

EXORCISING HISTORY

Argentine Theater
under Dictatorship

Jean Graham-Jones



Lewisburg
Bucknell University Press
London: Associated University Presses

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Associated University Presses
440 Forsgate Drive
Cranbury, NJ 08512

Associated University Presses
16 Barter Street
London WC1A 2AH, England

Associated University Presses
P.O. Box 338, Port Credit
Mississauga, Ontario
Canada L5G 4L8

The paper used in this publication meets the requirements of the American National Standard for Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials Z39.48-1984.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Graham-Jones, Jean, date.

Exorcising history : Argentine theater under dictatorship / Jean Graham-Jones.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p. 226-243)

ISBN 0-8387-5424-4 (alk. paper)

1. Argentine drama—20th century—History and criticism.
2. Theater—Argentina—Buenos Aires—History—20th century.
3. Theater—Political aspects—Argentina. 4. Politics and literature—Argentina. I. Title.

PQ7689.G73 2000

862—dc21

99-24478

CIP

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Preface

Artistic production and the artistic product cannot be separated from their sociohistorical moment, and so it follows that theater is intimately linked to its surrounding, and penetrating, reality. This book seeks to document, contextualize, and analyze the theater produced in Buenos Aires during Argentina's military dictatorship of 1976–83 and the first years of the nation's subsequent return to democracy.

Buenos Aires has enjoyed a long tradition of theater, from the eighteenth-century Teatro de la Ranchería to the present Corrientes Street commercial theater houses. Theater listings in the daily newspapers advertise fifty to sixty plays being staged at any given moment during the theater season. This quantitative wealth complicated the selection of plays analyzed in this book. Because I believe that a theater text truly comes to life at the moment of its staging, and in order to include the theater reception process (and the spectator) in my analysis, I have selected plays by Argentinean playwrights staged, yet not necessarily written, during the period under study.¹ I have thus excluded foreign plays produced in Buenos Aires in those years along with plays written, but not staged, during that time period. The reader will further note an overall focus directed away from a literary reading of dramatic texts and toward a theatrical account of productions taking place during this important period in Argentina.

The process of play selection followed several criteria: In an attempt at striking a balance between "consecrated" writers and the heretofore neglected or relatively unknown authors, I consciously chose to include the works of playwrights largely unknown outside Argentina (such as Roma Mahieu, Hebe Serebrisky, María Cristina Verrier, and Vicente Zito Lema), as well as the lesser-known plays of well-known playwrights (e.g., Aída Bortnik, Roberto Mario Cossa, Griselda Gambaro, Ricardo Halac, Ricardo Monti, and Eduardo Pavlovsky), and finally, those works of playwrights who were relatively unknown during the period under study (e.g., Mauricio Kartun, Eduardo Rovner, and Susana Torres Molina). The plays analyzed in depth include prize-winning independent plays, the productions

most often mentioned by *porteño* spectators, and the most controversial plays of the period. I have sought a similar representation in my discussion of theater groups, including Corrientes, "off-Corrientes," and "off-off-Corrientes" theaters in my analysis, as well as the official state and municipal theaters, where appropriate.

Some of the plays selected have never been published, and of those that have been published, many are not available in the United States or even known outside Argentina. Relatively few Argentine plays have been translated into English, and all translations are mine, unless otherwise noted. In view of the reader's possibly limited access to the plays analyzed, I have chosen to include plot summaries in my discussion of the texts and their productions. I have also quoted from critical reviews of these productions because I believe the reviews help us to assess the public's reception of these plays at the time of their staging. And there are moments in Argentina's recent past—the 1977 prohibition of Pavlovsky's *Telarañas* [Spiderwebs] comes to mind—when the critic has played a role far greater than that of giving a thumbs-up or thumbs-down.

By way of further acknowledging and documenting the wealth of theater created in Buenos Aires, a selection of national plays premiered during the period under study has been appended to this text (Appendix 1). While by no means exhaustive, said listing also includes restagings of national plays, productions of foreign plays, revues, musicals, and cabaret shows, visits from foreign theater groups, and events of particular importance to the theater community. I have also attached a general chronology (Appendix 2) to aid the reader in following the many events that conditioned this decisive period in Argentine theater.

The plays discussed in the subsequent chapters do not necessarily fall within the category of "political theater," as that term often connotes a theater of agitation and propaganda; nevertheless, I would fervently argue for their being read as political in the sense that each is a product of the experiences and imagination of its creator or creators, and conditioned and influenced by the sociopolitical structures in place at the moment of creation. I would also argue for each text being read as a "history," for, as the historian Hayden White (1987) has claimed,

One can produce an imaginary discourse about real events that may not be less "true" for being imaginary. It all depends upon how one construes the function of the faculty of imagination in human nature. (57)

It is not my intention to provide an event-driven history of the military junta's *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* [Process of National Re-

organization] through the plays staged during that time period; rather, I wish to examine how personal and collective history enters into the dramatic, theatrical creative process, that is, in the creation of dramatic worlds that, in a sense, re-create and thus respond to and revise the "real" world.

The chapters that follow are organized chronologically to facilitate an examination of theater produced during the different stages of the military regime and the early years of "redemocratization."

The Introduction opens with a discussion of the sociopolitical factors shaping Buenos Aires theater of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Having survived the violent Rosas dictatorship of the nineteenth century and at least one military coup d'état every decade since the 1930s,² Argentina, at the time of the 1976 military seizure of power, already had a long history of authoritarian rule. As a logical starting point for a discussion of what one hopes will be Argentina's last military dictatorship, I have chosen to begin with the mid-1960s, a period of political upheaval in nearly all the countries of the Western Hemisphere. From there I proceed to trace the subsequent repression's impact on Buenos Aires theater production, specifically regarding the paired issues of censorship and self-censorship.

The chapters that constitute the body of this study share a general structure: a historical overview of the period is provided, followed by a general discussion of the theater produced and in-depth analyses of two or more of the landmark plays of the period. Chapter 1 focuses on theatrical productions of the first years of the Proceso (1976–79), its darkest and most repressive years, when censorship and state violence were at their height. Theater reacted by closing in on itself, creating hermetic worlds in which family politics and sado-masochistic games stood in for larger social violence. The preferred trope was the metaphor, an expressive means employed to avoid censorial repercussions.

Chapter 2 traces the theater produced in the junta's decline (1980–82), when the plummeting economy and the now-divided military's defeat in the Malvinas/Falklands War fueled national protests.³ Theater continued its cautious counter censorship while simultaneously calling attention to its censored status in what I perceive to be a conscious demythologization of national and cultural myths and archetypes. The return of many previously exiled artists and the appearance of "new" theater practitioners on the stage provided additional perspectives and helped promote a self-critical distancing. This development of a self-critical voice also signaled the way toward a historical revisionist project that would be fully taken on in the early post-Proceso years.

The "sociotheatrical phenomenon" of Argentine theater, Teatro Abierto (1981–85), merits a separate chapter for its organized attempt at transcending the polarities of the dictatorship and the self-definition of Buenos Aires theater in opposition to the military regime. Teatro Abierto also stands as an excellent example of the traditional divisions in Buenos Aires theater between the realistic and avant-garde camps. In these efforts at transcendence also lay the seeds of Teatro Abierto's demise because, despite its efforts to annually reinvent itself both thematically and formally, the movement was not able to, nor possibly was it ever intended to, adapt sufficiently to the new "redemocratized" reality. As there has been no comprehensive history of this important national movement published to date, chapter 3 takes a short excursion into historical narrative by way of providing an overview of Teatro Abierto's brief life. The greater portion of the chapter is devoted to a comparison of multiple texts by the same playwrights as demonstrations of Teatro Abierto's thematic and aesthetic experimentation as well as its achievements and failures.

Chapter 4 develops the changes in post-Proceso (1983–85) Buenos Aires theater alluded to in chapter 3's discussion of Teatro Abierto and focuses on the theatrical processing of recent Argentine history and the self-interrogative issues of individual and collective responsibility. These changes also reveal the beginnings of an identity confusion crisis in porteño theater that has continued to the present day.

The reader may perceive in the text a gradual movement from the concrete to the theoretical. As the sociohistorical and sociocultural groundwork is laid, I incorporate more theoretical references in my analysis of the plays and productions. For example, in the early chapters I present mainly Argentine theatrical traditions and debates, such as the controversy between realism and avant-garde or the resurgence of the *grotesco criollo* and the *sainete*. In later chapters I am able to bring to the discussion the theories of Anne Ubersfeld, Augusto Boal, Bertolt Brecht, and Marjorie Garber. Given the fact that my personal formation as theater practitioner and critic is eclectic, it is logical that this book should avail itself of the many theoretical and practical models in circulation. My own reading of dramatic and theatrical texts has been conditioned by my work as a performer and director. I have internalized what would be called the theoretical models of semiotics, deconstruction, gender and identity construction, and historiography, especially as they have been applied to the theater, as the reader will note in my analyses of the plays of the period.

It will also be seen during the reading of this text that I am seeking points of contact between the often separated fields of literature and theater criticism, a case in point being chapter 4's discussion of the Brechtian split character and Bakhtinian dialogism. Both dramatic literature and theater are performance models, in the sense Hayden White (1987) ascribes to narrative when he asserts that "a discourse is regarded as an apparatus for the production of meaning rather than as only a vehicle for the transmission of information about an extrinsic referent" (42). This book is my analysis of the many "performances" that took place in Buenos Aires theater from 1976 to 1985.

I cannot conclude my prefatory remarks without acknowledging the many people and institutions that helped make this book possible. The members of my doctoral committee at the University of California, Los Angeles (Gerardo Luzuriaga, Carroll B. Johnson, José Pascual Buxó and Edit Villareal) provided much guidance during this book's initial stages. I am also grateful to George Woodyard, David W. Foster, Diana Taylor, José Miguel Oviedo, Shirley Arora, and Peter Hajdu for their invaluable counsel over the years. Gerardo Luzuriaga merits special acknowledgement: without his personal and professional encouragement and advice, this book would not have been born. A grant from the Fulbright Commission enabled me to spend most of 1992 in Buenos Aires; earlier and subsequent grants from the University of California, Los Angeles, and the Florida State University allowed for many other trips to Argentina. My greatest and most heartfelt thanks go to all the porteños who willingly shared their time, knowledge, and experiences: the critics Daniel Altamiranda, Jorge Dubatti, Miguel Angel Giella, Francisco Javier, Marta Lena Paz, Osvaldo Pellettieri, and Beatriz Seibel; the librarians at Argentores, the Instituto Nacional de Estudios Teatrales (INET), and the Biblioteca Nacional for access to their archives; and, especially the many theater practitioners who contributed so generously of their time, recollections, and personal archives. Of course, any failings this book may possess are entirely my own. On a personal note, I would like to thank my family, friends and colleagues, both in the United States and Argentina, for their innumerable kindnesses and unflinching support, especially Claudia Mazza, Sandra Ribotta, Silvia Cañaverl, Aníbal Ilguisonis, Julio López Uchaca, Susana DiGerónimo, Susana Lui, Claudia Salgado, Mercedes Falcón, China Zorrilla, Marcelo Ramos, Cristina Escofet, Ana María Casó, Ricardo Monti, Gustavo Geirola, Adriana Capparelli, Raúl Liberotti, Lola Proaño, Silvia Pellarolo, Kristine Ibsen, Michael Schuessler, Adriana Bergero, Hilda Peinado, José Luis Mirabal, Sherry Velasco, Jackie Mitchell, Enrique

García, William Cloonan and Betty LaFace, Ben Gunter, Delia Poey and Virgil Suárez, Nancy Powers, Roberto Fernández, Lori Walters, Mark Pietralunga, the Mickee Faust Club, and my beloved *tontaleros*. Finally, this book is dedicated to my parents, to Brian, and to the many Argentinean theater practitioners who continue to work, produce, and create under still less than ideal circumstances.

Introduction: Theater and the State: Buenos Aires, 1976

Every day we Argentines force ourselves not to turn the horror into a religion, but also not to forget what happened.

—Osvaldo Soriano

Immediately following his 1966 coup that overthrew the democratically elected President Arturo Illia, the military leader General Juan Carlos Onganía banned all political parties and activities. Onganía, during what with Proceso's hindsight would be seen as the first of two "*dictablandas*,"² set into motion his modernizing yet autocratic project of the "Revolución Argentina." He was met with a general strike by the labor unions. In 1969, reminiscent of the French May of '68, the *Cordobazo* riot shook the industrial city of Córdoba for forty-eight hours. Contrary to official reports of outside subversion, it was a spontaneous, grass-roots movement initiated by the unlikely union of the city's automobile workers and university students, both groups frustrated with the continued inflation and governmental repression. The *Cordobazo* divided the army into two camps: the Onganía hardliners versus those favoring concessions, led by General Alejandro Lanusse. The violence continued in 1969 when union leader Augusto Vandor was assassinated and bombs were set off in Buenos Aires supermarkets during Nelson Rockefeller's visit to the Argentinean capital.

By 1970, urban guerrilla groups seeking a popular revolution were actively engaged in bank robberies, kidnappings, and assassinations. In June, the *Montoneros*, a guerrilla organization within the Peronist party, kidnapped and, six days later, executed former President Pedro Eugenio Aramburu.³ Non-Peronist guerrilla groups formed, the best-known being the Córdoba-based *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* (ERP).⁴ A second demonstration in Córdoba, the *Viborazo* of February 1971, sharpened concerns about a possible popular

insurrection. Clandestine counterrevolutionary forces were also at work: In 1970, the group *Mano* (composed of ultraright extremists, rumored to be off-duty policemen) attacked the Soviet ambassador. In the early months of 1971, students, Peronists, and union militants were disappearing at the rate of one person every eighteen days.

In 1970 General Onganía in turn was overthrown, replaced by General Roberto M. Levingston, who would himself be succeeded by General Alejandro A. Lanusse in 1971. The relatively conciliatory Lanusse instituted his 1972 *Gran Acuerdo Nacional* [Great National Accord], in an attempt to unite the country in the fight against "subversion" and bring about a return to constitutional rule, with Lanusse proposing himself as his national coalition's candidate. The other political parties refused to agree, and Lanusse, as a concessionary measure, lifted the eighteen-year ban on Peronism, an opening seized by Perón (until that time exiled in Spain) to make a short visit to Argentina and reorganize his followers, generating a renaissance of his party's popularity. The repression continued, nevertheless, and a national outcry ensued from the Trelew prison "massacre," in which sixteen *guerrilleros*, including Ana María Villarreal, the wife of ERP leader, Mario Roberto Santucho, were shot while reportedly attempting to escape.

National elections were finally held in 1973, and Héctor Cámpora, the candidate from the Peronist alliance (*Frente Justicialista de Liberación*), was elected president, with forty-nine percent of the vote. During his brief term in office, Cámpora declared political amnesty for and the release of all imprisoned guerrillas, as tension between the Montoneros and the labor unions increased. This strain in their relationship became violent when Perón made his second visit to Argentina in 1973 and fighting broke out among the half-million supporters welcoming his arrival at Ezeiza Airport, culminating in the deaths of hundreds. To this day, the exact figure is unknown.

Juan Perón himself returned to office in October 1973, after winning sixty percent of the vote in the September elections. But, even after Perón's return, guerrilla activity remained high, and that same year, the Montoneros assassinated the secretary-general of Argentina's largest labor union, the *Confederación General de Trabajadores* (CGT). With the growth in world commodities trade, Argentina's exports and reserves increased, inflation declined, and public support of Perón soared. This popularity would collapse with Perón's death on 1 July 1974, and his widow and vice president María Estela "Isabelita" Martínez de Perón's assumption of the presidency. Divisions within the Peronist movement had already taken place before the president's death. Perón had publicly separated himself and his party from the Montoneros and the *Juventud Peronista*, labeling them

"subversives." Also prior to Perón's death, the *Alianza Argentina Anticomunista* (the feared AAA), had been formed and, like other clandestine counterrevolutionary operations, was believed to have been composed of federal police officers under the supervision of Perón's minister of social welfare, José López Rega. Guerrilla warfare resumed with the bombings and assassinations of predominantly army and police officials, union leaders, and politicians, to which the armed forces responded by adopting a wartime policy of expanding its espionage networks and clandestine operations and of defining as "subversive" any protest, no matter how small.⁵ The result was an increase in the numbers of *Tres A* death threats, the self-exile of many Argentines, and *desaparecidos* (disappeared).

When the chief of police was assassinated in November 1974, President Martínez de Perón declared a state of siege, effectively giving the army unconditional authority. The economy declined in inverse proportion to the country's escalating violence as Martínez de Perón oscillated between imposing wage and price controls and meeting union wage demands. An austerity program was implemented, the unions responded with a general strike, and the President retreated into seclusion.

As open impeachment proceedings were being undertaken, and after the air force's failed 1975 coup attempt, on 24 March 1976, the army abducted the president and took over the government. The junta, formed by leaders of the armed forces and headed by Army General Jorge Rafael Videla, adopted an extreme monetarist policy in an attempt to control the country's great economic problems and create a free-market economy. Complementary to and inseparable from the economic policy was the junta's political agenda of "national security," and both programs negatively affected the urban sectors of the unions and the middle class. With what the historian David Rock has called "iconoclastic élan" (1987, 368), the military destroyed Peronist-created corporatist institutions and embarked on the final phase of its "dirty war"⁶ and the elimination of all opposition: Military patrols were omnipresent in neighborhood raids, or *rastrillos*. The feared *Grupos de Tarea* [task forces] or *patotas* in their green Ford Falcons appeared at homes in the middle of the night. In all, some 30,000 people were abducted. These abductees were then taken to prisons and clandestine torture camps, and only in rare cases were they ever seen alive again.⁷ The 1984 *Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas* (CONADEP) report, published as the book *Nunca más*, summarized the junta's campaign:

The armed forces responded to the terrorists' crimes with a terrorism far worse than the one they were combating; and after 24 March 1976 they

could count on the power and impunity of an absolute state, which they misused to abduct, torture and kill thousands of human beings. (1)

Nevertheless, as Alain Rouquié has pointed out (1987), the battle lines between civilians and military were not neatly drawn: militarism was present in nearly every political party, and large sectors of the population, particularly the upper and middle classes, initially supported the military's takeover of the government as the last resort to ending the country's civil violence.

What happened in and to the theater during the tumult of the late 1960s and the early 1970s? Andrés Avellaneda has documented actors receiving death threats from the Tres A shortly after its formation in 1974.⁸ The writer Aída Bortnik, perhaps best known for her screenplay of the 1985 film *La historia oficial* [The Official Story], tells of an earlier experience during Lanusse's dictablanda, the day after the 1972 Trelew massacre:

[A]t that time we were performing *Soldados y soldaditos* [Soldiers and Little Tin Soldiers] in the city of Rosario, in a theater . . . in a sector of the city that had been shut down, closed by tanks, and the people that had come that night to the show . . . had to show their papers in order to get into the theater. Nevertheless, the house was packed, and behind the last row [of spectators] there was a row of soldiers with their weapons ready, . . . and we (the actor and I) dedicated the performance to those who had died at Trelew.⁹

The above events serve to demonstrate that the repression did not begin with the military coup of 24 March 1976. Militarism and authoritarianism have long been a part of Argentine life and consequently have directly influenced the country's artistic production. Just as many of the guerrilla movements' leaders had been eliminated in clandestine counterrevolutionary operations, many of the theater practitioners associated with the Left had already been threatened and gone into exile when the junta kidnapped Martínez de Perón in 1976. However, during the first years of the Proceso, repressive measures affecting cultural practices were intensified and, in some cases, made official. Terrorism became institutionalized in a project designed to impose "national values" along with "national security." Of the 8,960 disappearances officially documented by CONADEP (1984), 1.3 percent were "actors, artists, etc." (448).¹⁰ During the dictatorship, book burnings were organized, and certain artistic products, including plays, were prohibited by official decree. Griselda Gambaro's novel, *Ganarse la muerte* [Earning Death], was officially banned in April 1977 and precipitated her three-year exile in

Barcelona. The staging of Eduardo Pavlovsky's *Telarañas* was prohibited in November of that same year. Producers of the offending materials, such as publishing houses and theaters, were closed down temporarily. Bookstore owners, publishers and distributors often destroyed their own holdings to avoid censure. As smaller publishers went out of business, the larger publishing houses promoted international best-sellers in much the same way that commercial theaters imported "safe" Broadway musicals.

Television, radio, and film, were heavily monitored by official censors. Scripts had to be submitted for approval prior to taping, and blacklisted artists could not be contracted. Censors controlled the distribution of all films. Foreign films, if not prohibited outright, could have any "offensive" material cut before being shown, and Argentinean films received the same treatment.¹¹

Theater, unlike film and television, was typically subjected to censorship after going into production, usually when the play opened or, at the very earliest, during the rehearsal period. Apart from the relatively few official prohibitions of certain plays and the closing of theaters (usually for one or two days, as a warning), or the displacement of sets and costumes (under the pretext of conducting an "inventory check"), Argentinean theater and its practitioners were subjected to primarily anonymous aggression: Performances were disrupted by audience "plants." Smoke bombs (typically the "disinfectant" *gamexane*) forced audiences and performers out into the streets. Mysterious late-night bombings and fires damaged and destroyed theaters. Individuals were threatened in anonymous telephone calls and unsigned letters, and some theater practitioners "disappeared," as in the cases of the writers Rodolfo Walsh and Francisco Urondo. Unofficial blacklists were circulated, preventing those named from being hired by film companies, television and radio stations, and the "official" national and municipally owned theaters. These "official" theaters, and the larger commercial houses, limited their seasonal offerings to apparently non-political plays by canonized authors, primarily foreign.¹²

For the theater, an important conditioning factor arising from the above prohibitions and violent acts is the issue of censorship. Andrés Avellaneda, in his ongoing study of censorship in Argentina, has written that cultural control inextricably links power and text: "The history of culture is also the history of censorship" (1986, 1:7). He adds that the Argentine state had long practiced a cultural control that reached its apogee in the early Proceso with the increased number of censors and consequently of artistic products censored. Avellaneda's project, as well as Frank Graziano's (1992), is the examination of the

discourse of the censor; Diana Taylor's (1994, 1997), the "underside of social spectacle" that manifests itself in the cultural discourses shared by the military and resisting movements such as the Madres.¹³ My object of study is the discourse of the would-be censored. Theater, because of its limited diffusion (as opposed to television and film), was subjected to less censorial control. Often plays and performers were left alone if the productions took place in nonmainstream theaters or cabaret spaces.¹⁴ The junta, taking its cue from Chile's dictator, General Augusto Pinochet, preferred to ignore the productions rather than draw additional public attention and possible criticism by creating a cause célèbre out of a publicized closure and prohibition. Nevertheless, theaters were subjected to sporadic censorship, often without any apparent logic behind the attacks. The line between acceptable and unacceptable theater was purposely kept blurred, and such blurring corresponds to one of censorship's more insidious objectives, as Roberto Hozven (1982) points out:

Censorship, by not making literally explicit what the prohibition covers, extends itself figuratively to the totality of our social actions and interpellates us in relation to society, our jobs and ourselves as the always possible receivers and protagonists of some guilty action, collective and indeterminate, but experienced individually by a defenseless conscience. (70)

This universalization and internalization of the censoring process manifested itself in a self-censored discourse as Argentina became increasingly a "culture of fear."¹⁵ Hozven describes self-censorship as the act wherein the artist, as internal exile, provides an alienated answer to the problem of how to avoid having the artistic product censored: "[By] reproducing [censorship] within himself in order to attempt to prevent consciously, through the active practice of fear, the irruption of any 'slip' provoked by [one's] unconscious rebellion" (71).

Witnessed in the previously mentioned official prohibitions and unofficial acts of violence, explicit and implicit censorship became an important and effective controlling device. Eduardo Pavlovsky's *Telarañas* pushed the limits of censorship, thereby receiving the dubious honor of being the first play banned by official decree during the dictatorship. The play centers on the familial trinity (Deleuze and Guattari's mommy-daddy-me) to portray the attempted indoctrination of a child by his parents through increasingly sinister techniques of instruction, ending in the rebellious son's death by hanging and the parents' creation of a heroic memory myth of their dead son. Pavlovsky completed writing *Telarañas* before the coup, and rehearsals had begun in 1976. As the military regime settled in, Pavlovsky began re-

working what would become the play's most controversial scene, the "Invasion," in which two paramilitary agents break into the home and torture the family. In the production, these two outside torturers were "disguised" as gas company workers (*gasistas*). Yet even after such precautions, the troupe, which included Pavlovsky himself playing the role of the father, continued to have concerns about possible repercussions, and the premiere was postponed until November of the following year. As a further precaution, *Telarañas*'s opening was kept very low-profile, debuting during the Teatro Payró's noontime experimental theater series. Critics were invited to the opening, however, and one review appeared in a local newspaper.¹⁶ The play had only two performances, and when Pavlovsky chose not to respond to the municipal secretary of culture's request that the play be voluntarily withdrawn,¹⁷ *Telarañas* was prohibited by official written decree (Decree 5695 of the Municipality of the City of Buenos Aires) for its violation of junta-upheld values, as the following excerpt claims:

WHEREAS: [the play] proposes a line of thinking that is directly aimed at shaking the foundations of the institution of the family, [and] as said institution is a result of the spiritual, moral and social conception of our society. [Whereas] even though said position is portrayed, by and large, through a collection of symbolic attitudes, said attitudes have the necessary transparency to distort, in an easily-perceived way, the essence and traditional image of said institution. [. . .] To the above can be added the use of indecent language and the succession of aberrant scenes, delivered with excessive crudeness and realism. (Avellaneda 1986, 2:161)

The reader will note in the decree's wording no reference to the play's political content. The production took self-censorial pains to keep overt political references out, but it should be remembered that the Proceso sought to reshape the country politically and morally. The reader may also note, in the last lines, that the censor had no difficulty assuming the role of theater critic. Indeed, the language corresponded closely to that of the one published review, bringing up the related topic of the solidarity (or lack thereof) between critics and theater practitioners.

There were indeed cases in which critics took pains to omit any "compromising" information about the individual being profiled. For example, not one critic mentioned Ricardo Monti's overtly political predictorship play *Historia tendenciosa de la clase media argentina . . .* [Tendentious History of the Argentinean Middle Class . . .] in the previews for his 1977 *Visita* [Visit]. However, in other situations, such as *Telarañas*, the critic worked closely with the regime to repress and censor.

Although there are documented cases of theaters and playwrights having been censored, it is not always easy to track the effects of censorship. It is even more difficult to trace censorship's internalized counterpart, self-censorship, and nearly impossible to ascertain the extent of its influence on the creation of a text. Artists generally have been loath to admit the censor's presence in their creative processes. However, Argentina's situation, at least during the first years of the dictatorship, demanded that the artistic message be preconditioned, forcing the artist into a form of "in exile," or internal exile.¹⁸ In 1979, the Argentine writer María Elena Walsh described self-censorship's impact on the individual artist: "Each of us has a broken pencil and an enormous eraser already encrusted in our brain" (Avellaneda 1986, 1:48). That same year she condemned the collective result in the now famous article, "Misadventures in Kindergarten-Land" [*Desventuras en el País-Jardín-de-Infantes*]:

For some time now we've been like children, and we can't say what we think or imagine. When the censor finally disappears . . . , we'll be decrepit [and] not even know what to say. [. . .] The ubiquitous and diligent Censor has transformed one of the most lucid cultural centers of the world into a Kindergarten, a fabricator of deceits that can only undertake the childish, the impudent, the frivolous or the historic, [and then only] if it's been blessed by holy water.¹⁹

Even in the face of censorship and self-censorship, Argentine theater practitioners managed to create works with strong socio-political messages. How, then, can we account for the success of such artistic products? Over the last two decades, Chilean critics, writing both in and outside their country, have attempted to document the effects of external censorship and internal self-censorship on theater produced during their country's dictatorship (1973–90). By examining the various mechanisms and strategies employed to effect the communicative act, these critics have attempted to theorize the experience of attempted free expression in a repressive society. In the process, they have identified two types of self-censorship: (1) an after the fact self-censoring that excuses and retracts any previous unacceptable statement; and (2) a preventive self-censoring that attempts, proverbially, "to put the bandage on before the wound appears," in attempts to anticipate and avoid any potential offense. In both circumstances, the self-censoring subject is paralyzed and alienated, trapped between two moments: the lived threatening reality and the moment immediately preceding a hypothetical future apocalypse (Hozven 1982, 71). In order to account for positive cul-

tural production under repression, such critics as Roberto Hozven (1982) and Raúl Cánovas (1980) have proposed a third category, countercensorship. Countercensorship, unlike self-censorship, is active and resisting as it seeks "to disarticulate the repressive discursive system in order to generate a discourse censored by that very system" (Cánovas 1980, 171). Countercensorship allows for agency and thus functions as a positive alternative to the double bind of external censorship and internal self-censorship. Some examples of countercensorial strategies employed in plays staged in dictatorship Chile and Argentina include parody, the orphaned quote (i.e., inserting a "canonized" text so that it carries the potentially censored message), the double entendre, and transference (i.e., breaking the controversial message up so that different, fragmented "voices" carry a piece of the message and not one is solely responsible). The reader will note that all four strategies rely on irony, allusion, and ultimately on the text and its intended audience knowing the same "language." Indeed, Diana Taylor, in her discussion of *Proceso* theater (1997), writes of Argentine audiences honing the art of "countercensorial" spectatorship: "people had become good 'interpreters' or readers of signs" (237).

Argentinean theatrical texts, especially during the early, and most repressive, *Proceso* years, were encoded so as to escape the censor's gaze, primarily through the countercensorial use of such rhetorical figures as metaphor, allegory, and analogy, and the reappropriation of cultural codes already in place in Argentine theater. In the plays of this period, family dynamics functioned as a metaphor for multilevel power relations, and paternalism reached authoritarian extremes while the offsprings' immaturity symbolized a national state of arrested infantilism. The enclosed space of the home effectively, and frequently, represented the country under dictatorship. Onstage action often took the form of ritualized play as seemingly innocent games were transformed into sadomasochistic rituals. Productions blurred the boundary between realism and avant-garde absurdism, and often they cloaked themselves in such canonized, and therefore acceptable, structures as the turn-of-the-century grotesco criollo.

The above discussion illustrates Argentine theater's intimate relationship with its surrounding environment and the latter's effect on artistic production. The chapters that follow document the *Proceso* years in Argentine theater history and analyze the many strategies employed by Buenos Aires theater practitioners to survive, respond to, and even transform the all-too-present reality of the repressive authoritarian state.

1

1976–1979: Theater “Metaphorizes” Reality

My sensation regarding life today is of something rather sinister. And the grotesque is, for example, a kind of half-desperate humorous escape valve. . . . Humor is a desperate attempt at establishing a certain distance or rationality. It's as if you said: “Well, if we can look at even that with humor, then we still have some chance of modifying the situation.” [. . .] It could be black humor . . . but [it is] overall hopeful because when you provoke laughter you are provoking . . . a raising of awareness regarding the absurd and the sinister.

—Ricardo Monti

In a 1980 article, “The Drama of Argentine Theater: To Be or Not to Be?” (Barone 1980), it was estimated that, in 1977, nearly 2,900,000 Buenos Aires spectators attended the theater. By 1979, the number had dropped to 2,200,000. The author noted that the greatest loss of audience, sadly, was in the cooperative theaters, the very theaters that had consistently staged new and experimental works, especially Argentine texts. The piece concluded with a quandary that is all too common in debates regarding theater's future in our modern age, “art or business?”

Most striking about Orlando Barone's article is not this art-versus-industry debate but rather the statistical information: the decline notwithstanding, people continued to go to the theater in Buenos Aires during the military dictatorship's earliest, and most repressive, years. Disagreements unsurprisingly arise regarding quality and output. For example, in possible contradiction of the above claim that less local theater was being supported, a survey of the number of plays registered with ARGENTORES (the *Asociación Argentina de Autores*) during those years suggests that more Argentine plays were being created: 1976—189 plays; 1977—224 plays; 1978—322 plays; and 1979—278 plays.¹

Other critics' evaluations of the period support the image of a vital

porteño theater:² In his theater reviews for *Crisis* magazine, the Argentine playwright Ricardo Monti (1976c) wrote enthusiastically about 1976 being an exceptional year for theater.³ Jaime Potenze, in his review of Susana Torres Molina's 1977 play, *Extraño juguete* [Strange Plaything], called it a positive step toward overcoming the "national playwrighting depression," less than one month after an article in the daily newspaper *Clarín* had declared Buenos Aires's 1977 theater season as "one of its most brilliant" (Sergi 1977). Critic Rómulo Berruti (1978) assessed the 1978 season in the following manner: "[D]espite the economic retraction, the stages housed numerous and varied productions, encompassing all genres and from all sources." In *Latin American Theatre Review*, the Argentine playwright, director and critic Beatriz Seibel (1980) was positive, if somewhat guarded, in her evaluation of the 1979 theater season in Buenos Aires.

Critics of Argentine theater have generally preferred to collapse all theater produced during the military dictatorship into the phenomenon of Teatro Abierto (1981–85). Yet, as the above statistics and comments clearly demonstrate, there was a vitality and diversity in the theater created during the first years of the regime, well before Teatro Abierto. Granted, conditions imposed upon theater in the late 1970s were "crushing" (Foster 1989a, 75). As the Argentine critic Beatriz Sarlo (1988) would later recall, "Remaining in Argentina during 1976 and 1977 meant putting up with the worst conditions for any ideological or political reflection" (102). Nonetheless, more than a few Argentinean playwrights managed to transcend these political and economic constraints, by recreating onstage the very reality that permeated their lives. They successfully reached their audiences by, to paraphrase the Argentinean playwright Roberto Mario Cossa, "metaphorizing reality" (Eines 1986, 46).

A brief overview of these transformative offstage events is in order. The 1976 coup was the latest in a series of military seizures of power in twentieth-century Argentina. This regime did, however, distinguish itself in being by far the most repressive to date. The military junta's program, the Proceso, comprised political and economic policies aimed primarily at sectors of the urban population: organized labor, industry, and the middle class. All political opposition was abolished, including the labor unions, whose leaders and workers were subsumed in the all-embracing category of "subversives." As the junta courted foreign investment at the expense of the Argentine populace's living standards, it actively sought to eliminate all internal dissent. Both practices forced thousands of Argentines to leave

their country while still thousands of others "disappeared."⁴ By 1978, the military's ideological war had effectively destroyed the guerrilla movements and shut down opposition.

By 1978 also, however, the minister of economy, José A. Martínez de Hoz, and his extreme monetarist program faced internal governmental opposition as well as public criticism when the country found itself unable to leave behind its economic problems. The junta had become divided, too, over its own political program: Extremely nationalistic military populists, such as Naval Admiral Emilio Eduardo Massera, who favored a return to "Peronism without Perón" and demanded an end to the economic program, met with opposition from the hard-line anti-Peronists. These included Generals Carlos Suárez Mason and Luciano Menéndez, who supported an indefinite military dictatorship and the total elimination of dissension. Both factions left moderates, such as the junta's president, General Jorge Rafael Videla, and General Roberto Viola, still seeking gradual political liberalization and the implementation of the minister of economy's temporary solutions. In October 1979, General Menéndez and the anti-Peronist military faction attempted a revolt, which was immediately put down by the junta.

As a means of diverting national and international attention away from the country's political abuses and economic problems, and hoping to foment what Neil Larsen (1983a) has called a "mass forgetfulness" (117), the military government spent \$700 million in hosting the 1978 World Cup soccer championship.⁵ When Argentina won, the desired national mass euphoria was indeed achieved.

Nineteen seventy-nine saw the climax of Martínez de Hoz's *plata dulce* [easy money] program, as the government continued courting foreign investors and reducing tariff duties, with the resulting inflow of foreign investment and a 3:1 ratio of imports to exports (Rock 1987, 373). This policy backfired on the junta in 1980 when, with an overvalued peso and diminished exports, the trade deficit reached \$500 million. The government then attempted a devaluation, ending in numerous bankruptcies and the removal of billions of dollars from the country.

Even such a brief overview as the one above demonstrates clearly that the early years of the dictatorship were marked by repressive political and economic measures, directed toward the working and middle classes. Ironically, these very measures would bring about the junta's decline in the years 1980–82, when economic countermeasures had pushed the financial system close to collapse, and international human rights groups' denunciation of the government's

purge of its own citizenry destroyed any remaining credibility. Defeat in the 1982 Malvinas/Falklands War would finish off the regime.

METAPHORIZING REALITY:

DRAMATIC STRUCTURES IN EARLY PROCESO THEATER

As reality became more distorted and grotesque, so did the theatrical forms used both to capture as well as to comment upon events. By the early 1970s, the line demarcating the previously assumed-to-be conflicting aesthetics of realism and avant-garde had already begun to be blurred. So-called realistic playwrights began experimenting with more avant-garde forms, and the *vanguardistas* began introducing more realistic themes into their plays.⁶ Thus the theatrical image was distorted in order to represent the deformed and deforming realities inspiring it. The irony went both ways: the horrifying realities of daily life under dictatorship often surpassed the grotesqueness of their distorted dramatic representations, even as these very "representations" were being consciously deformed in an effort to avoid censorship.

