thousands of people in Mexico who search for their loved ones experience as they carry out actions to demand justice. As I mention in the epilogue, Bruno’s body was finally found in a clandestine grave, and returned to his family in November of 2020.

In the following pages, I address Lukas’s<sup>2</sup> struggle to trace the whereabouts of his brother, focusing particularly on his public performances *Buscando a Bruno* (Searching for Bruno) and *Llamado a la autoridad* (A call to the authorities), which were presented before government buildings and museums in Mexico and abroad. In a recent interview (Avendaño 2020a), Lukas explained to me that he considers his performances a means of slowly advancing on the road toward justice. But whatever is achieved on that terrain necessarily calls for at least two other fronts of action: legal battle and media attention. Thus, visibility is only a means to an end: to find Bruno and demand that the government make effective its mandate to end large-scale criminal impunity.

Lukas’s work is not only changing the ways muxe and other indigenous people are perceived in mainstream Mexico (as ignorant, exotic objects of contemplation). I argue he is also gesturing toward a queer utopia where political, aesthetic, and sexual dissidence merge, where violence and impunity fail to destroy hope.

What kind of disappearance does Lukas perform? His public interventions draw from an existing repertoire of political activism in Latin America since the Cold War, which demands governments investigate forced disappearances and make accountable those who have perpetrated these crimes. Lukas’s activism stands out for its aesthetics, which draws from



Figure 10.1 Lukas Avendaño in *Réquiem para un alcaraván*, Xalapa, Veracruz, México, 2012. Photo courtesy of Antonio Prieto.

queer and muxe sensibilities, as I discuss below. Like many others in recent years, Lukas appropriates performative tactics used by the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo (mothers of the disappeared) in Argentina and also in Mexico, where the Eureka Committee, headed by Rosario Ibarra de Piedra, has been fighting for the rights of political prisoners and the disappeared. Both groups have staged public protests since the late 1970s, during the so-called dirty wars waged against political dissidents by repressive regimes. They share similar forms of marching in public plazas or in front of government offices carrying pictures of their disappeared children, siblings, or partners. As Taylor has argued, the Madres in Argentina enacted a gendered political performance, capitalizing on the codified roles of the Latin American “mother” as both nurturing and suffering, while at the same time

subverting the patriarchal ideal of the submissive home-bound woman because they occupied the plazas as empowered and oppositional public figures: “Through their bodies, they wanted to show the absence/presence of all those who had disappeared without a trace, without leaving a body.... Instead of the military’s ahistorical forgetting, the Madres inscribed the time and dates of the disappearances. Instead of dismembering, remembering” (Taylor 1994, 269).

Lukas’s performance is gendered in a different way, displaying a defiant trans corporality, both feminine and masculine, which goes against the grain of the homophobic public sphere in Mexico. The artist, who is a university-trained anthropologist,<sup>3</sup> also deliberately deploys ethnicity, dressing in Tehuana attire as a way to, in his own words, “accentuate my origins in the Tehuantepec Isthmus of Oaxaca, and accentuate my particular *muxeidad*” (Avendaño 2018). The move can be read as “strategic essentialism,”<sup>4</sup> but it also derived from a number of practical considerations. More than a month after his brother’s disappearance, Lukas found himself depressed because of the blatant indifference and inaction on the part of the Naval Ministry (Bruno’s former employer) and the local public prosecutor’s office (Ministerio Público), responsible for investigating crimes against citizens, where he had immediately notified authorities of the situation. Because of these pressing circumstances, he had considered canceling an engagement to perform *Réquiem para un alcaraván* in Barcelona during the month of June. However, as the artist told me, his mother encouraged him to go, saying that it would be healthy for him to be away for a few days (Avendaño 2018). Once in Barcelona, when local activists learned about his plight, they offered support to stage a protest outside the city’s Mexican Consulate. Lukas’s decision to use the Tehuana attire came naturally, as he had traveled with the wardrobe used in *Réquiem*. Moreover, he knew that dressing in indigenous clothing would attract the attention of media and, more importantly, of the consulate employees, tasked with assisting Mexicans living in the city (Figure 10.2).

During the performance itself, Lukas invited his local friends to take turns sitting next to him and holding hands, creating a tableau vivant reminiscent of Frida Kahlo’s emblematic double self-portrait *Las dos Fridas* (1939). When I asked Lukas if he had deliberately set out to recreate the famous painting, he responded that it wasn’t his intention. “I’m not dressed like Frida; the gowns used in the performance are of the kind worn by *muxes* during the traditional *velas* (ceremonious social gatherings in Tehuantepec)” (Avendaño 2018). During the performance he avoided wearing makeup, except for discrete black eyeliner, “because that is how women and *muxes* in Tehuantepec mourn.” To the critic’s eye, it’s perhaps inevitable to draw analogies not only to Frida’s work but also to its 1989 iteration by the Chilean performance artists Pedro Lemebel and Francisco Casas (known as las Yeguas del Apocalipsis, or Mares of the Apocalypse). Lemebel and Casas were openly gay artists during Augusto Pinochet’s repressive military



Figure 10.2 *Buscando a Bruno* performed outside the Mexican Consulate of Barcelona, Spain in June of 2018. Lukas Avendaño holds hands with a local artist from the Xica Teatre group. Photo still from the short documentary *Buscando a Bruno*, posted on YouTube. Used with permission of Lukas Avendaño.

dictatorship, and the portrait of their *Las dos Fridas* pose—widely distributed during the early 1990s by LGBT activists throughout Latin America—suggested queer solidarity in the face of the death and pain caused by the AIDS epidemic (see Prieto Stambaugh, 2019, 1224–25). Lukas is familiar with Lemebel’s work and has quoted his poetic manifesto “Hablo por mi diferencia” (I speak for my difference, 1986) in his performance of *Madame Gabia’* (2010). His work thus merges muxe aesthetics with a Latin American queer/cuir sensibility.<sup>5</sup>

The Barcelona performance achieved its desired effect: an employee from the consulate came out to ask if they could be of assistance. Lukas was prepared and said he had a letter to deliver to the Mexican consul regarding his brother’s disappearance. He was invited onto the building’s grounds, where he met with Vice-Consul Ernesto Herrera López, who promised to notify Mexican authorities. The next day, the Ministry of Foreign Relations in Mexico sent a cable to Oaxaca’s public prosecutor’s office (*fiscalía*), instructing the office to look into the case. However, the investigation was stalled for more than a year, during which Lukas’s family received an insulting letter from Mexico City’s naval headquarters informing them that Bruno had been fired because of his failure to show up to work for three consecutive days. Not only was the navy doing nothing

to help find an employee who had been reported forcefully disappeared months earlier, but with that letter they also were denying any kind of compensation to the family.