In contemporary Western theater, a common synecdochic stand-in for the social structure has been the family. In plays considered to be naturalistic as well as those seen as avant-garde, the family unit has frequently been placed upon the stage for analysis as such or as a microcosmic substitute for society in general. Staging the family became an even more pertinent theatrical strategy in late 1970s Argentina under a military government that included in its national project the goal of preserving the family, portrayed as one of the cornerstones of "Western and Christian civilization." During the dictatorship's early years, and well after, family dynamics functioned as metaphor for multilevel power relations. Paternalism was taken to authoritarian extremes as the offsprings' immaturity symbolized the nation's arrested infantilism. The enclosed space of the house or apartment effectively represented the country under dictatorship, and the family home, with its many psychological and emotional connotations, became an institution created to constrain the human body and soul.⁷

Another structure employed to stage the violent struggles occurring outside the theater hall was the game, or diversion. The formula of ritualized play had been employed before, especially in the more "psychological," absurdist plays; however, certain homicidal twists on the theme were introduced in plays immediately preceding and following 1976's military coup. These diversionary strategies resulted

in onstage representations of family dynamics in which apparently playful amusements were exposed as self-destructive escapism or ritualized violence.

In *Drama, Metadrama, and Perception*, Richard Hornby (1986) describes a metadramatic structure that functions as a device for exploring social concerns: the ceremony within the play. Plays staged during the first years of the dictatorship often dramatized encoded, set, recurrent, and therefore ritualized behavior. State-generated violence was alluded to in onstage, cruel, grotesque games that built upon socially acceptable patterns of behavior but almost always ended in death and disappearance. The staging of the ceremonial served a further purpose. As Hornby points out, "Theatre is a means for examining ceremony, and thus for questioning supposedly eternal verities" (55). This is exactly what early Proceso plays managed to achieve: by staging rituals left incomplete or disrupted, or completed in a corrupt or perverse manner, theater practitioners could thus engender in their audiences "feelings of disorientation, discord, and sadness" (Hornby 1986, 55) and question those values purported to be eternal and unchanging in Proceso Argentina, even as they avoided the censor's gaze.

Although these formulas arose from cultural codes already in place in Argentine theater well before 1976, each was reworked during the early years of the dictatorship in remarkably varied ways to represent and reflect on this particularly horrific moment in Argentina's history. A survey of the period's theatrical productions will demonstrate this constant albeit varied union of family and play, and their extrascenic referents, the Argentinean state and repressive violence. This fusion is also clearly present in the three plays whose analyses follow the more general discussion: *Visita* by Ricardo Monti and Roberto Mario Cossa's *La nona* [The Granny] and *No hay que llorar* [No Need to Cry].

STAGING DOMESTIC/STATE VIOLENCE: AN OVERVIEW

Family relationships take several forms in the plays of this period. One of the more common variations was on the theme of "marital problems" [*problemática de la pareja*]. In Ricardo Halac's 1976 post-coup play, *Segundo tiempo* [Second Half],⁸ the action revolves around a young couple's conflicts over the wife's role within the family unit, with generational conflict provided by the husband's mother. Much as *La nona* marks a change in Cossa's realistic theater, *Segundo tiempo* is representative of a profound change in Halac's playwrighting. Os-

valdo Pellettieri (1987c) points out, in his introduction to the first volume of Halac's collected plays, that with *Segundo tiempo*, the Argentinean playwright begins to modify his Arthur Miller-influenced realism to create a more critical and less merely reflective onstage image of society.⁹ *Segundo tiempo* leaves behind the 1960s-style play when the couple's inner fears or desires are unexpectedly acted out on the stage, their actions transformed "into an exalted, farcical game, and their drama into a Grand Guignol comedy" (Javier 1992, 40).

In Beatriz Mosquera's 1979 *La luna en la taza* [The Moon in a Teacup], the husband-wife story is one of, to use the playwright's own term, "exasperated realism." The action takes place in 1978: Blas has lost his job after an anonymous denunciation of his politics, and his wife, Alba, is underemployed. We witness the playing out on the domestic scene of the outside world's intrusions. However, Mosquera's text is no mere photograph of Argentine reality. As a contemporary review hinted (Fernández 1979), the play seeks to "expose the social causes, . . . outside the couple's control, that determine their crisis" (19). Like the offstage sound effects of sirens and knocks on the door, the set design for the 1979 premiere underscored the overwhelming presence of the world outside: a typical Buenos Aires apartment encased within the walls of a prehistoric cave.¹⁰

Generational differences within the family also served as points of sociocritical analysis in the plays under study. Halac's 1978 *El destete* [The Weaning]¹¹ is a vaudevillian indictment of an egocentric society that refuses to allow its children to grow up and wean themselves from the parent. It even includes the grotesque vision of a young mother suffocating her child with her breast. In 1978, also, Carlos Somigliana premiered his self-described "act of contrition, in two Acts," *El ex-alumno* [The Ex-Student],¹² wherein both the older and younger generations, in the respective characters of the professor and his daughter, are found to be at fault. It is the middle generation, the professor's ex-student Horacio, that holds the promise of resolution. As Ana Seoane (1989) describes Horacio, "[H]e has lost the blindness of youth, but in some way this attempted return to his past is an attempt at reconciliation with his present" (152). Oscar Viale's 1978 *Encantada de conocerlo* [Delighted to Meet You]¹³ reworks a familial character type inherited from the turn-of-the-century *sainete criollo*: the mother that sees only what she wants to see in her quest to marry off her daughter. Viale gives the situation an ominously absurd twist when the woman refuses to acknowledge that her daughter has been raped in her own home by a clearly authoritarian enemy. In this case, he is a foreigner who communicates exclusively through brute

force, and both mother and daughter are seen as pathetic victims of his uncontrolled violence.

Sibling rivalry provides the central conflict in Carlos Gorostiza's *Los hermanos queridos* [Brothers Beloved], which also premiered in 1978.¹⁴ The play successfully melded structure and point of view in order to create the image of an infantilized Argentina, captured in María Elena Walsh's now famous indictment of her country as "Kindergarten-Land." Through the clever manipulation of an apparently realistic set, Gorostiza constructed what he termed a "counterpoint in two Acts." The text requires only one performing space to create two separate yet simultaneous plays: A patio behind a ground-floor apartment is occupied by two families, those of Juan and Pipo, the two brothers of the title. Although both families are on stage at the same time, they physically do not see each other as each brother prepares for the other's arrival. Through a telling miscommunication, each brother expects the other sibling to come for dinner; instead, each receives a different visitor, both about to leave the country for economic reasons. One is an old friend of Pipo's; the other is Juan's daughter. During conversations with their two wives, friend and daughter, it becomes clear that the brothers love and need each other, but it is also apparent how slim the chances are of any reconciliation. Even more importantly, we begin to understand the causes behind this inability to communicate, symbolized in the parental chairs over which the brothers have fought, each wanting to believe he has his father's chair.¹⁵ Pipo explains to his friend Agustín the origins of the chairs and Juan's domineering nature:

We inherited them. One each. If he hasn't changed his ways, he still must enjoy sitting here. That way he feels like he's the head of the family, you see? He feels like Dad. [. . .] When the two of them died . . . we inherited the chairs: one each. The inheritance divided in two. The old folks divided in two. [Los heredamos. Uno cada uno. Si no cambió de costumbre le debe seguir gustando sentarse aquí. Así se siente el jefe de la familia, ¿sabés? Se siente papá. [. . .] Cuando murieron los dos . . . los heredamos: uno para cada uno. La herencia dividida por dos. Los viejos divididos por dos.] (126)

The parents are ghosts that must be exorcised, yet when Agustín suggests that he burn the chair and leave the past behind, Pipo refuses. Near the play's end, Juan caresses his chair where the (for him) invisible Pipo is seated, and, unconsciously "looking at Pipo as if he were looking at his father," talks to his daughter about her failure of an uncle:

Luckily, the old man wasn't here to see him. He always used to say to me: "I don't worry about you; you're like me, you're gonna know how to fight in this life. But Pipo turned out like your mother: lotsa fantasies, lotsa *núbole de colore*." [Por suerte el viejo no estuvo para verlo. El siempre me decía: "Yo con vos estoy tranquilo; te parecés a mí, vas a saber pelear en la vida. Pero Pipo sale a tu madre: mucha fantasía, mucha *núbole de colore*."'] (139)

The bittersweet irony of this nonencounter was not lost on the audience; it is the one scene consistently commented on by spectators and one of Gorostiza's personal favorites. The repetition of these generational cycles is further reinforced in Juan's projection of his image of Pipo onto his son-in-law: what Juan perceives to be a shiftless bohemian is in fact a classical musician recently contracted to perform in Venezuela.

At the time of *Los hermanos queridos*' premiere, the press focused on the absence of communication between the brothers. One critic (Matharan de Potenze 1978) deemed the play "a pathetic vision of human relationships, in which even people of good will are destined to fail." The author himself referred to the play's theme as "the painful impossibility of loving what we have" (Ventura 1978). Nevertheless, *Los hermanos queridos* also makes reference to the country's sociopolitical reality, a reality present in his earlier play *Juana y Pedro* (written and produced in Venezuela in 1975, but never staged in Argentina) and the 1982 *Matar el tiempo* [Killing Time]. In *Los hermanos queridos*, the seed can be found of a recurring theme in Gorostiza's later plays: Argentina as kindergarten. The brothers, Juan and Pipo, occupying the same space yet completely isolated from each other, are two sides of one infantile coin. Their immaturity is the direct result of a paternalism whose ghost of excessive control must be exorcised before the country can indeed "grow up." The play ends on an ambiguous, hence, open note, as the final stage directions indicate: "The two brothers are alone, their heads down, face to face. After a few seconds, they lift their heads up and look at each other" (144). Unlike the sense of finality that concludes Gorostiza's earlier plays, this ending is tentatively open to change, suggesting that only through truly seeing and communicating with other members of the national family would Argentines stand a chance for growth. *Los hermanos queridos* becomes a call for solidarity at a moment when many Argentines were experiencing the same isolation as the two brothers and a caution against allowing the paternalistic junta to stunt the nation's development.

In addition to theatricalizing the Argentinean family, many plays of

the period staged sadomasochistic games in order to allude to the state-generated violence. The surprise hit of the 1976 theater season was *Juegos a la hora de la siesta* [Games during Nap Time], by Roma Mahieu, a writer largely unknown until *Juegos*, her fourth play.¹⁶ Staged by Julio Ordano, who won that year's Molière award for his direction, the play ran from July 1976 until December 1977, when it was prohibited by presidential decree, just as would be Mahieu's next play, *María Lamuerte* [Mary Morbid].¹⁷ *Juegos* tells the story of a group of adolescents playing in a park while their parents nap. Giving in to pressure from a bullying friend, the youths participate in a series of games culminating in a bird's strangulation death. The sadomasochistic allegory ends with a call for a solidarity of the weak as the youngsters finally stand up to the bully. The play struck a nerve in the 1976 audience, and even as late as 1981, the director Ordano, when asked in an interview about the play (Naios Najchaus 1981), called it "an allegory, still valid, about violence and the leadership of the strong over the weak" (105). The sadomasochism inherent in the games is revealed as the players are unmasked in their violent power struggles. The sociopolitical implications were clear, as the eventual prohibition demonstrated. Mahieu would later say, "I don't invent anything. What I do is a re-creation of reality" (Martínez 1980, 43).

Another play of the period that exposed the destructive consequences of social power games is Griselda Gambaro's *Sucede lo que pasa* [It So Happens that It Happens], her least analyzed major work of this period. *Sucede* was written in 1975 and staged shortly thereafter by Alberto Ure in 1976 at the Teatro Popular de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires.¹⁸ Like Clara in Gambaro's earlier play, *Puesta en claro* [Made/Staged Clear],¹⁹ the protagonist, Teresa, through her "transgressive" playful behavior, succeeds in exposing the posturings of the other characters, all male. The plot is slight and reveals little of the lives of the five characters: two down-and-out petty thieves (Tito and César), their fence (Zamora), Tito's sister (Teresa), and her young doctor-suitor (Quique). Despite the absence of a complex story line, the text continuously redefines the characters' interrelations. At a deeper level, the play becomes a "permanent metamorphosis of the frank relationship between victim and victimizer, transcending perversity or kindness" (Javier 1992, 44).

As Ricardo Monti (1976b) stated in his review of the 1976 production, "The simple structures fall down one after the other, imperceptibly, and life filters through the fissures left behind and grows like a juicy sprout, unexpected, on a dry branch."²⁰ It is revealed that Teresa's brother's terminal illness was not imagined, that her sexual abuser is a pathetic and impotent exhibitionist, and that her "true

love" is a selfish weakling. In *Sucede*, the mere act of unmasking the game is empowering, and the play advances the revolutionary possibility, for 1976 Argentina, of conquering the daily horror through solidarity. The two siblings, fully aware that Tito will die, are united in their acceptance of reality, having finally abandoned the games.

Another type of game, in this case self-consciously metatheatrical, is central to Susana Torres Molina's 1977 play, *Extraño juguete*.²¹ What appears to be an unexpected visit from a door-to-door underwear salesman to the family home of two middle-aged, unmarried sisters turns into an attempted rape, deterred only at the last moment by the man's need to relieve himself. It is at this point, nearly the end of the play, that the spectators realize that they have just witnessed a performance, an erotic, psychodramatic acting out, scripted and staged by two upper-class matrons. Their salesman-assailant is really an unemployed actor, who, before he leaves, persuades the two women to rehire him for their next play: about a New York drug addict who breaks into a family home.

I'll note *Extraño juguete*'s myriad interpretations because they exemplify the problems of reception under censorship. For many 1977 critics, *Extraño juguete* was nothing more than the auspicious debut of a young Argentinean playwright in a well-performed psychological drama, as this blurb from a local newspaper (*El Economista* 1977) demonstrates: "For those who may find answers in subjects relating to—or immersed in—psychoanalysis, we recommend . . . *Extraño juguete* by Susana Torres Molina." Others picked up on its playful, absurdist nature.²² Twelve years later, David W. Foster (1989a) would interpret *Extraño juguete*'s metatheatrics as a pointed reference to their sociocultural role, one that transcends an eroto-psychodramatic function and "points toward an awareness as much about our society with its commercial culture of mass consumption as about the legitimate proposals of a deconstructivist theater" (83). We see, in the two women, the consumerism of Martínez de Hoz's *plata dulce* and, in Miralles, the actor-rapist, the marginalization of the artist in particular and in general of "a vast economic sector that has to depend for its survival on the good disposition of ladies like Perla and Angélica" (Foster 1989a, 77).

Meriting developed exploration elsewhere are the issues of arrested catharsis in *Extraño juguete* and its social implications, the carnivalesque role inversions and concomitant reversals of audience expectations and empathies, and the distancing effects on a spectator who must reformulate the entire play in the last minutes of its viewing. The richly metadecritical piece lends itself to a multilevel

games playing that, in 1977, both diverted the censor's gaze and inspired varied interpretations.

Extraño juguete's Perla and Angélica play out their dramas as an escapist distraction, a means of avoiding reality. The same technique of diversion is exploited by Juan in *Los hermanos queridos* when he chooses to play chess rather than confront the family problems facing him, that is, when he chooses non-communication. It is also this type of escape into ceremony that is at first embraced by the mother and daughter in Pacho O'Donnell's 1977 play, *Lo frío y lo caliente* [The Cold and the Hot], only to be later rejected by the daughter when she repeats the forbidden word "basta" and leaves her mother's home. *Lo frío y lo caliente* also has overtones of ritualized violence in the sewing needles that will terminate the daughter's pregnancy. Through the ritualization of violence in family relations, the play creates a theatrical metaphor for the institutionalized savagery occurring daily within the country.²³

The state and domestic ritualized violence present in the described productions is best exemplified in Ricardo Monti's 1977 *Visita*, and Roberto Mario Cossa's two plays of the period, *La nona* (1977) and *No hay que llorar* (1979). What follows are extended analyses of these three plays. In *La nona* and *No hay que llorar*, the concepts of filicide and parricide are expanded to include all generations in a savage class genocide. In *Visita*, the act of murder itself is purposely deferred so that it remains unclear at play's end exactly who succumbs: has the spectator just witnessed an attempt at revolutionary parricide, or does the authoritarian parent destroy the child?

FILICIDE OR PARRICIDE? *VISITA* BY RICARDO MONTI

Visita premiered on 10 March 1977 at the Teatro Payró and was directed by Jaime Kogan.²⁴ The production ran for three years, received national and international awards, and represented Argentina at the 1978 Fourth International Festival of Theater of the Nations in Venezuela. For David W. Foster (1989a), it is one of only two plays of the period (the other being Torres Molina's *Extraño juguete*) that managed to transcend "the overwhelming conditions imposed by the [Proceso's] cynical ideology" (75).

Nevertheless, *Visita* remains Monti's least studied play, and when it is examined, the text is typically given a psychological, existentialist interpretation that ignores the conditions under which *Visita* was created. The following excerpts from the premiere's reviews pub-

lished in Buenos Aires newspapers should suffice to demonstrate: *La Nación's* critic ("Sugestivo" 1977) called the play a "labyrinthian journey toward the world of the subconscious," with its dramatic action occurring, according to Rómulo Berruti (1977), in "a profoundly subjective dimension . . . in which an Everyman ends up seeing in the flesh the very ghosts he carries inside himself." This focus on the subconscious was given a Freudian interpretation by another local reviewer (Magrini 1977) as others (Schóó 1977) rendered the subjectivity collective: "[T]he piece's [. . .] enigmatic essence [. . .] allows each spectator to see in it whatever *Visita* has to offer him; but the catharsis is collective, and with a tremendous impact." Only one of the Buenos Aires reviewers (Stevanovitch 1977) located the play in its historical moment, yet even he followed the critical existentialist trend:

This play is a bitter 1977 fairy tale, scented with incense, like the kind one smells at a wake, and loaded with tulles to cover up our own existence, because the mask that Equis wears, on his journey to apotheosis—or to nowhere—is none other than the one we all wear.

In part, this emphasis on the individual, and occasionally interpreted as collective, psyche may be explained by the pressures of censorship on the critics of the time, an explanation further supported by the absence, at that moment, of any critical mention of Monti's most overtly political play, *Historia tendenciosa de la clase media argentina, de los extraños sucesos en que se vieron envueltos algunos hombres públicos, su completa dilucidación y otras escandalosas revelaciones* [Tendentious History of the Argentinean Middle Class, of the Strange Events in which Certain Public Figures Found Themselves Involved, Their Complete Elucidation and Other Scandalous Revelations].²⁵ When it was brought to Monti's attention that not one of the reviews of *Visita's* premiere even mentioned his earlier *Historia tendenciosa*, he responded that the critics were protecting him from the censor: "There was a kind of tacit norm that one did not mention another person's compromising background."²⁶

I argue that *Visita*, too, is a very political play about action and change. The text's hermeticism and metaphysics not only permit a broader philosophical meditation on the limits of human existence but also function as a means of disguising the strongly sociopolitical elements and message of a play that premiered at the most repressive moment of the Proceso.

Visita is a self-consciously hermetic play, set in an enclosed, limited space, with only a few doors to connect the playing space to the

"outside world."²⁷ The action takes place in the living room of an old, run-down apartment whose furnishings and stains on the walls testify to an earlier wealth. The lighting is purposely dim, so it is barely possible to make out the figure of Equis, the intruder, attempting unsuccessfully to open a drawer when he is interrupted by Perla,

an old woman, tall and thin, with an upright and rigid posture. Her movements are extremely agile and energetic. Her face is a white mask, and exaggerated makeup accentuates her already cadaverous looks. [una anciana delgada y alta, de actitud rígida y erguida. Sus movimientos son sumamente ágiles y energicos. Su cara es una máscara blanca en la que una pintura exagerada acentúa la expresión cadavérica.] (7)

The two continue a cat-and-mouse game that ends in Perla's "discovery" of Equis:

Delicate features, almost feminine. White, transparent skin; thin, red lips. . . . Dark eyes, heavily shadowed. Long, white hands. He wears a bluish suit that is too small for him, thus giving him a slightly ridiculous look. [Rasgos delicados, casi femeninos. Piel blanca, transparente, labios finos y rojos. . . . Ojos oscuros, muy sombreados. Manos blancas y largas. Lleva un traje azulado, que le queda muy chico y le da un aspecto levemente ridículo.] (8)

The two struggle for control of the drawer, inside of which lie Perla's cigarettes. This is the first in a series of "disorienters" that fill the play and thwart the spectator's attempts at extrapolating any logical story: when Equis tells Perla the exact location of her cigarettes within the drawer, which she easily opens, the spectator is forced to re-evaluate Equis's earlier inability.

Another battle takes place offstage; screams and objects crashing are heard, then silence. More noises are heard, and Perla excuses herself. Just as Equis renews his struggle with the once-again stuck drawer, Perla's husband, Lali, enters. His appearance echoes Perla's: "The makeup on top of the white-washed skin emphasizes an infinite corruption." [Sobre un blanco de cal, el maquillaje acentúa rasgos de una infinita corrupción] (111). Excusing the interruption, he leaves, returning as Equis is about to destroy the lock with an ornamental ax. The two men eye each other, Lali urges Equis on with his work, becoming perturbed only when Equis does not return the ax to its exact place on the wall and correcting the placement so many times that he humiliates Equis. A door opens, music from an out-of-tune harpsichord is heard, and Lali begins a recitative, an oddly metered, internally and externally rhyming seduction.

Lali physically and figuratively takes Equis for a ride, promising the young man a view of heaven if he mounts his back. When Equis tries through brute force to prolong the game, Lali declares the trip over. The door slams shut, and the ritual ends. The Lali-Equis power struggle continues as the two wrestle. When Perla enters with the fourth character, Gaspar, Lali falls down "dead."

Equis, thinking he has killed Lali, runs to the bathroom. Lali, returning to life immediately after Equis's exit, consoles Gaspar, hysterical because his bathroom sanctuary has now been invaded by Equis and fearing that he is soon to be replaced. Interestingly, Gaspar is the only character left undescribed in the stage directions,²⁸ and it is precisely this informational lack that motivates the first act's climax: Up to this point, Gaspar has been referred to variously as dwarf, adoptive son, servant, imbecile, foundling, and child. When Equis, returning from the bathroom, questions the reality of this last designation ("But this boy is an adult" [22]), Perla notices the moustache Gaspar is desperately trying to hide with his finger: "¡Pelos!" she cries just before she collapses (23). When Gaspar declares her dead, Lali ends the act, saying, "What a tragedy! We'll have to give her a funeral." [¡Qué tragedia! Va a haber que velarla] (23).

The second act is even more convoluted than the first. The empty stage echoes the at-first-glance uninhabited stage of act 1, but the furniture has been moved to accommodate Perla's funeral. Lali and Gaspar fight for control throughout the parodied religious service, and Perla's resurrection brings on yet another "death," this time Equis's. Nevertheless, Equis is forcibly resurrected when Gaspar and Lali torture him, ostensibly to ascertain if he is still alive, and the attempted return to normalcy is directed by Perla. In keeping with Richard Hornby's stated effect of onstage ceremonies left unfulfilled, equilibrium is not regained (1986, 55). Instead, the stage directions instruct two "simultaneous actions": Perla berates Gaspar over invisible stale cookies for her tea party while Lali tries to impede Equis's exit. Gradually, the Lali-Equis struggle takes focus as it becomes more clearly a life-or-death battle between spiritual eternity and earthly mortality. Once again there are simultaneous actions: Gaspar's demands to be paid for his thirty years of service are transformed into a litany, repeating the word *existencia*, while Equis finally physically defeats Lali. The pairs now separated, it is as if each character were in stasis, an impasse once more to be broken when Gaspar bites Equis. Equis, again ill, exits toward the bathroom, as Perla and Lali consult each other regarding the "performance."

When Equis returns, Perla and Lali play their last card as they discover a characteristic mole on Equis that cements their parentage.

Perla orchestrates Lali's and Gaspar's almost simultaneous indignant exits, and the play ends nearly as it began, with Perla and Equis together on stage. Instead of the opening rivalry, however, the final image is familial, as Equis lies in Perla's arms, trying to recapture, connect, and revise the fragmented sensations of an afternoon during his youth. His monologue concluded, Equis appears to have fallen asleep with his eyes open. Lali and Gaspar quietly reenter as the lights focus exclusively on Equis.

Key to *Visita's* interpretation as a sociopolitical play is an action made explicit in the text's original ending, which was discarded by the author (although it has been appended to the revised text in published editions). In the original ending, the "visitor" murders his hosts and then, finding the outside door locked, takes over the now-vacant position of power. A sound is heard, and when the family's manservant investigates, he finds someone on the other side of the door watching them. The lights then come up to reveal the machinery of the theatrical spectacle. The ending favored by the playwright is much more open, the murder ritual left incomplete: while cradled in his hostess's arms, à la Pietà, the visitor appears to sleep with his eyes open.

The murders carried out in the rejected ending have precedents in Monti's two plays produced before *Visita*. In 1970's *Una noche con el señor Magnus e hijos* [An Evening with Mr. Magnus and Sons],²⁹ the patriarch's children kill him but are themselves co-opted into his world. Monti's next play, *Historia tendenciosa*, would originally end with the appearance of a "creature." In the Payró Theater staging, a beautiful young male entered, carrying a machine gun, in what was intended by its author to be a warning to the established, older order. Monti rejected this ending after it was interpreted by some audience members as a call to arms. With *Visita*, Monti excised the "closed" ending and thus allowed his spectators to draw their own conclusions.³⁰

Ambiguities teem in *Visita*. The visitor may well be the host couple's prodigal son, returned to displace the adopted child and the parents themselves. Thus, what we read in Equis's actions as the premeditations of a thug's homicide can be seen as parricidal desire, a theme of many pre-Proceso plays. Responding to an interviewer's collapsing of all early-1970s plays into a general "parricidal" category, Monti (Pacheco 1992b) opined:

It's a curious fact, several plays spring up during that period with the same thematics, wherein a parricide, in either covert or direct form, is produced. [. . .] Without a doubt they reveal a vehement generation, very tied into the wave of a world revolutionary-boom. We had just come from

the French May [of 1968] and what was being expressed was parricide, as a metaphor for the desire to liquidate the values in which we had stopped believing. (65)

Although *Visita* was staged after the repressive backlash of the "paternal" Right had begun, Monti began writing *Visita* in 1970, just after completing *Una noche* and before he wrote *Historia tendenciosa*. *Visita* is heavily influenced by the writing of the events included in the overtly political *Historia tendenciosa*. In a 1992 article on political theater, Monti (1992a) discussed the anachronic pitfalls of the political epic play:

[T]he first object of reflection has to be the intellectual himself . . . because we cannot continue on mechanically as if nothing had ever happened here. I think that we have to look for a theater with a more problematized vision, . . . go deep into it to see what happened to that generation that was so committed and, although it may be hard, [that generation] must ask itself if it really was right or if it made a mistake. (26)

The above quotation speaks directly to a self-critical project that Monti had already begun by the time he completed *Visita*. In the time period between the play's genesis (1970) and its completion (1976), the playwright had witnessed the extreme, negative reactions of the Right to his generation's politicization. Monti, in *Visita*, begins the process of self-evaluation and makes his first attempt at couching this analysis in the tragic form.³¹

In addition to the sociopolitical context of the play's creation that resulted in an image of parricide, if only *in potentia*, at *Visita*'s thematic core is a metaphysics of life and death. It is this center upon which most critical discourse has focused (Driskell 1978 and Podol 1980), with the most developed metaphysical interpretation provided by Horacio González. González summarizes the one constant in Monti's theater as follows: "As long as the performance continues, death is delayed." The subtitle of González's analysis of *Visita* ("phantasmagoria and intrusion") reveals this life-death aporia that he unfolds in a series of oppositions: mental activity/antiverbalization, phantasmagoria/body, and theatrical representation of the event/mystery of human life.³²

While González's study is penetrating and certainly the farthest reaching to date in its attempts to capture Monti's plays in their entirety, he runs the risk of decontextualizing and unnecessarily hermeticizing *Visita*. At the other extreme, Roberto Previdi Froelich (1989) courts overcontextualization when he claims that *Visita* "scru-

tinizes exploitation in terms of an ancient and eternal institution, both normal and ceremonial, whose ends are made clear in spite of its discourse that espouses the equality of social classes" (38). Interestingly, both González and Previdi Froelich base their arguments on aporetic homologies, a strategy David W. Foster (1979) employs as the starting point for his discussion of *Visita*. It is Foster who comes closest to uniting these varied receptions when he praises the play's "challenging [of the audience's] self-image as a collectivity of individuals that overlaps with the characters of the play as participants in a common experience, whether national or universal or both" (17).

Much of the critical discord arises from the hermetically sealed dramatic world created by the text, which is an aesthetic device as well as a countercensorial strategy.³³ The dreamlike ambience sets the mood for a series of power struggles that are played out in a succession of ritualized games wherein loyalties are constantly shifting, and with each change in alliance, a change in the game. The constant slippage results in a profoundly disorienting, but deeply felt, experience for the spectator. If, as Keir Elam (1980) states, the hypothesizing act that the spectator performs upon seeing a play is the construction of a story from the plot,³⁴ the audience's frustrations are multiplied. Moreover, this disorientation is generated not only at the level of the "play," in what Elam would denote as the Dramatic World. As seen in the above discussion of *Visita*'s two endings, conflict also enters from outside the Dramatic World frame, that is, at the level of the "playwright" and, by extension, the actual world of the spectator. Since the confusion created onstage refers directly to a "real world" situation, *Visita* is a profoundly political play about action and change, and not a play to be interpreted solely as a philosophical meditation on the limits of human existence.

The identity confusion present in *Visita* would appear to lead the reader to a philosophical and psychological interpretation. The final overlit image of Equis contrasts with his murky appearance at the play's beginning, yet Equis remains a mystery throughout *Visita*. His name is a cipher, X; however, in the published text it is written out, in full, as if it were a real name. Severino João Albuquerque (1991) interprets this as a denial of identity (62); I propose the converse, that it opens up identity. As Foster (1979) states, Equis is "the classic unknown: the value to be determined, the semantic shifter whose nature varies according to the structural position he occupies" (18). Equis is thus Everyman, a human being standing in for all human beings, and hence the human condition, and standing in contrast to the "nuclear family" whose home he invades and whom he confronts.

This family unit of mother, father, and child is also mysterious.

Both Perla and Lali are of the same stock; they share cadaverous masks as well as the pretensions of an impoverished nineteenth-century aristocracy. Nonetheless, even they are in conflict: Lali puns on Perla's name, calling her "una perra en celo" [bitch in heat], a twist on the phrase "perla en el cielo" [pearl in heaven] that foreshadows her celestial after-life tea with Queen Victoria. Perla, in turn, portrays Lali as a pederast. Both claim to live on a "higher" plane of existence as immortals while each attempts to reduce the other to "animal" status.

Gaspar's identity, too, remains as unclear as his position within the family. At times, he plays lackey and fool, to Lali and Perla's lord and lady; at others, he is the cherished adopted son. Has he worked for them for thirty years, or is he a child? Is he a dwarf? It is suggested that he arrived under circumstances similar to Equis's, a possibility made more credible by Gaspar's overreaction to Equis's presence. Structurally, in the parallel scenes, Gaspar and Equis play similar roles in their respective battles with Perla and Lali.³⁵ Not to be overlooked as a source is the Caspar legend of the boy raised in captivity, isolated from the outside world.³⁶ Gaspar's name also suggests a connection to Perla and Lali, as one of the three Magi, searching for signs of recognition of the Messiah, witnessed in a twice-repeated examination of Equis's image on Lali's handkerchief and its presentation to the audience.

Visita, in all its purposeful ambiguities, becomes the active, violent encounter of two worlds and its locus, the enclosed, hermetic world of Lali and Perla intruded upon by the outside world of Equis, with Gaspar functioning alternately as ally or adversary. The audience is constantly forced to reshuffle events and information, even from the opening moments of the play. Equis is barely distinguishable in the penumbra of the apartment. In the 1977 staging, Equis entered the scene in slow motion "as though invading the stage from the audience" (Foster 1979, 20 n. 7). At performance's end, Equis left the stage in slow motion, "facing the audience center stage." Kogan's direction clearly drew a line between on- and off-stage worlds and in the process conserved resonances of Monti's earlier rejected ending:

For a few seconds, the stage becomes more and more brightly lit until all the stage machinery can be seen, the falseness of the decor, the illusion of the staging . . . Sudden blackout. Curtain. [Durante unos segundos el escenario se ilumina intensamente, hasta poner al descubierto toda la maquinaria teatral, lo ficticio de los decorados, lo ilusorio de la representación. . . . Repentina oscuridad. Telón.] (47)

Foster interpreted this off-stage invasion of the dramatic world to be an emphasis on the "Gothic context 'visited' by Equis, but from which he escapes." It also made visible the controlling hand(s) of playwright and director: from the beginning, Kogan's staging forced the spectator to distinguish between reality and theatricality, between the event and its representation.

The spectator must attempt to make sense of a series of disorienting events occurring within and without the dramatic world of the enclosed space. Drawers, stuck earlier, are opened easily, only to be just as easily stuck again. Relationships between the characters shift as the social and familial codes that determine these relationships are transformed: Are Perla and Lali married? Is Gaspar Perla's sexual partner? Or Lali's? Is this a nuclear family? Does Equis play Ganymedes to Lali's Jupiter? Or is he playing Oedipus to Perla's Jocasta?³⁷ Perla and Lali's grotesque makeup and dress are as disconcerting as the incongruencies of their ages and physical energies. Constant reference is made to Gaspar as a boy, but Equis sees him as an adult. Equis himself is described as effeminate, but all his actions are brutish. Characters' reactions are often unanticipated and therefore defamiliarizing. For example, when Perla asks Equis why he has come, he responds with a timid smile, lowering his eyes, and running a finger across his throat as if slitting it. Perla reacts "slightly disappointed" [but not frightened!]: "Oh. (Pause. Smiling.) Well. (Pause.) Sit down. You must be exhausted. A decision like that . . ." [Ah. (Pausa. Sonriendo.) Bueno. (Pausa.) Siéntese. Debe estar extenuado. Una decisión así . . .] (10). The characters themselves are frequently thrown off guard by the others' actions and words. Equis appears to truly believe he has killed first Lali and later Perla, although nearing the play's end he, too, has learned how to feign his own death. Gaspar and, of course, Equis are the two most affected by the changing course of Perla and Lali's games, often executed at cross-purposes, leading to yet more confusion for both the character and spectator. Strange sounds are heard off-stage; "anonymous" hands open and close doors.

Additional confusing elements in the written text emphasize *Visita's* metadramatics. Stage directions that would indicate whether the character is "acting" or "playing it straight" are often absent. For example, is Lali truly disappointed when he finds out that Equis does not read the newspapers? Perla and Lali's grotesque masks, as they are described in the written dramatic text, foreground once again the extradramatic world of the playwright.

These deliberately contradictory and confusing details point to a series of power struggles at every level of theatrical representation:

spatial and temporal, linguistic and corporal, thematic and structural. Although in *Visita* more than two characters may be present on stage, the battles are always fought by two foes. Other characters act as observers or offer support, either as adjuvants or opponents, or they are engaged in their own parallel struggle. Attempts are made to control space and time: In Equis's ride on Lali's back, the visitor attempts to turn the host's game against him. Equis avails himself of both linguistic and physical resources, until Lali negates the reality of the journey and ends the game (17).

This final example implies an additional struggle for control over structure and content, a battle over whose game will be played and how the ritual will be conducted. Equis attempts to take over Lali's story in trying to prolong the trip. Lali, in turn, undermines the entire ritual when he claims that they never left the living room. Another power struggle ensues during the second act's funerary rites, and all subsequent struggles will lead to the greater question of immortality and control over one's own life. These battles reach their climax in the final act precisely at the moment of the "simultaneous actions." The parallel struggles hint that two "plays" are in conflict. When Gaspar, during his battle with Perla over the stale cookies, "borrows" one of Equis's lines (which Equis says while struggling against Lali to leave the apartment), the simultaneous actions commingle and confuse. It is precisely at this point that *Visita* exposes its political intent by becoming an extended call to action. Perla and Lali struggle to create parallel worlds of illusions, while Equis and Gaspar hold fast to the corporeal reality. Momentarily, the Equis-Lali struggle pulls focus as Perla and Gaspar become observers. The two worlds separate again as Lali and Equis engage in a physical battle during which Gaspar soliloquizes on his thirty years of service and ends with an incantatory questioning of his own existence. An impasse is reached when all four are separate, static. The deadlock is broken when Gaspar acts, biting Equis and thus cuing Perla's verbal abuse. The action then regains the momentum sufficient to carry the four characters to the end.

If we compare the open ending favored by Monti with the rejected version, in which Equis kills Lali and Perla, it becomes obvious that the discarded ending fails by being both too neat and too fatalistic. In murdering Perla and Lali, Equis has acted, but nothing fundamental has changed. He assumes the couple's mask when he makes himself up, with the assistance of the still subservient Gaspar. Having taken over Perla and Lali's role without altering the established power structure, Equis's revolution has failed. He has been co-opted. The physical space has not been altered; if anything, its

power is cemented when Equis learns that he cannot open the door. The ritualized duplication of the play's events is suggested by the idea of the visitor at the door—a spectator? or another Equis-usurper? In the retained, ceremonially incomplete version, Equis is in the arms of the "enemy," apparently asleep, but his eyes are open. The intruder appears to be in a trance, a temporary stasis, yet he is vigilant. The possibility of action remains.

I read this ending as an acknowledgment, and the first such instance in Monti's work, of the difficulty of the rebellious "child" liquidating the repressive "parent." The trancelike impasse stands as the moment of recognition of the failure of the parricidal ritual, but it also represents the birth of self-awareness, of a self-critical position. Does Equis give in to the parent, or is he taking stock? In a later interview (Pacheco 1991), Monti refers to the theme of parricide in the plays of the early Proceso and adds, "One never ends up settling on an understanding of the world, because it always changes, and so one needs to recompose his thinking in order to understand the new world that has been established" (65–66). Installed in a new world, Equis is recomposing himself at play's end, and the spectator is directed by the lighting to give him full attention.

In view of the sociohistoric moment of the play's premiere, *Visita's* ending proffers solid advice: the parent-junta being overwhelmingly, apocalyptically present, it was not the time to strike, such actions having already met with violent reprisals by 1977. The early years of the Proceso necessitated a vigilant pause and both critical and self-critical assessments of the national situation. Roberto Cossa's two plays of the period, *La nona* and *No hay que llorar*, offer other, even fiercer visions of Argentinean state-domestic genocide.

MIDDLE-CLASS GENOCIDE:

LA NONA AND *NO HAY QUE LLORAR* BY ROBERTO MARIO COSSA

La nona premiered on 12 August 1977 in the Lassalle Theater, under the direction of Carlos Gorostiza.³⁸ Along with Monti's *Visita* it was the most critically acclaimed show of the 1977 season (Ordaz 1981, i). *La nona* is the story of the title's eponym, a centenarian whose voracious hunger destroys everyone else in her family. The Argentine novelist Osvaldo Soriano (1987) places this voracity clearly within an Argentinean context when he writes:

It is an impious story, terrible, without redeeming characters or any message of hope. Cossa bares Argentinean cruelty, as the devastating mili-

tary dictatorship was rapidly expanding, a dictatorship called for and later tolerated by the majority of the country. (8)

La nona, apart from being one of the great successes of recent Argentine theater,³⁹ marks an important change in Cossa's dramaturgy. After 1970's *El avión negro* [The Black Airplane],⁴⁰ which was Cossa's first experience with collective playwriting, he did not write for the theater for seven years. He returned to the stage in 1977 with *La nona*, produced by his newly formed *Grupo de Trabajo*.⁴¹

La nona differs greatly from the playwrights's previous five plays.⁴² In *La nona*, Cossa reworks the grotesco criollo model into what has been termed *neogrotesco* theater. At the same time, as Osvaldo Pelletieri (1990) has stated, the playwright succeeds in "parodying the ideological discourse of turn-of-the-century theater" (177). David W. Foster (1979) notes that Cossa's *nona* evokes the lower middle-class immigrant community of Buenos Aires in "a devastating caricature of the need and the will to survive of the dirt-poor New World immigrant for whom *hacer [la] América* is reduced to having enough to eat" (17). I read *La nona* as a play that has its origins in this search for the "American dream" and its subsequent frustration. The text, scorpion-like, turns back on itself and becomes a stinging critique of the Argentine middle class, set within the menacing context of the military dictatorship.⁴³

La nona's biting self-critical indictment is often lost in international productions, given the play's humor, but neither its critical targets nor the difficult conditions under which it was written and premiered should be forgotten. In a post-Proceso interview, Cossa (1985) discussed these nightmarish conditions:

It's evident that the type of black humor present in *La nona* was determined by the climate of terror in which the country was living. We Argentines began to experience things that we had never experienced before, the deaths and disappearances of our friends or strangers. One had the sensation that every day the bullets were striking closer and closer. (40)

In a 1978 interview Cossa suggested that the nona was "death as a metaphysical entity" (Naios Najchaus 1981, 129). The nona as destructive force, blind to the needs of others, can be easily interpreted as a metaphor for those circumstances described by the playwright.

The play's dramatic action occurs in two places: the family's old *casona* with its dual playing areas of the kitchen and one grandson's room off to the side; and the back room of a kiosk owned by the nona's suitor. In the original staging, Leandro Hipólito Ragucci's set

was dominated by huge piles of empty crates, which created multi-level playing areas as well as blurred the boundaries separating the two spaces.

The play begins during the evening of a typical workday. The nona's granddaughter-in-law, María, and aging unmarried daughter, Anyula, are preparing a dinner of enormous amounts of food. María's brother-in-law, Chicho, is in his room reading the daily newspaper, hiding behind his claim of being a composer of tangos in order to maintain his unemployed lifestyle. The nona is in the kitchen eating, and when she demands more food, she is sent to her room whereupon it is discovered that she has stolen some bread. María's daughter, Marta, passes through the kitchen on her way to work the night shift at the drugstore; as she leaves, she runs into her father, Carmelo. All in all, they are an average *familia del barrio*, with one exception: the nona eats constantly. Every word she utters in *cocoliche*⁴⁴ and every move she makes has one goal: more food. Not surprisingly, the rest of the family is obsessed with economic survival in order to support their nona. Chicho, the family ne'er-do-well, invents a series of money-generating schemes that culminates in a plan to marry the nona off to Don Francisco. Nona's suitor, the owner of a kiosk and her daughter's boyfriend decades earlier, is now more interested in his future great-granddaughter, Marta. When Chicho insinuates that Francisco will inherit the nona's nonexistent land holdings in Italy upon her imminent death, the acquisitive Francisco agrees to the marriage. The first act ends with the wedding preparations and a toast, in which the old woman joins with a mistaken "¡Feliche año nuevo!" [Happy New Year].

The second act finds the newlyweds nearly destitute after only six weeks of marriage:

The shelves are empty, the floor is littered with empty cardboard boxes and the table covered in silvery paper. Nona, seated at the table, chews. Francisco is seated on the bed, with a lost expression on his face: the image of defeat. [Los estantes están despoblados, el piso lleno de cajas de cartón vacías y la mesa cubierta de papel plateado. La Nona, sentada frente a la mesa, mastica. Francisco está sentado en la cama, con la mirada perdida: la imagen de la derrota.] (110)

Francisco, frustrated at hearing the nona speak constantly of food yet never of her nonexistent inheritance, attempts to hit his wife, whereupon he suffers a stroke. The next scene in the family home echoes act I's meal, but the overall situation has eroded: the nona eats even more voraciously; Francisco is now a hemiplegic confined to a wheelchair; and Carmelo's consumption of grappa has in-

creased in inverse proportion to his self-esteem's decline. When Chicho, finally employed, comes home early from work, a confrontation between the two brothers ensues. The angry words and Carmelo's subsequent breakdown lie in grotesque contrast to his automatic responses to his grandmother's continued requests for food and drink. The scene ends when all leave except the matriarch, who of course keeps on eating.

The rest of the act is the economic demise of this family in a *reductio ad absurdum*. By now everyone works, including Francisco, who is left out on the street in his wheelchair and collected at the end of the day to count the coins thrown into his cap. When the old man disappears, the family mortgages the house, and Marta takes a new job as a "hostess" at a *confitería* [tea room]. As Chicho, Carmelo, and María comprehend the source of the family's decline, they embark on a series of desperate moves to rid themselves of their nona. The final attempt takes place after the refrigerator has been sold and the young Marta is now entertaining clients at home seventeen hours a day. Chicho, Carmelo, and María try to poison the old woman. Nona drinks half the potion and remains unaffected, but when Anyula comes home, she innocently drinks a few drops of the leftover amount and promptly dies. In the closing minutes of the play, all die or leave: Marta is hospitalized for work-related illnesses to which she later succumbs; Carmelo's heart fails upon seeing his grandmother eat the flowers he was going to sell at the cemetery; María goes to live with her sisters in Mendoza; and Chicho, overcome by the prospect of spending the rest of his life with the nona, commits suicide. Only the old woman is left, eating, as the lights fade on her face.

Traces of the grotesco criollo⁴⁵ populate *La nona*: it has the stock types of the nona immigrant from southern Italy, the Spanish *gallego*, the hard-working son in conflict with his vagabond younger brother. The dialects, such as the nona's use of the aforementioned cocoliche, are suggestive of the genre, as are certain names and occupations. For example, Carmelo's name and Chicho's brief career as Bible salesman recall Defilippis Novoa's 1930 play *He visto a Dios* [I've Seen God]. *La nona*'s basic plot structure of a middle-class family's decline and resulting anguish is also typical of the grotesco. This last characteristic is pivotal to an understanding of Cossa's play and its biting commentary on 1977 Argentina. As Eduardo Romano (1986) points out in his analysis of the rise, decline, and renewed ascent of the grotesco genre in Argentine theater, the form is intimately tied to the changing fortunes of the Argentine middle class: "[T]he tragicomedy of the grotesco protagonist reveals the alienated nucleus of the petty bourgeoisie with its expectations of power" (31). Romano reinforces

these parallel trajectories by contrasting the decline of the grotesco from 1935 until 1955⁴⁶ to the middle class's growing optimism during the same period. The grotesco made a reappearance in Argentine theater of the late 1960s and early 1970s in plays such as *El grito pelado* [The Stripped-Bare Scream] by Oscar Viale and *La fiaca* [The Blahs] by Ricardo Talesnik.⁴⁷ As Romano notes, this reappearance coincided with the growing pessimism that accompanied the middle class's economic decline.

Thus *La nona* premiered in 1977,⁴⁸ a product of the Argentine middle class and its theatrical vehicle, the grotesco. The nona's voraciousness was a metaphor, in Romano's words, "for the economic mechanisms that were sucking up the country's workforce and, in passing, destroying family life" (36). Cossa's other play from the first years of the dictatorship, *No hay que llorar*, also examines the destruction of middle-class family life. When taken together, the 1977 *La nona* and the 1979 *No hay que llorar* constitute two very different, but complementary, attempts at addressing the same issue: the socio-economic and ideological failures of the Argentine middle class and its resultant impotence and increasing violence.

In his review of the 1989 compilation of Cossa's *El avión negro*, *La nona*, and *No hay que llorar*, Osvaldo Pellettieri (1990) barely addresses *No hay*, preferring to dismiss the play as merely "an attempt at resemanticizing certain artifices from the first phase of reflective realism in light of its ideological and aesthetic assumptions. It is an automated orthodox realistic version of the matricide left unmaterIALIZED in his earlier play, *La nona*" (177). While *No hay que llorar* may have been less successful both commercially and artistically than *La nona*,⁴⁹ it merits examination as a companion piece to its predecessor, as an anti-*nona*. Luis Ordaz (1985) has noted,

La nona's terms have been inverted and, in place of the grandmother appearing as the absorbing and demolishing figure, devouring the entire family with her voracious appetite, the Mother is ferociously destroyed by her own children. Cossa continues to be concerned with an unmasking in which, because of the uncommon violence that prevails, the psychological subtleties and the candor of his old theater no longer work. (18)

No hay que llorar premiered less than two years after *La nona*, on 11 May 1979, at the Auditorio Buenos Aires, once again under the auspices of the Grupo de Trabajo and directed by Héctor Aure.⁵⁰ It tells a similar story of obsession and cruelty but from another perspective and with a very different structure. Unlike *La nona*, there is only one act and one playing area: the living-dining area of a two-room, fairly

run-down apartment. As the stage directions point out, the only jarring note in this conventionally appointed room is the presence of a refrigerator.

It is nine o'clock at night. Two adult brothers, Pedro and Osvaldo, together with their respective wives, Ester and Graciela, are discussing the physical condition of their mother, who has just fainted at her own surprise party. The apartment is hers; the others have come to celebrate her seventieth birthday. The third brother, Gabriel, arrives, disguised in a clownlike pointy hat and false nose. While waiting for the doctor to arrive, the three brothers and two wives talk about their jobs, health, expectations, and resentments.

The spectator gradually realizes that all family members, with the possible exception of Gabriel, a reasonably successful owner of a *rotisería* in the distant province of Río Negro, have specific financial agendas: Ester wants Pedro to arrange for them and their young son to move in with Mother; Osvaldo, without having consulted the social-climbing Graciela, wants Gabriel to lend him some money so he can open a kiosk out of his home. The pretext for the discussion is Mother: what to do about her now that it is obvious she cannot live on her own? All bickering ceases when Gabriel finds seven property deeds dating from the mid-1940s.

The offspring then begin to fantasize about how they are going to use their mother's deeds. Each reacts almost unconsciously: ex-smoker and drinker Gabriel returns to both habits; Pedro sobs uncontrollably while Ester embraces and kisses him; Osvaldo drinks cognac while Graciela caresses the nape of his neck. She soon moves on to the deeds, and Ester, not to be outdone, follows suit. The territorial fighting ends when Gabriel suggests that the three brothers become business associates in a warehouse. The earlier reactions of happiness are transformed grotesquely as the five start eating: (according to stage directions) "[A]t first it is an unconscious act, but little by little it becomes transformed into a sensual, violent and disagreeable meal" [(A)] principio es un acto inconsciente, pero poco a poco se irá transformando, en una comida sensual, violenta y desagradable] (163). Before, we saw the couples reuniting. Now, relationships are deformed as Graciela dances and ends up in brother-in-law Gabriel's lap, and he begins to fondle her; Ester kisses brother-in-law Osvaldo while her husband, Pedro, drinks; and everyone takes an almost adolescent delight in swearing, insulting, and laughing hysterically.

At this moment, Mother passes through the living room on her way from the bedroom to the bath. Moments later, she returns, seating herself in the armchair and beginning to cry as she says, "This is probably the last birthday that . . ." [A lo mejor es el último cum-

pleaños que . . .] (166). The children attempt to cheer her up, using the same words she used with them when they were young. As Gabriel says,

Come on, Ma! No crying! Do you remember what you always used to say to me? No crying! [To Graciela] When we were kids and something happened to us, she always used to say: No crying! ¡iVamos, vieja! ¡Sin llorar! ¿Te acordás cómo me decías siempre? ¡Sin llorar! (A Graciela) Cuando éramos pibes y nos pasaba algo, siempre nos decía: ¡Sin llorar! (167)

As her sons share their plans for the business in the South, Mother begins to suspect that they have discovered her deeds and puts them away, saying: "The only thing I ask is to be left in peace during my last years." [Lo único que pido es estar tranquila estos últimos años] (171). When Pedro begins to sob, his mother retorts, "No crying!" and as he begs for her assistance, she talks about their childhood and her expectations:

You grew up healthy and that's what's important. [. . .] There are mothers who want their sons to become doctors . . . or to have a lot of money. For me, the only thing that mattered was that you be honorable. And that you have good wives. [Se criaron sanos y eso es lo importante. (. . .) Hay madres que quieren que sus hijos sean doctores . . . o tengan plata. A mí, lo único que me importa es que sean honrados. Y que tengan esposas buenas.] (172–73)

When Mother asks for *sidra* [hard cider], Gabriel, Osvaldo, and Graciela comply and start giving her more food and alcohol, knowing that both are prejudicial to her already weakened condition. Ester finally comprehends the motives of the other three, followed soon after by Pedro, as finally all five urge Mother to drink, eat, and sing the old tango, *Caminito* [Little Road]:

Caminito que el tiempo ha borrado,
que juntos un día nos viste pasar . . .
He venido por última vez . . .
He venido a contarte mi mal.
.....
Desde que se fue . . .
nunca más volvió . . .
Seguiré tus pasos . . .
Caminito, adiós.

(176–77)⁵¹

The struggle intensifies as Mother asks to lie down, to which the five respond by insisting that she open her birthday presents⁵² and cut her birthday cake. The play ends as Mother's cries of "I'm dying, I'm dying" are drowned out by the children's singing of "Happy Birthday."

In terms of structure, *La nona* and *No hay que llorar* have very little in common. *La nona*'s action is divided into two acts, consisting of chronologically sequenced scenes of varying lengths. There are unfilled gaps in the dramatic action, and at times it is impossible to ascertain exactly how much time has elapsed between scenes. This temporal fluidity underscores just how much Cossa's 1970s playwrighting had distanced itself from his more realistic plays of the 1960s. In *No hay* Cossa goes back to a more straightforward form of play making, a return that elicited Osvaldo Pellettieri's previously quoted dismissal. The 1979 work is structured as a one-act play whose onstage events occur in "real time," that is, in a discourse time that corresponds exactly to plot time (Elam 1980, 117–18). Thus the spectator witnesses the events in their entirety, without gaps or interruptions.

The first conclusion to be drawn from these temporal and structural differences is that there has been a change in focus. In *La nona* we see the gradual, inevitable, and complete eradication of a family; *No hay* instead compresses its action into a single evening over the course of which the destruction of the family matriarch takes place. Nevertheless, the locus of destruction in both plays lies in the family unit, and it is in the examination of the family where the similarities between the two texts become clear.

Each play takes place in the family home—in *La nona* the kitchen is the focal point; in *No hay* it is the living-dining room, with the refrigerator's presence serving as an ironic ongoing reminder of the family's obsession with survival. Four generations live together in the large house of the earlier play; in the latter work, the children visit their mother at her apartment. The center of both families is the mother, and the patriarch is absent, having died long ago. The father's absence notwithstanding, the reactive generation is represented by men: Both plays have brothers who, whether they live together or have not seen each other in three and a half years,⁵³ disagree with each other. The conflict propelling *La nona*'s outrageous plot is Carmelo's overworked and responsible older brother pleading with the unemployed "artist" Chicho to help rectify the family's economic situation. Chicho responds to Carmelo's work ethic with various stratagems in an effort to avoid getting a job. There is also great resentment and sibling rivalry among the three brothers in *No hay*: Osvaldo and Pedro resent Gabriel's good fortune,

and Osvaldo, especially, believes that Gabriel has a fraternal obligation to help him out.

With the exceptions of *La nona*'s Anyula and Marta, the women in both plays are daughters-in-law, which affords the author yet two more stereotypical entries into family politics: the self-serving daughter-in-law with plans for the son (Graciela in *No hay*) and the selfless and underappreciated daughter-in-law (María in *La nona*). Anyula is the *nona*'s unmarried, aging daughter, whose prospects for marriage and life outside the family home were destroyed by her own mother, ostensibly to retain her as live-in maid. Marta is the great-granddaughter, representing the new generation, that, like everyone else in the family, will be sacrificed by the matriarch.

Both plays are built upon the premise of a celebration, and in each, the ceremonial festivities undergo a grotesque twist. The first play celebrates the marriage of the one-hundred-year-old *nona* to her daughter's ex-suitor, who, in turn, lusts after her great-granddaughter.⁵⁴ In *No hay*, the surprise party held to celebrate the mother's seventieth birthday results in her own death.

The endings of the two plays appear to be contradictory. As Cossa has remarked in reference to a possible association of *No hay* to *La nona*, "Many people saw [*No hay*] as the children's revenge."⁵⁵ In *La nona*, it is the mother who destroys the family line whereas, in *No hay*, the mother is destroyed by her offspring. Thus we have a multiple filicide lying in contradistinction to a matricide. But what really is destroyed in each play? The *nona* has lived for more than one hundred years, and it appears that she will live forever; the offspring of *No hay*'s mother have killed her, but she lives on in their cold-blooded selfishness. Her true legacy to them is not the property deeds she was hoarding for herself; rather it is the play's title and the phrase, "¡Sin llorar!" The tango that the mother used to sing to her sons foreshadows her death ("I've come here for the last time" [He venido por última vez]) and their loss ("she never returned again" [nunca más volvió]), but it also suggests continuation. All are on the same *caminito*—"I will follow your footsteps" [seguiré tus pasos].

Read together, the plays constitute an indictment of the extreme individualism to which the middle class has subjected itself, becoming both victimizer and victimized as it has pursued its goal of *hacer la América*, the American dream. In the 1977 play, the victims were clearly distinguished from their torturer, but by 1979, as evident in the title, the focus had shifted to a philosophy implicating and binding both victim and victimizer.

In a note accompanying an interview with Cossa (Morero 1985), given on the occasion of *No hay que llorar's* 1985 restaging in the government-run Teatro Municipal General San Martín (the first time a Cossa play had been staged in an "official" theater), the playwright empathizes with his 1979 play's characters:

No hay is about people who are the victims of an exalted individualism. About those poor people who go through life destroyed by what they could have been if they had only had a better economic situation, destroyed by a society that pushes them toward impoverishment. . . . Man appears, reduced to his basic necessities, with huge fantasies staked on economic achievements. And the solutions have to come from outside, magically, like the lottery. [. . .] As if each one had a personal lottery inside him. (41)

I believe that Cossa, from a 1985 vantage point, softens his earlier 1979 stance, reinterpreting *No hay's* characters as victims of a capitalistic mentality, absolved of any complicity in their 1979 circumstances of living under an apparently, at that time, entrenched dictatorship: It appears that the playwright was aware, at least in 1979 if not later, of the bind in which many middle-class Argentines found themselves: they had welcomed the 1976 military coup as a means of restoring order only to suffer under the junta's repressive National Reorganization Process.

By 1979, the regime had eliminated the opposition, most of the "disappearances" had occurred, and the country was well into its economic slide toward 1980's near collapse. Theater thus was able to go beyond its earlier role of reacting to and dramatizing the daily horror. By 1979, Buenos Aires theater had begun to unmask and analyze the structures operating within Argentine society, including its own involvement, in what was happening within the country. The plays discussed in this chapter demonstrate that more than a few Argentinean playwrights were able to transcend the dictatorship's social, political and economic constraints, as they attempted to "metaphorize" for the stage what was occurring in their country. By the early 1980s, theater's role would become even more pronounced as the dictatorship loosened its grip on public expression.

2

1980–1982: Myths Unmasked, Unrealities Exposed

This country is a mixture of an underdeveloped country with pretensions, with European cultural influences. A country that still hasn't digested all its forms of immigration and that constantly invents a country that doesn't exist: the All-Powerful Argentina. [. . .] In sum, myths and unrealities.

—Roberto Mario Cossa

When Ricardo Halac was asked about the prevailing general climate at the 1980 premiere of his play, *Un trabajo fabuloso* [A Fabulous Job], he termed it "the worst moment of the military dictatorship." Indeed, in 1980, the military junta had been in power for four years, and the country's financial system was near collapse. The country would have to wait two more years until a failed attempt at repossessing the Malvinas/Falkland Islands impelled the junta to agree to open civilian elections and a return to democracy.

Halac's comment surprises, however. The first years of the military's Proceso de Reorganización Nacional were considered to have been the most repressive and brutal. By 1980, the majority of "disappearances" had taken place, and many of the exiled were beginning to return to Argentina. During the 1980s, too, local criticism of the authoritarian state became increasingly open as international attention finally turned to the military's human rights abuses.

Buenos Aires enjoyed strong theater seasons during 1981 and 1982. Nineteen eighty-one would also witness the birth of Teatro Abierto, the "sociotheatrical phenomenon" often referred to as the most important theater event in Argentine history. As in the previous years, theater survived by adapting to socioeconomic realities: plays with smaller casts staged with modest production values were favored over larger productions. In assessing the 1980 theater season, local critic Rómulo Berruti (1980) posed, if only then to answer defiantly, the following question:

Was it a hard year for theater activity? Yes, it was. . . . Pressing economic problems affecting broad sectors of the population made themselves felt with severity at the box offices. [. . .] The result? Worrisome for many. But positive if one learns the lesson: the public will not go to see anything except what's truly attractive. But they will go. And theaters have not closed. Because once again, "the theater that you would have dead is enjoying good health."

Nineteen eighty had seen the bankruptcy of several *casas financieras* and the flight of huge sums of money from Argentina.² The country's economic system neared collapse under the import-substitution industrialization policies of the junta's finance minister, José A. Martínez de Hoz. As the regime plunged into economic crisis, it appeared to have loosened its repressive grip on the populace. "Discernible repression" began to wane (Rock 1987, 373) at the same time international attention finally began to focus on the military regime's abuses; Argentinean ex-detainee Adolfo Pérez Esquivel won the 1980 Nobel Peace Prize for his human rights activism. Many blacklisted theater practitioners returned from exile as the military regime sought to improve its image and financial relationships abroad.

The following year, junta leadership transferred from General Jorge Videla to General Roberto Viola. Finance Minister Martínez de Hoz resigned as the financial crisis and internecine fighting within the various armed forces branches continued. Amid rumors of military coups and popular demonstrations, Viola announced his commitment to a political *apertura*, an opening of dialogue with the political parties. Nevertheless, a November run on the peso triggered Viola's resignation, and he was succeeded by his chief military critic, General Leopoldo Galtieri. In April 1982, Galtieri orchestrated Argentina's attempted repossession of the Malvinas/Falkland Islands from the British. This war ended in Argentina's surrender after the loss of many young lives because of poor training, corruption, horrible living conditions in the Antarctic, and brutal corporal punishment. The defeat further discredited the junta, forced Galtieri's resignation, and impelled new president General Reynaldo Bignone to agree to open civilian elections. In November 1982, the first of many mass graves was discovered, in La Plata. Demands for an official response regarding the desaparecidos continued to come from both national and international human rights groups.

Such positive changes aside, porteño theater practitioners found themselves in the strange position of attempting to process onstage the events they were experiencing as the nightmare of the Proceso dragged on. I believe that it was this toll on everyday life under pro-

longed dictatorship to which Halac is referring in his comment that opens the present chapter. Ricardo Monti, whose play *Marathón* [Marathon] was one of the 1980 season's hits, has also contemplated the period's effect on his writing (1992b):

Today, at a distance, I understand that that crisis of unbearable, mortal anguish was the result of the daily coexistence with horror and death during the interminable years of the dictatorship. As long as I was working on *Marathón*, the effort required to express all that was going on and all that I felt and thought kept me unharmed. When I finished the play, my feelings were shattered. My work, my life, reality: everything was a nightmare. (249–50)

This double-edged state, of attempting to objectify on the stage the very subjective daily experience of life under authoritarian rule, manifested itself in many plays of the 1980–82 period. Playwrights, all the while aware of the censor's gaze, sought to expose both the experience of daily life under dictatorship and the factors conditioning said existence. Although still reacting to and suffering under the constraints of the authoritarian regime, early 1980s plays took the first steps toward a critical self-distancing. While continuing to employ the metaphor as a means of "masking" the referent, playwrights chose as their referents national myths and the mythologizing process itself to begin a project of historical revision. In essence, they embarked on a "masked" project of "unmasking" the processes that both transcended and perpetuated the country's present condition, not only to reflect contemporary nightmarish reality but also to begin the analytical process of isolating the elements that created and sustained an Argentina under dictatorship.

A brief examination of two plays of the period, Halac's *Un trabajo fabuloso* and . . . *y a otra cosa mariposa* [And on to the Next One] (1981) by Susana Torres Molina, will serve to introduce some of these strategies at work. Both plays take on the myth of the macho porteño, inverting gender roles and exploiting cultural assumptions about men and women in what, at a superficial glance, would appear to be nothing more than a grotesquely carnivalized masquerade. Yet, in a closer reading, both texts constitute two very different but equally biting analyses of early 1980s Argentina. These texts additionally reveal the playwrights' attempted double positioning as both personally inside and critically outside the situation. These plays, too, stand as examples of Proceso Argentine theater's first steps toward a critical self-distancing and critique of its own participation and complicity in the perpetuation of the authoritarian state. This larger picture,

that is, theater's relationship to what Nicolas Shumway (1991) has called Argentina's national "guiding fictions" is the focus of my readings of the two critical and box office successes of the 1980 theater season: *El viejo criado* [The Old Manservant] by Roberto Mario Cossa and *Marathón* by Monti. The chapter concludes with a look at the contributions of two groups of practitioners silent (and silenced) during the first years of dictatorship: returning exiles, such as Eduardo Pavlovsky and Griselda Gambaro, and new playwrights, such as Mauricio Kartun, Hebe Serebrisky, Eduardo Rovner, and María Cristina Verrier.

PROCESO THEATER'S DUAL ROLE

More than one critic has noted theater's use of the masquerade as a metaphor for the Argentinean (self)censored condition. Luis Ordaz's prologue to a 1981 edition of the previous season's two critical successes (the two plays I examine later in this chapter: *Marathón* and *El viejo criado*) demonstrates an awareness of the strategy: "[I]n light of 'reasons of epoch' and similar circumstances, both [plays] resort to a 'masking' of reality, to the 'theatrical metaphor,' at its various levels" (ii–iii). Ordaz then posits a historicopolitical intent behind the mask: "[B]oth speak of us, of this place and the times we are going through" (iii).³ Gerardo Fernández (Rojas 1992), too, commented on this tendency toward historical revision in early 1980s texts and their critical targets of certain national myths:

[T]here was a critical tendency toward great traditional myths, customs, ceremonies and allusions about what was then (and still is now) spinning the life of the country, configuring its so-called "national self" and halting the development and maturity of the flooding human conglomerate, in search of its true identity. (150)

Finally, the critic Mario Rojas (1992), expanding upon Fernández's concept, has developed a critical analysis of this double movement, mythologization-demythologization, in the Argentine search for its *ser nacional*:

Playwrights like Cossa, Monti and many more have once again taken up myth, not in order to seek out any one meaning but rather to discover history's contradictions, to question myth as having a constitutive character, to thwart the dictatorship's monological discourse, to emphasize its plurivalence, to open multiple alternative readings, to return the erased spaces of history to the collective memory. (167)

Absent from Rojas's analysis is Ordaz's allusion to the use of historical displacement and myth/metaphor/masquerade as a means of deterring censorship. In the above quotation, Rojas confuses this double action of masking and unmasking, a confusion resulting from the vague semantics surrounding the word "myth" as it is used in Argentine plays of the period and their subsequent analyses. A look at Roland Barthes's essays on myth and Bertolt Brecht's concepts of *Verfremdung* and *Gestus* will both clarify this issue and enable us to analyze the demythologizing processes at work in such early 1980s plays as *Un trabajo fabuloso* and . . . *y a otra cosa mariposa*.

In his 1956 essay, "Myth Today," Barthes (1982) defines myth as a second-order semiological system, "constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it" (99), in that a preexisting "meaningful" sign of a first signifying system becomes a "mere" (Barthes's evaluation) signifier in the second. In this way, the secondary, or mythical, system transforms itself into a structure devoid of content: "When it becomes form, the meaning leaves its contingency behind; it empties itself, it becomes impoverished, history evaporates, only the letter remains" (103). Barthes goes on to develop an ideological critique of myth's distortional, rather than masking, function in a bourgeois society. For him, myth is "depoliticized speech," designed to give "historical intention a natural justification, and [to make historical and thus temporal] contingency appear eternal" (130–31). In sum, myth renders reality unreal, not in that it denies the existence of things, but rather in the way that "it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification" (132). By essay's end, Barthes finds himself aporetically lodged between two methodologies:

[T]here is as yet only one possible choice, and this choice can bear only on two equally extreme methods: either to posit a reality which is entirely permeable to history, and ideologize; or, conversely, to posit a reality which is *ultimately* impenetrable, irreducible, and in this case, poetize. In a word, I do not yet see a synthesis between ideology and poetry. (149, his emphasis)⁴

I perceive in Argentinean plays of the early 1980s an attempt at the aforementioned synthesis, or at the very least an acknowledgment of the aporia existing in the relationship of an object, in the present case, contemporary Argentina, and the understanding of that object. Early 1980s plays attempted to remove distortions, unmask myth, and repoliticize the sign, by restoring to the sign its historical signified, even as these plays maintained a tension between

the object and its beholders, in the case of the theater, between the performance and the audience.

Brechtian Epic Theater had earlier engaged in roughly the same project of demythologizing bourgeois theater and reactivating the spectator. As Anne Ubersfeld (1977) notes: "[Brecht] has recovered, [moving] beyond the bourgeois audience's passivity, the fundamental law of theater: making the spectator a participant, a decisive actor" (45, emphasis hers). It is no coincidence that Brechtian Epic theater techniques, introduced to Latin American theater in the 1950s and 1960s, can be read into Argentine theater of the 1970s and 1980s,⁵ in strategies akin to Brechtian opacity, Gestus, and Verfremdung that succeed in both avoiding censorship and engaging the spectator.⁶ In Rojas's 1992 discussion of the relationship between dramatic discourse and audience reception within the context of the Proceso, the author postulates:

With the goal of creating a space for their own discourse, playwrights resorted to the plurivalent verbal sign. Using a semantic opacity, they attacked the dictatorship's monological, falsely transparent sign and at the same time they were able to clear the lattice-work of censorship. (157)

Rojas then describes how, as a consequence of the "opaqueing" process, the spectator-as-participant is required to "de-opaque [*desopacar*] that multidirectional and cryptic language [by] contextualizing it" (158).

As Rojas sets forth these "opaqueing" and "de-opaqueing" actions, they are quite possibly opposing and certainly confusing: the text makes the transparent "Official" sign opaque both semantically and formally, only to have the audience then remove its opacity upon deciphering the signified. This confusion betrays a lack of clarity regarding the function of the *Verfremdungseffekt*,⁷ which is, to quote Brecht scholar John Willett (1968), "not simply the breaking of illusion. . . . It is a matter of detachment, of reorientation" (177). Two types of opacity are at work in Argentinean plays of the early 1980s: the conscious metaphorizing of the sign in a plurivalent signifier to avoid censorship and the equally deliberate pointing back to this very signifier to draw attention to its function as counter-censor. Thus the spectator is not only required to decipher the reference but also encouraged, in the process, to question and consequently demythologize what society (and the military government) would present as "truth." Together, the text and audience deconstructed the military junta's mythopoetic "national reorganization project," in which, as Frank Graziano (1992) points out, "the junta's ideology po-

larized the complexities and ambiguities of reality into simple, dichotomous antitheses, into binary oppositions mapping out the absolute positions of actors in a mythological struggle" (113). Furthermore, text and spectator together confronted national myths that both transcended and perpetuated the current sociohistorical conditions.

EXPOSING THE "MACHO PORTEÑO":

UN TRABAJO FABULOSO AND . . . *YA OTRA COSA MARIPOSA*⁸

Ricardo Halac's *Un trabajo fabuloso*,⁹ premiering in July 1980, was neither a critical nor a popular success, despite the playwright's reputation and the name recognition of the Lassalle Theater and of the principal actor, Hugo Arana. J.C. Cernadas Lamadrid (1983) alludes to this failure in his introduction to the Paralelo 32 edition: "*Un trabajo fabuloso* was not entirely understood when it premiered, but it has been increasingly more so and will be [fully understood] to the same degree that our memory recovers from the terror" (8). An example of this initial, less than complete, reception is the unsigned 17 July *La Nación* review (1980) of the original production. The reviewer commends the play's staging and the impact of some of the play's scenes. Nevertheless, the reviewer concludes that the text is structurally flawed, split when the first act ends in "a delirium of enormous suggestion" that is undermined by the second act's "routinely conventional ending." The reviewer continues:

[The play's] critical vision of a society that reaches such extremes that it compels a man to assume a female role brought on by shortages and necessities, that vision gets lost in collateral paths. Such as the gibe at machismo, the true leitmotif of the second Act; although it includes some good humorous choices, it superimposes itself on the central idea and distracts the main action.