It is a testimony to Lukas's steadfastness and courage that, in spite of the blatant mistreatment received by government offices supposedly in charge of procuring justice, he continues to carry on with such grace. As he frequently points out, his is but one of thousands of stories shared by families in Mexico.

Bruno's disappearance occurred in the context of what is often referred to as a "spiral of violence" that began in 2006 when President Felipe Calderón declared war on drug trafficking. Since then, more than 70,000 people have been forcibly disappeared, according to a recent report by Mexico's Secretariat of the Interior (Secretaría de Gobernación) (*La Jornada* 2020).<sup>6</sup> This staggering number does not include the nearly 300,000 homicides—mostly feminicides—registered as of that year (*El Universal* 2020). This scenario of cruelty, death, and fear, found to a greater or lesser degree in many countries around the world, continues to thrive unabated, leading analysts to conclude it has become deeply ingrained in the modus operandi of governments and private corporations. Mexican theorist Sayak Valencia calls this "gore capitalism" (2010).

### **Gore capitalism in the Tehuantepec Isthmus**

Lukas's struggle to demand justice regarding his brother Bruno—as in the case of the families of the forty-three students disappeared in the state of Guerrero in September 2014—lends a human dimension to the unfathomable numbers cited above. Most of the lives lost are of people who already suffered economic, sexual, or ethnic marginalization, people who were exploited and then disposed of by the "narco-machine."<sup>7</sup>

Valencia has coined the term "gore capitalism" to speak of an extremely violent economy developed by organized crime in regions of impoverished populations, which profits from the predatory use of bodies and the sadistic display of violence (Valencia 2010, 7). To the question of what kind of individuals engage in this grim way of life, Valencia responds that they are "sujetos endriagos," or monstrously inhuman subjects who espouse violent masculinity. *Sujetos endriagos* belong to the ranks of Third World subjects disempowered by global neoliberalism, held thrall by an economic colonization that ceaselessly promotes hyperconsumerism. Widespread marginalization and unemployment, suggests Valencia, has led working-class men to fear losing their virility, unable to perform their expected gender role as household provider. These young men are easy prey to the seductive lure of quick profit and macho-building risk involved in joining criminal organizations (*ibid.*, 9–11).

In Mexico, as elsewhere, organized crime has infiltrated local government institutions, ranging from the police force to city halls. Banks and

transnational corporations dedicated to mining and infrastructure also partake of the lucrative black market of drugs, money laundering, or trading human bodies. As journalist Pedro Miguel has noted, the present scenario suggests that Mexico is becoming a “narco-state” or “narco-government,” where up to 5 percent of the Gross National Product derives solely from money laundering, apart from other dealings with organized crime (Miguel 2020). He points out that politicians and heads of private corporations often subcontract criminals to get rid of activists, journalists, and others perceived to pose a threat to their dealings.

Lukas’s family doesn’t know the reason Bruno was targeted. Even though the navy employed him, his job description only involved office work in Mexico City. But there are reasons to believe he could have been a victim of the narco-machine in Oaxaca, a state that has geopolitical importance as part of the Trans-Isthmus Corridor, a long-planned alternative to the Panama Canal. A brief summary of this complex geographical and historical context is in order.<sup>8</sup>

Little more than 200 kilometers separate the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans at the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in its middle section. This narrow strip of land—one of the areas with the highest biodiversity in Mexico and the world—was for centuries a meeting point for many Mesoamerican peoples and civilizations, and during the colonial period was thought of as a possible passage to global maritime trade routes.

In 1859, a recently independent Mexico signed the Treaty of Transit and Commerce with its northern neighbor, also known as the McLane-Ocampo Treaty, which, among other things, granted the United States exclusive and perpetual rights of transit over the isthmus for commercial and military purposes (cited in Torres 2017, 132). However, because of their Civil War, the United States never ratified the treaty, and it would take a few decades before the idea of building a railway across the isthmus came true. In 1894, under the government of Porfirio Díaz, the railway was finally inaugurated and began to function under several concessions to US passenger and cargo companies (Torres 2017, 131). This arrangement was terminated after the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914.

Ever since, this ecologically and culturally rich part of the country has been the scenario of at least six development and geostrategic projects, including the Puebla-Panama Plan (Torres 2017). However, in none of these projects have the demands of the local inhabitants been seriously taken into account, and most economic development attempts have been accompanied by environmental pollution and social strife.

The isthmus is a complex area. A meeting point of two major mountain range systems, it is divided into a northern and a southern portion, each of them with its own conflicting cultural, economic, and political needs. The northern portion, in the southern part of the state of Veracruz and into the state of Tabasco, is economically dominated by a giant oil industry, concentrated along the coastal strip and served by the port of Coatzacoalcos,

with cattle ranching, subsistence agriculture, and plantations in its hinterland, plus other recently established industries. In the southern portion, in the eastern part of the state of Oaxaca and into the state of Chiapas, lies a more structured agricultural region with a tradition of community organization in the many indigenous groups that inhabit there, including the Zapotec.<sup>9</sup> Local ways of living have been compromised by changes in the landed property regime, as well as by imposed industrialization and modernization schemes since the 1970s, which accelerated urban growth in the towns of Juchitán and Tehuantepec (Villagómez Velázquez, 2002, 85), close to where the Avendaño family is from. The already existing conflict brought about by unemployment and environmental pollution from the fishing industry and the refinery in the port of Salina Cruz (86) has been enhanced by the establishment of wind power plants in the mid-1990s, regarded by local communities as an act of territorial dispossession (see Nahmad et al. 2015). Mexico has a centuries-old tradition of indigenous territorial struggle, and the isthmus today is no exception.

The current center-left administration of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador is intent on carrying out an overhaul of the existing infrastructure in the isthmus and attracting fresh investments in an attempt to restore the region on the global trade map. The current Trans-Isthmus Corridor project is conceived as a multimodal interoceanic transportation system featuring railways, roads, maritime ports, and airports. As opposed to its forerunners, this megaproject appears to be more mindful of the local population, as it intends to “propitiate the common good, well-being and prosperity” of the isthmus’s inhabitants (Candelas Ramírez 2019, 4, table 2), ensuring the participation of communities and fostering the development of an inclusive, sustainable economy respectful of both cultural and social values—including those of indigenous communities—and the environment (*ibid.*, 5, table 3).