The reviewer, despite missing the play's point, aptly perceives a textual structural conflict that resulted in a far more pessimistic play (and consequently even more reflective of its moment of staging) than Halac himself had even envisioned: "I tried to write a comedy, and the play slipped away from me."¹⁰ Unlike his earlier plays, beginning with *Segundo tiempo* and including 1978's *El destete*, in which quasi-realistic scenes are interspersed with grotesque "cuts" or transformations, in *Un trabajo fabuloso*, the situation itself is grotesque. Francisco enters already transformed, dressed as a woman

and having begun the transsexual process of receiving female hormone injections. Throughout the play's six scenes, Francisco never abandons his female drag costume, yet this is not simple cross-dressing for humorous effect à la Carlos Perciavalle,¹¹ nor is it the grotesque effect of Roberto Cossa's 1977 *nona* being played by a male actor. Francisco's change of gender is the result of two outside pressures, the first economic and the second social. Francisco has become "Tatiana" so that he can increase his income as a female escort for visiting foreign businessmen. It appears that he has tried everything else, having sold insecticides to restaurants during the morning, pots and pans door-to-door in the afternoon, towels at swimming pools on the weekends, and having worked nights as a host at a Russian tavern (94–95). Exhausting all moneymaking possibilities and himself, he sees prostitution as his only remaining alternative. For Francisco, this solution to his family's financial difficulties functions also as penance. Believing he has failed as husband and father, Francisco-the-macho-porteño emasculates himself, abdicating his role as patriarch and demoting himself to Woman. When his wife, Lidia, tries to win him back to the family during a Father's Day celebration, Francisco explodes:

Idiot, do you think that I made a big change like this because I'm a sexual degenerate? You know how hard I worked . . . and when I didn't have work, I floundered about as best I could. . . . Until I got fed up! [. . .] There was a time when a father brought home the bacon, protected the family, and when his son was growing up, he would take him by the hand and show him the world. Those days are gone! Today a father doesn't show anyone anything! He doesn't have any more words! [. . .] He's dumb! He goes around dressed like a woman! [Idiota, ¿creés que hice un cambio tan grande porque soy un depravado sexual? Vos sabés todo lo que trabajé . . . y cuando no tuve más trabajo pichuleé como pude . . . ¡Hasta que me pudrí! [. . .] Había una época en que el padre traía el pan a casa, protegía el hogar y cuando el hijo crecía lo llevaba de la mano y le enseñaba el mundo. ¡Esa época terminó! ¡Ahora el padre no enseña nada! ¡No tiene más palabras! [. . .] ¡Se quedó mudo! ¡Anda de mujer!] (101)

Society and family misinterpret this change, and the remaining action consists of a series of fruitless attempts to remasculinize Francisco. The playing space is divided between the home and the local bar, the former the private locus of the family and the latter the public social space (as we bear in mind that both spheres have been traditionally male-dominated). In the play's final two scenes, after the apparent failure of the remasculinization project, acceptance of Francisco's situation is rejected in favor of his destruction. He has

already been physically displaced: His family has moved to a less-expensive apartment, now referred to as Lidia's house in the dramatic text; and the local bar, owned by his childhood friend Vicente, has been transformed into "Macho's Bar," a paean to phallocentrism, as the stage directions make clear:

A military march is heard at full volume. Various posters are lowered, all alluding to man's great bravery, a poster of [Buenos Aires's] obelisk, and shotguns and other virile symbols are mounted on the walls. Vicente enters . . . dressed like a gaucho. [Se oye una marcha guerrera a todo lo que da. Bajan carteles alusivos al gran valor del hombre, un póster del obelisco, y en las paredes se ven escopetas y otros símbolos viriles. Entra Vicente . . . vestido de gaucho.] (115)

This grotesquely humorous send-up of machismo quickly turns tragic as Francisco unexpectedly returns to fulfill his paternal role of being present when his daughter's boyfriend asks for her hand in marriage, this too a conscious return to his traditional lifestyle. Vicente's militaristic and homophobic nephew, Guillermo, threatens to alienate Francisco from his son Diego, and Francisco, grabbing Vicente's gaucho knife, challenges Guillermo to a duel. The protagonist once again, and this time fatally, is undone by his love of family, as Guillermo calls out to Diego, and the son runs away; Francisco, momentarily distracted from the fight, is stabbed. The wounded Francisco manages to return home and witness his daughter's engagement before (now reconciled with his wife) he dies.

Francisco is a soul *and* body in pain; he is Argentina of 1980, dispossessed, displaced, and ultimately disappeared. Furthermore, instead of recognizing that Francisco has been victimized by both social pressures and economic reversals, society wrongfully punishes the victim as the cause of the very problems, private and public, that have transformed him. Francisco's tragic flaw is his own adherence to his society's norms; thus he is as much a victim and supporter of *machista* Argentine society as his victimizers.

Across-the-board blindness toward social and economic repression that leads to a blaming of the victim, and even the victim's own self-blame, is *Un trabajo fabuloso's* target, a repressive tendency that 1980 Argentina was still not ready to acknowledge. The misapprehension is apparent in *La Nación's* piece: The reviewer criticizes the playwright for playing up the second act's sexism, when it is specifically this *machismo* that triggers the family's and society's reaction to and tragic destruction of Francisco. It would require some historical distancing to acknowledge this error, as Cernadas Lamadrid stated three years after the premiere. Cernadas Lamadrid goes so far as to

suggest that, even under democracy, Argentines have not unmasked and recognized themselves in their own national mythology:

Francisco is a mutilated man, an accomplice, prostituted and disappeared by his own hand. He is ourselves, without the masks of our roles, castrated by a ferocious dictatorship that mutilated, assassinated, and prostituted. Francisco is a scream, an open sore, the same sore that today and in all its intensity, even after we have overcome the terror and remain stupefied by the horror, aches in our body and aches in the entire social body. (8)

Un trabajo fabuloso constitutes a tragic representation of what had been occurring in Argentina since the early 1970s: a systematic militaristic eradication of any "subversive" element in an attempt to preserve the "natural order" myth manifest in Western (and Christian) civilization. And, as it occurred in Argentina, the supposed remedy was in reality the disease. It was this repression (social, economic, and by historical extension, political) that needed to be eliminated, not the Francisco "subversives." Frank Graziano (1992) relocates the blame: "The junta was the predominant cause of the woes for which it believed itself the solution, and it therefore, like Oedipus, had to be driven from the State before 'health' could be restored" (137). *Un trabajo fabuloso*, through gender inversion, critiques the repressive mythmaking of an Argentina under military dictatorship, reassigning blame to the victimizer, the myth perpetuators, and not exclusively to the victim.

Another play that focused on the macho porteño myth and suffered at the box office, for reasons beyond its producer's control, was the 1981 . . . *y a otra cosa mariposa*,¹² by Susana Torres Molina. The playwright, having returned that year from political exile in Spain, wrote and directed the text, which traces the lives of four friends from childhood through old age. There are five scenes: (1) in "La prima," we see the boys at preadolescence, ogling a stolen *Playboy* magazine; (2) "Metejón" shows them as teenagers in a café, talking about picking up girls but never daring to follow through; (3) in "Despedida de soltero," the four men, now in their early thirties, meet to celebrate Flaco's upcoming marriage, only to be surprised when Pajarito reveals his homosexuality; (4) the fourth scene, and the play's climax, takes place in a borrowed apartment, while the four, now cynical misogynists, wait for their dates to arrive for a night of pornographic films and debauchery; and (5) the four characters, in their late sixties, meet for one of their weekly encounters in the park, reminiscing about the old days and their wives, mothers, chil-

dren, and grandchildren. The structure is cyclical, beginning and ending in the same plaza, and this circularity is heightened at the play's conclusion when the four characters shed their old-age personas and return to their twelve- and thirteen-year-old selves of the initial scene.

Of crucial importance to the text's interpretation is the author's explicit written requirement that women play the roles of these four male characters. To underscore the gender play, the performance actually begins before the first scene when the women actors enter dressed as women and, according to the stage directions, slowly begin to change into the costumes of the preadolescent boys. At play's end they will again transform themselves, taking off the male clothing. Another purposeful male/female juxtaposition of the 1981 staging was in the makeup and costuming, as Torres Molina made clear in a preopening interview ("El machismo" 1981): "[The actresses] will be heavily made up and will wear men's clothing but [the clothing will be] made out of bright fabric, the smooth kind that suggests, along with the makeup, feminine characteristics."

One might ask, what is the point of having women cross-dress as men, a theatrical convention dating back to the Spanish Golden Age,¹³ in a send-up/critique of sexism in porteño society? It is not only an exposé of male sexism, as several critics have interpreted, including one who went so far as to suggest that the play's impact would be even stronger if the characters were played by male actors!¹⁴ The reading, and appreciation, of this play lies in the fact that *both* sexes are present throughout the performance, thus providing a constant humanization to counter the dehumanizing process of sexist mythologizing. Woman dominates the conversations of the four characters, but always as an imaginary object. In the first scene, the four are "watching" a girl in the plaza; they talk about Pajarito's female cousin; they study Inglés's brother's English-language *Playboy*. Woman is present but only as a visual or conversational object. In the play's climactic fourth scene, when the four have reached the height of their misogyny, Cerdín begins to seduce an inflatable doll, only to have her deflate, and Pajarito, who previously had terrified his friends with the revelation of his sexual orientation (all the while asserting his masculinity, "Soy marica pero no mina" [I'm a fairy, but I'm not a chick] 38), now openly cross-dresses.¹⁵

In other words, all representations of Woman are stand-ins, mediated by a masculine vision of Woman. The fact that four women play these roles creates a distancing effect that not only alienates the text from its actors and forces the spectator to reevaluate what is being said and acted out, but it also allows for another process to take

place. Each time Woman is objectified and thus dehumanized in the text, the would-be dehumanization is counteracted by the very physical human presence of the women portraying these characters, their social condition as women reinforced and even exaggerated by the original staging's costuming and makeup.

The distancing in . . . *y a otra cosa* has a deconstructive effect similar to Epic Theater's *Verfremdungseffekt*. The relationship of woman actor to masculine role further calls to mind Brecht's related concept of Gestus.¹⁶ Gestus, inadequately translated to English as "gest," is "at once gesture and gist, attitude and point" (Willett 1968, 173). As Patrice Pavis (1982) notes:

Gestus may be a simple bodily movement of the actor, or a particular way of behaving, or a physical relationship between two characters, or a stage arrangement, or the common behavior of a group, the collective attitude of characters in a play, or the gesture of global delivery from the stage to the public via the *mise en scène*. This range of different kinds of Gestus reveals the constant enlargement of the notion of social Gestus. . . . The actor constantly controls his gestuality, in order to indicate the character's social attitude and way of behaving. (41)

Gestus's multiple social functions shed the most light on Torres Molina's text. Within a cyclical structure, sexism becomes a social Gestus that is repeated and reinforced from one generation to the next. The characters, as preteens and adolescents, are constantly "trying out" roles, repeating trite popular phrases, aware that they have an audience in their friends and women, that is, society. Inglés, alone at the beginning of scene 2, is a very different person from the persona he takes on when his friends arrive. When the other three characters refuse to "see" Pajarito's true sexual orientation, it is a conscious self-blinding effected to allow the traditional system to remain in place unquestioned. Were the three friends to acknowledge Pajarito's homosexuality, they would be forced to reassess the nature of their friendship with Pajarito and with each other.

These modes of conduct imply that machismo itself is consciously acquired to mask very human insecurities. By having women mimic male discourse, Torres Molina proposes that all social behavior is learned role-playing. The premiere's gestic performance was even more complex as it metatheatrically foregrounded women actors portraying women who are playing men. In this way, Torres Molina further suggested that women play a vital role in the perpetuation of these behavior patterns.¹⁷ . . . *y a otra cosa mariposa* humorously deconstructs the myth of the macho porteño by invoking the female

presence, functioning doubly to demythologize and to insinuate female complicity in the myth's perpetuation through learned behavior and attitudes.

Both *Un trabajo fabuloso* and . . . *y a otra cosa mariposa* employ the longtime theatrical tradition of cross-dressing to disrupt what Marjorie Garber (1993) calls "binarized" sexual and gender differences.¹⁸ Both plays create a "category crisis" (16) by blurring the distinctions between male and female. Echoing Simone de Beauvoir's notion that "one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one," both plays suggest that "female" is a social construct. Further, by calling into question such basic Western cultural assumptions as gender and sexual identity, the two texts destabilize the traditional patriarchal hierarchy built upon binary oppositions such as male/female.¹⁹

In *Un trabajo fabuloso*, Francisco's cross-dressing is the result of a social and economic impotence; it is a last resort for survival. It is also self-punishment: Francisco sees "female" as a step down in the sociocultural hierarchy. Francisco never abandons his female drag even when he returns to his family role as the patriarch. He remains in a self-imposed sexual limbo, neither male nor female. The play makes it clear that Francisco is an accessory to his own victimization. Thus, although Francisco is the tragic protagonist of *Un trabajo fabuloso*, his participation in his own destruction makes him less than heroic. For Halac, Francisco is a "freak of nature," rendered "unnatural" by the repressive society to which Francisco himself belongs. Consequently, although Halac exposes the mythmaking, he does not fully abandon the myth. No matter how sympathetic his text's portrayal of Francisco may be, its treatment of gender blurring as a negative "freakish" construct, neither male nor female, ends up perpetuating the sexual binarism typical of the Western patriarchal tradition it would appear to be criticizing. There is little gestic distance between the actor and the character; the text calls for realistic, illusionistic acting in a grotesque situation. Transvestism in *Un trabajo fabuloso* is judged as deviant, regardless of who is to blame.

No such condemnation of transvestism can be found in . . . *y a otra cosa mariposa*. Instead, Torres Molina exults in the tension inherent in the coexistence of male and female. She wishes for the spectator to witness various levels of masquerade as the women actors transform themselves into adolescent boys; as the aged men, at play's end, return to their adolescent selves; and as the women finally exchange their male drag for female. The male costume is never entirely masculine: the fabrics are shiny and soft, the makeup exaggerated. In these ways, simple binarisms, such as male/female, are rendered limited and illogical. Whereas *Un trabajo fabuloso* exposes the individual's

(self)destruction at the hands of an authoritarian binary mentality, . . . *y a otra cosa mariposa* focuses on the collective participation in cultural production and posits that learned modes of behavior can just as easily be unlearned.

Unlike *Un trabajo fabuloso*, . . . *y a otra cosa mariposa* was well received by both critics and spectators, only to have its run interrupted by the summer heat, and then never resumed because of the outbreak of the Malvinas/Falklands War, a debacle that was, ironically, an acting out at the international level of the very machismo the text sought to expose.

Many plays staged in early 1980s Buenos Aires were critical and box-office successes, as the following examples from the 1980 theater season will attest. Rubens Correa's staging of Roberto Arlt's 1929 novel *Los siete locos* [The Seven Madmen]²⁰ re-created the nightmarish world of Arlt's marginalized porteños, victims of a deforming reality, and introduced the theme of self-destruction as the direct result of modern society's annihilation of individuality. Ricardo Monti's *Marathón*, winner of the 1980 Argentores award for best drama, holds a 1980-as-1932 Argentina up to its fondest, and most feared, historical myths. *El viejo criado*, for which Roberto Cossa won the Argentores award for best comedy, evokes, only then to dismantle, national archetypes.²¹ It is to these larger categories of the guiding fictions of "national identity and peoplehood" (Shumway 1991, 7) that I now turn in my discussion of *El viejo criado* and *Marathón*.

UNMASKING AN IMAGINED ARGENTINA:
El viejo criado BY ROBERTO MARIO COSSA

An Argentina of the collective national mind is clearly the target of *El viejo criado* [The Old Manservant],²² apparent even in the dramatic text's initial description of the stage:

The action transpires in a bar in the southern part of Buenos Aires, rather it is the "image" that we porteños retain of what a bar of this type might have been like fifty years ago. The atmosphere is unreal, suspended in time, isolated from the world, but retaining the warmth and mystery of Buenos Aires's old bars.

Its only contact with the outside world is the entrance, a door located to the right. [. . .] To the left there is an exit that leads to the "family room" and upstage there is a vague, dark space, where the ghosts have been discarded, the ghosts of those who once shared conversations and silences, "learned darts and cards," "cried over their first disappointment," a magical zone.

[La acción transcurre en un bar de la zona sur de Buenos Aires, mejor dicho en la "imagen" que los porteños conservamos de lo que pudo haber sido un bar de ese tipo hace cincuenta años atrás. Es un ambiente irreal, suspendido en el tiempo, aislado del mundo, pero que conserva la calidez y el misterio de los viejos bares de Buenos Aires.

Su única conexión con el mundo exterior es la puerta de entrada, ubicada a la derecha (. . .) A la izquierda hay una salida hacia el "salón de familias" y hacia el foro un espacio impreciso, oscuro, donde seguramente se arrinconan los fantasmas de aquéllos que alguna vez compartieron charlas y silencios; "aprendieron dados y timba", "lloraron su primer desengaño". Una zona mágica.] (13)

I have quoted the description practically in its entirety because it brings together the various themes and issues addressed in the play itself: the image of a magical Buenos Aires lost in time and space, the collectivity of this image in such shared cultural artifacts as the tango,²³ and the suggestion of ghosts inhabiting the imaginatively rich but sparsely furnished space, the "magical zone" of this bar.

Even the play's creation owes itself to a certain collectivity, acknowledged by Cossa to have been pivotal to his development as a playwright. He expanded on the earlier experience of *El avión negro* (on which he had worked collectively with Carlos Somigliana, Ricardo Talesnik and Germán Rozenmacher) and, in the 1980s, began to write plays based on improvisations with the actors who would later participate in the staged productions. Improvisations for *El viejo criado* began in 1978, based on Cossa's ideas for the characters and the atmosphere. The actors improvised on written scenes, and Cossa incorporated elements from the improvisations (Morero 1985a, 40; Moncalvillo 1982, 71). I believe this method of collective creation served to strengthen the cooperative mythopoetizing elements at work in the play and support the text's demythologizing intent.

An examination of national identity myths, and their cultural production and subsequent deconstruction, is key to an understanding of Argentine theater of the early 1980s. In *El viejo criado*, Cossa stages several guiding fictions, juxtaposing them to Argentine historical reality in order to subsequently decimate them. Francisco Jarque Andrés (1991) notes two theatrical realms present in *El viejo criado*: a theatricality of 1980 Argentine reality that lies in contradistinction to an imaginary past's metatheatricality (479). The two worlds are personified in two pairs of characters: Alsina and Balmaceda, and Carlitos and Ivonne. When the play begins, Alsina and Balmaceda occupy one of the set's two tables. They are engaged in a seemingly eternal *truco* tournament (the tally at an absurd 153,204 games to 67,724, Balmaceda's lead), which neither appears capable of leav-

ing, nor willing to do so. The play will end with them still playing cards. Alsina is the French-quoting poet, the "classic figure of the intellectual" (13), anti-capitalist and anti-Cartesian. Balmaceda is an earthy ex-boxer, described by Alsina as a rationalist, and the recipient of Alsina's many lectures on history and culture.

Into the world of the bar step Carlitos and Ivonne, two more "types": "They are two almost unreal figures, caricatures, he of the tango-singers of the twenties, she of an aging prostitute" (23). When Carlitos enters singing "Mi Buenos Aires querido," both his name and the tango he sings pointedly refer to the internationally known *cantor de tangos* of the 1920s and 30s, Carlos Gardel. Ivonne's name comes from another tango, "Madame Ivonne," which tells the story of a French prostitute and her Argentine pimp. Indeed, the play is saturated with references to tangos; even the play's title comes from a song, "La casita de mis viejos."²⁴ Throughout the course of the play, Carlitos, recently returned from a forty-year stay in Paris, will try to complete *his* tango, patterning his life after the lyrics of other songs, as he attempts to re-create a lifestyle appropriate for a *cantor de tangos*.

The initially separate worlds of Alsina/Balmaceda and Carlitos/Ivonne come together when Carlitos discovers the card players seated at the "trio's table," yet another reference to the famous tango-playing trios of the musical genre's golden age. Alsina and Balmaceda, at first wary of Carlitos, are ultimately drawn into his fantasy world when told that Ivonne slept with Gardel. Each exits individually with Ivonne to emulate the great Gardel, which allows the other character to be probed by Carlitos for details regarding his tango-created Buenos Aires. Carlitos's imaginary capital is consistently rebutted by the cardplayers' porteño reality:

- Carlitos.* Tell me, young man, do you know where I might engage an old manservant?
- Alsina.* The old menservants are all working in the factories. They pay better.
[. . .]
- Carlitos.* Another question: where is the set of streets that meet in a diagonal?
- Alsina.* I don't know. [. . .] I heard something about that, but nobody knows. Besides, it's not a good idea to talk about it much.
- Carlitos.* Why not?
- Alsina.* They'll throw you in jail. [. . .] The jails are full of people.
[*Carlitos.* Dígame, joven, ¿no sabe dónde puedo conseguir un viejo criado? [. . .]

- Alsina.* Los viejos criados están todos trabajando en las fábricas. Les pagan mejor.
[. . .]
- Carlitos.* Otra pregunta: ¿dónde está el juego de calles que se da en diagonal?
- Alsina.* No sé. [. . .] Algo oí, pero nadie sabe. Aparte, no le conviene hablar mucho de eso.
- Carlitos.* ¿Por qué?
- Alsina.* Lo meten preso. [. . .] Las cárceles están llenas de gente.
(37–38)

When Carlitos misidentifies these prisoners as followers of Leandro N. Alem's turn-of-the-century *Radical* movement, Alsina responds in typical Proceso fashion: "One doesn't talk about who's a prisoner" [No se dice quién está preso] (38).

Carlitos and Ivonne leave in search of his old tango trio, and the card game resumes. Less than one minute later, the couple returns, with news of the trio. The chronological shifts take on absurd proportions: Carlitos claims to have been gone for at least five years, during which time he found the members of the old trio. When Carlitos poses rhetorically, "What's happened to the trios?" [¿Qué ha pasado con los tríos?], Alsina responds, "It's the decline of the myths, Mr. Carlitos. You really ought to read Jung." [Es la decadencia de los mitos, señor Carlitos. Usted deberá leer a Jung.] (46). Nevertheless, the two cardplayers are once again sucked into Carlitos's fantasy when he proposes that the three of them form a new trio. They indulge him until he imposes such ridiculous conditions that the group breaks up, and Carlitos and Ivonne exit one more time, with the admonition to meet again, "Back here, in twenty years" [Dentro de veinte años acá] (51).

Carlitos reappears minutes later, saying, "Twenty years is nothing" [Veinte años no es nada] (54), and disappears only to return again almost immediately, asking where he can find a *viejo criado*. Alsina replies that they do not exist anymore. Carlitos tells the story of the past eight years (only a few minutes have elapsed in the theater) he has spent in the purposeful economic decline necessary to create art. He has lost Ivonne to a city office worker, but he has finally completed his tango and, in the play's climax, recites it. Alsina and Balmaceda's anticipation turns to disappointment as they listen to Carlitos plagiarize a tango first sung by Gardel in 1917: "Mi noche triste" [My Night of Sadness]. In disgust, they return to their game.

The two dramatic worlds separate during the text's denouement: Alsina and Balmaceda continue their card game; and Ivonne returns

to Carlitos. The couple makes plans to return to Paris, a city now as nostalgically potent for them as Buenos Aires once was. The card game continues, and Balmaceda once more thinks about leaving. He stays because it has started to snow—practically impossible in Buenos Aires. The play's last words belong to Alsina, "How beautiful! How I love Buenos Aires when it snows!" [¡Qué hermoso! ¡Cómo me gusta Buenos Aires cuando nieva!] (64).

Jarque Andrés (1991) believes *El viejo criado*'s central theme to be the Gardellian myth,²⁵ contrasting the myth's "expression of the past that one does not wish to give up" (473) to Alsina and Balmaceda's realistic present. Although the tango and Gardel are possibly the most deeply felt of Argentinean national myths, Alsina and Balmaceda are equally products of Argentinean mythopoesis, and they too may be subjected to demythologization. Both characters' names come from tango lyrics, and as such they are tied into the national mythmaking project. Both are archetypes of the neighborhood *compadritos*: one the impotent intellectual, the other the earthy machista, opposites yet equals in their escapist behavior. Alsina brings literary knowledge to their card table; Balmaceda provides the current events. Neither acts upon this information. Alsina talks of writing critical essays; Balmaceda speaks of visiting his brother. Neither one engages in these activities; they play cards. Language, the codifier of myth, is their medium and their destruction, as Susana Anaine (1990) has pointed out: "If speaking is making use of language, language consumes these characters: their lines are tango lyrics, [and] the myth-generated fossilization or alienation keeps them from creating" (88).

It is true that Carlitos-as-Gardel disintegrates on stage, exposing the emptiness of the Gardellian myth; however, Alsina and Balmaceda are not spared their own critique. Just as they provide the counterpoint and destructive mirror to Carlitos's mythmaking, the outside world intervenes in their mythical space of the bar and undermines their own atemporal unreality.

Although *El viejo criado* is often cited as the moment of Cossa's definitive breaking with realistic chronological time,²⁶ the outside "real" world intrudes constantly on the suspended limbo of the bar. Balmaceda makes an almost immediate reference to Jimmy Carter's presidency, thus placing the cardplayers in the moment of the play's 1980 premiere. Alsina uses Balmaceda's comment as a pretext for launching into a lecture on the failure of the Keynesian economic model, and they leap referentially into the past, mentioning two other United States presidents, John F. Kennedy and Theodore Roosevelt. Scattered throughout the play are references to Balmaceda's

personal past as a boxer, and Alsina has a bad running joke about two turn-of-the-century bohemian writers.

The above historical references would easily be lost in the chatter of the *compadritos*' card game were it not for two other elements, historically based and theatrically foregrounded, that force the spectator to take a critical step back from the characters' world(s) and reevaluate these collectively created myths. I purposefully withheld these two elements from the above description because they shape and modify the reception of the story. Indeed, I would posit that there is no real *fabula* in the above synopsis, and that what story we may construct comes from these two foregrounding elements:

The first element arises from a question that Alsina poses to Balmaceda four times throughout the play, "What could be going on for there to be so many people in the street?" [¿Qué pasará que hay tanta gente en la calle?]. Each time, Balmaceda answers without looking out a window, and all four answers are firmly rooted in the last half-century of Argentine history:

1. "They've come out to ask for the Colonel's release" [Salieron a pedir que lo larguen al coronel] (23): On 17 October 1945, thousands of workers marched to the Plaza de Mayo to demand Perón's release from prison, precipitating the collapse of Perón's opposition and his reintegration into the government.
2. "It appears that they've kicked the General out" [Parece que lo echaron al general] (42): On 19 September 1955, after simultaneous military revolts in Córdoba and Bahía Blanca, Perón resigned and went into exile, and the government was taken over by the military's "Liberating Revolution" under General Eduardo Lonardi and later General Pedro Aramburu.
3. "They say that the General has returned" [Dicen que volvió el general] (54): On 29 June 1973, Perón attempted a return to Argentina, and in anticipation, at least half a million people went to Ezeiza Airport, where fighting erupted and hundreds died.
4. "They say that we're world champions" [Dicen que somos campeones del mundo] (62): On 25 June 1978, Argentina unexpectedly won the World Cup in soccer, after the government had spent approximately \$700 million, roughly 10 percent of the annual national budget, on hosting the games (Larsen 1983a, 117),²⁷ unleashing a nationalistic mass euphoria.

Implicit in each of these historical references is a nationalist-based fervor, but behind each is a manipulation of this mass nationalism by a few, usually military, puppeteers, and most cases involve senseless

deaths.²⁸ Balmaceda's last response clearly refers to the Proceso and the military junta's manipulation of nationalistic sentiment. The junta invested heavily in the games, financially as well as politically, as it used the World Cup to legitimize its government.²⁹ Other socio-historical allusions are present in the text: Carlitos's arrival parallels Perón's return from exile in that they were both exiles of approximately the same duration. Additionally, for an Argentine audience trained in the art of political spectatorship, a reference to any "trio" could be taken as an allusion to the military junta's triumvirate.

The second textualizing element at work in this demythologization of the neighborhood intellectual and the local *arrabalero* is acoustic. Shortly after Alsina and Balmaceda tally their scores, a distant siren is heard from offstage. It is heard again shortly thereafter and is repeated six other times during the course of action. As the characters attempt to control their surrounding reality, they transform even these acoustical effects. Soon after the third siren has been heard, Carlitos thinks he hears an *organito* when the sirens sound for the fourth time. The next time the siren is heard, it is transformed, in accordance with the stage directions, into the hand-organ music foreshadowed in Carlitos's earlier perception.

The characters appear to be capable of transforming outside, seemingly "objective," reality to suit their mythmaking needs. The sirens do not return until after Carlitos and Ivonne exit in search of the lost trio, and they sound only once before Carlitos returns with his idea of forming a new trio. The sirens once again are held in textual abeyance until after Carlitos is exposed as a fraud. As he and Ivonne plan their return trip to Paris, the sound of a police siren nearing the bar and stopping is heard. Carlitos and Ivonne interpret it as a signal that their "carriage" has arrived and leave. At the play's end, the lights dim and the card game is resumed, but, as Alsina and Balmaceda make one final attempt at transforming reality into unreality by having it snow in Buenos Aires, "[the sounds of] sirens inundate the stage" (64). The outside world cannot be deferred forever.

The spectator witnesses an unreal world, a world that, in the hands of its inhabitants, transcends temporal and spatial boundaries. It is a world where signs from the outside "real" world are transformed into empty signifiers, and where life is patterned after art. Yet Cossa goes beyond a world-turned-upside-down carnivalization in his biting critique. By first sharing with his porteño audience their collectively created myths only then to dismantle these myths before their eyes and bombard them with an imposing reality that will not go away, no matter how often it is transformed, he creates

an alienating disjuncture in his audience that forces them to resee and rethink their own reality.

Jarque Andrés (1991) writes, "The old manservant that Carlitos seeks is nothing but a literary creation" (480). I would expand Carlitos's search to include culture; for Cossa, Carlitos's is a national cultural project of artistic sublimation. In *El viejo criado*, Cossa traces both the project's failure, personified in Carlitos's inability to be Gardel, and the great negative consequences of the resulting collective paralysis. Just as Alsina and Balmaceda are frozen in an eternal present, Argentina exists in a dangerous limbo of self-sustained ignorance that not only suggests a sterile nonproductivity but also a counterproductive complicity in the perpetuation of the nation's ills. In *El viejo criado*, as the novelist Osvaldo Soriano (1987) has noted, "the metaphor once and for all embraces the painful process of the decomposition of a society vitiated by unattainable dreams, impossible ambitions, immobilizing myths" (9).

DEMYTHOLOGIZING ARGENTINA'S PAST AND PRESENT:
MARATHÓN BY RICARDO MONTI

Ricardo Monti's *Marathón* also takes on Argentina's immobilizing myths of national and cultural identity, but it does so in order to suggest the existence of a mobilizing, positive countermyth. *Marathón* premiered on 13 June 1980,³⁰ to great anticipation: it was Monti's first play in three years, after the critical and, for an "off-Corrientes" production, commercial success of the 1977 *Visita*. Additionally, it was the Equipo Teatro Payró's maiden play at the new Teatros de San Telmo, in a space designed especially for the premiere by the architect Tito Egurza. The set recreated a 1930s ballroom in a suburb of Buenos Aires but suggested at least two levels of performance: the dance contest with its Emcee and audience of 1932 porteños, and the play as witnessed by the Payró spectators of 1980.

The tension between disjuncture and confluence is further emphasized in the play's title. As Monti explained in an interview conducted at the time of the premiere (R.G. 1980), "It's about a real marathon and at the same time [it's] a metaphor. The 'h' included in the [title] is a form of distancing [note that the Spanish word for marathon is *maratón*, not *marathón*], it's a kind of signal that the thing is not as real as it appears." Mario Rojas (1992) calls the title a "metaphoric icon that leads to a deeper meaning that one must 'dis-cover'" (156). This is clearly what Monti appears to have had in mind for his spectator.³¹ Such textual foregrounding also prefigures the Brechtian

Epic theater conventions of the *Verfremdung* and *Gestus* employed throughout the work. Like Brecht, Monti encourages the spectators to question and demythologize what they see, hear, and read.³²

The spectator's very role is subject to continuous scrutiny throughout the play: At times the spectators are scopophiliacs, incorporated into the event by the Emcee "as if" they were 1930s spectators who have paid to watch the marathon. At other times, the Emcee, directing his attention away from the 1980 spectators, addresses a fictional audience. The spectator is therefore both included and excluded. A space is created textually for audience complicity in, and thus responsibility for, what is happening in the ballroom; yet, at the same time, the audience is given a critical distance from which to analyze and judge what transpires. In sum, the spectator is both witness and participant, self-consciously caught between passive spectatorship and active involvement.³³

Marathón was inspired by images arising from discussions with director Jaime Kogan regarding the possibilities of working with music and of adapting Horace McCoy's novel *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*³⁴ to the stage. The result is a text at once Argentine and universal. The lights come up on five exhausted couples, contestants in a dance marathon, "lifeless dolls, covered in dust and cobwebs" [*muñecas sin vida, cubiertas de polvo y telarañas*] (59). The dancers are: the aging poet Homero Estrella and his aging muse, Elena García; a young couple (with the false and incomplete names of Tom Mix and Ana D.); the unemployed office worker Héctor Expósito and his wife, Ema; another incognito couple later revealed to be a bankrupt industrialist (who goes by the initials "NN" to establish further his anonymity) and a prostitute, Pipa; and a tubercular bricklayer, Pedro Vespucci, and his wife, Asunción. The five couples will be joined later by two wealthy siblings, out for a night of slumming.

The six pairs of dancers stand in for different socioeconomic, cultural, and age groups. By play's end we realize that there are really seven pairs, the last couple functioning as the sadistic actants of the marathon's repressive order: the Emcee [Animador] and the Bodyguard [Guardespaldas].³⁵ Both are victimizing technocrats, with one engaging in psychological games and the other in physical threats and abuse. Both are ultimately revealed to be nothing more than the regime's middlemen, in many ways as pathetically victimized as their own victims.

The tragicomedy's twenty-three episodes interweave several levels of reality: the events of the marathon itself, including the contestants' vigilant dancing and their dreaming aloud, and the five *mitos* [myths], each of which constitutes an episode.

To construct the text, Monti made use of a censorship-evasive resource common to many Proceso plays: allusions to a parallel yet temporally removed historical moment. The playwright (1992b) described *Marathón's* historical referent and its function as "an atrocious metaphor, an X-ray of the soul during those ominous years. In order to talk about the present I went to the past, to an equivalent period, the unhappy decade of the '30s, known in Argentina as the 'infamous decade' " (249). Many parallels can be drawn between the two Argentinas of the 1930s and of the Proceso. In the thirties, the Great Depression's impact on the Argentine economy precipitated a power struggle between

the elites and the middle classes . . . in a contest for rapidly shrinking resources. . . . Caught in the middle, the [Yrigoyen] government failed to satisfy either side and became a target for both. In 1930 its popular support and party base collapsed; this was the prelude to its overthrow. (Rock 1987, 215)

On 6 September 1930, the Argentine Army orchestrated its first coup of the twentieth century,³⁶ led by ultranationalist General José F. Uriburu, who was heavily influenced by the Spanish dictator Primo de Rivera's concept of *hispanidad* and Italian fascism and was the founder of the paramilitary organization *Legión Cívica Argentina*. Again quoting historian David Rock (1987),

The change of government in 1930 was a conservative, and to some an "oligarchic," restoration. . . . Throughout the 1930s, dubbed "the Infamous Decade," the conservatives repeatedly rigged elections to keep themselves in power. . . . After 1939 new political forces took shape, forces the conservatives were unable to control and which finally overwhelmed them. In June 1943 they too were overthrown by a military coup d'état. (214)

Marathón's flashback strategy creates an immediate double-text for Argentine spectators, allowing them to revisit and revise their nation's history from a 1980 vantage point and to see how analogous elements of the past still operate in the present. For example, just as the Emcee's eulogy of the 1930s in scene 21 serves as a prelude to the later growth of Nazism and Fascism in Argentina, it also, by extension, alludes to the nation's contemporary authoritarianism that culminated in the Proceso regime.

In any case, the text does not merely re-create 1932 Buenos Aires nor simply juxtapose two moments in Argentine history. *Marathón* draws our attention to the very idea of factual history and historiog-

raphy: Dates presented as "facts" are exposed as falsified when, for example, in the text Pedro de Mendoza founds Buenos Aires in 1535, not 1536 (a year as well known to a porteño audience as 1492 would be to its North American counterpart). The date announced at the play's beginning is 23 June 1932, but in scene 16, the Emcee states that it is March 1932. These games of chronological "fact" are not merely surrealistic touches but rather serve to question what one considers to be "true" about reality and how history is constructed.

The play's structure also reflects this demythologizing project. *Marathón's* text operates at three levels of experience: the dance marathon itself, its participants' nocturnal dreams and repressed desires, and the five myths. Critics have noted the various techniques employed to move among these levels, labeling them surrealist (Podol 1980), Artaudian (Sagasetta 1989), or grotesque (Monteleone 1987). The critical tendency has also been to treat these three levels as separate, creating an artificial division where, to my reading, there is a conscious attempt at fusion. Far from separating the three worlds, the play interweaves them into one, human experience: the conscious pain of individual daily existence, the dreamlike subconscious that is also a part of daily existence, and the collective memory of shared myths.