This optimistic vision was announced by the newly inaugurated President López Obrador when he launched the project in December 2018 at the port of Salina Cruz, Oaxaca. Lukas took the opportunity to attend the rally and succeeded in catching the attention of López Obrador, who briefly paused to hear the story of Bruno’s disappearance, and asked him to convey details of the case to a naval officer, who would soon be appointed minister of the navy. In spite of having been promised a follow-up to the case, Lukas says no one ever called him back (Avendaño 2020a).

Technical aspects aside—which question the very viability of this ambitious project (Juárez 2019)—its social contradictions are already surfacing. Even before its promulgation, popular protests began across the isthmus (Oropeza 2019), and discontent has grown as concessions have been also granted to foreign companies (Castro Soto 2020, 13). To comply with international human rights and labor standards, the federal administration claims to have conducted consultations with the local population. However, both local community leaders and outside observers have denounced these consultations as not only methodologically inadequate but also politically

illegitimate (Matías 2020; Manzo 2019; *DesInformémonos* 2020). The murders and disappearances of local activists are thought to be related to protests, outright opposition, and lawsuits (Comuneros 2020).

According to the Al Jazeera news agency, the 2020 murder of fifteen indigenous activists in one of the coastal towns that belong to the Trans-Isthmus Corridor “bore all the hallmarks of drug cartel executions” (Wilson 2020). However, local authorities blamed this massacre on conflicts between rival political factions (Chaca 2020).

The question remains, how can people fight for justice in such a structurally violent scenario? Sociologist Rossana Reguillo has theorized that the effectiveness of the narco-machine’s power lies in its elusive ubiquity: “the *narco* [as organized crime is called in Mexico] de-localizes itself. Its power appeals precisely to the densest dimension of the machine’s logic: its placeless ubiquity, which enables it to act in a silent but efficacious manner. Its presence is phantasmagoric. The narco-machine is a phantom” (Reguillo 2010, 8). One possible route to opposing this faceless power structure, Reguillo suggests, lies in grassroots networks of “counter-machines”: “By counter-machine (in the context of the work of the violence of narco-trafficking), I mean the group of fragile, intermittent, expressive, and fragmented devices society deploys to resist, make visible, or subtract power from the narco-machine” (ibid., 24).

In a similar vein, Sayak Valencia maintains that resistance to gore capitalism is possible from a transfeminist praxis, which calls for linking critical thought and social action to enable a “processual micropolitics,” transcending toxic gender constructs to help reconstitute the social fabric (Valencia 2010). This is particularly relevant when taking into account Valencia’s argument that the narco-machine thrives on the production of violent masculinity. As she points out: “It’s not possible to forge an effective resistance to the current economic system, whose power is based on extreme violence, without questioning masculinity” (ibid.).

According to Valencia, transfeminist subjects can help decenter the hegemonic notions of masculinity in order to forge community alliances. She envisions a “queer multitude” able to “develop g-local agency through performative materialization” (ibid.). While in her article Valencia doesn’t offer specific examples of this kind of activism, I find her words resonate closely with the work of activists like Lukas Avendaño and also Lía García, a trans woman who has been working in male prisons in Mexico City, organizing workshops aimed at developing an affective sense of care through haptic touch (Delgado 2019).

If this vision of transfeminist queer multitudes taking on the narco-machine sounds farfetched or utopian, theorist José Esteban Muñoz might have argued that this is precisely the point. Following the work of Robert Bloch, Muñoz maintains that utopian feelings are “indispensable to the act of imagining transformation,” making possible a “certain affective reanimation” needed to displace “a disabling political pessimism” (Muñoz 2019, 9).

Queerness, contends Muñoz, “is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that something is missing” (ibid., 1). Facing this sense of loss, queer people may articulate a “critical idealism” through art (ibid., 2).

Lukas’s political and artistic work gestures towards a muxe “butterfly utopia,” as is suggested by the title of the 2019 documentary of the same name that chronicles his struggle. I’ll return to this notion later. First, we’ll take a closer look at the ways Lukas has performed his brother’s disappearance in *Buscando a Bruno*.

### **Performing the search for Bruno Avendaño**

In most presentations of *Buscando a Bruno* that took place during 2018 and 2019, Lukas was seen holding hands with diverse women, men, trans, and nonbinary people who accompanied him in silence.<sup>10</sup> He held a large framed color picture of his brother close to his body. On the white surface surrounding the picture, spectators could read the phrase “Continuamos buscando a Bruno” (We continue searching for Bruno) above and “Por las y los desaparecidos en México” (For the disappeared in Mexico) on the bottom. In each performance, previously invited friends (and sometimes spontaneous onlookers) took turns sitting beside Lukas, dressed in Zapotec traditional feminine dress, the torso uncovered. They would first look forward toward the audience, then slowly turn to look into each other’s eyes in a serene but powerful engagement.

During a presentation held on February 9, 2019, in front of the National Autonomous University of Mexico’s Chopo University Museum of contemporary art in Mexico City, I was able to see the hour-long performance from a very close distance (alternately standing and crouching three meters away from the performers). The rest of the audience was placed at a similar distance, forming an irregular semicircle. We were around sixty people, mostly students, fellow artists, activists, and teachers, including the critic Ileana Diéguez (curator for the performance) as well as Teresa Ralli and Miguel Rubio from the Peruvian Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani.<sup>11</sup> To one side, among the audience members, stood the traditional Zapotec-Mixtec trumpeter Edgar Cartas Orozco playing a mournful elegy, which lasted for the entire performance.

The performance slowly built its powerful effect on the audience as some fifteen people took turns sitting beside Lukas to hold his hand, gaze at the audience, and gently look at one another. Many of the fellow performers were unable to contain their tears while Lukas steadily held their empathic gaze, dressed in a black lace mourning dress, a translucent black shawl covering his head and shoulders. In spite of the presence of video and still cameras, as well as the discomfort caused by standing in the blazing sun, spectators remained attentive, silently bearing witness and also acting as collective companions. More than an act of political protest, this was an act of steadfastness, of resisting violence with dignity, and of forming empathic

bonds with those who suffer and demand justice. Around forty minutes into the performance, I noticed Lukas's breathing became agitated, his eyes blazing with fierce emotion, defiantly looking forward. I could almost touch his feeling (to borrow Eve Sedgwick's phrase), partaking of the activist's performative production of affect (Sedgwick 2003).

There was a ritual cadence to this collective act of accompanying Lukas, the gesture of companionship iterated as each person held the performer's hand. Their stillness was powerful, maintaining a sitting pose with a kinetic quality "full of promise, of immanence," as Diana Taylor has argued in her discussion of Guillermo Gómez-Peña's photo performances and *tableaux vivants* (Taylor 2012, 102). Lukas became familiar with this aesthetic when he collaborated with Gómez-Peña's collective La Pocha Nostra during their Oaxaca workshops in the late 2000s. But rather than "performance art," Lukas prefers to call this kind of work "installation for the human body" or a "nomadic installation for the ambulatory body" (Avendaño 2020c), suggesting the body is a site where meaning and affect are installed. Japanese Kabuki actors developed a language of expressive poses in what they call the *mie*, a stylized gesture that "indicates an emotional climax." To perform the *mie*, actors "need to impregnate themselves physically and emotionally with the required emotion, be it anger, fear, indignation or surprise" (Cavaye 2008, 77–78). Lukas, who is trained in contemporary dance and Butoh techniques, takes to his activist performances the art of condensing emotion in expressive gestures, installing silent rage in his body, projecting it to the public sphere. Still performances such as these—documented and disseminated beyond their live presentation—reflect, according to Taylor, the "durational nature" of colonialist/racist/sexist practices that continue to dehumanize subaltern subjects (Taylor 2012, 101). On the other hand, the stillness of the performers asks audience members "to reflect and to interact" (*ibid.*, 102) in a kind of work created "to provoke, and to animate us" (*ibid.*, 103). Here Taylor anticipates a more recent theorization on the power of what she calls the "animative," "a term that captures life's fundamental movement... located in bodies rather than in language, its efficacy [lying] in the affective transmission from body to body.... [Animatives] may represent fears, hopes and also outrage" (Taylor 2017, 16).

*Buscando a Bruno* is animative in the sense that it calls for witnesses to share rage while keeping empathic company. Lukas invites us to be patiently present there with him while he denounces the absence of his brother and at the same time makes evident the absence of justice and government response to his demands (Lozano de la Pola 2018, 38). Taylor maintains that the exclamation *¡Presente!*, widespread in political demonstrations across Latin America, "can be understood as a war cry in the face of nullification; an act of solidarity as in responding, showing up, and standing with; a commitment to witnessing; a joyous accompaniment; present among, with, and to, walking and talking with others" (Taylor 2020, 4).

Lukas's installations of embodied gestures call for a particular kind of presence, not only as a political protest but also as an affirmation of queer/cur possibility. In *Buscando a Bruno*, Lukas takes to the phobic public sphere the presence of queer, trans, and nonbinary bodies accompanying one another in the struggle for justice. I maintain Lukas performs a "historically dense queer gesture" (Muñoz 2019, 67), "dense with antinormative meaning" (ibid., note 223), taking cue from the writings of José Esteban Muñoz. This can be called, borrowing LaFountain-Stoke's term, a *transloca* gesture,<sup>12</sup> in its drawing from both local Zapotec muxe and international drag traditions, bringing to this call for finding the disappeared a queer/cur demonstration of solidarity to resist violence. These gestures also points to what Muñoz calls a "queer futurity," a utopian space of possibility where hope resists "the stultifying temporal logic of a broken down present" (ibid., 12). Cuban-Mexican critic Ileana Diéguez maintains that activism in this context contributes to a *communitas* of pain (Diéguez 2016, 47–51); I would add that Lukas's work also gestures toward a *communitas* of hope. I'll return to the matter of queer utopia later, when discussing the documentary *La utopía de la mariposa* (The butterfly's utopia, 2019).

Lukas deploys a very different form of public intervention in *Llamado a la autoridad* (A call to the authorities), a series of actions that began during the fall of 2018 with massive numbers of phone calls to the offices of public prosecutors and attorneys known for their inaction in carrying out justice. When the phones were answered, activists would state the same phrase: "I'm Bruno Avendaño; I was disappeared on May 10 in Tehuantepec, Oaxaca." In this way, the activists stubbornly brought the disappeared subject's presence to the attention of authorities that would usually ignore him and others in the same plight.

*Llamado a la autoridad* took a more radical form when Lukas carried out what he calls an "act of desperation" after continued meetings with prosecutors in Oaxaca and Mexico City failed to yield results. In early 2019, Lukas was invited to join a demonstration of *madres de los desaparecidos* in downtown Mexico City on May 10, the first anniversary of Bruno's disappearance. That day, he planned to join them at 11:00 a.m. but decided to first stage a protest outside the Fiscalía General de la República (FGR, or the National Prosecutor's Office) on Insurgentes Avenue. To that end, he contacted a group of activists to help him with the symbolic occupation of the offices at 7:00 a.m., when employees would be arriving to work.<sup>13</sup>

This public version of *Llamado a la autoridad* began with Lukas and thirty people showing up in front of the modern, glass-covered FGR building. They were all dressed in white coveralls, similar to the uniforms used during forensic investigations in mass graves around Mexico.<sup>14</sup> On the backs of the overalls was printed the phrase: "¿A dónde van los desaparecidos? Seguimos buscando a Bruno" (Where do the disappeared go? We keep on looking for Bruno). Lukas recounts how guards came out of the building to nervously survey the proceedings, calling employees to quickly go up to their offices, perhaps concerned that the group was planning to set off explosives. The activists

followed Lukas's instructions, which he conveyed by what he calls "an encrypted hand language," used "because I didn't want onlookers to anticipate what we were up to" (Avendaño 2020b). Lukas then read out loud a poem to his brother, each verse repeated in chorus by the group (Figure 10.3):

May is the summer  
 May is the day of the everlasting Sandunga  
 May is when the earth's craters exhale their breath...  
 It was May, cicada child, winging of cicada, flamboyant child...  
 It was May when they took you away, Bruno;  
 But I know that when you finally emerge, you will be a beautiful  
*Cicada orni*,  
 Because that is your *tona*, your *nagual*, your avatar.  
 That is why May is not the month of the disappeared,  
 It is instead the month of the immortalized, the everlasting.  
 May 10, forty degrees Celsius in the shade,  
 May 10, the day they took you away, Bruno.  
 We carry on with our search for Bruno!<sup>15</sup>



*Figure 10.3* Lukas Avendaño at the entrance to the Fiscalía General de la República (National Prosecutor's Office) building in Mexico City, during the "Llamado a la autoridad" demonstration, May 2019. Photo still from the short video *Niño cigarra* (Cicada child), by Miguel Crespo, available on Vimeo. Used with permission of Lukas Avendaño.