Monti (1992b) has described the play's five mitos as "coming from the depths of the collective memory. . . . Thus five myths appear in the play, in their majority failed historical dreams: the Conquest, the Independence, the dream of a pastoral America, the dream of an industrial America, and the Fascist myth" (249). Rojas (1992) personifies the mitos as "the myth of the conqueror, the myth of the hero of the Independence, the myth of the cattle rancher, the myth of the industrialist, and the myth of the fascist" (163). This personification enables us to form individual associations from the text's five mythic transformations and demonstrates the fusion of the play's three levels of dance marathon, individual dream, and collective myth:

1. Pedro Vespucci, the tubercular bricklayer, becomes Pedro de Mendoza (and quite possibly Amerigo Vespucci). The two Pedros are united in seeking a home, both having been displaced.
2. Tom Mix, the youth with the assumed name of a cowboy hero of North American silent westerns, becomes Mariano Moreno, hero of the Independence movement. Mix is also a stand-in for the contemporary anonymous guerrilla, hence the assumed name.
3. When the aristocratic siblings, "Man" and "Woman," arrive, the

other dancers are transformed into a collective herd of cattle. The herd exaggerates the dancers' contrast to the newly arrived couple's obvious status as members of the oligarchic elite. Apart from the overt class distinctions suggested by this image, there is a supplementary allusion to Esteban Echeverría's heavily symbolic nineteenth-century novella *El matadero* [The Slaughterhouse]. In Echeverría's text, the cattle slaughtered are identified with the Argentine populace oppressed by the mid-nineteenth-century Rosas dictatorship. The double reference can be amplified to include the contemporary Proceso regime's destruction of the population.

4. The bankrupt "NN" is transformed, in the myth, into an investor in both national and foreign markets who is willing to exploit anyone for a profit.
5. The Bodyguard becomes an authoritarian nationalist whose antidemocratic stand is clearly associated with the Emcee's glorification of Fascism.

The question arises: How complete are these five transformations that the various characters undergo? A certain hybridization results when the mitos' elements trespass structural boundaries and enter the marathon itself. The crossing over universalizes specific negative character traits present in the individual dancers and, by extension, certain negative elements present in the national culture.³⁷ The play's focus on negative myths accounts for the absence of any transformative myth for the play's "hero," who, according to Monti (1992b), is the unemployed office worker Héctor Expósito:

Toward the end of the play, one of the characters, an adolescent [Tom Mix], disgusted, decides to abandon the marathon. In the signifying system of the play, this is almost equivalent to abandoning one's life. When the young Tom Mix invites another character to accompany him, this character refuses. . . . And, for me, the hero is the man who stays: Héctor Expósito. (251)

As his surname denotes, Expósito, similar to *Visita's* Gaspar, is a foundling,³⁸ and, like both Gaspar and Equis of the 1977 play, he chooses to stay. Tom Mix, the "hero" apparent because of both his name and ability to leave the dance, is rejected by the author. Just as *Historia tendenciosa's* machine gun-carrying Creature was excised from the final version of the text and Equis's parricide is left incomplete in *Visita*, so too is Tom Mix's youthful revolution rejected as a solution to the problem of ongoing oppression.³⁹

The ideal of the hero still holds true for Monti, hence Expósito's absence from the other criticized and degraded myths. His myth is a parable for daily life. It is played out during the dance, within the context of the marathon. Héctor, as foundling, stands in for the individual human being abandoned and isolated, but he is not powerless. His is the only character that questions, responds to, and comments on the Emcee and Bodyguard's actions. He is the only one who consciously chooses to stay and combat the power structure; and his choice to stay with his wife offers the possibility of human solidarity and the chance of awaking from the nightmare of this self-perpetuated collective mythology.

Nevertheless, the prognosis is not optimistic. At play's end, Héctor is alone, abandoned by the younger generation and surrounded by others who continue to dream. The negative situation encircles him as the Emcee's last words ring out in a repetition of the first scene: "If it weren't ridiculous, this would be a tragedy. On with the dance!" [Si no fuera ridículo, esto sería una tragedia. ¡Sigue el baile!]. Monti's work takes a tentative step beyond the demythologization process of the plays of this period as it seeks to create a positive countermythology, still grounded in the negative reality of an Argentina under dictatorship but pointing toward the possibility of self-redemption.

SELF-UNMASKING: RETURNING EXILES AND YOUNGER VOICES

The early 1980s Buenos Aires theater scene was also enriched by the return of many of its practitioners to Argentina, as the military junta loosened its repressive grip, seeking to improve its image and financial relationships abroad. Voices were heard that had previously been silenced by blacklisting and exile.⁴⁰ Director David Amitín returned to Argentina and restaged Fernando Arrabal's violently hallucinatory *Fando and Lis* in 1980. Celebrated actors such as Cipe Lincovsky and Norma Aleandro returned to the Buenos Aires stages. Aleandro performed in Mario Vargas Llosa's *La señorita de Tacna* (1981). Lincovsky, after a less-than-successful comeback in 1980 with *Filomena Marturano*, went on to enjoy great success with her one-woman shows, beginning with John Murrell's *Sarah Bernhardt*.⁴¹ Another one-woman show was her 1982 defiantly entitled *Siempre vuelvo* [I Always Return]. The show, with its theme of "freedom," was a collection of songs, fragments of plays, and adaptations of short stories by such writers as Carlos Fuentes, Jorge Luis Borges, Eladia Blázquez, Anton Chekhov, and Isadora Duncan. The playwrights Susana Torres Molina, Eduardo Pavlovsky, Aída Bortnik, and Griselda Gambaro also

returned home. These returning exiles brought with them a new perspective, the Argentinean outsider's view of Argentina, as demonstrated in the examples that follow.

Bortnik came back in 1979 for the editing of Alejandro Doria's film *La isla* [The Island], for which she had written the screenplay. She decided to remain despite her continued prohibition.⁴² Nineteen eighty-one saw the successful staging of her play *Domesticados* [The Domesticated Ones],⁴³ based on a television play written years earlier entitled *Estar domesticada* [Being Domesticated]. *Domesticados* examines an issue that would become common in Bortnik's work: the frustrations of her own generation upon seeing youthful idealistic promises destroyed in the private as well as public spheres.

Gambaro returned after an absence of nearly three years, mostly spent in Barcelona. Unable to write plays while in exile, upon her return in 1980 she produced *Real envideo* [Royal Gambit], which was not staged until 1983, and *La malasangre* [Bitter Blood] in 1981. The latter play's 1982 premiere, which featured the actor Lautaro Murúa, himself recently returned from exile,⁴⁴ was the target of several mid-performance attacks by ultranationalist groups objecting to perceived criticisms of the nineteenth-century Rosas regime. In reality, these allusions constituted yet another example of the distancing countercensorial techniques employed by plays of the period in order to critique the junta's monolithic power structure. *La malasangre* marks, for many critics, a turning point in Gambaro's plays. Unlike the silenced women characters in her earlier texts, the heroine Dolores openly defies her autocratic father and, when this confrontation ends in the death of her lover, determines her own fate as silent watchdog: "I'll be quiet, but my silence will scream out!" [¡Yo me callo, pero el silencio grita!] (110).

As *La malasangre* has been a favorite of Gambaro's criticism and its historical references are well documented,⁴⁵ I will forgo a recapitulation here and instead discuss a less-studied play of the early 1980s, Pavlovsky's *Cámara lenta* [Slow-Motion].

In July 1980, Pavlovsky returned to Buenos Aires after more than two years in Spain, where he had continued working as a psychiatrist and actor, publishing works on psychodrama and group therapy, and performing in a restaging of Torres Molina's *Extraño juguete*, directed by fellow exile Aleandro. In 1981, he performed in *Cámara lenta* (subtitled *Historia de una cara* [Story of a Face]),⁴⁶ a play he had begun writing in 1978 and published in 1979, while he was still in exile.

Cámara lenta can be seen as an anomaly in the Pavlovsky oeuvre: Not only was it Pavlovsky's first and quite possibly only "commercial" success,⁴⁷ it was his only play written in exile. Of even greater

interest to the discussion here is the fact that Pavlovsky, who is generally regarded as a highly politicized writer, today considers *Cámara lenta* to be a nonpolitical play: "[I]t's not one of my political plays nor is it a play that can set off too many conflicts because, after all, there's a very simple anecdote that is death, deterioration, love between men, solidarity, human ambivalence, old age."⁴⁸

Nonetheless, there are several intertextual points of contact between the 1981 play and Pavlovsky's other, more "political" works that both precede and follow *Cámara lenta*. *Cámara lenta* marks a change in the playwright's work, where avant-garde poetics commingle with a political theme, despite the playwright's denials. It heralds a new type of play, a play of self-analysis, and one of Pavlovsky's most personal works to date.⁴⁹

A clue to this extreme identification lies in its original title, *Dagomar*, the name of the boxer-protagonist and, not coincidentally, the character portrayed by Pavlovsky in the 1981 staging. The playwright stated in a 1983 interview with Miguel Angel Giella (1985):

[*Cámara lenta*] was the metaphor for the people, of the blows to the people and their scars. Because I think that it's not only the blows and the disappearances but also the scars that we have and we don't know that they're there because they are internal scars. The boxer has his scar on the outside, but what we don't realize and what's now being studied in microsurgery is that every blow produces a microhemorrhage; that is, that you can't see it with normal vision, but when you do an autopsy, you realize that the boxer's brain has microhemorrhages. In some way we Argentines have microhemorrhages despite that, judging from our faces, we might not [appear to] be wounded. (57–58)

Pavlovsky had treated the subject of boxing before, in the 1967 *Ultimo match*. [Last Match] (alternately entitled *Ultimo round*) co-written with Juan Carlos Hermé,⁵⁰ and the themes of male friendship and solidarity would be taken up again in the 1985 *Pablo*. The later play also developed issues central to a reading of *Cámara lenta*, issues that Pavlovsky enumerated in a recent description of *Pablo*: "[I]t's about what happened to us, about what it would be like to return, to have stayed, identity, fragmented identities, the problem of memory and recollection."⁵¹

Like *Pablo*, *Cámara lenta* is built around three characters, two men and one woman. *Cámara lenta*'s Dagomar and Amílcar, ex-boxer and ex-manager, respectively, live together, as Amílcar cares for the rapidly deteriorating Dagomar. Amílcar and Dagomar, in effect, constitute one person, with the trainer Amílcar operating as the brain of Dagomar the boxer's body. Both still suffer from previous blows, and

Amílcar seeks refuge in uncontrollable eating binges while Dagomar relies on the solace of drugs. During the course of the play, we witness Dagomar's decline, the story below the surface of the boxer's face.

Structured in nineteen scenes of varying length, the play has a cinematic feel with its freezes, short takes, rapid cuts, and slow fade-outs. There is little plot action, only the tragic and irreversible movement toward death. The third character, Rosa, is purposely kept vague. Part prostitute hired to distract Dagomar by allowing him to look at her feet, part friend of both men, and even the embodiment of Death as was emphasized in the 1981 production, she too is victim and victimizer.⁵² The play ends one moment before Dagomar's death at Amílcar's hands, a death that had been dreamed and recounted by Dagomar earlier in the play.

Death was the primary thematic point of discussion in the reviews of the Olimpia production. Although warmly accepted critically, *Cámara lenta* remained nebulously underanalyzed in these reviews, also written, it should be remembered, under dictatorship. Most critics commented on the marriage of text and staging in a rich symbolism, as exemplified in the following review by the playwright Patricio Esteve (1981) for *La Prensa*: "[I]n a totally symbolic atmosphere, between peeled walls, fading doors, panes that break in art-nouveau iron windows, [the play] achieves the material transcription of the confusion and the lamentable state of Dagomar's mind." It is in an earlier review, also published in *La Prensa*, that one finds an attempt to relate the play to its contemporary surroundings, albeit in a veiled reference to audience reception via the classical element of catharsis. Olga Costa Viva (1981) notes that the play

deposits us on the road of fear and compassion without freeing us from them and without producing the purification [necessary] in order to establish ourselves in the cosmos. And it is precisely in that void where the force of its topicality can be found, the cutting need to desperately seek out the daylight of a catharsis that will not appear on the contemporary stage until our culture's night gives way to the dawn of an ordered vision of the universe.

Costa Viva continues by pointing out Beckettian influences that locate the play within the contemporary theater of despair and ends the article with a return to this denied catharsis: "We can only add that after suffering so long in 'Camaralenta' [sic], we wished that the world were different; perhaps [that is] the only catharsis possible in our time."

What Pavlovsky calls "microhemorrhages" and Costa Viva designates as "arrested catharsis" are products of the same process: the slow, steady internalization of quotidian violence and repression that results in the slow, inexorable deterioration of both body and mind. Pavlovsky says that the play speaks of his personal experiences, and he has further stated that these are the shared experiences of the Argentine people. His vantage point of returning exile afforded him the additional viewpoint of the outsider, and this external perspective enabled the author to perceive the slow-motion destruction of the Self:

[It's] as if for some time we had "slow-motioned" all our intellect, our capacity to discern, the internalization of violence became obvious, the repression wasn't outside but rather it had transformed itself into the inside. We have had to pretend or create characters in order to survive, and afterwards we have converted at times into our characters. [. . .] I think that this has "slow-motioned" us on some level, and we still don't know exactly what the effects are. (Giella 1985b, 58)

This virtual standstill, a death-in-life, is the result of the internalization of blows taken as victim of one's own life, just as Dagomar was manipulated and beaten up in the execution of his profession as boxer. For the empathizing spectator, the effect is one of denied catharsis, because in 1981 there was, to borrow Costa Viva's analogy, no dawn yet visible in the long Argentinean night. However, Pavlovsky goes beyond a call to awareness of current conditions. As the above comments suggest, he has performed an autopsy in which the flesh is peeled back to reveal the internal hemorrhaging that many believe continues unchecked to this date in Argentine society, in a country that still has not healed itself from the blows of military regimes. *Cámara lenta* is one of the first Argentine plays to transcend the representation and unmasking of repression and violence, and thus to begin the long self-interrogation and historical analysis of what happened in Argentina, both projects that would be fully embraced in later, post-Proceso plays.

In the early 1980s, as established theater practitioners returned from exile, many lesser-known playwrights who had started writing in the 1970s began to come into their own. This prompted more than one local critic to speak of a new generation of Argentinean playwrights. Nineteen eighty saw the successful premiere of Mauricio Kartun's *Chau Misterix* [Bye Misterix],⁵³ set in the 1958 San Andrés neighborhood of the author's childhood Buenos Aires. In a pre-

opening interview ("Huir" 1980), Kartun describes the play as "a children's story, but at the same time, an adult tragedy," to which Carlos Catalano, director of the 1980 production, adds ("Nostalgia" 1980): "[I]t's the story of a generation that becomes omnipotent in response to its own impotence." Modeling itself on the traditional one-act *sainete porteño* and the popular genres of radio and comic books, *Chau Misterix* is the tale of a boy's coming-of-age in late 1950s Buenos Aires and of the failure of a generation to free itself from an unjust society.

Kartun participated in Ricardo Monti's playwriting workshops for several years,⁵⁴ as did Hebe Serebrisky, a journalist and labor union press secretary who came to the theater late in life and wrote only a handful of plays before her death in 1985. Her second play, *Don Elías, campeón* [Don Elías, Champion], written while studying with Monti in the late 1970s and winner of a 1980 ARGENTORES prize, was staged in the Teatro Municipal General San Martín near the end of the 1981 season.⁵⁵ The play is composed of scenes from the daily lives of Don Elías and his wife, Zulema, Romanian Jewish emigré store owners residing in a small town in the interior of Argentina. These naturalistic scenes contrast with orange-lit dreamlike sequences during which Don Elías acts out his domination fantasies and fears. The text offers the promise of self-healing when Don Elías rediscovers familial and romantic love. He manages to leave behind the solitude and bitterness brought on six years earlier by the tragic deaths of his son and daughter-in-law. In this way, Don Elías triumphantly reenters life, first by reconciling with Zulema and later through adopting his former rival, the young, fatherless Hugo. In *Don Elías*, Serebrisky rehumanizes the Jewish immigrant archetype, traditionally the object of dramatic ridicule in the porteño theater.

Another 1981 text, Eduardo Rovner's *Ultimo premio* [Last Prize],⁵⁶ examines the issue of internal exile. Well received for both its text and staging, *Ultimo premio* portrayed the crisis suffered in the friendship of two men when the outside world invades their carefully self-marginalized lives. Abelardo is an aging professor of natural sciences who lives with Daniel, a young poet. The nature of their relationship remains unclear, and constant role shifting maintains this ambiguity: Daniel as housewife to Abelardo's breadwinner; Abelardo-the-nurse attending to an ailing Daniel; Daniel playing Abelardo's adopted son; and the two men as lovers. It is clear, however, that both have rejected or have been rejected by their biological families and have responded by creating their own affective nucleus. This fragile relationship is threatened when Abelardo is awarded a prize for his study, entitled "The Origin, Deterioration and Rupture of the Bond

in Biostructures" (102). During the resulting conflict, Abelardo leaves Daniel and returns home only after seeing his alter ego, the award-winning "Dr. Terso," in the park. In returning to Daniel, Abelardo consciously rejects the socially acceptable persona and reembraces his "viejo loco" self. *Ultimo premio* is the story of two outsiders choosing to remain marginalized; they are, as Ana Pampliega de Quiroga (1989) writes in an introduction to the play, "expatriated beings in a hostile world, refugees" (95). They are internal exiles from the inhospitable world of 1981 Argentina, the antagonistic world to which Daniel refers in his parody of the award's presentation speech:

It belongs to me, the one who has shared these last years with him, accompanying him and saving him . . . from the madness of loneliness. [. . .] That's how the life forces of the world are now and, why not say it?, that's how the dead ones are, too . . . the ones that rise up and the moribund ones. [Me corresponde a mí, que he compartido con él estos últimos años, acompañándolo y salvándolo (. . .) de las locuras de la soledad. [. . .] Es así como, ahora, las fuerzas vivas del mundo y ¿por qué no?, también las muertas . . . las que surgen y las moribundas.] (119)

Osvaldo Pellettieri (1989b) writes that these two characters "are one and the same image of the frustration of the Argentine dream" but adds that there exists the possibility of redemption at play's end, at least on an interpersonal level, "beginning with the mutual recognition of their great limitations" (26). Nonetheless, the rejection of the outside world remains complete as both Abelardo and Daniel destroy the prize, choosing to stay in last place.

Argentina-as-destructive-Other is the target of María Cristina Verrier's *La roña* [*The Filth*], written in 1978 and receiving only two performances in 1981.⁵⁷ *La roña* achieved celebrity, both nationally and internationally,⁵⁸ as one of the first Argentine plays to address openly the issue of the desaparecidos. *La roña* was Verrier's creative way out of depression in 1977 when her husband, a political activist imprisoned since 1975, was killed in a supposed "attempted escape" (Reichertz 1985, 205). The following is Verrier's account (1985) of her play's 1981 opening night:

[T]hat day the foreign press was present in full force, among the Argentines there was only one journalist: Guillermo Alamo. People filled all the spaces of the [Margarita Xirgu] theater because we weren't in Paris or in Brussels, we were here. During those nights that the play ran, every one of those present was an Argentinean who, with or without fear, said "NO" straightforwardly, as things ought to be said. (14)

La roña, structured in four acts, relates the decline of a Buenos Aires middle-class family destroyed financially, emotionally, and, for Verrier, morally by their country's reality. The house is falling down around them. The father cannot earn enough money to support the family and is finally laid off, after working for the same company for forty-five years; and the mother gradually sells off all the family heirlooms. The two sons are lost: Juan, a doctor, volunteers his services to help the poor but cannot bring himself to help his own family. Bibi, a one-time tennis star but now unemployed, spends his days at the club. The other character is Juan and Bibi's uncle, Albertito, a cynical pragmatist and most likely the one who will survive the crisis, together with the amoral Bibi.

Completing the family's story of decline is the disappeared brother, Manuel, alluded to throughout the play but only explicitly discussed at the play's climax. The Father briefly mentions Manuel in the first act while the Mother attempts to deny the situation. Her denials notwithstanding, the Mother frequents cemeteries, searching out unmarked graves to excavate in the hope of finding her lost son's body. Into this miserable household comes María, a pregnant woman from the provinces, seeking work as a maid. María brings the play to its climax when she reveals the circumstances of Manuel's death and the identity of her child's father:

It was dawn. I'd gone out to find food. . . . He was just coming home when I heard the shots. I saw Manuel, he was going across the field as if he were walking toward the sun, but the land behind him started to get covered in stains. Dark stains . . . and he suddenly fell, he fell facedown. [. . .] That's how they carried him away . . . but I stayed in the brush . . . holding on to my guts, talking to my son. [Amanecía. Yo me había ido a buscar la comida . . . Venía llegando cuando oí los tiros. Lo vi a Manuel, se iba yendo por el campo como si caminara hacia el sol, pero la tierra detrás de él empezó a cubrirse de manchas. Manchas oscuras . . . y de pronto cayó, cayó de boca. [. . .] Así se lo llevaron . . . pero yo me quedé ahí en los yuyales . . . apretándome las entrañas, hablándole a mi hijo.] (238)

The text, although strong in its focus on and analysis of this family, is weakened by a forced moral outrage toward the characters of Bibi and Albertito and loses strength during the denouement. The Father's epiphany of culpability lacks the requisite verisimilitude for a play structured on an Arthur Miller realistic model. His recognition of his own guilt further undermines Juan's logical and necessary assumption of responsibility as the play's moral core and promise for any future salvation of Argentina. Nevertheless, Verrier distinguishes herself in treating openly an issue that the nation's mythmakers had

silenced for so many years. That same year her outcry would be allusively echoed by many of the plays staged during Teatro Abierto.

* * *

The most striking element of the plays produced during the years 1980–82 is their dual status: while still reacting to and suffering under the constraints of the military dictatorship, Argentinean playwrights took the first steps toward a critical self-distancing. These efforts not only reflected and responded to contemporary nightmarish reality but also began an analytical process of isolating the elements that created and sustained an Argentina under dictatorship. While continuing to employ the censorship-averting strategies of the dictatorship's early years, these playwrights attempted to unmask their nation's cultural and historical myths. Their positioning created a strange double sign, and Monti's 1983 speculation on a connection between his two plays aptly describes the double positioning: "*Visita* [1977] was the side inside the mirror and *Marathón* [1980] was the outside, the mirror's reflection" ("*Crear*" 1983, 38). Able to begin the process of stepping outside, playwrights sought their own reflections in the Argentine mirror to begin the dual unmasking process of critiquing the social mirror and the individual images reflected therein.

In the early 1980s, theater practitioners continued to avail themselves of metaphorical language and imagery in order to counter censorship, much as they had in the early years of the military dictatorship; however, a growing awareness of the opaque nature of the censored sign, coupled with increasingly open criticism of the authoritarian state, contributed to a theater that drew attention to its own (self-)censored status while questioning certain sociocultural assumptions that "Official" discourse would present as transparent. Playwrights began to experiment with a historical perspective in order to analyze the contemporary period and to question their own participation and complicity. This critique of history, and historiography, would play an even more prominent role in plays staged in the first years of democracy.

In the early 1980s, exiled theater practitioners, many of whom had been active in early 1970s "committed" theater, returned to Argentina. Their return, coupled with the increasing recognition of playwrights who had begun writing in the 1970s, contributed to strong 1980 and 1981 theater seasons, despite continued extreme economic problems. These events paved the way for Teatro Abierto, the "sociotheatrical phenomenon" that is the subject of the next chapter. Its existence and impact on Argentinean and Latin American theater owe a debt to the changes that were already taking place in Buenos Aires theater of the early 1980s.

3

Vigilant, Vigilante Theater: Teatro Abierto (1981–1985)

Theater is in the position to demonstrate and expose things that no other medium of communication can do. The success of the plays being staged in Teatro Abierto doesn't come so much from their overall quality rather than from [the fact] that the audience knows it is going to see twenty different ways of telling things at a time when things are told and heard in only one way. While the news expounds one compulsory truth in a univocal manner, theater raises the dilemma: [o]f all these things, which one is the truth?

—Osvaldo Dragún

Teatro Abierto [Open Theater] has been declared "the most important Argentine theater movement of all time" (Giella 1981, 92), an event during which, in the words of playwright Griselda Gambaro, "Reality surpassed fiction in many ways."¹ The subject of numerous articles, Teatro Abierto has been described as a "nuclear moment" that witnessed the rare exchange and possible fusion of the divergent and often bitterly opposed 1960s theater systems of realism/naturalism and the experimental/avant-garde.² Teatro Abierto transcended aesthetics to become a "sociotheatrical phenomenon,"³ not only within the Argentine theater communities but internationally. Teatro Abierto's impact on its own country was such that, at one point during its first years, it was even suggested that the members should form their own political party of the same name and run for office.⁴

Ironically, these very achievements of Teatro Abierto have also served to limit an understanding of its role within the larger picture of Argentine theater produced during the Proceso. Because of Teatro Abierto's political nature, many critics have opted either to praise the movement's political defiance or to denigrate many of its plays for having privileged the political at the expense of the aesthetic, and in the process misapprehend what Diana Taylor (1997) calls "the

project's dual status as art and political spectacle" (236). There has been an additional tendency among critics, especially on the part of those living outside Argentina, to reduce all Argentinean theater produced during the military regime to Teatro Abierto.

What was Teatro Abierto's role within the broader context of Buenos Aires theater under dictatorship? Was it a catalyst for change, or the culmination of a sociotheatrical movement already in motion?

In this chapter I seek to answer the above questions, first by recontextualizing Teatro Abierto both historically and aesthetically, from its origins through its four-year development and subsequent demise. Secondly, I look at the individual and collective contributions to Teatro Abierto from four playwrights, two of them well-established writers (Aída Bortnik and Roberto Mario Cossa) and the other two dramatists who achieved recognition in the 1980s (Eugenio Griffero and Mauricio Kartun).

This recontextualization will demonstrate Teatro Abierto's important role during the last years of the Proceso. The dual ideas contained in the chapter's title describe this role: art as vigilant, aware of surrounding events; and the artist as vigilante, that is, actively responding to and, if necessary, challenging these events.⁵ Furthermore, Teatro Abierto, in this role as artistic respondent to Proceso abuses, exemplifies the changes that took place in the theater, together with the problems encountered, during the early years of Argentina's "redemocratization."

The first incarnations of Teatro Abierto, in 1981 and 1982, staged plays that shared themes arising from a defiant stance toward the military dictatorship, but there was little experimentation regarding dramatic genres. The few experimental efforts were kept on Teatro Abierto's periphery; realism prevailed as the dominant theatrical aesthetic. However, from 1983 on, Teatro Abierto's plays reflected aesthetic changes that would be seen in other post-Proceso performances:

1. a fusion of realistic and avant-garde aesthetics, profiting from the already blurred boundary between the two approaches, that created new structures conducive to experimentation;
2. a corollary change in the reception of experimental works with the critics apparently more willing to accept a fusion of theretofore separate, even opposed, aesthetics, and creating a fertile ground for the subsequent "underground" theater movement of the late 1980s and early 1990s;
3. the development of a self-critical voice in the theater and the beginnings of historical revision and analysis leading to a plu-

rality of viewpoints (instead of a binarily opposed Self/Other) and the examination of individual and collective responsibility and culpability.

TEATRO ABIERTO'S ORIGINS

The spring 1991 special issue of the *Latin American Theatre Review*, dedicated entirely to contemporary Argentine theater, included several articles that examine the 1980s phenomenon of Teatro Abierto. In one such article, the late Argentinean playwright Patricio Esteve (1991) recounted his version of the origins of the 1981 event. He credited the 1980 theater season, during which "many plays that questioned the state of things were premiered" (6), for having set the stage for Teatro Abierto's birth. Esteve, however, neglected to mention several 1980 events that served as stimuli for Teatro Abierto. Miguel Angel Giella has also overlooked these decisive events in his otherwise excellent description of Teatro Abierto's first year in *Teatro argentino bajo vigilancia* [Argentinean Theater under Vigilance].⁶ I will briefly summarize said events.

In 1980, the National Conservatory of Dramatic Arts eliminated the study of "History of Argentine Theater" from its world theater history curriculum. The action prompted outrage both from within and outside the Buenos Aires theater community. Even an editorial published in the leading conservative daily newspaper *La Nación* stated: "Eliminating from a drama school the teaching of our theater's history is the same as assuming that this history does not exist."⁷ ARGENTORES (the Association of Argentinean Authors) registered an official complaint with the Ministry of Culture and Education, saying that this action was equivalent to "annihilating the source of knowledge for the younger generations" and requested the course's reinstatement.⁸

In October of that year, the *Asociación Argentina de Actores* [the Argentine Actors' Union] convened to draw attention to continuing censorship in the arts and to state that such censorship was a violation of the freedom of expression guaranteed by the 1853 Constitution.⁹ Via a communiqué to the press and the military government, the union also protested the closing of theaters and the artistically debilitating pressure of self-censorship, concluding:

[I]f this determination to deny the audience of its [own] will continues, within some time, unfortunately, we will have to correct [things] and say, with nostalgia: [t]he Argentine audience was once an adult audience, be-

fore the censors turned it into—to use María Elena Walsh's sadly appropriate expression—a kindergarten-country.¹⁰

One year later, as Teatro Abierto was taking form, the playwright Roberto Mario Cossa (1981) would point to these events as pivotal to the continued existence of a national theater:

If they will not stage our plays in the official theaters, if they will not mention us on the television channels, if we do not appear in any of the second-rate syllabi in our main theater school, *do we Argentine playwrights even exist?* [. . .] Because if we Argentine playwrights do not exist, then there is nothing for them to censor. (Cossa's emphasis)

In this article, too, Cossa announces Teatro Abierto's opening date, 13 July 1981, in the Teatro del Picadero. The article closes with a challenge to the government regarding theater's potential for irritation in society, this challenge a clear indication of Teatro Abierto's self-perceived sociopolitical role.

Thus was Teatro Abierto born, from a desire to reaffirm Argentine theater's already vital existence and to respond to forces that wanted to censor, so that they could afterward deny, its presence. Twelve years later, Aída Bortnik summarized the political situation and Teatro Abierto's response:

Not only did they prohibit us, they threatened us, and then they decreed that we weren't even going to exist. Because, if Argentinean theater isn't studied in Argentina, where will it be studied? So we decided to show that yes, [our theater] exists, and there continues to exist an audience for it. Those were the beginnings of Teatro Abierto.¹¹

TEATRO ABIERTO 1981

Central to Teatro Abierto's success, as observed in Bortnik's comments above, was the movement's awareness of theater's intimate relationship with its audience and the collectivity inherent in the theater as a public forum. This understanding is also present in the "Declaration of the Principles of Teatro Abierto," read by the actor Jorge Rivera López, on the festival's opening night:

. . . because we wish to demonstrate the existence and vitality of Argentine theater, so often denied; because theater is an eminently social and communitarian cultural phenomenon, we are trying, through the quality of the shows and the low ticket prices, to recover a mass audience; be-

cause we feel that all of us together are much more than the sum of each one of us alone; because we are attempting to exercise, in an adult and responsible manner, our right to freedom of opinion; because we need to find new forms of expression that will free us from shallowly commercialistic structures; because we painfully love our country and this is the only homage we know how to give; and, because, most important of all, we feel happy to be together.¹²

Teatro Abierto, with a series of twenty plays that ran from 28 July until 21 September, brought together twenty-one playwrights,¹³ twenty-one directors, more than one hundred fifty actors, technicians, and designers, and some twenty-five thousand spectators. The festival was structured in seven-day cycles, with three one-act plays presented each afternoon.¹⁴ Teatro Abierto kept its prices below the cost of regular theater or movie tickets, and all the scheduled performances were sold out the week prior to the opening.

The year before, each of the twenty-one authors had been asked to write a one-act play especially for the event. The idea of the one-act play came from Osvaldo Dragún, the playwright most closely identified with Teatro Abierto and one of the few people present from the movement's inception until its 1985 demise. According to Dragún,¹⁵ a group of young actors asked him to write what would later become *Al violador* [To the Rapist/Violator]. He, in turn, enlisted other playwrights to create additional one-act plays for the group.¹⁶ Because of the controversial subject of Dragún's play,¹⁷ the actors began to have concerns about possible prohibition and loss of income. Their self-censoring reluctance infuriated Dragún, who repossessed his play and dissuaded the other playwrights from participating. The authors instead, with their one-act plays already written, met together in what would become Teatro Abierto's first *convocatoria*. At this meeting, it was decided to stage the plays and to invite others to participate. In this way, Teatro Abierto defied external official and unofficial censorship, in the forms of the recent cancellation of the Argentine theater history course at the National Conservatory and the continued closing down of theaters. It additionally confronted self-censorship, such as Dragún had experienced with the group of actors.

The project grew in size and momentum. Antonio Mónaco offered his newly remodeled Teatro del Picadero for the performances.¹⁸ Support was received from Buenos Aires's daily newspaper *Clarín*, which promised to publish any article written by Teatro Abierto's members. Throughout the months of May, June, and July 1981, there were notices, interviews, and articles in nearly all of the city's major publications.

Teatro Abierto was a local success even before its opening night, and it rallied the nation when, in the predawn hours of 6 August 1981, the Teatro del Picadero was destroyed in an "accidental" fire.¹⁹ A press conference was held the following day in the packed Teatro Lassalle, and among those attending were human rights activist Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, the writer Ernesto Sábato, and representatives of the various artists unions.²⁰ During the press conference, it was announced that Teatro Abierto would continue in one of the sixteen theater houses that had volunteered their space.²¹ Performances were moved to the Teatro Tabarís, a larger commercial theater on Corrientes Street, where the run continued without further incident.²² Ironically, the larger Tabarís afforded even more people the opportunity of attending.

Teatro Abierto became, to use the critic Juan José Calegari's gender-marked term, the *vedette* [starlet/showgirl] of the 1981 theater season.²³ By the time the festival ended, on 21 September, it had generated other movements: Danza Abierta, Música Siempre, the Encuentro Nacional de Teatro Joven, Cine Abierto, a series of roundtable discussions, and even a documentary film.²⁴ Several of the plays continued on at the Tabarís: Carlos Somigliana's *El nuevo mundo* [The New World], Aída Bortnik's *Papá querido* [Daddy Dear], Roberto Mario Cossa's *Gris de ausencia* [The Gray of Absence], and *El acompañamiento* [The Accompaniment] by Carlos Gorostiza. The productions of Cossa's and Gorostiza's plays also traveled to the resort city of Mar del Plata for the summer season and then embarked on a national tour. All twenty-one plays were published, and the 8,000 copies quickly sold out. Ricardo Monti edited the *Revista de Teatro Abierto* and a "circle of friends" was formed to support future Teatro Abierto projects.²⁵

Popular and critical response was great. Raúl H. Castagnino (1981), in his final review of the event, noted that Teatro Abierto had attracted an audience that extended beyond the typical experimental theatergoer. In the pages of the daily newspaper *Clarín*, the cartoonist Fontanarrosa joked about the possibilities of Open Theater engendering "open elections."²⁶ The festival's leading figures, as well as its spectators, were interviewed by the press. Optimism for the future of Argentine theater was strong, as Orlando Barone (1981) summed up, "At a moment when everything seemed critical, when culture was not exactly the topic of the day, a unifying experience was enough to revive the stimuli."

TEATRO ABIERTO 1982

Soon after the first festival, Teatro Abierto began to organize itself as a national movement.²⁷ It had its own headquarters (in the now-

deceased director Roberto Durán's studio in San Telmo), and a fifteen-person organizing committee was formed with Osvaldo Dragún as its president.²⁸ As Jorge Dubatti (1991) has pointed out, in his overview of the movement's activities immediately following its 1981 inauguration, Teatro Abierto aimed to include the entire nation in its 1982 festival:²⁹ "[there was] an attempt at 'nationalizing' the movement, starting with an opening up of it to obtain a greater representation of the whole country and, moreover, of less-known artists and young people" (79).

In order to realize these goals, it was decided to hold an open contest for the selection of the 1982 plays.³⁰ Of the 412 plays submitted, together with some seventy-five proposals for "experimental" projects, thirty-four plays and seventeen projects were chosen.³¹ Despite attempts at inclusivity, heated debate ensued when certain "consecrated" authors were not among those whose works were selected.³²

Teatro Abierto 1982 ran for two months, from October through November. Of the more than 1,400 actors who auditioned, approximately 150 participated; thirty-three directors were selected from the 124 who had signed up; and there were set and costume designers, stage technicians, and musicians. The fifty plays were staged in two series that ran concurrently in two theaters: the Margarita Xirgu Theater was converted by set designer Gastón Breyer into an arena space that seated 450 spectators, while the Odeón Theater maintained its traditional stage *à la italiana*, with a 900-person seating capacity.

Teatro Abierto 1982 appeared to have overreached in its ambitions: the use of two theaters led to confusion among spectators regarding performance locations; performances were canceled because of poor attendance;³³ and the organizers were criticized for excluding certain authors and certain theater aesthetics from the cycle. A public debate transpired in the pages of *Hum*³⁴ magazine during the months of December 1982 and January 1983, between Pacho O'Donnell, who had participated in Teatro Abierto 1981 but whose play was not chosen in 1982, and Roberto Mario Cossa, one of Teatro Abierto's earliest participants.