As had happened with the performance at the Mexican Consulate of Barcelona the year before, this action drew the attention of the authorities, and Lukas was asked to enter the building to state his demand. He was able to deliver a letter denouncing the fact that the previous prosecutor had “lost” papers pertaining to Bruno’s case, which resulted in further delays to the investigation. “After that demonstration of force,” Lukas told me, “I was able to meet with the national prosecutor, who ordered the creation of dialogue meetings [*mesas de trabajo*] to look into the case. As of that day, things are finally advancing, albeit at a snail’s pace, but I’m accusing previous officials of deliberately delaying the investigation and thus acquiescing to Bruno’s disappearance” (Avendaño 2020b).

Lukas also points out how justice in Mexico is made inaccessible to the poor, via the high costs involved in everything from taking buses to the cities where you need to file demands to the prohibitive fees involved in hiring lawyers.<sup>16</sup> “Bear in mind,” Lukas told me, “that farmworkers in rural Oaxaca barely earn two hundred pesos [less than ten US dollars] a day!” Add to that the lack of knowledge of citizens’ rights and legal terminology, the Kafkaesque bureaucratic labyrinth awaiting those who attempt to file demands, plus the constant fear of suffering harm from criminals who would block any investigation into their dealings. It is for this reason that families of the disappeared have formed hundreds of independent groups; they are working-class people (mostly housewives) who, regrettably, need to become experts in forensic excavations. These people, at times aided by nonprofit organizations, use the kind of protective uniform donned by the activists of *Llamado a la autoridad*.

A month after the demonstration in front of the FGR, *Buscando a Bruno* was programmed as the opening act for the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics’ XI Encuentro (part conference, part performance festival) at Mexico City’s National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). On June 9, 2019, the performance was staged in front of the UNAM’s University Museum of Contemporary Art. Lukas showed up wearing a black Tehuana skirt, his body and head completely covered with a skin-colored bodysuit, which impeded the audience from contemplating his naked torso and striking gaze, as in previous versions of the performance. The image thwarted audience expectations of seeing “the muxe artist” while suggesting the ambivalence of bodily presence/absence. Lukas told me one of the reasons he decided to wear that bodysuit was to avoid the voyeuristic gaze of the Encuentro’s international audience. He also wished to emulate “the feeling of loneliness and confinement” that people who are kidnapped by criminal organizations experience. “Kidnapped people are always blindfolded, and if murdered, their bodies are found in garbage bags or wrapped with blankets, so in the performance, I wanted to approach that experience of sensory deprivation and absolute loneliness, which was very difficult, as I always want to be close to my audience and to engage people directly” (Avendaño 2020b) (Figure 10.4).



Figure 10.4 Performance of *¿Dónde está Bruno?* during the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics' XI *Encuentro* in Mexico City's National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), June 2019. Photo: Manuel Molina Martagon, by permission of the Hemispheric Institute.

Some spectators grew restless, the midday summer sun bearing down on them, their attention wandering as they greeted fellow *Encuentro* participants. As opposed to previous versions of *Buscando a Bruno*, where people could gather close to the performers, here they were separated from the performance area by a large reflecting pool.<sup>17</sup> At one point, spectators were given white sheets of paper and invited to fold paper boats and make them float on the pool. About this action, Lukas told me: “The act of folding paper boats transports us to our childhood but is also a metaphor of disappearance, of the invisibility of criminal actions. One can see how the little boats begin to sink and disappear from the surface, but no one in the audience does a thing about it, so I make them accomplices to the sinking of those fragile paper bodies” (Avendaño 2020b).

At the end of the performance, an unannounced group of about twenty people arrived and walked into the pool, where the remaining paper boats struggled to stay afloat. They were the activists who had participated in the *Llamado a la autoridad* protest outside the FGR the previous month. This time, in addition to their white overalls, they wore sanitary face masks similar to the ones that became compulsory during the following year's

COVID-19 pandemic. The group approached Lukas and surrounded him completely as we in the audience read the name B-R-U-N-O, one letter written on the back of each one of five uniformed activists. The group eventually broke up and abandoned the space, but Lukas was nowhere to be seen. Had he been dressed in one of the uniforms to conceal his departure? Edgar Cartas's trumpet continued to play its last, mournful notes, as we realized the act of disappearance was complete<sup>18</sup> (Figure 10.5).

### The politics of visibility

During our conversations, Lukas remarked that his performances are not mainly concerned with bringing about visibility but rather with the attainment of justice: “I don't want to limit my work to mere visibility, which is often achieved without advancing in the procurement of justice. What I want is to stop this kind of thing from repeating, so that others don't have to suffer what we are going through” (Avendaño 2020b).

As I have discussed above, Lukas, along with his family and activist friends, has engaged in numerous tactics in his search for Bruno, including



Figure 10.5 Concluding moments of *¿Dónde está Bruno?* during the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics' XI *Encuentro* in Mexico City's National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), June 2019. Photo: Archive of the Hemispheric Institute.

filing legal paper work, putting out social media alerts, participating in panel discussions, becoming the subject of a prize-winning documentary, and staging political demonstrations and performance art. While public and media attention are important ways of speaking truth to power, Lukas has practiced caution in how much he makes visible to whom, as mentioned in the version of *Buscando a Bruno* performed during the Hemispheric Institute's XI Encuentro. In *Llamado a la autoridad*, he forgoes signifiers of muxeidad and instead appears nearly incognito, dressed in the identical head-covering uniform worn by the other activists.

These interventions contrast with other performances in Lukas's repertoire, notably *Madame Gabia'* (2010) and *No soy persona, soy mariposa* (2014), where he engages in defiantly erotic choreographies, wearing either a sequined red skirt or stiletto high-heeled boots, wielding two horsewhips (Prieto Stambaugh 2017, 45–48). These performances can be placed in the tradition of postporn, or *pornoterrorista*, acts, in-your-face interventions that unsettle the dominant heteronormativity, reclaiming the performer's right to the dissident mixing of politics, sexuality, and pleasure (see Torres 2013). However, as Lukas pointed out in remarks quoted above, *Buscando a Bruno* is an altogether different matter, involving a very personal and painful struggle for justice.