As Dubatti (1991) states in his succinct analysis of the polemic, O'Donnell's criticisms were aesthetic, political, and ethical in nature (82). For Dubatti, O'Donnell's most legitimate, and least personally motivated, complaint was leveled at Teatro Abierto's aesthetic leanings toward a 1960s-style realism. O'Donnell perceived, in Teatro Abierto's continued staging of selected works from the 1981 festival and its choices for the 1982 season, an aesthetic preference for "the naturalist-realist [trend] known by everyone"³⁵ and a rejection of experimentation. O'Donnell had valid concerns. Projects deemed

avant-garde had been relegated to a *Sección experimental*, and this marginalization was practiced not only by the organizers but even by the media.³⁶

O'Donnell voiced additional concerns regarding the Argentine political climate. Nineteen eighty-two had been a year of many changes, not the least of which were the March mass demonstration and the Malvinas/Falklands War;³⁷ both events occurred just months before Teatro Abierto's opening night. Nonetheless, given the March deadline for that year's submissions, most of the plays had already been written before these events. With their socio-political thrusts, many plays became outmoded even before their premieres. In Dubatti's words (1991), "The accentuation of the Proceso's decline created a phenomenon of asynchrony between many of the plays' hypotheses and the audience's reality during the festival" (83).

O'Donnell (1982) concluded by asserting that Teatro Abierto would only have meaning if it acted as a "social revulsive potent enough to enlighten our theater, which has no alternative but to *improve, grow and change*" (53, his emphasis). Cossa's response, published in *Humor*'s next issue,³⁸ skirted discussion of necessary change. He instead rebutted O'Donnell's ethical and political assertions even as he acknowledged that Teatro Abierto 1982 had made mistakes, owing in large part to the project's size.

Dubatti (1991) correctly notes that "Cossa does not examine thoroughly the aesthetic question regarding this supposed marginalization of avant-garde poetics in favor of realism" (83). The playwright instead subsumed the issue of aesthetics under a perceived general confusion in the theater community regarding who the "real enemy" was, now that the junta had discredited itself. Cossa (1982) challenged the prevailing criticism that the season had been a mixed success, asserting instead that "the '82 festival staged a greater quantity of good productions than the one the year before had" (54).³⁹

TEATRO ABIERTO 1983 (AND 1984)

Cossa's public disavowal notwithstanding, he and other Teatro Abierto organizers appeared to take these criticisms and complaints to heart. In 1983, they once again completely restructured the event, scaling the festival down in size and attempting to incorporate the sought-for collectivism and experimentation into the project's very design.⁴⁰ Seven groups were created. Each group comprised four playwrights and four directors, who then invited actors and techni-

cians to participate. The proposed theme for all seven groups was, to quote Osvaldo Dragún, "a kind of vision on the part of theater people as to what has happened during these last seven years [under dictatorship]." Each group's results were staged on a given night of the seven-day cycle, and all works were presented in the Teatro Margarita Xirgu.

The breadth of these productions was surprising: Some groups opted to stage individually written plays, mounted by different directors but organized around a common subtheme.⁴² Other groups collectively wrote and directed a single play.⁴³ Yet another group staged three separately written plays, collectively titled *Ensayo general* [Dress Rehearsal/General Essay]. The three plays were framed by ongoing commentary written especially for the event.⁴⁴

The 1983 festival opened on 24 September, with a huge parade that began at the site of the burned Picadero Theater and then traveled down Corrientes Street. The opening celebration lasted six hours, and the crowd extended for five blocks,⁴⁵ marching behind a banner that read "For a popular theater, without censorship" [Por un teatro popular y sin censura]. In keeping with the celebration of Argentina's 1983 return to democracy, "la Censurona," a huge effigy in the form of a woman that symbolized "the drowning of freedom of expression" ("La alegría" 1983), was set on fire in the park.⁴⁶

The festival ran from October until December.⁴⁷ Despite the more positive critical response and lower ticket prices,⁴⁸ the event did not attract as wide an audience as the previous two festivals had.

Nineteen eighty-four's festival was canceled after it became apparent that that year's project would not be completed in time. For the 1984 season, Teatro Abierto had invited twenty-one playwrights to write on the subject of freedom.⁴⁹ Each piece was to have been staged by a different director and the material organized into eight Monday night performances taking place in Buenos Aires and its suburbs. In August of that year, Dragún spoke with Miguel Angel Giella (1984) on Teatro Abierto 1984's theme of freedom:

We believe that the subject of freedom, in principle, encompasses all subjects, because we really have not enjoyed freedom as a normal thing, we have enjoyed repression as a normal thing. And it's curious what is happening with the material that's being written, it's still talking much more about repression than about freedom, as if we needed to have repression as the opponent to freedom. That's probably what's going to be interesting about this year's festival. (119)

In reality, this thematic confusion regarding freedom and repression resulted in the absence of any finished texts.⁵⁰ The failure was

symptomatic of a deeper perplexity regarding Teatro Abierto's role within the new context of democracy. This uncertainty would ultimately produce, in the words of the playwright Carlos Somigliana (1984), "a paralysis in the movement" (20).

TEATRO ABIERTO 1985

At the same time that the organizers of Teatro Abierto were conceiving the 1984 project, they began work on what would become the movement's final season. The 1985 festival structured itself around two different projects, both dedicated to promoting and supporting lesser-known playwrights and directors:

1) *Nuevos autores, nuevos directores* [New Playwrights, New Directors]: Four playwriting seminars were organized. They were to be conducted by Teatro Abierto veterans for playwrights with no previous involvement in Teatro Abierto. It was hoped that the seminars, scheduled to meet in 1984, would produce new play texts that would then be staged by directors and actors also new to Teatro Abierto.

2) *Otro teatro* [Another Theater]: Several research groups composed of theater practitioners, sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists would study aspects and images of a reality unknown to them. Areas of study included the marginal status of indigenous groups living in Buenos Aires, the ex-combatants of the Malvinas/Falklands War, the role of women within the working class, and the detained-disappeared. No specific format for any performance resulting from the experiences was dictated.

Ironically, the 1984 season, which depended exclusively on already established writers, never happened; on the other hand, the 1985 festival, devoted to providing a forum for still-unknown theater practitioners, successfully took place.

Teatro Abierto 1985 opened with the *Teatrzo*, a forty-eight-hour celebration of theater throughout the entire country, with 21 September declared "Latin American Theater Day." *Teatrzo's* program of events for Buenos Aires alone was so extensive that the daily newspapers listed only a few of the performances. In addition to more conventional venues, performances were scheduled for parks, plazas, warehouses, train stations, subways, and buses. There were theater classes, open rehearsals, performances, readings, round-table discussions, and concerts, for both adults and children. Throughout Argentina, more than 1,000 groups participated (Gaucher/Morales 1986, 144).

After the *Teatrzo*, performances that had grown out of the various

workshops began. Ten plays were presented from the project *Nuevos autores y nuevos directores*. Only one of the research workshops, planned under *Otro teatro*, produced a performance piece: *Comunicado número . . .* [Communiqué Number . . .], a collective creation by the Taller Cultural Paco Urondo, was directed by Ricardo Miguez. The performance was the product of a workshop on the detained-disappeared.

The festival's plays were very negatively received by the press. Of the *Nuevos autores* cycle, only Cristina Escofet's *Té de tías* [Aunties' Teatime] managed to get generally favorable reviews, as did *Comunicado número . . .* While reactions to *Teatrzo's* refreshing spontaneity were positive, the 1985 festival was chided for its overall lack of accomplishment in both the writing and the staging. Many critics suggested that it was time for Teatro Abierto to reevaluate itself.

Nineteen eighty-five would be Teatro Abierto's last year. The movement was disbanded, defeated by annual revampings, lack of funds, and diminishing audience response. The country's economy would soon fall victim to hyperinflation, and these problems served only to exacerbate further theater's already precarious situation.

Even as early as the 1982 O'Donnell-Cossa debate, the seeds of Teatro Abierto's demise were present. From 1982 on, Teatro Abierto suffered from being both under- and overstructured: 1982's season was overly ambitious, and there was no infrastructure to support the production of so many plays. At the same time, the 1982 festival was too organized. The timetable created for the selection of the plays was so restrictive that when the Malvinas/Falklands debacle occurred, the 1982 plays had already been selected. The early deadline delivered plays that dealt with themes already passé, and the outmoded subject matter elicited complaints that Teatro Abierto, which only one year earlier had been at Argentina's sociopolitical forefront, was now out of touch with its own country. A comparable judgment would be made of Teatro Abierto in 1983. With the country undergoing the transition from dictatorship to democracy, Teatro Abierto appeared to be confused as to its own role in the redemocratization process.

Other areas of conflict and confusion were intratheatrical in nature. Teatro Abierto never resolved the issue of its own professional/nonprofessional status and the related problem of preferential treatment. The movement was criticized when it "professionalized" some of the 1981 plays. The organizing committee allowed several pieces to enjoy an extended run followed by a national tour. Thus Teatro Abierto became a profitable enterprise, but only for a few of its original participants.

When Teatro Abierto attempted to support experimental projects in 1982, it was criticized for paternalistically separating these works from the more mainstream plays and thus effectively marginalizing the avant-garde. It is debatable whether the organizers of 1982's festival were solely to blame for this marginalization. As I pointed out earlier, critics chose to attend the productions of plays written by the more highly visible and aesthetically more accessible playwrights. Are critics such as Jorge Dubatti, Osvaldo Pellettieri, or even Pacho O'Donnell justified in their complaints of a predominance of "realistic" theater in Teatro Abierto when other works were staged, only to be ignored by the press and the public?

Teatro Abierto was also criticized for its *amiguismo*. This complaint was possibly the result of the movement's failure to decide upon a definitive policy of play selection. This accusation of "insiderism" was given additional weight with the aforementioned decision to grant certain plays extended commercial runs after the season ended.

Most importantly, Teatro Abierto's problems and ultimate demise illustrate the difficulty of organizing and maintaining a democratic movement within a country unaccustomed to democracy. As its name suggests, Teatro Abierto called for a theater free of the constraints of censorship. It endeavored to create an open, communicative theater standing in direct opposition to a closed, noncommunicative, intolerant state. This dialectic, of the open theater versus the closed state, was present not only contextually but also thematically in the 1981 plays. The overwhelming public response to the first festival clearly demonstrated a Teatro Abierto in sync with the 1981 Argentine community.

In the 1982 festival, however, the press noted an overall theme of frustration resulting from a now-asynchronous relationship between the plays staged and changes within the country. As Argentina moved toward redemocratization, most of the 1982 plays were still locked into the previous year's thematics of a country living under dictatorship.

Nevertheless, by 1983, with the proposed theme of "the seven years of the Proceso," Teatro Abierto began taking the first steps toward a historical distancing. This distancing, characteristic of later postdictatorship theater, afforded Teatro Abierto the opportunity to break the binarism of an open theater that defined itself in opposition to a closed country. Nonetheless, that year, critics wrote of a thread of despair running through the plays. Apparently these critics still saw Teatro Abierto as a theater of opposition that had not yet entered into the euphoria of Argentina's return to democracy. This

problem was exacerbated in 1984 when the playwrights found they could not even write about freedom, the festival's chosen theme. Nineteen eighty-five's festival provided the epilogue to Teatro Abierto's doomed story.

Before entering into a final evaluation of Teatro Abierto, I want to examine some of the plays it produced. They will serve as concrete examples of Teatro Abierto's various projects, including the problems encountered and the solutions proposed. The discussion also will allow me to introduce some theoretical concepts crucial to an understanding of Teatro Abierto's role in Argentinean cultural production.

TEATRO ABIERTO'S THEMATIC AND AESTHETIC TRANSFORMATIONS: THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF FOUR PLAYWRIGHTS

Given the unfeasibility of analyzing all the plays produced during Teatro Abierto's existence, I have chosen to compare multiple works by the same authors. I have selected plays by two authors who had achieved recognition well before Teatro Abierto's genesis, Aída Bortnik and Roberto Cossa, as well as texts by two playwrights who did not come into prominence until the 1980s, Mauricio Kartun and Eugenio Griffero. I have excluded the works of several well-known playwrights from this study, either because the authors did not participate in more than one season or because their contributions have been well documented elsewhere.⁵¹ An examination of these four authors' plays will reveal the changes in Teatro Abierto's thematic focus. Lastly, these plays demonstrate Teatro Abierto's various dramatic approaches as well as question the image of Teatro Abierto as a monolithic theater of protest and realism.

Contrary to the generally held critical belief that Teatro Abierto 1981 was the movement's only festival with any sociopolitical or aesthetic value, there is a discernable evolution in Teatro Abierto's thematics and aesthetics. The development is particularly noticeable in a comparison of the 1981/1982 and 1983 installments. This transformation suggests an awareness on the part of later Teatro Abierto participants of their changing role. Playwright, and participant in the 1983 festival, Jorge Goldenberg's evaluation (in Mossian 1983) of theater's role in early 1980s Argentina echoes Teatro Abierto's understanding of its own importance: "I think that theater—in these moments of confusion, of ideological chaos, where ideologies tend to get mistaken for personal interests and vice versa—needs more than ever to serve as a guiding light, a rostrum for the great truths."

From 1983 on, Teatro Abierto attempted to move from a self-definition of univocal opposition toward a larger definition of the theater as a forum for plurality.⁵² This change became even more pronounced in other plays staged during the years immediately following the dictatorship. It is in this light that a study of Teatro Abierto's individual thematic and aesthetic experiments can also serve as an introduction to transformations in Argentine post-Proceso theater.

RESITUATING THE BLAME: MAURICIO KARTUN'S *LA CASITA DE LOS VIEJOS*
[THE OLD FOLKS' LITTLE HOUSE] AND *CUMBIA MORENA CUMBIA*
[DANCE DARK WOMAN DANCE]

Mauricio Kartun, currently one of Buenos Aires's most active playwrights, began writing, and performing, in the 1970s.⁵³ Olga Cosentino (1991) has traced a project of exposing national-cultural contradictions throughout Kartun's dramatic oeuvre, from his 1970s "agit-prop" plays to his recent and more commercial theater. She describes this project as:

the revision and reformulation of certain historical assumptions, the recovery of the dearest images from infancy, and the painful bewilderment of the human creature in its movement toward puberty as a metaphor of every other displacement that, inevitably, locates man in a no-man's land and confronts him with his cyclical and irreversible helplessness. (36)

In *La casita de los viejos* and *Cumbia morena cumbia*, Kartun's contributions to Teatro Abierto in 1982 and 1983, respectively, we see this "inevitable displacement" as intrinsic to the human condition. The action of both plays takes place in the same suburban Buenos Aires neighborhood of the author's childhood. Both plays expose the same repressive society. However, a subtle shift in the analysis of the human condition can be noted between the two texts: 1982's *Casita* returns to the preadolescent world created in Kartun's 1980 *Chau Misterix* and locates individual repression in the family and society. The 1983 *Cumbia* internalizes these negative elements in the individual himself. By resituating the causes of human impotence, Kartun opens his project to include the probability of individual complicity in a perpetuated "no-man's land."

In 1982, *La casita de los viejos* was seen by only a handful of critics and given only one enthusiastic review (in the article "Teatro Abierto 1982," published in *Hum*[®]). Most reviewers complained that the play

was incomprehensible, a problem that they attributed to an underdeveloped "absurdist" style and the confusion generated by the multiple superimposed temporal planes.⁵⁴

*La casita de los viejos*⁵⁵ retains the spatiotemporal coordinates of *Chau Misterix*, that is, the San Andrés neighborhood of Kartun's own youth. *Chau Misterix* told the story of the preadolescent Rubencito's oscillation between his imagined omnipotence as the comic-book superhero Misterix and his desire to leave those childhood fantasies behind and enter the adult world. *La casita de los viejos*, its title evocative of the nearly homonymous 1931 tango, *La casita de mis viejos* [My Old Folks' Little House], continues Rubencito's story: Once again we see the prepubescent boy of 1958 suburban Buenos Aires. Rubencito's world, which had been populated exclusively by children in *Chau Misterix*, is now extended in *Casita* to include his parents, neighbors, and his adult self, Rubén. The larger picture affords the spectator a glimpse into the social factors that have contributed to the adult Rubén's impotence.

The action begins as Rubencito confronts his thirty-two-year-old self, Rubén, who has returned to his parents' house to tell them of the dissolution of his marriage. Rubén first watches Rubencito react to the lascivious teasing of the neighbor girls, and later, he counsels his younger timid self. The protagonist both witnesses and reexperiences the events of his life in this tragic story of an existence distinguished only by a series of failures and mistakes.

The text makes evident early on that Rubén/Rubencito's father, as well as the neighbor, Doña Rosa, are dead, and that his mother will die soon. All characters, except Rubén, are represented by their once-living selves, their bodies frozen in the time of Rubén's 1958 memories. References to the mistakes of Rubén/Rubencito's life do not necessarily follow any chronological order, and when they do, they serve to enumerate and underscore his failures, as his father points out:

at twenty-five he quit architecture to draw crap . . . at twenty-nine they fire him from the Ministry for arguing about politics with the second in command . . . at thirty he has his first son . . . at thirty-two he gets a separation! [ique a los veinticinco largó arquitectura para dibujar basuras . . . que a los veintinueve lo suspenden en el ministerio por discutirle de política al subjefe . . . que a los treinta el primer hijo . . . que a los treinta y dos se separa!] (145)

Rubencito watches from an armchair as Rubén accidentally breaks a small jar, which causes his father to punish the adult Rubén by send-

ing him hungry to the bathroom. His mother, at first conciliatory, then accusing, punishes Rubencito for Rubén's mistake and later hits the boy even harder when he stands up on the chair. Both Rubén and Rubencito are afraid; and the boy tries to disappear in his chair while the grown man attempts to leave, only to find the front door locked. His father continues to list Rubén's many errors, punishable by his being sent to the bathroom, from where he may never leave ("You're still in there." [Ahí estás todavía.] 147).

The blows and cries of pain that emanate from the bathroom, its door barred, are Rubencito/Rubén's accumulated punishments, attempts at beating into the boy the passive acceptance of his mediocre destiny. As Rubén is being locked up in the bathroom, and as Mother hugs and kisses Rubencito, the doorbell rings. Another Rubén has arrived. The neighbor girls run to answer the front door, and the scene freezes into a tableau. Only Rubencito is animate as he slowly observes each figure. He covers his eyes with his hands as the lights are quickly dimmed.

The idea of repeated abuse is underscored in the split character of Rubén as the ten-year-old Rubencito and his adult self. Rubén interacts with his younger counterpart, who at first does not recognize him, nor initially does his mother: Rubencito later identifies all too closely with his older self; however, the boy is unable to do anything that might modify his future. He can only hide his eyes from what is about to happen.

The play creates other splits: The set description calls for a wall that separates the family apartment from the street. This wall is raised whenever the action moves to the living room, thereby erasing the boundaries between public and private lives. As the neighbors follow Rubén into his parents' home, they become witnesses and accomplices, not unlike the spectator, to the domestic violence and indifferent fatalism that engender individual powerlessness.

Another form of impotence, resulting from an unwillingness to change one's fate, is present in Kartun's 1983 Teatro Abierto contribution, *Cumbia morena cumbia*.⁵⁶ The drama also won that year's ARGENTORES prize for best short play. Nevertheless, critical reception was split once again. *Cumbia* was regarded favorably as part of the evening's event collectively billed as *Ensayo general* but criticized for its obliqueness.⁵⁷

The theme of individual and collective complicity unified the four plays that constituted *Ensayo general*. And it was through this theme of complicity that the critics attempted to make sense of Kartun's play, identifying the two characters as "those that, knowing what was going on [in the country], dedicated themselves to ignoring it

systematically, to pretending that they lived somewhere else, a place perhaps fantastic and unreal" (Mazas 1983).

The action takes place in Kartun's same boyhood neighborhood, but it is many years later. The two characters, forty years old but dressed in the schoolboy attire of their 1960s adolescence, are alone in a dance hall. Outside, it is raining, just as it was during the climactic dance scene of *Chau Misterix*. Willy, too large for his clothes, is dancing to a cumbia record of the period that is being played over and over. Meanwhile, Rulo, gravely ill, lies on some chairs placed together to form a bed. They are awaiting the imminent arrival of twenty-nine girls from the wealthy suburb of Belgrano. As the weakened Rulo sobs, convinced that they will not come, Willy accuses him of pessimism and a lack of faith. Willy frequently calls out for the doorman to turn the heat down, but each time the request is made, more heaters are turned on. Tension and discomfort increase until, by play's end, the dance hall has been transformed into a feverish hell.

Willy and Rulo have been waiting for twenty years. As they continue to wait, the sounds of the outside world, apparently governed by a *Loco* [madman], penetrate theirs and augment their uneasiness. A parade passes by, and when it approaches again, Rulo wants to see it. Willy finally relents and lifts his friend's wasted body up to the transom to look, which causes Rulo to begin vomiting. The third time the *murga* passes by, Willy reacts to the outsiders, saying to Rulo:

They've wanted to join in for years, and he never lets them . . . each time they get involved, he throws them out. . . . What does it matter to us what they do outside . . . ? It's their business and that madman's . . . us, we don't have anything to do with it. [Hace años que se quieren colar y él no los deja . . . cada vez que se meten los vuelve a echar. . . . ¿Qué nos importa a nosotros lo que hacen ahí afuera . . . ? cosas de ellos y del loco . . . nosotros, nada que ver.] (158)

On this third pass, the festive sounds are transformed into fighting, yells, and a sudden silence, which is interrupted by isolated yells, a long horrifying shriek, and the sound of a child crying for his father. After another shriek, there is silence. Rulo throws himself onto the floor and attempts to crawl to the door. When Willy sees that his friend is determined to leave, he begins to sing "Happy Birthday," picks Rulo up and throws him to the ground for each one of his forty years. He beats him with an increasing violence that culminates in Rulo's being tied to the bar, blowing on a birthday whistle for help. As all the heaters come on, Willy calls out to the porter for help, but

his cries and Rulo's whistles are drowned out by the sounds of the thunderstorm and the parade.

Cumbia morena cumbia portrays two men attempting to live in the time-arrested world of their 1960s adolescence. They belong to the same generation as *Casita's* Rubén. However, unlike Rubén, they have rejected the outside world, preferring to hide indoors for twenty years as they await the realization of their adolescent dreams. Willy desperately struggles to sustain these fantasies. When Rulo, convinced that he will die if he stays, attempts to leave their world, Willy beats him.

The outside world of early 1980s Argentina is not entirely hospitable either: Attempts at public gatherings are violently put down by the Loco, and the violence is echoed in nature as the rain continues to pour down. However, as Darrell B. Lockhart (1992) points out, the real conflict is taking place inside the dance hall, in the hellish world of the two men who, in their refusal to acknowledge reality, become that oppressive reality's accomplices as well as its victims (88).

The extratextual (and extrascenic) references make clear that *Cumbia's* dance-hall environment has been conditioned by recent Argentine politics: Willy and Rulo have been waiting for twenty years, since the fall of Peronism and throughout a series of military governments. Twenty years of repression have created a general climate of confusion and violence. Rulo says he has been sick for one year and seven months, a period of time that corresponds once again to the confusion and violence generated by two forces in conflict: open massive resistance to the military junta and the junta's desperate attempts at relegitimation.⁵⁸

This conflict, between a popular movement and a repressive authority, is further defined in Willy's description of the "outside" madness as "their business and the madman's" [cosas de ellos y del loco] (158) when he refuses to become involved in the attempts of the *colados* [paraders] to enter and the refusal of the doorman to let them in. The never-seen doorman equally ignores the needs of the two protagonists. He countermands each of Willy's attempts to lower the heat, and he refuses to respond to the two men's final calls for help even when it appears inevitable that the *colados* are going to enter the space.

In *La casita*, the three onstage witnesses to Rubencito/Rubén's familial conflict are Doña Rosa and her two daughters Pocha and Porota. All three have grotesque mustaches that are carefully described in the dramatic text. Kartun has said that the facial hair was inspired by childhood memories of a family that lived next door,⁵⁹ but this grotesque triumvirate could just as easily be interpreted as a veiled reference to the junta. The two sisters are a threatening presence for

Rubencito, teasing him mercilessly with allusions to his sexual inadequacies. Doña Rosa reintroduces Rubén to his own mother, who, unlike Rosa, at first does not recognize him. The three enter the family home, drawn by the conflict between Rubén and his parents. They gradually insinuate themselves into the argument, acting as "impartial" authorities who side with the parents or incite Rubencito to actions resulting in even crueler punishments.⁶⁰ When Rubén tries to leave, it is Rosa who pronounces the verdict: "This child's pretensions. . . . Look at the scene he's made and now he wants to leave. . . ." [Las pretensiones del niño . . . Miren el escándalo que armó y ahora se quiere ir . . .] (147). At that point, Rubén finds the door locked. When he has accepted his fate and gone into the bathroom, it will be the two girls who race to the door to receive the next Rubén.

These three women exercise a certain control over the action of the play, manipulating events and encouraging the parents to engage in repressive behavior. It is a level of involvement that goes beyond mere neighborly meddling and suggests an outside authority similar to that of Poroto the doorman in *Cumbia*. In the 1982 play, the authority is social: social norms require certain modes of behavior that result in a loss of independence and power. This is implicit in Rosa's dictum: "[A] good son always returns to his old folks' little house" [un buen hijo vuelve siempre a la casita de los viejos] (141). In the 1983 text, the net is cast wider to include the political struggle between two forces, the never-seen but omnipotent doorman and the invisible but omnipresent masses, from which no one, not even the apolitical escapist, is free.

La casita, from its tango-inspired title to the repetition of conventional sayings, is an indictment of a seemingly benign but ultimately repressive social environment. Parents destroy their children, who in turn are powerless to free themselves and so are destined to return time and again to the family home of guilt and punishment. *Cumbia* examines the individual's complicity and culpability within society and within a certain socioeconomic class. Like many of the 1983 plays, it takes a step away from the social family unit, omnipresent in early Proceso theater. By setting the play in the public sphere of a dance hall and referring to specific historical moments, *Cumbia* attempts a broader analysis of recent Argentine events.

GIVING VOICE TO THE SILENCED: AÍDA BORTNIK'S *PAPÁ QUERIDO*
AND *DE A UNO* [ONE BY ONE]

Aída Bortnik's contributions to Teatro Abierto, 1981's *Papá querido*⁶¹ and 1983's *De a uno*,⁶² both focus on family rituals that stand in

for the Argentine social structures, as in many plays of the period, and on the role of the individual within Argentine reality. In each play, there are important absences and presences, and in each, too, death and disappearance play pivotal roles. The past and the future function in each play's present moment as mirrors in whose reflections the characters, and by extension the Buenos Aires spectators, may recognize themselves and evaluate their actions. *Papá querido* posits the need for individual and collective subjectivity in history, in a rejection of externalized belief systems and an affirmation of self-awareness and self-criticism; in *De a uno*, this process of subjectification is taken a step further by staging confrontations between the subjects' (non)actions and their consequences. *De a uno* thus becomes an indictment of the Argentine middle class's individual and collective culpability in the Proceso.

Papá querido is structured around a loss, the death of a father, whose presence is evoked by his four children, who meet each other for the first time at his wake. The play's action occurs in the shabby, run-down room of this historian, journalist, anarchist, and revolutionary, who ended his life "in this miserable, crummy town, alone like a dog . . . and putting a bullet through his head" [en este pueblucho miserable, solo como un perro . . . y pegándose un tiro en la cabeza] (18). Although the father was never a part of the children's daily lives, unlike their absent, multiple mothers, he exerted an influence over his children. The influence continues even after his death. As one says, "he programmed us" with his gifts and letters: Electra received biographies of the great revolutionaries and became a journalist; Carlos (or Germinal, the name given to him by his father) is now a doctor; Clara, or Minerva, is a housewife; José, or Ateo [Atheist], has become, in his own words, a "bourgeois pig" (23) despite the art books he was sent by the father; and a fifth child, Amanecer [Dawn], referred to by the other offspring, never appears. The names given to the five children by the father further reflect his utopian belief in and desire for revolutionary, necessary change. This was the mission to be carried on by his Promethean offspring. The children's own adult reality is quite different. During the course of the play, they will argue over his, and consequently their own, image and identity.

The father has bequeathed to each child a file, and while they guess its contents, they expose their own projections of the deceased man: Clara thinks it is the book he never finished (entitled *Revolutions in the History of Societies*), José claims it is his poetry, Electra his memoirs, and the angry Carlos is convinced that they are copies of his letters to them:

the letters through which he filled up our heads and messed up our lives. His letters full of great words and great sentiments . . . with lots of freedom and awareness and honor and dignity and solidarity and all his wonderful vocabulary from the last century. . . . His exalting letters that made one feel heroic and special just for having received them . . . until one began to feel uncomfortable and then accused and then a really filthy worm because he wasn't worthy of all this marvelousness that was his father. [Las cartas con las que nos llenó la cabeza y nos jorobó la vida. Sus cartas llenas de grandes palabras y grandes sentimientos . . . con mucha libertad y conciencia y honor y dignidad y solidaridad y todo su maravilloso vocabulario del siglo pasado . . . Las cartas exaltadoras que hacían que uno se sintiera heroico y especial solamente por recibirlas . . . hasta que uno empezaba a sentirse incómodo y después acusado y después un verdadero gusano inmundo porque uno no se merecía toda esa maravilla que era su padre.] (22)

All are wrong; they have inherited *their* letters to him. As each begins to read his/her letters silently, lost in an exclusively private relationship, the reactions differ. Carlos's is the strongest: "He appears to have received a blow. He's hurt and bewildered. But more than anything else, he's much more furious than before" [*Parece haber recibido un golpe. Está herido y desconcertado. Pero sobre todo mucho más furioso que antes*] (23–24). His fury propels the action to its climax when he confronts the others: "[Y]ou still don't get what he did to us, that fucking old man!" [(T)odavía no se dieron cuenta de lo que nos hizo, ¡el viejo de mierda!] (24). José, the child most ideologically distant from their father, asks Carlos to explain:

- José. I would like you to tell me about . . .
 Carlos. Tell me, what did you write him? [. . .] . . . What did you promise him. . . . And what did you promise yourself? How did you bet on your future? What things did you say that you would always defend? What things did you say that you would never be? [. . .]
 Electra. Nobody's that man. . . .
 Carlos. Try to read those letters now, try to read them without feeling like a worm. . . .
 Electra. Nobody's that man. . . .
 Carlos. That fucking old fool was that man!
 Electra. . . . So that's why you hate him so much. . . . No, not even he was. . . .
 [José. Me gustaría que me contara . . .
 Carlos. Decime ¿qué le escribías vos? [. . .] . . . qué le prometías a él. . . . ¿y qué te prometías a vos mismo? ¿Cómo apostabas por tu futuro, qué cosas decías que ibas a defender siempre? ¿Qué cosas decías que no ibas a ser nunca? [. . .]

- Electra.* Nadie es ese hombre. . . .
Carlos. Tratá de leer esas cartas ahora, tratá de leerlas sin sentirte como un gusano. . . .
Electra. Nadie es ese hombre. . . .
Carlos. ¡Ese viejo de mierda era ese hombre!
Electra. . . . por eso lo odiás tanto. . . . No, tampoco él.] (24–25)

The play ends in a recitation of one of these letters, a mega-epistle, with the four children beginning and ending chorally but alternating voices in the middle:

[E]ach one of us is responsible for all the freedom, for all the solidarity, for all the dignity, for all the justice and for all the love in this world. And we can never renounce this responsibility . . . and no one can do it for us if we want to be free. . . . I'm going to be able to remember all this until the day I die and I'm never, ever going to betray you or myself. . . . The only thing I want to do is grow up, grow up soon, so I can become the human being you taught me to be . . . someone like you, Daddy dear. . . . [(Q)ue cada uno es responsable por toda la libertad, por toda la solidaridad, por toda la dignidad, por toda la justicia y por todo el amor en el mundo. Y que a esta responsabilidad no se puede renunciar . . . y que nadie puede cargarla por nosotros si queremos ser libres. . . . voy a ser capaz de recordar todo esto hasta que me muera y que nunca, nunca voy a traicionarte o traicionarme. . . . Lo único que quiero es crecer, crecer rápido, para convertirme en el ser humano que vos me enseñaste a ser . . . en alguien como vos, Papá querido. . . .] (26)

This epistolary legacy functions as a mirror that the four adults can hold up to their present lives. Once full of promise, they have arrived at middle age without having either followed the father's revolutionary path or created a new one. The play's structure underscores this abdication. By creating an absent protagonist in the father, as one 1981 reviewer noted,⁶³ the four characters present deny themselves leading status in their own play. They have fused their father with his ideals, thus constructing a phallogocentric system⁶⁴ from which the four characters themselves are excluded. In the process, the four deny themselves the possibility of ever becoming subjects of their own histories. Unable to separate the parent from his beliefs, the offspring are unable to internalize these values and experience the self-conversion desired in their letters. Instead, they rely on the idea that "no one is that man" to rationalize the father's poverty and suicide and to justify their own failure to take on any responsibility for "freedom, solidarity, dignity, justice, and love" in the world.

The other absence present is the fifth child, Amanecer, whose purposefully androgynous name suggests hope for the future. Ama-

necer, nevertheless, is missing, quite possibly "disappeared," and with her disappearance, all hope for a tomorrow is gone. Both the past and future may be dead; there remains only the disoriented present, lost, without a functional belief system.

The text gradually displaces the father's past and Amanecer's future by focusing on the present, in the characters of the four children and their words. The final choral reading constitutes an exhortation to the children themselves and, by extension, to the spectator, to remember and retain those youthful ideals, to be self-aware and self-critical, to judge themselves on their own terms alone and not those of an outside entity.

A very different interpretation of the play's ending is given by Miguel Angel Giella (1991b), wherein he sees it as a recapitulation of:

the loss of all identity on the part [of the four characters], the failure of their illusions and hopes that, at the same time, exposes the father's desire that his own frustrations not be reproduced in his descendants as they search for a dreamed-up and unreal authenticity that will never be attained. (68–69)

Giella's negative reading of the choral epistle may have resulted from the 1981 staging, described by one reviewer as "cold" (Paredero/Garayoa 1981, 54). Giella's interpretation, however, seems at odds with the author's intent:

[T]he ending for me is a compendium of . . . the wagers one makes about one's life at the age of sixteen. Remembering them seems to me to be something that not all of us can allow ourselves to do at times. [. . .] This is what many people spend the rest of their lives trying to avoid. And my wager is that it's worth the effort to remember, to compare, [and] to try to resist any comparison with the adolescent dreamer.⁶⁵

De a uno also juxtaposes adolescent ideals to adult despair and loss. The action takes place during a typical family meal on "a long Sunday that lasts for eight years" (58). The initial stage directions, in addition to locating the staged events in the eight-year regime of Proceso Argentina, introduce a series of contrasts that will grow in intensity until the play reaches its final breaking point.

The first contrast is auditory. While the stage is still dark, a frenetic *valsecito criollo* begins, only to be quickly transformed:

From the first time it is indicated, the waltz will become distorted, at times, rising and falling rather like an animal siren, like a scream, very distant and muffled. [. . .] But the effect should be "musical," not human, . . . so that at times, it will

appear that the protagonists hear it and it makes them scream, as if they were trying, without realizing it, to cover up the anguish. Other times, no one will appear to even notice. [Desde la primera vez que se lo indica, el vals se distorsionará, por momentos, subiendo y bajando algo como una sirena animal, como un grito muy lejano o muy ahogado. (. . .) Pero el efecto debe ser "musical", no humano, . . . que a veces, destacará algo en la impresión de que los protagonistas lo oyen y los hará gritar, como si intentaran, sin saberlo muy bien, tapar con angustia. Otras veces, nadie parecerá reparar en ellos.] (57)

While the sounds oscillate between sonority and distortion, the text takes pains not to alter the lighting until the very end, thus reinforcing the sensation that all that is seen and heard pertains to the same dramatic world. The dramatic world presented is a middle-class family preparing for the Sunday meal. Onstage is the huge dining-room table, not unlike an altar and large enough to accommodate standing actors underneath. The written text suggests that a blue cloth cover the table in its entirety, and that the cloth could possibly become stained red by play's end.

Intensity and exaggeration are set in motion from the beginning actions: The mother, beating egg whites, daydreams of an absent possible lover. The grandfather, his back to the audience, reads the newspaper, listens to the radio (thus sharing the "official" news with the family), and says: "The best thing about Sunday is that everyone's at home" [Lo bueno del domingo es que están todos en casa] (58). This statement will be repeated at the play's conclusion, but by then it will have been completely resemanticized. The father, engaged in his morning shaving ritual, speaks of this ceremony as symbolic of civilization, tradition, and respect, all three of which he believes are values missing in contemporary society and in his children. This game of absences and presences is almost immediately extended to include the carefully described "other" dramatic world that exists below the table, when the mother, Julia, sees a movement in the tablecloth. She smooths the cloth and delicately kicks under the table. Observing no further movement, she continues her preparations.

A strange man enters the house and asks about the family's gardener, who has not appeared for work in three days. Aguirre, the interrogator, requests names of people who recommended the man and insinuates that he may return at any moment to check in on the family. Aguirre, as his name suggests, is an angel of death, the only character who can interpenetrate the two worlds: the seen world of a family spending a Sunday together and the hidden, sinister world under the table. His interrogation and insinuations chillingly recall

the military's *patotas*, the task forces of heavily armed men in civilian dress who carried out the abductions of citizens. The never-seen gardener, the romantic poet of Julia's daydreams, presages the fates of more than half the play's characters—real and symbolic disappearances that take place under the blue tablecloth, its color reminiscent of the sky-blue stripes of the national flag.