Peggy Phelan has expressed skepticism regarding the politics of visibility, cautioning against assuming that increased visibility automatically leads to enhanced political power, as it can backfire, making minoritarian subjects easy prey to surveillance and fetishism (Phelan 1993, 6–7). Using examples such as the Guerrilla Girls' anonymous interventions, Phelan advocates another route: that of working with the *unmarked*, in performances that defer the voyeuristic gaze, resist the economy of reproduction, and articulate an “active vanishing” (ibid., 19). The unmarked, maintains Phelan, is possible in works of performance art where it “shows itself through the negative and through disappearance” (ibid., 27).

But what kind of disappearance are we talking about? In his discussion on performances that address the ambivalence of presence and disappearance, the Spanish critic José A. Sánchez writes of three kinds of “exclusions from the sphere of appearance”: (a) *passive* disappearance, which he describes as “a state of invisibility characteristic of the dispossessed, of the marginal, of those who are not given any social value”; (b) *forced* disappearance, “the most radical form of exclusion”; and (c) *active* disappearance, which can be “a means of emphasizing the absence of those who are not allowed to appear or those who were forcibly disappeared” (Sánchez 2019, 6).

Regarding his brother's plight, Lukas has stated that physical disappearance “is the culmination of a series of previous disappearances. Bruno used to be a *jornalero* [itinerant farmworker], also an ‘illegal’ immigrant to the United States. People like him are always already *desaparecidos* in the social, economic, cultural, and workforce spheres” (Avendaño in RompivientoTV 2019). Bruno went from a “passive” to a “forced

disappearance,” in Sánchez’s terms, to which Lukas responds with public performances of “active disappearance.”

Lukas’s work employs tactical negotiations of visibility and invisibility. While it’s at some point important to deflect the voyeuristic gaze of curious onlookers, he finds power in “darle rostro a los desaparecidos,” that is, making public the faces and names of people who have suffered forced disappearance. “It is important to allow the *desaparecidos* to have enunciation,” Lukas points out. “The face of Bruno does not belong to an individual, but to thousands of men and women” (Avendaño in RompevientoTV, 2019).

As of this writing, the most recent public staging of *Llamado a la autoridad* occurred in Lukas’s hometown of Tehuantepec on May 10, 2020, the second anniversary of Bruno’s disappearance. At that time Mexico (as were most countries in the world) was undergoing nationwide confinement and social distancing measures to hinder the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. For this scaled-down version of *Llamado a la autoridad*, Lukas was accompanied by two other activists to the regional prosecutor’s office and later to the local headquarters of the human rights defender. Wearing white overalls and surgical face masks, with photos of Bruno dressed in his naval officer’s uniform hanging from their necks, the group proceeded to paste posters and paint graffiti concerning his disappearance on the buildings’ facades.

In the short video posted by Lukas on Facebook to document this action, we can hear his voice-over saying:

Confinement from COVID-19 adds to the perpetuation of the crime-on-all-fronts scenario to which the Mexican State has subjected us. We refuse to become victims; we refuse to be incriminated by our phenotype. I don’t accept the stigmatizing categories of “stubborn” and “social misfits” they try to impose on us.

In defiance of such categorizing, we rise above this catastrophe of sanitary, humanitarian, ethical, and aesthetic proportions to tell them we will not leave. Though they would have us disappear, there will always be someone else to fill that void with the only resource we, as the less than nobodies, have: the conscientious objection to any inhuman order.<sup>19</sup>

Lukas denounces how state agencies dismiss crimes against citizens they should be protecting. He emphatically repudiates the mechanisms of racial and class stigmatization used to marginalize and disappear those who dare call for justice. The brief but impactful statement makes clear that the power of those branded “less than nobody” lies in collective action and the “conscientious objection to any inhuman order.” Even in the midst of the pandemic, Lukas says, “¡Presente!” (Taylor 2020), making his body

politically present before the closed, indifferent government buildings, affirming a collective determination to continue demanding accountability.

Lukas's work engages in what Diéguez describes as the task of "imagining a way of writing unfound bodies" (Diéguez 2016, 272) and of creating rites to "sustain the yearning for lost affects" (ibid., 265). This is one of the most critical challenges facing those who wish to create artistic evocations of absent bodies. It is eloquently summarized by the Peruvian artist Emilio Santisteban in his question: "What role does body art play in a country of disappeared bodies?" (quoted in Diéguez 2016, 342).

The paradoxical tasks of representing the unrepresentable and embodying disappearance are addressed in Diéguez's important book *Cuerpos sin duelo* (Bodies without mourning). The author discusses several possible ways, exemplified by the work of artists and activists in Mexico, Colombia, and other Latin American countries. These are artists who work with procedures of evocation instead of substitution or who engage in allegories of mourning to suggest that which has been robbed of its image (Diéguez 2016, 297–322). Following Georges Didi-Huberman, Diéguez calls for working with the image's phantasmal quality, exploring the latent life that inhabits, for example, the picture of a lost relative (ibid., 220). These are all ways of resisting the ghastly "necrotheatre" staged by criminals in public spaces (ibid., 125–242). To oppose these "punitive" displays of extreme violence, Diéguez points to art that articulates "performativities of pain, that are at the same time performativities of a desire to perpetuate and affirm life" (ibid., 81).

*Buscando a Bruno* stands out as a performance that fully embraces the challenge of bringing forced disappearance into the public *space of appearance*, as Riansares Lozano has argued following Hannah Arendt's formulation (Lozano de la Pola 2018, 32–33). Spaces of appearance are, according to Arendt, made possible through collective political action "wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action" (quoted in d'Entrevés 2019). Lukas's work brings together people of all genders as a liminal "moral community" (Diéguez 2016, 49) that demands accountability and transforms pain into political action. The stakes are high, as the violence of the narco-machine often appears insurmountable, leading Diéguez to interrogate the extent to which artists are able to materialize "liminal micro-utopias" in such a scenario (ibid., 47). In the following concluding section I suggest Lukas has found ways to interpellate the state and the law with the graceful power of muxeidad, gesturing toward his particular micro-utopia symbolized by a colorful migrating insect.