Julia's brother, Héctor, comes to dinner to announce his imminent self-exile to Europe and is kicked under the table by his brother-in-law. Next, José, the daughter's boyfriend, is sent into hiding under the table while his sister Inés is pushed under, wearing a detainee's hood and missing her blouse. Aguirre comes out and takes Claudio, the idealistic son attempting to help Inés and José, back to his chair as he hums the march played during the 1978 World Cup competition. When the mother of the now-disappeared José and Inés comes asking for support, she is pushed under the table by Julia. The final victim is the family's youngest son, Pablo, whose death during the Malvinas/Falklands War is communicated to the family by the menacing Aguirre.⁶⁶

Although the victims have disappeared under the table, they are still present. Each repeats a key line: Héctor states, "One can't live without witnesses and memory" [No se puede vivir sin testigos y sin memoria]; Inés attempts to reassure herself, "It's lucky that I don't know anything" [Es una suerte que yo no sepa nada]; José asks, "You're seriously interested in my opinion?" [¿En serio le interesa mi opinión?]; and Rita accuses, "Do you really believe that a mother can remain silent?" [¿Vos creés que una madre puede quedarse callada?]. Each represents a different category of *desaparecido*, each rendered invisible by certain Argentines during the Proceso. These citizens sealed themselves hermetically inside their homes, in the same way that the father Daniel tapes up the family house, so as not to see the disappearances going on outside: Héctor, the political exile; Rita, the politicized madre demanding her child's "*aparición con vida*" [(re)appearance alive]; Inés, the innocent detainee and torture victim; José, the younger generation disappeared for voicing an opinion;⁶⁷ and Pablo, the young man sacrificed in the Malvinas/Falklands War.

All the "survivors" have been implicated by play's end. They have actively placed the others under the table, by kicking, pushing, or shoving their victims. Or they passively have allowed these actions to occur: Grandfather turns his back on what is happening as he parrots the newspaper and radio's "official story"; and Gaby, the daughter, imitates her mother's enforced normalcy, baking cakes and forgetting about her disappeared boyfriend. Only the oldest son,

Claudio, continues to question his family's behavior, yet he, too, is implicated for having chosen to stay inside the sealed house instead of following the others under the table.

When the grandfather restates, at play's end, that the best thing about Sundays is having everyone at home, the lights finally change as all the actors freeze in place. The dead as well as the living are immobilized in this tragic family portrait of 1983 Argentina.

Overall, in the earlier plays of 1981 and 1982, the disappeared, if present at all, are silenced, whereas, by Teatro Abierto 1983, they are given a voice and will not go away. By the time of 1983's *De a uno*, the three prematurely aged Furies of Ricardo Halac's 1981 *Lejana tierra prometida* [Faraway Promised Land], who roam the earth in search of their child's body, have openly declared themselves madres of the Plaza de Mayo. Examples of early 1980s silencing abound: Carlos Somigliana's 1982 *Oficial primero* [Official Number One]⁶⁸ buried the stage in corpses in one of the first explicit representations of the desaparecidos, but these corpses were silent witnesses, physical evidence to corroborate the habeas corpus, whose validity the government official so vigorously denied.

Pepo, the servant and popular hero of Aarón Korz's 1982 *De víctimas y victimarios* [On Victims and Victimizers],⁶⁹ is silenced by the all-powerful Señora and forced to express himself in pantomime, until he finally screams in an attempt to save a child from being taken from his servant mother. For these efforts, Pepo is disrobed, beaten, and strangled. When Pepo's murderers realize what they have done, they fall down and are slowly swallowed up by the dining-room table, leaving behind only their audible cries and laments. These moans, too, end abruptly as Pepo's inert body falls from the table.

In Ricardo Monti's 1981 revisionist history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century power struggles and alliances in Argentina, *La cortina de abalorios* [The Beaded Curtain],⁷⁰ the playwright creates, in the character of the *Mozo* [Servant/Waiter], a stand-in for the Argentine populace. The servant is killed by the controlling forces only to resuscitate himself, time and again. When the play ends, the *Mozo* has not recovered from his third death, leaving the spectator to wonder at the permanence of the stasis achieved between the ruling powers.

In 1982's *Prohibido no pisar el césped* [Not Walking on the Grass Prohibited],⁷¹ by Rodolfo Paganini, all discourse is nonsensical, exaggerated, or contradictory, and ultimately rendered hypocritical. The inhabitants of this insane world prevail over the only sane character, Amado (literally, "beloved"), and his logical and therefore rebellious questioning. By play's completion, although Amado has eliminated the enemy by decapitating everyone in his family, he, too, is de-

stroyed. He is left, a fetal corpse, lying helpless on the floor as the family priest absolves him of his sins.

By extension, then, the pessimistic messages contained in these 1981–82 plays suggested that the status quo would prevail, and that the most theater could do at that moment was expose the hypocrisy and abuses of the system. By 1983, however, Teatro Abierto plays such as *De a uno* actively sought to give voices to the silenced. Thus they provided a forum for the disappeared and the silenced even as they raised the issues of individual complicity in and responsibility for their continued silencing in the official arena. In Roberto Mario Cossa and Eugenio Griffero's contributions to the final installations of Teatro Abierto, we can see this dual project of bearing witness to the negative events of recent history and proposing positive counterforces to the repressive sociopolitical structures still at work.

PARADIGMS OF POWER AND POWERFUL COUNTERPARADIGMS:
ROBERTO MARIO COSSA AND EUGENIO GRIFERO'S *GRIS DE AUSENCIA*,
EL TÍO LOCO [THE CRAZY UNCLE], *CRATURA* [CREATURE],
PRÍNCIPE AZUL [PRINCE CHARMING], and *EL VIENTO SE LOS LLEVÓ*
[THEY WERE GONE WITH THE WIND]

The collectively written *El viento se los llevó*⁷² carried on the dual project of exposé and confrontation by situating a cross-section of Buenos Aires society, the inhabitants and employees of an apartment building, in yet another enclosed space, the dwelling's basement. As suggested in the play's title, a reworking of the Spanish title for the film *Gone with the Wind* [*Lo que el viento se llevó*], the worlds of cinematic fiction and dramatic reality meet to create a portrait of nightmarish life under Proceso. The fusion of these worlds depicts the internalization of violence, or, in the words of one reviewer, "how corruption settles itself deep inside each and every person living under a disgraceful regime."⁷³

Various paradigms of violence are set up. The first model of legal, institutionalized prohibition is in place even before the "play" begins and is directed toward the audience: An offstage voice reminds the spectators that they are forbidden to take photographs or make recordings of the performance. The interdictions grow increasingly restrictive and ludicrous, and include bans on crossing the legs, especially the left leg, and coughing. The announcer concludes by repeating in German, "Verboten."

Onstage, the set is an apartment building that abuts upon a reper-

tory movie theater, where 1940s films play constantly. Characters from these movies interact with the apartment residents. Antonio, one of these film characters and *El viento's* moral center, has just escaped a Nazi ambush of his house in 1943 Budapest and is seeking refuge in the basement. He makes continual references to his cinematic realities that change with each film in which he has appeared. In this way, the 1940s European fascist parallel insinuates itself into the Argentine dictatorship.

Antonio has interrupted the young Rosana and Felipe, who have sought refuge in the storage area to make love. Omnipresent violence even intrudes upon their romantic exchange:

Rosana. You kill me so well. Ow, you're killing me! Murderer!
Felipe. Ask me to kill you some more. ASK ME. Ask me.
Rosana. Yes. Please! But first torture me. Like that. Torture me like that. Son of a bitch! You torturing son of a bitch!
 [*Rosana.* Me matás lindo. ¡Ay, cómo me matás! ¡Asesino!
Felipe. Pedime que te mate más. PEDIME. Pedime.
Rosana. Sí. ¡Por favor! Pero antes torturame. Así. Torturame así. ¡Hijo de puta! ¡Torturador hijo de puta!] (1–2)

A new form of violence and intolerance is introduced with the arrival of each new character seeking to wait out the conflict in the basement. Sound effects serve to increase the tension; sirens, machine-gun fire, explosions, screams, and brutal commands are heard throughout the play. Smoke and tear gas invade the basement. Nazi soldiers enter and leave; they speak in German and Spanish, refer to Prague and Buenos Aires, and harass the other characters. But not all the repressors are German: Three priests from the Inquisition are later replaced by collaborators from Franco's Spain. Later, more Nazis are joined by an old man appearing to be near death but whose coughing conceals his true power, which will be revealed at play's end. A body is thrown down the stairs. A foreigner, speaking an unintelligible language, is taken away by the soldiers: "We'll give you a bath, and then you'll go on a trip" [Te damos un baño y te vas de viaje] (24).

Nonetheless, even in this climate of overt domination, the battle lines are not clearly drawn between an outside repressive regime and its victims who find themselves trapped inside the basement. Within the very apartment building, there are many opponents: the homeowners versus the renters, Gentiles versus Jews, the resisters versus the regime's apologists, and those who care for the wounded man versus those who do not want to get involved.

The play reaches its climax when the old man, the Franco collaborator, and the onetime Nazis, now dressed in contemporary civilian clothing, enter the basement to investigate an attempted escape. Forcing the others to leave, the old man demands that the young couple reenact their violent lovemaking so that it can be filmed. The lovers comply, but they now employ a new language of love and desire. The old man angrily calls off the project and sends the couple away.

Two people still remain on stage: the wounded man, now dead, and a grandfather, revealed to be one more infiltrator. As everyone leaves, the dead man stands up and, facing the audience, recites a letter he has written to his mother:

I want to tell you that I'm alive. [. . .] I know that you're reading this letter next to the window. Look out at the river. [. . .] Our sad, bloodstained, brown river. I want to tell you too . . . that I'm afraid, but we have to keep going. [. . .] I'm alive . . . I'm alive, Ma . . . Alive . . . Buenos Aires, September 1st, 1983. [Quiero decirte que estoy vivo. (. . .) Sé que estás leyendo esta carta junto a la ventana. Mirá el río. (. . .) Nuestro triste, ensangrentado río marrón. Quiero decirte también . . . que tengo miedo, pero tenemos que seguir. (. . .) Estoy vivo . . . Estoy vivo, mamá . . . Vivo . . . Buenos Aires, 1 de septiembre de 1983.] (32)

El viento se los llevó contains a theme present in many 1983 Teatro Abierto plays: the unsilencing of the disappeared Argentines and their reinstatement in the Argentinean consciousness. The real focus of the play, however, is the violence itself, the "wind" that swept away so many Argentines. *El viento* reconstructs this storm through a montage of images evoking every stratum of Argentine society as well as a larger Western history and culture. The violence permeates the theater's preplay prohibitions, the war films of the 1940s, and the everyday encounters between lovers. Divisions between reality and fiction, past and present, are erased by the reality of terror and violence. The 1983 production exploited this reality by staging the action throughout the entire theater house, which succeeded in maintaining the spectators in the same state of apprehension as the onstage basement inhabitants.

El viento posits love and tolerance as the only two antidotes to violence. The lovers replace their sadomasochistic dialogue with words of mutual comprehension and desire. Antonio attempts to communicate with the foreigner and learns to accept his son's homosexuality. And it is the play's hero, Antonio, who states repeatedly that the only way out of the inferno is through solidarity.

These conflicting themes of solidarity and solitude have parallels in the authors' 1981 and 1982 contributions to Teatro Abierto.⁷⁴ Cossa wrote, for the first Teatro Abierto festival, *Gris de ausencia*.⁷⁵ *Gris* was an oddity among the other Teatro Abierto plays because of its very personal treatment of exile. Indeed, present in the play are all stages of the exile experience, from the internally exiled, still living in his own country, to the second-generation children of self-exiled parents. As in many of Cossa's plays, the divisive effects of misery, greed, and isolation stand out, just as they do in his 1982 *El tío loco*.⁷⁶ This later play seems caught between Cossa's 1977 neogrotesque *La nona* and the more experimental 1980 *El viejo criado*, a division that is reflected in *El tío loco*'s split structure.

The first half of *El tío loco* deals with a lower middle-class Buenos Aires family, living among the crates and merchandise of their kiosk and working feverishly to stave off their poverty. In the play's second half, when the bohemian tío loco returns after a thirty-year absence, the family achieves a certain catharsis at the uncle's expense. Urging him on to crazier and crazier stunts, they physically propel him to his death. He dies in the arms of his only true friend, a non-Spanish-speaking German, while the other family members continue to stuff themselves with cake.

The members of this family are the true inheritors of the Nona's destructive gluttony. Cossa's *El tío loco* portrays the Argentine lower middle class as a monster created from its having adopted the upper classes' capitalistic mentality. Nevertheless, the possibility of redemption is visible in the friendship between the uncle and the German, in their ability to communicate and care for each other even across linguistic and cultural barriers.

Solidarity is also one theme of Griffero's 1982 contribution to Teatro Abierto, *Príncipe azul*.⁷⁷ Griffero, a practicing psychoanalyst, established himself in the 1970s as a playwright of cruelly humorous monologues (such as the 1977 *Familia se vende* [Family for Sale]). *Príncipe azul* was one of the few 1982 plays unanimously praised, and it was selected, together with Carlos Gorostiza's *El acompañamiento*, Carlos Somigliana's *Oficial Primero*, and Cossa's *Gris de ausencia*, to represent Argentina in the 1983 Caracas Theater Festival.

The text is composed of one dialogue that follows two monologues, each spoken by one of the play's two characters. The two men have come to the beach in order to fulfill a promise to meet again, a commitment made sixty years earlier during a summer romance. Each character, dressed in a white suit whose perfection is marred by a blue stain on the lapel, is escorted onstage by a nude adolescent male. Each verbalizes, in the monologue, his memories

of the adolescent romance, his life afterward, and his expectations for the encounter. Juan is a frustrated actor who now works as a stagehand in a music-hall revue. Gustavo is a criminal judge, married and a grandfather, who has been left hemiplegic from a stroke.

When the two men finally meet again, they are terrified and disappointed. Each treats the other with the formal "you" (*usted*), after having privately addressed him with the familiar *tú* during the individual reveries. Each lies to the other, inventing a past for himself that, coincidentally, parallels the other's career. Only through such distancing are the two men able to speak of personal and shared experiences, and it is only as they say goodbye that each is able to pronounce the other's name.

The various themes of lost love, the eroding effects of time and loneliness, and the hopes carried in one's memory create a very bittersweet play, whose essence is encapsulated in the futile titular search for a "Prince Charming." The text can also be read, however, in a much more political fashion. During the characters' monologues, they speak their thoughts to the sea, directing themselves outward to the audience and thus involving the spectator in their dramatic world. On several occasions, the two men notice that a yellow flag, symbol of an unstable sea, is flying, and this unstable sea is clearly representative of the unstable Argentina inhabited by the 1982 audience. Instability is one element that, in a repressive environment, has caused these two men to deny their sexual orientation and to live out a masquerade. In the play, the two characters' life choices are ridiculed in a carnivalesque exchange of professional roles, as each inadvertently claims the other's career for his own and then proceeds to criticize it.

Griffero has said that what interests him as a playwright are "the structures of the lies that a person invents for himself and for his reality" (Pogoriles 1983). In *Príncipe azul*, the invention of lies takes its toll. Both characters of *Príncipe azul* are physically and psychologically deformed: Gustavo is half-paralyzed, in essence, half dead. Juan occasionally steals, even from his old lover Gustavo.

Counterpoised to this (self)destructive world of mirages is the ideal of individual freedom, again expressed in the utopianism of the play's title and the conclusion's final mutual recognition. *Príncipe azul* champions individual privacy and the importance of love and imagination. The idealism evoked by the blue of the play's title is qualified by the blue splotch on each man's lapel: the utopian dream of love, present in the title's blue Prince Charming, must combat the nationalistic, authoritarian blue of the Argentinean flag and the daily reality of repression.

Griffero's earlier contribution to Teatro Abierto 1981, *Criatura*,⁷⁸ involved a similar struggle, but this time internal: a single split character battling herself. Corralled within a circle of light and roped to a wooden stake by a sheet, this half-bird/half-woman, the harpy-*criatura* of the play's title,⁷⁹ has witnessed the murder of all the other birds, including her own offspring. She desires to fly or walk away from her cage/prison but cannot, limited by both the cage and her fear. The extended monologue ends with the character begging her killers to take her away. She would rather be dead than alone, and she vows that she will be avenged when her bitter flesh destroys her executioner's stomach.

The bird-woman's condition is not only a metaphor for the victims of a carnivorous regime; it also dramatizes how hate can be internalized and violence perpetuated. The bird-woman has seen both human beings and birds kill each other, and, like Medea, she has killed her own children. In the *criatura*'s world, sexual relationships are nothing more than self-serving power transactions.

Criatura's internal struggles would be transformed into interpersonal relations in the 1983 *El viento*. Love, in its varied manifestations, is posited as the only means of surviving the violent storm. It is the dead man's love for his mother that inspires his epistle. It is the young couple's love for each other that motivates their defiance of the old man's orders. And, lastly, it is Antonio's belief in fraternal love that enables him to shake the foreigner's hand and confront the others' prejudices. Different from many earlier Teatro Abierto contributions, 1983 plays such as *El viento* propose a positive counterforce to the repressive sociopolitical structures, structures that these plays locate not only in recent Argentinean events but also within the larger context of Western history.

TEATRO ABIERTO AS A SOCIOTHEATRICAL PHENOMENON

Oswaldo Dragún, in a 1992 conversation, termed Teatro Abierto a "floating island."⁸⁰ The image comes from Eugenio Barba's strategy for artistic creation under negative conditions. When the hegemonic structure will not provide a support system or space, and the artist feels powerless to change this structure, the artist can create for himself or herself a space, an island sufficiently large to continue producing. Barba believes that if enough islands are created, they will eventually begin to connect and in this way form a large land mass. The analogy is apt: Teatro Abierto was born from a need to preserve Argentine theater and the Argentine artist under a hostile

regime, and it was created without a preconceived structure in the face of great economic and ideological resistance. Was it, however, successful in creating the larger land mass?

Evaluations of Teatro Abierto's final years are generally negative. In Osvaldo Quiroga's 1985 overview of Teatro Abierto, the Argentine critic concluded: "Reality changed and Teatro Abierto remained, to a great extent, facing toward the past. It could happen to them what happened to Lot's wife, [who was] turned into a pillar of salt because she looked back." The two Argentine critics Jorge Dubatti and Osvaldo Pellettieri claim that Teatro Abierto's tragic flaw was the overemphasis on confronting political reality at the expense of developing a new aesthetics of theater.

Before I enter into a final assessment of Teatro Abierto's contributions and failures, I'll qualify some of these remarks. As previously noted, most discussions of Teatro Abierto tend to ignore the other theater that was being produced concurrently in Buenos Aires and almost always ignore the "alternative" theater produced within Teatro Abierto itself. Such discussions reduce Argentine theater production to Teatro Abierto,⁸¹ thereby placing Teatro Abierto in an aesthetic straitjacket: Teatro Abierto becomes the sole idealized standard by which all Argentine theater is judged, including Teatro Abierto itself. While it is true that part of Teatro Abierto's demise resulted from its arrested development within a changing country, it's also true that Teatro Abierto was not allowed to grow: attempts at experimentation, such as the 1982 "experimental projects," were not given the press attention that the more overtly sociopolitical "Teatro Abierto"-type plays were awarded. Critics have also preferred to cast Teatro Abierto in the role of progenitor: earlier Proceso plays that attempted to fuse experimentation and tradition have rarely been given credit for their influence on Teatro Abierto.⁸²

The above qualifiers notwithstanding, Teatro Abierto did fall victim to its own binarism, manifested in the opposition of *abierto* [open] to *cerrado* [closed]. The movement was created in response to a very real enemy, the totalitarian regime that seemed bent on censoring and ultimately disappearing its own country's theater. The irony of Teatro Abierto's genesis is that, by defining itself in opposition to this enemy, it merely inverted the roles already in place in the junta's polarized ideology.⁸³ Thus, because "one pole of a binary opposition is dependent for its existence on the symmetry of the antithetical counterpart that defines and guarantees it" (Graziano 1992, 113), when the country returned to democracy and "openness," Teatro Abierto's necessarily closed "Other" was no longer in power. Teatro

Abierto's Other-dependent existence was jeopardized and ultimately lost.

However, Teatro Abierto made genuine attempts to transcend its Self/Other binarism, especially after 1982, as exemplified in the preceding analyses of plays staged during the festivals. Teatro Abierto was a phenomenon of its moment in Argentine history and perhaps a phenomenon that was not necessarily ever meant to become a continuing fixture of the Argentine theater scene. Subsequent events owe their existence in part to Teatro Abierto as a model for communitarian theater, especially the ongoing *Movida* festival that promotes local and Latin American experimental works and 1992's flawed *Voces con la misma sangre* [Voices With the Same Blood], a municipally produced "Teatro Abierto" on an international level, staging plays from Latin America and Spain with all-Argentine casts. Teatro Abierto also attempted to nurture young and lesser-known theater practitioners, and many of those who would become influential in the 1980s and 1990s *teatro joven* [young theater] or *teatro under* [underground theater] participated in its later editions.⁸⁴

* * *

Through nearly annual attempts to reinvent itself, structurally as well as thematically, Teatro Abierto not only attempted to grow but also provided many models of theatermaking worthy of additional study. Some of its plays began to pry open the narrow homological paradigm of the Self/Other (victim/victimizer, friend/enemy, individual/state, etc.) and thus embarked on the arduous process of examining the Self's own role in recent history, evidenced in many of the plays produced after the junta's fall. Nevertheless, Teatro Abierto ultimately wasn't able to transcend its original binarism and thus make the transition from theater under dictatorship to a "redemocratized" theater. And it is precisely in this debate as to whether or not Argentina has indeed left behind its own authoritarian binarisms that another element of Teatro Abierto's demise can be found: an identity confusion, present in other theatrical production of the post-Proceso period, that has resulted in a national crisis continuing to this day.

4

1983–1985: Settling Accounts

Every play is a settling of accounts, an immediate confrontation with society.

—Griselda Gambaro

National elections were held in Argentina on 30 October 1983, following months of organized and spontaneous mass demonstrations, political parties consolidating their platforms, and nearly weekly rumors of another military coup or repeated conflict with Chile over the Beagle Channel. In the presidential race, the Radical candidate Raúl Alfonsín defeated the Peronist Italo Luder with 52 percent of the vote. Alfonsín took office on 10 December, and the date was proclaimed "Democracy Day."

Four days later, Alfonsín ordered the junta leaders to stand trial before a military court, and he established the CONADEP, *Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas* [National Commission on the Disappeared], to ascertain the fate of the desaparecidos. The following September, CONADEP, headed by the writer Ernesto Sabato, published *Nunca más*. In the book, more than 300 clandestine camps and prisons were identified, and 1,300 armed forces members were incriminated. Subsequent public outcry forced the government to move the cases of the junta leaders from the military to a civilian appeals court, after nearly a year of procrastination on the part of the military council. The trials ran from April through December 1985, as the Proceso leaders were accused of kidnapping, torture, and murder.¹ During the proceedings, some 1,000 witnesses testified regarding the 8,960 officially recorded disappearances.

Even as euphoria swept the nation during its return to democracy, Alfonsín's government clashed with the military, trade unions, Peronists, and the *madres*. By early 1985, inflation reached a four-figure annual rate. As the foreign debt rose to \$47 billion, the International Monetary Fund threatened to curtail any new credits.

In 1983, with the return to democracy imminent, theater in Buenos Aires was embarking on its own "redemocratization" project. Many theater luminaries were given positions in the new government: Carlos Gorostiza became the secretary of culture, Pacho O'Donnell was named secretary of the municipality of Buenos Aires, and other playwrights were placed as directors or advisors in the principal theaters. Numerous round-table discussions were organized, polls were taken, and critics and theater practitioners contemplated "a new theater for a new country."²

In a gesture of reconciliation, "official" national and municipal theaters actively sought out plays by authors who had been previously blacklisted from these same theaters. Kive Staiff, director of the Teatro Municipal General San Martín, published extensive interviews with local theater practitioners in the San Martín's *Revista Teatro*. In editorials with titles such as "One Theater, One Country" (1983) and "Democracy and Culture" (1984), Staiff repeatedly pledged his commitment to "disseminating the expressions of the national dramaturgy" (1983, 3). Smaller "off-Corrientes" theaters, such as the Payró and the Olimpia, continued with their Proceso tradition of staging national plays. During these early years of "redemocratization," too, another type of theater established itself, producing experimental works in new theater houses such as FUNDART and Espacios as well as in nontraditional public spaces such as plazas, warehouses, and subways. These new independent theater groups often had to resort to innovative means of funding. One example is the Teatro de la Gorra, named after its financing strategy of passing the hat after each performance.³ And, finally, with the return to democracy also came an opening up of Argentina to the rest of the world: more foreign theater groups visited Argentina, and Argentine theater groups expanded their participation in international festivals.

Optimism aside, the nation's financial problems were reflected in diminishing box-office returns. In 1985, because of a lack of funding, Argentina's National Theater, the Cervantes, managed to generate only one new production. By 1985, too, many theater practitioners were calling for a *Ley del Teatro* [Theater Law] that would create regional theater centers and subsidize existing theaters' projects.⁴ Disenchantment with the new government was growing as, once again, the national crisis was mirrored in the theater's crisis, a crisis both practical and aesthetic.

I believe that two of 1981–85 Teatro Abierto's principal contributions to Argentine theater were the promotion of experimentation with new dramatic structures and the development of individual and collective self-critical voices. These attempts at differentiation and

growth were equally evident in other theater produced during the 1983–85 period as Argentina navigated the transition from dictatorship to democracy.

The need to respond to and analyze immediate Argentine history led to the staging and restaging of plays set in the redemocratizing present, the immediate past of the dictatorship, or in a specific historical or mythical past clearly analogous to the country's current situation.⁵ Many of these texts went beyond their Proceso counterparts' representations of violent repression and its unmasking to take on the project of historical revision, building upon examinations of extant power and mytho-historical structures. They also entered into a self-interrogative analysis of the individual's role within society and discussion of individual and collective responsibility.⁶

This project of processing recent history created a twofold problem. How to address, or narrate, recent events in which one was a participant yet maintain a self-critical distance? In their textual solutions to these issues, the plays of the first years of Argentina's return to democracy display striking similarities, in both their genre choices and their strategies of characterization and structuring. Before turning to the plays themselves, an overview of these genres and strategies is in order.

COMEDY AND TRAGEDY, GENRES OF SYNTHESIS AND RECONCILIATION

Like most "histories," the dramatic worlds created in 1983–85 Argentine plays constitute attempts at making sense of a very real world. Hayden White (1987) has noted that "one can produce an imaginary discourse about real events that may not be less 'true' for being imaginary" (57). In his works on historical representation, White asserts that, similar to a fiction writer, a historian employs certain tropological strategies and modes of emplotment, argumentation, and ideological implication in order to write a history. In the process, the writer of histories creates a "verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse" (1973, ix).

In developing his model, White built upon the four modes of literary emplotment proposed by the critic Northrop Frye: Romance, Tragedy, Comedy, and Satire. The distinguishing characteristics of each mode as it is described in White's 1973 text, *Metahistory*, can be briefly summarized as follows:

1. The romantic mode of emplotment is formist and anarchist in the transcendent and utopian senses.⁷ Romance's preferred

trope is the metaphor; and the romantic history recounts the hero's transcendence of world of experience that leads to his victory and subsequent redemption (1973, 8). In Romance, the remote past of lost innocence is idealized.

2. Tragedy, in White's model, employs a mechanistic argument that seeks justifications or "causal laws that determine outcomes of processes" (1973, 17). Its structure follows that of the Classical Greek tragedy. Tragedy employs metonymical troping, which is reductive (as opposed to the comic mode's integrative synecdoche, which will be discussed) and whose divisive nature is mirrored in the tragic catastrophe. Nevertheless, as White points out, the tragic ending offers the spectator the possibility of catharsis, which has traditionally been regarded as positive and reconciliatory. Reconciliations are a part of the tragic mode of emplotment, but "they are more in the nature of resignations of men to the conditions under which they must labor in the world" (9). Tragedy's ideological implication is radical, described by White to be a desire to "reconstitute society on new bases" (24) by means of cataclysmic transformation.
3. Comedy seeks a happier reconciliation in a "hope for the temporary triumph of man over his world" (9). Its ideological implication is conservative, focused on maintaining a "natural" rhythm. The authority of a group or class is regarded as an eternally valid system of social organization, exemplified in the traditional Comedy's denouements of festive occasions and authority-blessed weddings. Comedy's project is integrative: it attempts to synthesize synecdochic parts into an organic whole, hence an emphasis on re-presentation and re-creation.
4. The final mode of explanation is Satire. With irony as the satirical trope, the standard values are inverted in a negation of the status quo. "Irony tends to dissolve all belief in the possibility of positive political actions" (38), and human beings are seen as ultimately captives of their world rather than as its masters.

Frank Graziano (1992), too, utilizes Frye's archetypal models in his analysis of the military Proceso's mythopoetic project. Graziano classifies the *guerra sucia* [dirty war] as a "lived myth . . . structured on a hybrid literary model consolidating elements of romance and tragedy" (119) and specifies that the junta's narrative was "emplotted as a tragic myth with romantic traits" (119). The Hero-Junta thus saw itself as embarking on a messianic Quest-War to vanquish the Enemy-Subversives. However, according to Graziano, this purge brought with it a peripeteia that transformed Romance into Tragedy

when it became apparent that the remedy was also the disease. The result was pharmakos: "The Junta was the predominant cause of the woes for which it believed itself the solution, and it therefore, like Oedipus, had to be driven from the State before 'health' could be restored" (137).⁸

What remains ambiguous in the quoted discussion is the perspective of historiography, or narrativization; the junta-as-historian's position remains unclear. The military triumvirate perceived its project as a "romance."⁹ However, unlike the traditional tragedy, the junta never recognized its guilt (anagnorisis) nor even acknowledged the possibility of a tragic flaw (hamartia). Its members would first claim legal authority in their 1983 *Documento Final* [Final Document], based on decrees that had been issued earlier by Isabel Perón's government, only later to maintain throughout their trials and sentencings that they were acting for the public good.

Hence, in order to render Graziano's analogy functional, it must be clarified that it was the public that eventually recognized the junta's evil,¹⁰ in contrast to the requisite tragic self-recognition. It was the Argentine populace that called for the purgation of evil so that the community's order could be reestablished. Graziano, in effect, has confused two very different, even "opposed" narratives. And, in the process, he has reiterated those very issues omnipresent in post-Proceso theater: what stories should be told, how should they be told, and who should tell them?

Fredric Jameson (1987), in relating the four modes, Romance, Tragedy, Comedy, and Satire, to A.J. Greimas's "semiotic square," opposes the two optimistic modes of Romance and Comedy to the two pessimistic modes of Tragedy and Satire. The optimistic modes seek the closure of a "happy ending" whereas the pessimistic narratives perpetuate what Jameson calls the "negative crisis" (xix). In another coupling, Jameson notes that both Comedy and Tragedy are attempts at synthesis, hence their use of metonymy and synecdoche, both tropes that unify the whole and its parts.

In the plays produced in Buenos Aires immediately after Argentina's return to democracy, there is a striking absence of Romance and Satire. Especially arresting is the missing ironic element, a longtime stalwart of Argentine theater and of particular importance during the dictatorship, given the pressures created by (self) censorship.¹¹ The few post-Proceso satires or farces staged, all of whose dramatic texts had been written during dictatorship, were box-office failures. Tragedy and Comedy dominated the 1983–85 Buenos Aires theater scene.

DIALOGISTIC SPLITS AND DUPLICATIONS

In an attempt to understand immediate history and the individual's complicity in the country's past and future, post-Proceso theater shifted its thematic focus regarding the relation between the individual and society. Split and doubled characters were utilized to embody internal and external conflicts, and the metadramatic technique of role-playing within the role was employed as a means of portraying individual conformism with and co-optation by a corrupt social order. By opening up the dialogic field, these plays participated in a dismantling critique of what Graziano has called the dictatorship's "fascist" binary discourse.

Anne Ubersfeld (1977), in the final chapter of *Lire le Théâtre* [Reading Theater], claims that every utterance in the theater is a dialogue, and that "even within the monologue, the character's discourse functions as dialogue, implicit or explicit" (281). The French theorist expands on this concept of dialogic heterogeneity to explain Brechtian distancing techniques: "[A] considerable part of the work of Brechtian distancing consists of wresting the character's utterances away from an illusion of monocentrism, in order to demonstrate in them the juxtapositions of utterances from diverse sources" (280). Ubersfeld further suggests that the Brechtian split character, often defined as a dramatization of an inner conflict, is actually a staged "discourse collision" (281).

Thus, for Ubersfeld, to analyze theatrical texts is to tease out the contradictions, to question the dialogue through the dialectics of words and actions, words and ideology, and words and situations. The juxtaposition of utterances, in dialogues as well as monologues, can be itself described, according to Ubersfeld, as a form of dialogism.¹² Dialogism, following Mikhail Bakhtin, consists of fracturing one voice into several¹³ and "assuming a non-coincidence of the character with himself, it calls into question the character's unity and demonstrates, through the discourse, the emergence of historical contradictions that transcend individual psychology" (291). Ubersfeld develops the Bakhtinian concept of dialogism, emphasizing its heterogeneity, as seen particularly in the organizing structures of collage and montage.¹⁴

Ubersfeld's idea of heterogeneity, of multiple discursive levels interacting with and confronting one another, is directly related to the problem of intonation, as explored in V.N. Vološinov's essay, "Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art" (1987). Intonation "establishes a firm link between verbal discourse and the extraverbal context"

(102). Intonation "can be thoroughly understood only when one is in touch with the *assumed* value judgments of the given social group" (102, my emphasis). It is precisely through Ubersfeld's practice of dialogistic juxtaposition that the spectator can comprehend the "extraverbal context" and the ideological "assumed." Dialogistic analysis thus opens up dialogue not only between different epistemes within the dramatic world but also between the dramatic world and the "real" world.¹⁵

The search for dialogism is overtly present in post-Proceso Argentine theater in its representation of a plurality of voices, including those heretofore unheard or underdeveloped. In the process of viewing and reviewing recent Argentine history, post-dictatorship plays evaluated national events, the underlying structures that led to these events, and individual/collective reactions and complicity. Extensive use was made of multiple, simultaneous, or cyclical temporal zones and such cinematic techniques as flashbacks, cross-fades, and montage to juxtapose different moments in the nation's private and shared histories.

This project of heterogeneity also manifested itself at the levels of characterization and dramatic structure. Diana Taylor (1991) has discussed the splitting and doubling mechanisms at work in Griselda Gambaro's earlier 1960s plays. For Taylor, splitting entails a "breaking off" of a part of the individual's personality, or a "one-into-two," with the result that the "deadened part of the personality atrophies, while the dominant looms larger" (100). Conversely, doubling, or "two-in-one," "maintains two, almost separate 'wholes'" (100).¹⁶ In Gambaro's staged conflicts between victimizer and victimized, Taylor maintains, these mechanisms allow the victimizers to play out their brutal theatrical roles without losing their quotidian humanness, just as the same mechanisms simultaneously force the victims into roles that convert them into accomplices of their own destruction.

Taylor's analysis of Gambaro's splitting and doubling in essence subdivides the Brechtian "split character." Walter Sokel (1962) defines this Brechtian Epic technique as a splitting of the self in order to express a conflict "between reason and instinct, prudent self-preservation and romantic self-abandonment" (127). However, the conflict can also be read as a representation of the clash between human instinctive goodness and the harsh cruelties of the outside world (128). As such, the Epic split character comes to embody Brecht's idea of the tragic problem or situation,¹⁷ with what Walter Benjamin (1969) has called Brecht's "untragic hero" lying in contradiction to the Aristotelian tragic individual. As Augusto Boal (1975) points out, the Brechtian character is by his very nature di-

vided. He is both subject and object, "the object of economic or social forces to which he [as subject] responds and in virtue of which he acts" (92).

The Epic character, because of this dual nature as object of surrounding forces and subject of his own actions, occupies a privileged position that allows him both to understand and to act. It also follows that the problematic situation in which the Epic character finds himself can be altered and thus improved. In Brechtian Epic Theater, splitting serves to embody the individual/society conflict as well as to suggest the possibility of transformation both internally, through individual self-criticism, and externally, through a critique of society.¹⁸

Character splitting (or doubling) effects a kind of split in the audience's response, resulting in what the Russian formalists called *ostranenie*. The spectators experience a defamiliarizing jolt that breaks the empathic bond of identification with the character and forces them to step outside and reevaluate what they have just witnessed. It is in this way that, as Benjamin says, they "discover the conditions of life" (150). Split and doubled characters abound in post-Proceso theater as the plays worked to rediscover and critique the conditions of life in redemocratized Argentina.