### *The butterfly's utopia*

During the early months of 2019, independent filmmaker Miguel J. Crespo followed Lukas in order to tell his story in the documentary *La utopía de la mariposa*. At the outset of the striking thirty-minute film, we can see Lukas working with his mother tending goats in their farm in Tehuantepec. Felipa

Martínez Avendaño is not the prototypical Tehuana matriarch pictured in Graciela Iturbide's iconic photographs of Zapotec women in Juchitán. She has a masculine demeanor, wearing an old baseball cap, checkered shirt, and baggy pants as she works in the field or speaks candidly about how she loves Lukas but is actually not too fond of seeing him perform.<sup>20</sup> In other scenes, Lukas is shown applying makeup and fixing his hair as he talks about playing with gender roles as a child, something that is "culturally permitted" in his community. After some brief scenes of Lukas's early work as a performance artist, the film arrives at the topic of Bruno's disappearance and the ensuing struggle.

In the last sequence, following the painful chronicle of outrage and government indifference, we see a nearly naked Lukas refreshing himself in a river. The images, suggesting cleansing and renewal, are accompanied by Lukas's serene voice-over: "Searching for Bruno is... well, it's a utopia, because in this context of 40,000 *desaparecidos*, it's a utopia to think you can have a different outcome to that of the 40,000. To think we can find him, alive and well... that's a utopia, because the other 40,000 disprove that possibility."<sup>21</sup>

The documentary's title links this utopia to the image of a butterfly, a creature that was featured in Lukas's 2014 performance *No soy persona, soy mariposa* (I'm not a person, I'm a butterfly). In that piece, Lukas embodied the strong erotic presence of an indigenous high-heeled dominatrix, emerging from an oversize paper Monarch butterfly hanging in the background.<sup>22</sup> As he performed a slow choreography looking straight into the eyes of the student and teacher audience huddled close to the catwalk, Lukas spoke in a powerful poetic voice. His speech borrowed from fellow performer Felipe Osornio's manifesto "Pensamiento Puñal" (roughly translated as "Faggot Thought"):

I'm going to speak,  
 I'm going to speak,  
 I'm going to speak for those who are afraid to go to their neighborhoods and schools...  
 I'm going to speak for those who will make of their lives a masterpiece,  
 To jump over the precipice, and fly,  
 I'm going to speak for all the occupied bodies,  
 From the operation room, amniotic liquid, mother's blood,  
 Up to the shooting wall, the mad house, the hospital, the concentration camps with pink triangles...<sup>23</sup>

This is a butterfly warrior for the dispossessed queer multitudes who are stigmatized because of their social class and skin color. In speaking for "all occupied bodies," he deploys a decolonial gesture, as theorized by Walter Dignolo, a set of performative actions, sentiments, movements, and speech acts that "directly or indirectly disobey the dictates of the colonial matrix"

(Mignolo 2014, 13). Mignolo maintains the decolonial gesture “is a strategy of delinking from Western modern epistemology and its hermeneutic which is based in the detachment of soul/body, mind/body and in a Masculine superior being, and also a strategy of regaining the confidence and the knowing of the androgynous Energetic force of Creation” (ibid., 8). Here the author refers to the cosmology of Native Americans and Canadian First Nations peoples, known in Latin America as “pueblos originarios.”

Lukas’s muxeidad is informed by these systems of knowledge, which include the notion of the “two-spirited people,” those who espouse both the feminine and the masculine. According to Canadian author Gilbert Deschamps, First Nations have a long history of recognizing two-spirited individuals within the community and often consider them to be visionaries and healers (Deschamps 1998, 1). Two-spirited people and muxes have the ability to perform decolonial gestures that disobey the ideology of the “Masculine superior being,” contributing to deflect the hyperviolent masculinity that propels gore capitalism.

Lukas has spoken about the need to exercise an “archaeology of memory” to recall the way muxes were historically stigmatized during the colonial period by Spanish priests, who branded them as nefarious sodomites (Avendaño 2020a). At the same time, priests considered some Zapotec deities, such as the bat god to be representations of the devil. Lukas explains bats are called *biguidi beela* and *biguidi zinia* in the Zapotec language or, in his own words, “mariposas de carne” (flesh and skin butterflies). “Maybe that’s why homosexuals are called *mariposones!*” he says. The regular butterfly, on the other hand, is called *biguidi*, “el que tiene piel de aire” (the one with skin made of air). He suggests the *biguidi beela* bat is the muxe’s totemic spirit and links it with the image of the *mariposa*, or gay butterfly (Avendaño 2020a).<sup>24</sup> Lukas’s decolonial archaeology transforms historical homophobia into a cosmology populated by airborne creatures that are able to gracefully resist oppression.

The Chicana poet and theorist Gloria Anzaldúa found the Mesoamerican bat god to be a powerful metaphor for the kind of vision discerned in the work of Chicana and border artists who exist, she argues, in the space of *nepantla*, a Nahuatl word that suggests a liminal and transitional state of “in-between” (Anzaldúa 1993, 180). In her key essay “Border Arte: Nepantla, el Lugar de la Frontera,” Anzaldúa associates the *murciélagos* god with the “*nepantla* stage of border artists—the dark cave of creativity where they hang upside down, turning the self upside down in order to see from another point of view, one that brings a new understanding” (ibid., 183–84). Maybe Lukas Avendaño’s *biguidi beela* also has this epistemic power of perceiving the narco-machine from another point of view and of finding ways to demolish its foundational reliance on gender violence.

Butterflies are remarkable beings, both fragile and resilient, as seen with the migrating monarchs that annually cross an entire continent seeking new homes. Lukas’s performances gesture toward a butterfly utopia where queer/

cuir multitudes enact “a refusal of... finitude” (Muñoz 2019, 65) and forge alliances with international activists from all walks of life. As Mignolo points out, “Decolonial gestures in one domain impinge on the others. It is the butterfly effect” (Mignolo 2014, 18). *Buscando a Bruno* and *Llamado a la autoridad* are already working to interpellate the state and the law in actions that, along with many others across Mexico and Latin America, offer a glimmer of hope for justice.

## Epilogue

On December 3, 2020, news broke that justice authorities had found Bruno’s body in a “clandestine” common grave close to the town of Salina Cruz in the Tehuantepec region of Oaxaca (Manzo 2020). The report states that the Avendaño family received Bruno’s remains at his mother’s home for proper burial, a painful event that nonetheless was “good news” after 30 months of searching. A few days later, Lukas posted a video on Facebook where he thanks all involved in making the return possible but affirms that his activism will continue, centered on bringing justice to the forced disappearance and murder of his brother. He also denounces local officials who deceived his family by falsely claiming they had seen Bruno at a party a few days after his disappearance. Lukas later told me his family had been notified of the discovery on November 12, and that the investigation had been conducted under the supervision of the Oaxaca Public Prosecutor’s Special Unit for Forced Disappearance (2020d). However, for some reason, officials withheld the information for four months, as the document they were given shows the results of the test on Bruno’s remains had been ready as early as July 2020. I asked Lukas what comes next, to which he replied that he and his family will keep demanding truth, justice, accountability, reparations, and the assurance that crimes of this kind will not go unpunished.

Bruno Avendaño can finally be mourned, but Lukas will continue to work with activists and families to denounce crimes against humanity in Mexico and elsewhere in the Americas.

## Notes

- 1 *Artist* refers to people whose work mixes art and political activism.
- 2 I’ll use the artist’s given name to avoid confusing him with his brother Bruno.
- 3 Lukas holds a BA in anthropology from the Universidad Veracruzana, where he also studied contemporary dance.
- 4 See Eide (2016) for a summary of the way this concept famously coined by Gayatri Spivak has been discussed in the humanities.
- 5 *Cuir* is a recently coined term that twists the English adjective *queer* as a decolonial gesture that in the geopolitical south aims to foreground LGBTQ+ lives and struggles (Valencia 2015, 32–33).
- 6 Up to 2019, official estimates mentioned around 40,000 disappeared, so it was surprising that the number almost doubled after the current administration’s report.

- 7 *Narco-machine* is a term coined by the Mexican sociologist Rossana Reguillo (2010).
- 8 I thank my partner Luis Esparza for helping me with the Trans-Isthmus Corridor's human geography and history.
- 9 Other ethnic groups that inhabit the isthmus region are the Huave (or Ikoots), Zoque, Chontal, and Mixe. The Zapotec call themselves Binnizá, meaning "people who come from the clouds" (Instituto Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas 2017).
- 10 *Buscando a Bruno* was performed eight times between June 2018 and August 2019 in public spaces in Barcelona; Oaxaca City; Mexico City; Valladolid, Spain; and St. Gallen, Switzerland.
- 11 The performance was part of a series of lectures and round-table discussions on art and politics in Latin America held at the museum. Right after the *Buscando a Bruno* performance, Lukas, Yuyachkani director Miguel Rubio, and activist Mario Vergara participated in a discussion with the audience, facilitated by critic Ileana Diéguez.
- 12 La Fountain-Stokes proposes the term *transloca* as a vernacular queer of color "critical intervention to account for the intersection of space, geography, and sexuality" in the work of drag (and *loca*) performance artists who live in trans-local or diasporic contexts (2011).
- 13 I asked Lukas about the people who help him with these actions, and he said they are a group dedicated to making injustice visible in Mexico, choosing to remain anonymous.
- 14 *Llamado a la autoridad* can be seen online in a short video produced as an addendum to the documentary *La utopía de la mariposa*: <https://vimeo.com/337897667>.
- 15 Mayo es el verano Mayo es el día de la inmortal Sandunga Es mayo cuando los cráteres de la tierra exhalan su aliento (...) Es mayo, niño chicharra, aleteo de chicharra, niño flamboyán (...) Es mayo cuando te llevaron, Bruno; Pero yo sé que cuando emerjas, serás una hermosa *Cicada orni*, Porque ese es tu tona, tu nahual, tu avatar. Por eso mayo no es el mes de los desaparecidos, Sino de los immortalizados y perpetuados. Diez de mayo, cuarenta grados centígrados a la sombra, Diez de mayo es el día que te llevaron, Bruno. ¡Seguimos buscando a Bruno!
- 16 Lukas estimates that, up to mid-2020, he and his family have spent nearly 500,000 pesos (around \$23,000 US) in legal and other expenses, funds that were raised through enormous effort (Avendaño 2020c).
- 17 Lukas told me he had originally intended to sit in the middle of the pool, having the audience around him, but the museum didn't allow it (Avendaño 2020b).
- 18 For another account of this performance, see Medina 2019.
- 19 "El confinamiento del COVID-19 suma a que se perpetúe el delito pluriofensivo al que nos ha sometido el Estado Mexicano. Nos negamos a ser víctimas, nos negamos a ser incriminados por nuestro fenotipo. No acepto sus categorías que nos estigmatizan llamándonos necios, inadaptados. Pese a todas sus enunciaciones, nos sobreponemos a esta catástrofe sanitaria, humanitaria, ética y estética, para decirles que no nos iremos. Aunque desaparecidos nos quieran, siempre habrá alguien que llenará este vacío con el único recurso que tenemos los menos que menos que nadie: la objeción de conciencia a toda orden inhumana."
- 20 In the documentary, Lukas says he's the third of six siblings, Bruno being the youngest. Their father, whom Doña Felipa mentions enjoyed attending Lukas's performances, passed away in 2011.
- 21 "*Buscar a Bruno* es como, es una utopía. Porque en este contexto de cuarenta mil desaparecidos, pues es una utopía pensar que puedes tener un final diferente a

- esos cuarenta mil. Pensar que lo podemos llegar a encontrar, y lo podemos encontrar con vida y bien, eso es una utopía, porque te desmienten esas otras cuarenta mil ausencias.”
- 22 Here I describe the performance done for students and professors of the Universidad Veracruzana’s performing arts programs in the city of Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico (September 2014).
- 23 “Voy a hablar, voy a hablar, voy a hablar por los que tienen miedo de llegar a los barrios y a las escuelas, [...] Voy a hablar por los que quieren hacer de su vida una obra maestra, saltar al vacío, volar, voy a hablar por todos los cuerpos ocupados, desde la sala de operaciones, líquido amniótico, sangre de madre, hasta el paredón, el manicomio, el hospital, los campos de concentración con triángulos rosas...”
- 24 The word *mariposa* is used in homosexual slurs such as *mariposón*, alluding to the term *maricón* (sissy). Mexican gay director and actor Tito Vasconcelos playfully employed this terminology in his 1985 show *Mariposas y maricosas* (see Prieto Stambaugh 2000).

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