Another technique employed to jolt Argentine audiences during the early post-Proceso period was the use of metatheatrical structures. In *Drama, Metadrama, and Perception* (1986), Richard Hornby describes five metadramatic types: (1) the play within the play, (2) the ceremony within the play, (3) role-playing within a role, (4) literary and real-life references, and (5) self-reference (32). The first two categories, according to Hornby, are devices for exploring, respectively, existential and social concerns. He draws particular attention to the last three categories as devices employed in Brechtian Epic Theater. Role-playing within a role, whether voluntary or involuntary, explores individual concerns vis-à-vis society and suggests a strong dualism. Literary and real-life references seek to produce a recognition on the part of the spectator and can also serve to separate the actor from the character. The final category, self-reference, foregrounds the performative elements of the text and thus draws attention to the play as a play.

The texts staged during Argentina's return to democracy employed various metatheatrical devices, yet during this period there were few plays-within-plays or ceremonies-within-plays. Instead, the texts emphasized role-playing within the role and real-life reference. By focusing on role-playing and real-world references, post-Proceso theater underscored a preoccupation with the relationship

between the individual and society, an identification of the onstage world with its offstage counterpart, and a desire for sociohistorical documentation.

Through these various structuring modes and devices, the plays of the early post-Proceso years evinced a narrative search for synthesis in either the optimistic comic or pessimistic tragic mode. These texts attempted to settle historical accounts between the individual and society, set against the backdrop of recent and anticipated national events.

In order to show the reader how these various strategies sprang directly from the nation's transition from dictatorship to democracy and from theater's changing role during this period, I begin my discussion with a brief overview of the wildly divergent receptions of three plays written by Gambaro, all of which were staged between 1983 and 1985. A survey of the numerous and varied plays staged during the period is followed by detailed analyses of two texts: *De pies y manos* [Hand and Foot] by Roberto Mario Cossa and *Knepp* by Jorge Goldenberg. I conclude with a study of two productions of Eduardo Pavlovsky's *Telarañas*, a comparison of the 1977 and 1985 stagings that allows me to frame the theater produced during the Proceso and bring my study full circle.

INDICATORS OF NATIONAL TRANSITION:
GRISelda GAMBARO'S THEATER OF "REDEMOCRATIZATION"

The staging and reception of Griselda Gambaro's plays during the first years of redemocratization and their reception exemplify the strategies I have discussed and function as signposts of the national times. *Real envido*,¹⁹ written in 1980–81 but not premiered until 1983, was judged by Gambaro herself to have been "a good failure" (quoted in Giella 1985a, 40). The Teatro Odeón production achieved some notoriety when the theater was closed down for one day after the censor deemed offensive a scene involving four puppets. According to the director, Juan Cosín, the puppets were interpreted as an allusion to the military triumvirate and President Alfonsín. Nevertheless, the production did not suffer the physical attacks delivered upon the highly successful 1982 *La malasangre*, quite possibly because *Real envido*'s negative reception and limited success attracted less attention from the general public. Gambaro attributed *Real envido*'s failure to its inappropriate genre, noting simply that, by 1983, "people didn't need to be spoken to in farce" (40).

A parodic revision of several classic fairy tales, *Real envido* inverts

traditional chivalric values to show the delusive and deceptive, yet self-perpetuating, nature of patriarchal despotism.²⁰ Like many plays of the early 1980s, the text juxtaposes a series of doubles; however, different from other plays of the period, these doubles are employed to carnivalize asymmetrical power relations by inverting the master-servant roles. The play was not well received by critics or spectators, and Gambaro would later return to the tragic mode, following the example of her commercial success of the previous year, *La malasangre*.

Gambaro's 1967 text, *El campo* [The Camp], was restaged at the Teatro Nacional Cervantes in 1984.²¹ Directed by Alberto Ure, the 1984 production was controversial and often at odds with audience expectations for this well-known and respected play. Gambaro described Ure's violently paced *mise en scène* as "aggressive and not romantic at all. . . . It produced bewilderment and distancing for one part of the audience, while for another, smaller, sector, it produced the opposite result: rapprochement and emotion" (quoted in Giella 1985a, 38).

El campo's 1984 set was dominated by a huge open hand that hung suspended over the stage. The hand delineated the playing area while, at the same time, it reinforced the dramatic text's suggestion of an omnipresent control over the onstage actions and even over the large Sala Argentina of the Cervantes Theater itself. These meta-theatrics were further accentuated in the costuming of Emma, the "camp" resident, who is at once the camp director's prisoner and his pawn in attracting new residents. In the 1984 production, the burlap smock suggested in the original dramatic text was replaced by a French maid's costume, and Emma walked on tiptoes as if she were wearing high-heeled pumps. Both costume and mannerisms heightened Emma's role-playing within the camp and added the element of "humiliation of a [certain] class and of a [certain] feminine condition"²² to her already degraded status as victim-victimizer. Martín, the new recruit, and for Gambaro, the play's witness, assumed a less-active role in the 1984 production, turning himself over to the director's men without any struggle. In this staging, *El campo* became Emma's play more than ever as it concentrated on her tragically split condition.

Premiering the same year, Gambaro's *Del sol naciente* [From the Rising Sun],²³ directed by Laura Yusem, was well received by audiences but critically panned. Set in a medieval Japan of shoguns and courtesans but just as easily read as the recent Argentina of the Malvinas/Falklands War,²⁴ *Del sol naciente* centers on the prostitute Suki, the tragic heroine, who, like Dumas's Camille, sacrifices herself for love.

However, unlike the French courtesan, Suki does not die for her lover-warrior but rather courts death when she chooses to comfort an already dead tubercular beggar.²⁵ In the process, she both assumes responsibility for and denounces these senseless deaths.

Augusto Boal's typology of conflicts present in Aristotelian tragedy lists *La Dame aux camélias* as an example of the classification "negative hamartia versus negative social ethos," wherein the protagonist's one virtue enters into conflict with the corrupt social ethos. Similarly, in *Del sol naciente*, the protagonist's reversal of fortune is brought about by her virtuous action from within a corrupt society. Gambaro thus distances herself from the onstage social ethics and "hopes that the spectator will be purified not of the tragic flaw of the hero, but rather of the whole ethos of society" (Boal 1985, 44). In this way, an Argentine parallel can be drawn with Gambaro's portrayal of Oban's warrior society and the proposed substitute ethos embodied in Suki's compassionate solidarity. This indictment of society as corrupt and corrupting became the moral focus of many texts of the period.

Gambaro's plays staged from 1983 to 1985 demonstrate a preoccupation with repression and the role of the individual within both repressive dictatorship and nascent democracy. The plays discussed next serve to further exemplify these thematic concerns and the variety of the modes, comic as well as tragic, in which they were staged during the transitional period of 1983–85.

FROM BINARY OPPOSITION TO OPEN DIALOGISM: AN OVERVIEW OF POST-PROCESO THEATER

A striking number of 1983–85 plays employed dialogistic strategies in order to re-present and reassess recent Argentine history, and they did so primarily through an exploration of the relationship between individual and society. Binary oppositions provide the structure of many of these plays, including several of the period's critical successes. In Vicente Zito Lema's 1984 theatrical text, *Mater*,²⁶ the battle lines are clearly drawn in the phrase "The war is between light and darkness" [La guerra es entre la luz y las tinieblas] (75). Originally conceived as an extended poem written by the author during his exile in Holland, *Mater* is an homage to the Madres of the Plaza de Mayo, for whom Zito Lema worked as a lawyer upon his return to Argentina. The play is staged as an oratory, spoken by the Mother and sung by the Chorus, and its five sections trace the matriarch's search for her lost children: "Annunciation in the Enemy Night," "Ex-

haustion and a Cradle Song," "Prayer," "Blasphemy," and "Waiting and the Waltz of the Rose."

The 1984 staging differed from the written poem in its elimination of the three dialogues between the forces of light/good (Mater) and darkness/evil (the Guardián). In these encounters, Mater confronts the protectors, who according to the text's instructions are to be played by one actor, of the Houses of Death, God, and Power. In each, she is turned away but only after she has asked for her children: "Tell me if they are alive or dead" [Dime si están vivos o muertos] (43). The 1984 production moved away from a direct confrontation between good and evil, centering instead on the stages undergone in a mother's personal journey: searching, hoping, grieving, and finally reconciling herself to her own reality as a madre of desaparecidos:

I'm waiting for them
 I'm not going to stop waiting for them
 because they live on in my waiting
 because, in order for me to believe that they are dead, they will have to
 show me
 their cadavers
 cadavers that I would kiss and bury next to a flower but
 not next to their dreams
 and I would carry them intact inside myself once more
 until the assassin pays his debt
 until [the day that] there is never again another assassin born.
 [yo los espero
 yo no los voy a dejar de esperar
 porque están vivos en mi espera
 porque para creerlos muertos tendrían que mostrarme
 sus cadáveres
 cadáveres que yo besaría y enterraría junto a una flor pero
 no junto a sus sueños
 y yo los llevaría enteros otra vez en mí
 hasta que pague lo suyo el asesino
 hasta que no vuelva a nacer otro asesino.]

(32)

Both poetic and theatrical texts end in an affirmation of the continuity of life (symbolized in the evoked image of the eternal rose), wisdom, justice, and harmony: "for the new and always / the uplifted / fleeting / humble and tall / the ever so fragrant / tenuous very tenuous / eternal rose" [para la nueva y siempre / la erguida / breve / humilde y alta / la tan fragante / tenue muy tenue / eterna rosa] (34).

According to one reviewer (Luis Mazas, writing in *Clarín*, August

1984), the staged version included a self-reflective moment that embraced the recognition that "all of us are a little guilty." In choosing to focus on the mother's experience and acknowledgment of her involvement, the 1984 staging emphasized each Argentinean's need not only to remember recent history but also to come to terms with it. In this way, the performed text transcended the written text's explicit, and static, conflict between good and evil.

Other plays of the period elected to underscore this very opposition, manifested in the figures of the tragic individual versus a hostile society. In 1983, Carlos Somigliana staged what would be his last play, *Lavalle, historia de una estatua* [Lavalle, the (hi)story of a statue],²⁷ positioning the nineteenth-century general of the play's title squarely between the opposing forces of the Provincial Federalists and the Europeanized Unitarians. Lavalle is presented as a man manipulated by both groups during the civil wars that followed Argentina's independence from Spain. This ensuing struggle becomes a variation on the binary model, and both warring constituents are portrayed as equally evil in their willingness to sacrifice the individual, Lavalle, to their large-scale power plays.²⁸

Equinoccio [Equinox],²⁹ by the then still-exiled Mario Diament, was praised for both its construction and staging. The text's two acts, respectively entitled "Day" and "Night," dramatize the power struggle between a severely depressed Guido and the women of his apartment building, who force him to conform to their standards "of traditions, of blood, of history" [de tradiciones, de sangre, de historia] (172). Functioning as a mysterious victim-victimizer is the neighbor Amanda, who, together with the audience, first encounters Guido as he is just about to hang himself in his apartment. By play's end, as Guido's girlfriend, Mariela, points out,³⁰ he is once more on the verge of suicide. This time, instead of taking his life, he sacrifices his individuality to the interests of conformity and fear.

The play's tragic structure pits the individual against a grotesque authoritarian society within the microcosm of an apartment building. The building's commission, composed exclusively of housewives in curlers, predetermines all norms of behavior for the residents. Under the pretense of searching for a murderer, whose victim's limbs are rumored to have been found in the building, these housewives infiltrate both Guido's apartment and his life: they first suspect he is a *descuartizador* [dismemberer], and then they accuse him of being a menace to the well-being of the building because of his "antisocial" intellectual lifestyle. *Equinoccio* exploits all the Proceso clichés to recreate an authoritarian discourse in which the traditional values are

held up as sacred, and anyone who disagrees is automatically guilty of treason.

Equinoccio relies on a characterization device employed by several other plays during Argentina's return to democracy: "animalization." Although *animalización* was not frequently utilized in Proceso plays, the device has long been present in Argentine theater and is clearly an extension of the early twentieth-century grotesco criollo. One of animalización's chief innovators, Osvaldo Dragún, defined the term in an 1979 interview:

I take *grotesco* to mean that which is deformed, and the grotesque in the theater [is] what's deformed in society. What's deformed in a society is what's unnatural about that society. So, the unnatural produces a deformity that, deep down, is nothing more than animalization. It is man projected onto the reality of animals and things. (1981a, 14–15)

The women commissioners, having first paid Guido a neighborly daytime visit, return in the evening of the second act to search his apartment, several of them now converted into "dog-women." According to the stage directions,

Guido opens the door. Matilde and Sofía burst into the room on all fours, barking and growling. They still have curlers in their hair. Behind them Irene appears, holding on to the two women by their long leashes. Irene now wears a belt from which are hanging various cleaning products. [Guido abre la puerta. Matilde y Sofía irrumpen en el cuarto en cuatro patas, ladrando y gruñendo. Aún llevan los rulos en la cabeza. Detrás aparece Irene, llevándolas de dos largas correas. Irene lleva ahora un cinturón del que cuelgan distintos productos de limpieza.] (168)

When the women return for the last time, all have been "animalized," with the exception of the leader, Irene, and her new recruit, Amanda, who then proceeds to denounce Guido. The lights dim as Guido and Mariela are encircled by the dog-women, their fluorescent curlers glowing in the darkness.

Pacho O'Donnell's experimental, impressionistic³¹ dramatic biography of Vincent van Gogh, *Vincent y los cuervos* [Vincent and the Crows], also premiered in 1983.³² Like *Equinoccio*, this play traces the destruction of the individual at the hands of a hostile society. The text, loosely based on Antonin Artaud's *Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society* (1965), presents bourgeois European society as "animalized": all characters unsympathetic to van Gogh's struggle join the multitudinous crows of the title, and the flock ultimately crucifies the painter on his own easel. As one of van Gogh's few supporters in the play, Artaud himself makes periodic appearances to address the audience

directly regarding the tragic case of the artist-madman in an uncomprehending society: "[A]s if all of us weren't, like poor van Gogh, society's suicides!" [(C)omo si no fuésemos todos, igual que el pobre van Gogh, unos suicidados de la sociedad!] (208).

The binary opposition of artist versus society is enriched by the use of *suicidar* as a transitive verb. Here, the victimized artist, a casualty of both society's narrowness and his own presence within that society, is a metaphor for the very condition of internal exile experienced by many artists during the military dictatorship. Vincent rejects his friend Paul Gauguin's offer to abandon Europe, acknowledging that:

you yourself are reality. . . . the only thing one can do with what's real is to surrender to it or combat it. . . . we can't separate from each other, we mustn't, the others will devour us; together, we just might be able to resist. [tú mismo eres la realidad. . . . lo único que se puede hacer con lo real es someterse o combatirlo. . . . no podemos separarnos, no debemos, los demás nos devorarán, juntos quizás podamos resistir.] (197)

In opting to fight from within his own reality, Vincent in effect chooses his own death. The play proposes that only as a confederacy can the "lunatics" withstand the pressures of a society from which they cannot escape.³³

Other social pressures, including those revolving around subjects previously censored during the dictatorship, were dramatized on the post-Proceso Argentine stage. Hebe Serebrisky's *Redes* [Nets] and Juan Carlos Badillo's *En boca cerrada* [A Closed Mouth] confront the repression of homosexuality by the individual as well as society.³⁴ Both plays end in a reconciliation that takes place only after the homosexual characters have openly acknowledged their sexual orientation to their families.³⁵

Redes splits the protagonist into two characters: Leopoldo Primero [the First] is the "good" husband, who gets up and goes to work at a radio station, where he spends his on-air time quoting platitudes from traditional cultural texts such as the *Popul Vuh*, Danish mythology, and the Bible. The "other" Leopoldo, who comes out of the wardrobe mirror just as Leopoldo Primero leaves for work, spends the day at home working on his play.

Leopoldo's sexual orientation is questioned by his wife, jealous of his friendships with young men, as she attempts to entangle him in the web of domesticity she and her dead mother crochet onstage. Leopoldo Segundo [the Second] finally frees himself from this trap when he "sees," through an imaginary wall that divides the two dra-

matic zones, that Leopoldo Primero is about to jump out of his upper-story radio station window. As Leopoldo Segundo clings to his other self, he shouts, "Don't do anything stupid! Quit fucking around! I love you, old guy!" [¡No hagás macanas! ¡Dejate de joder! ¡Te quiero, mi viejo!]. Leopoldo Primero responds, "Me too!" [¡Yo también!] (34). With the two selves now reunited, Leopoldo Primero tells his wife that he is leaving her because "I want to grow up before I die" [quiero dejar de ser un chico antes de morir] (35). As Leopoldo Primero leaves, Leopoldo Segundo reenters the mirror.

En boca cerrada employs cinematic techniques to tell the story of Víctor's reconciliation with his family. The action takes place in late 1975, when Víctor returns home after the death of his disciplinarian father. With the reenactment of scenes from the family's past, but without any set changes to modify the family home, cinematic flashbacks are repeated as new information is added. The content and intonation of these flashbacks change in response to the perspective of the character controlling the scene.

Through these fragments of his family's history, Víctor discovers that their self-silencing has prolonged the violent anger springing from everyone's unspoken insecurities. Only when Víctor tells his mother who he is and how he feels is he finally reconciled with his dead father. The father then leaves the past of the flashbacks and enters his son's present as he reminds Víctor to take his old raincoat with him when he leaves.

The reiteration of dialogue fragments, in re-creations of the same moment from the family's past and the repetition of an old farewell in the present, suggests that familial structures will not change but that our understanding and interpretation of those events can be modified. Aída Bortnik employs a cyclical structure in *Primaveras* [Springtimes] to a similar end. The play, which premiered in 1984,³⁶ assesses the differences and similarities between Bortnik's generation and their parents and offspring. The text depicts generational repetitions and changes over a twenty-five-year period, in three synchronic springtime cuts: (1) 1958: The protagonists of the central generation are approximately twenty years old and committed to the values of "honor, dignity, solidarity, justice";³⁷ (2) 1973: With their children now adolescents, the protagonists are more cautious. May of 1968 has passed, and the country is experiencing the start of a repressive backlash;³⁸ and (3) 1983: In an Argentina on the eve of democracy, they fight over who has lost and won, and who is to blame for the damage inflicted on their country and ideals.

The play ends in reconciliatory festivity, as the couples, finally at peace with their past and each other, dance a waltz. By juxtaposing

different moments in the history of one group of friends and family, Bortnik not only allows for the diachronic documentation of recent history but also for the recognition of one's (changing) role within that history. For her, this re-possession of history is the great opportunity of the 1983 return to democracy:

I believe that for once we have the opportunity to learn that we can't erase the board and start over. This juvenile dream that has attacked so many men, so many societies, that we could erase the past and begin again as if we were beginning from zero, that has finally been denied us. (Morero 1985, 18)

Just as multiple temporal zones are created in many of these 1983–85 plays to re-present the multiple events recently experienced, techniques of doubling and splitting are employed in characterizations that portray not only an internal, "psychological," conflict but also embody the external contradictions revolving around the individual/society relationship. Carlos Gorostiza's 1983 *Papi* [Daddy] propels two childhood friends into a confrontation of doubles to demonstrate that both men have been equally corrupted by a corrupt society.³⁹ In Eduardo Pavlovsky's *El señor Laforgue* [Mr. Laforgue], which premiered that same year, Haiti's "Papa Doc" Duvalier stands in for the Argentine military junta.⁴⁰ The play chronicles the attempted transformation of the torturer-bureaucrat Juan Carlos Open into the weightlifter Laforgue. However, Laforgue cannot erase Open's memories of torture, which manifest themselves in fears and dreams,⁴¹ and, instead of leaving his political life behind, the ex-torturer becomes an opposition leader.

As seen in *Equinoccio* and *Vincent y los cuervos*, some of these splits/doubles dramatized the static divisions between good and evil, with the corrupt, animalized society vanquishing the virtuous, but doomed, individual. Other plays, such as *Redes*, split a single character into two to show internal contradictions resulting from societal expectations and their possible resolution in action. Similarly, Bortnik's *En boca cerrada* has the same character re-play his earlier personas within the family in order to achieve a new "historical" awareness regarding his family and his own role within the familial structure.

A play that reintroduced themes unacceptable to junta-espoused "family values" was Dragún's *Al violador*, completed (and published) in 1981 but not staged until late 1983. In the play, the character re-creates himself, in a manner combining the techniques of Brechtian split character and metadramatic role-playing. The rapist Aldo, in an

effort to escape his pursuers, transforms himself into Alain, a murderer.⁴² In this satirical, and controversial, indictment of enforced conformism, with specific references to Proceso Argentina, a murderer is presented to be a socially acceptable criminal. Murder is a lesser crime because it does not create more murderers, whereas a rapist's very crime engenders new rapists.⁴³ The rapist thus becomes, in Dragún's words,

a threat to the nation. Because the rapist breaks the equilibrium that the inert society is desperate to maintain. . . . So there are two options: incorporate the rapist into this inert society, or destroy the rapist. Incorporating the rapist means forcing him to deny his condition of rapist. In order to do that, he has to become another person. (1981b, 69–70)

This is exactly what Aldo/Alain attempts to do: he changes his name and nationality (from Argentine to French), marries a woman he raped in his earlier incarnation, and attempts to conform to society's standards. He is undone by his own individuality, first when he is exposed as a solitary onanist after having left the socially approved all-male circle to masturbate alone. Later, after murdering several of his would-be accusers and seeking the help of a psychoanalyst, Aldo/Alain reenacts the childhood rapes of his mother and his teacher. He rediscovers his true nature and, returning to his old ways, attacks his own wife.

The text explicitly presents Aldo/Alain as victimized by society, his tragic flaw being his very individualism. In this way, Dragún identifies his character with all those who, because of their individual natures, question unchanging social standards and then, when faced with punishment for nonconformism, attempt to transform themselves into "good citizens." In a 1980 interview, Dragún included in this group of chameleons Argentine authors writing during the dictatorship and noted the extreme consequences for a writer:

[I]n order to change who you are, just as has happened to many of us authors in today's Argentina, sometimes you have to change your name, nothing else. Suddenly, what's been prohibited, what's made someone a violator/rapist, is his own name. . . . Which means that, just as soon as he's incorporated himself into the inert society [by changing his name], he finds that he doesn't stand a chance of communicating with anyone else. (1981b, 70)

Aldo/Alain recognizes that his nature as a rapist dooms him to a life of isolation, whether or not he attempts to conform, and so he chooses to return to his true vocation. He is consequently purged by

society, and his corpse is still hanging from the tree when the play ends. The scapegoat has been transformed into the tree's fruit, the dictatorship's spoils: "Look at what incredible grapes have come from the harvests of '76 to '80" [Mire qué uvas más increíbles han dado las cosechas del 76 al 80] (164).

Most of the plays examined here, when not ending in the reconciliation demanded by the comic form, conclude with the disappearance of the tragic protagonist at the hands of an uncomprehending and hostile society. This destruction of the individual is foretold by the plays' very titles: some center on the power struggle between the two forces (*Vincent y los cuervos* and *Equinoccio*) while other titles remember the tragic hero (*Papi* and *Lavalle, historia de una estatua*). All these plays depict the status quo as corrupt and corrupting. The texts thus distance themselves from the social ethics created in the dramatic world as an onstage stand-in for the Argentine "real" world of the recent dictatorship. They further suggest that, in an inversion of the classical tragic value system, it is the dominant ethos of the society that must be purged and not the individual protagonist's tragic flaw.⁴⁴

THE INTELLECTUAL AS TRAGIC HERO:

DE PIES Y MANOS BY ROBERTO MARIO COSSA

A play that focused on the intellectual as tragic protagonist was Roberto Mario Cossa's 1984 *De pies y manos*,⁴⁵ described by one critic as "a lucid social [X]-ray of our country during the past years."⁴⁶ In interviews, Cossa called attention to *De pies'* gestation during the transition from dictatorship to democracy and its themes of memory and justice (Eines 1986, 46). It is the evasive manipulation of memories, ideals, and ultimately reality that is the target of this indictment of the Argentine middle class and its intellectuals. Like other Cossa plays, *De pies y manos* exposes the middle class's failure and impotence, but, unlike earlier texts, it plays with the very circumstances that inform the middle class's inadequacies. The text transforms them, keeping their circumstances purposely ambiguous, so that by play's end any possibility of cathartic release has been withheld.

Of importance, also, to Cossa's dramaturgy, was the introduction of a new character to embody this failure and resulting powerlessness, the family intellectual.⁴⁷ Like Alsina, the philosophizing poet of 1980's *El viejo criado*, Miguel is exposed as an impotent *poseur*. However, Miguel is also the text's tragic hero, and his condition as both

tragic and heroic was further underscored in the original production's casting of Alfredo Alcón, an Argentine actor whose powerful stage presence is most often associated with classical theater and for whom the role was written.⁴⁸

The spectator was kept off balance from the very beginning of the 1984 production. According to Francisco Javier (1992), Guillermo de la Torre's set design kept the identity of the playing space ambiguous:

[I]t is the interior of a professor's house; nevertheless, the set gives the impression of an open space (Are those tree trunks?) where the furniture gets lost; or a big room with columns—maybe a large library. (48)

In another rerouting of audience expectations and prolongation of suspense, the protagonist does not even appear in the first third of the play. The spectator is instead subjected to a stream of deictical references to Miguel as his girlfriend, mother, best friend, and a visitor struggle for control over Miguel's identity. The three insiders are never identified by name but rather by their relationship to Miguel: Girlfriend, Mother, and Friend. The visitor, who introduces himself to the family as Miguel's former student, has a name, Hernán, but because the only thing we know about him is his name, we are denied any knowledge of Hernán's true relationship to Miguel.

All four characters play various roles, usually the one most closely associated with their "type" but grotesquely cut off from any psychologized individuality. For example, when the play begins, the girlfriend is brushing a wig, which she then puts on, and then she applies false fingernails. On various occasions, during attempts to seduce Miguel, she hands him one or both of her false breasts, and when finished, she puts them back inside her clothes. The mother, as the stage directions explicitly state, also "plays" at, and thus grotesquely distances the spectator from, her role: "[S]he likes to take on all the tics of a traditional mother" [(L)e gusta asumir todos los tics de una madre tradicional] (145). The friend, who is terrifyingly violent to everyone, frequently threatens and attacks Miguel, yet he sees himself as Miguel's only true childhood friend.⁴⁹ Hernán, claiming to be a professional clown, imitates Charlie Chaplin and mockingly impersonates Miguel himself, the very person he professes to admire.

While waiting for Miguel to return from school, the four bicker over details of their shared histories. These attempts at appropriating history, each claiming to know the "true" version of Miguel's life, become a second controlling device employed by the various characters. Their third tool, in addition to role-playing and historiog-

raphy, is a competition of ideologies. Mouthing phrases supposedly taught them by Miguel, each adopts a different ideological stance: Nationalism, Utopian Socialism, Fascism, and Marxism.

In this way, various strategies of control have already been set into motion by the time Miguel appears. He enters, fleeing a *patota belicista* [militarist gang],⁵⁰ and crying, "Long live peace!" [¡Viva la paz!] (163), a phrase he delivers to the family and not to his outside pursuers. Miguel will attempt to maintain this pacifist stance throughout the play, as the other four attempt to disorient and control him by re-making him in their conventional images: the obedient son, the loving fiancé, the loyal friend, and the activist teacher.

As the discussions twist and turn, it becomes obvious that Miguel, who earns his living teaching the lives and words of other people, has no memory of his own experiences. His friend accuses him of having abandoned him once, when they were attacked by another gang, something Miguel does not remember but for which he begs forgiveness; he cannot remember his own father, saying that he was very young when he died; and, when threatened with death by his friend if he does not recall his return after having left the country, he invents a memory, the stage directions removing all doubt as to its falseness:

I remember it as if it had happened to someone else. (He begins a story.) Buenos Aires was a new image . . . like someone arriving at a strange city. They say it's a gray city. . . . And that's not true! If they only knew what gray is like! I remember this fleetingly . . . Colors . . . colors . . . Ochre . . . yellow . . . green . . . (He gets carried away by the rhetoric.) The rain was hitting my face. . . . [Lo recuerdo como si le hubiera pasado a otro. (Inicia un relato.) Buenos Aires era una imagen nueva . . . Como quien llega a una ciudad extraña. Dicen que es una ciudad gris . . . ¡Y no es cierto! ¡Si supieran lo que es el gris! Recuerdo, así fugazmente . . . Colores . . . colores . . . Ocre . . . amarillo . . . verde . . . (Se deja llevar por la retórica.) La lluvia me pegaba en la cara.] (191)

Twice Miguel tries but fails to leave the house. When he realizes that he is powerless to escape, he attempts to save the younger Hernán from the same fate. The true nature of his relationship with Hernán, as mentioned earlier, is left unclear: Is Hernán a former student wanting to join the struggle with his teacher? Is he a homeless man to whom Miguel has offered a place to stay? Or is he someone Miguel propositioned in a bar and who is now insinuating himself into Miguel's personal life? Our uncertainty as to their relationship is still there at the play's climax when Miguel physically separates Hernán from the other three, who, in a counterparty, at first feign indiffer-

ence by returning to their card game and then later appeal to Hernán's emotions by having the mother pretend to faint. Miguel reacts by contradicting his teachings as he tells Hernán: "Don't feel sorry for them. You can save yourself" [No les tengas compasión. Vos te podés salvar] (196). When Hernán throws Miguel's pacifistic ideology back in his face, the professor responds:

That's not true! . . . I showed you a different world. I taught you that the oppressed should not have compassion for their oppressors. I had you mingle with the crowds . . . I saw you wave flags . . . and call out. [¡No es cierto! . . . Yo te revelé un mundo distinto. Yo te enseñé que los oprimidos no deben tener compasión de sus opresores. Yo te mezclé con las multitudes . . . yo te vi agitar banderas . . . y gritar.] (196)

Hernán offers to call out but this time for help "like that other time," whereupon Miguel slaps him, saying he could not do anything for him that time, and seeks refuge in his world of platitudes: "We must construct a world of love" [Tenemos que construir un mundo de amor]. When the practical Hernán asks, "A world of love between whom?" [¿Un mundo de amor entre quiénes?] (196), Miguel finally runs out of words. Hernán insists on an answer, and the friend attacks him. Miguel acts to rescue Hernán, who continues looking to him for an answer to the earlier question. Miguel cannot answer. Finally, Hernán joins the group's card game. As they discuss the necessity of birth control in a world that will soon be overrun by "sons of bitches," Miguel stands alone, engaged in an isolated self-interrogation: "What pain . . . What infinite sorrow . . . (Brief pause.) Where will all my piety lead me?" [Qué dolor . . . Qué pena infinita . . . (Breve pausa.) ¿A dónde iré a parar con esta piedad?] (197). The final stage directions insist, "From here on out, it will be a question that he asks himself every instant of his life" [de aquí en más será una pregunta que se hará a cada instante de su vida] (197).

As an intellectual and a teacher, Miguel is expert at disseminating the liberating theories of others, yet he has no memory of his own past nor is he capable of disengaging himself from his destructive relationships. *De pies y manos* shows the failure of a man to translate theory into practice and thus combine learned knowledge with lived experience. This failure results in an impotence as paralyzing as having been bound hand and foot. Miguel himself has exposed his four antagonists to their diverse ideologies, further implication that he has vacillated even in his intellectual pursuits.

Miguel's tragic flaw is a cowardice that precludes any possibility of action. Nevertheless, unlike the classic tragic hero, Miguel does not

undergo anagnorisis; he still has not recognized his own fear. He thus ends the play in anguish, alienated from himself because he has chosen to continue playing the role of the politically correct intellectual, of the good son, friend, and lover.

De pies y manos dramatizes the risks of role-playing in life: the social expectations and prejudices that imprison the individual, the individual's inability and unwillingness to construct strategies of resistance and social change, and the search for an ideological rationalization for nonaction. Society appropriates ideology and history to perpetuate totalitarianism, and the individual, in turn, adopts an ideological stance in order to feign action without risk or memory.

Given the moment of its 1984 premiere, *De pies y manos* offers an additional warning. Ideological posturing can inhibit personal growth, even under democracy, as Cossa himself (1985) has noted: "External change doesn't mean anything if there is no change inside. . . . Even though we may live in a democratic country, there is a censor in each one of us, a crouching dictator ready to react" (25–26). Cossa, in relegating the intellectual to the role of tragic protagonist unwilling to recognize his own tragic flaw, also refuses to allow any pseudo-intellectual Argentines in his audience the luxury of catharsis. Having witnessed multiple episodes wherein the protagonist is exposed to his own cowardice only to see him refuse to recognize his error and consequently condemn himself to a purgatory of deferred catastrophe, the audience too remains unpurged of this flaw. On the contrary, *De pies y manos* forced Argentine intellectuals to confront a tendency toward hiding behind theory, that is, their own intellectualization of reality. Furthermore, by underscoring the treacheries of selectively remembering and revising history, the play served as a warning to its Argentine spectators to remember the country's entire past and their involvement in it. If they allow others to remember and rewrite the past, they too will be left isolated with an unfocused compassion, surrounded and controlled by enemies both at home and in the streets.

"NATIONAL PACIFICATION" AS COLLECTIVE AMNESIA:
KNEPP BY JORGE GOLDENBERG

Another warning signal to the Argentine middle class was shot off in Jorge Goldenberg's 1983 play, *Knepp*.⁵¹ The play has been described as a murder mystery, "the drama of a woman determined to find out what has happened to her husband,"⁵² where "the ethical necessity of keeping him *alive* inside her goes up against the pressure

of a certain form of common sense and even [against] some nuances of her own feelings."⁵³ *Knepp* is a play about the surviving relatives of the desaparecidos and their dilemma: how to bring to closure the unresolved fates of those who were disappeared and get on with their own lives?

It must be noted, however, that the title character is neither the disappeared husband, Raúl, nor his surviving wife, María Elena. Knepp is the assumed name of a scientist-bureaucrat who "magically" appears one evening in María Elena's bedroom. The woman, terrified, at first thinks the elegantly dressed Knepp is a rapist or a burglar. She then assumes that he has come for her, just as someone came for Raúl, one year earlier. When she telephones the police, a policeman instantly (again "magically") materializes in her room, but he does not "see" Knepp and leaves. María Elena, realizing that she is powerless to control the situation, listens to Knepp's proposal: she will receive a telephone call every Friday from her husband, and she will be allowed to speak to him as long as she does not attempt to discover anything about his life.

Knepp says that the telephone calls are part of a scientific experiment. Yet even as he operates within the parameters of this scientific project, Knepp is more than just a scientist. He interrogates María Elena while filling out various forms and questionnaires, and he tortures her by playing a recording of Raúl's voice only then to inform her that her husband is reading from a script coauthored by Knepp himself. Desperate for any contact with her husband, María Elena agrees to the arrangement.

The next two scenes are built around telephone conversations and the conflicts between María Elena and the two people closest to her. Both her mother and her lover, Luis, find themselves torn between supporting María Elena and ending what they consider to be an unhealthy prolongation of her past. Luis is willing to accept the Friday telephone calls if María Elena will give him the rest of her time. Conversations reveal that Luis and María Elena had been lovers for at least one year before Raúl's disappearance and that María Elena was about to tell her husband when he disappeared. Even more disturbing is María Elena's revelation that she was secretly relieved when Raúl was abducted because it postponed the confrontation. Additionally, during these days, weeks, or months, María Elena has been engaged in another struggle of wills, with Knepp, who has confessed his physical attraction to her.

The fourth and final scene begins with a depressed María Elena. Her mother tries to convince her that she is not responsible for her husband's disappearance nor for any change in her feelings toward

him. Luis appears in her room, announcing that he is moving in with her. Once again, he pressures her to tell Raúl, and she once more agrees but cannot bring herself to do it during the weekly telephone call. She instead engages Raúl in a convoluted retelling of the plot of the film *La Cage aux Folles*. As she hangs up, Luis leaves, taking his things with him.

Knepp enters and plays his final card: Raúl's status as alive or dead was never dependent on either María Elena or Knepp, and the telephone calls neither prove nor disprove his having survived. To demonstrate, Knepp plays a recording of fragments of Raúl's one-sided conversation, suggesting that his phone calls may have been taped a long time ago or they may have been a very good impersonation. He notes further that all of María Elena's questions to Raúl have been left unanswered. When she demands to know the truth of Raúl's status, we finally learn the nature of Knepp's experiment: to observe the wife of a desaparecido in the process of deciding whether her husband is alive or dead.

Knepp offers María Elena a form to sign that will release the cassette into her possession and serve as an admission of Raúl's death, or she can refuse to sign and continue to receive the Friday telephone calls, thus prolonging the illusion that he is still alive. After María Elena twice refuses to sign, Knepp tells her Raúl is dead, to which María Elena responds by demanding to know the details of his death. Knepp, one last time, tries to force her to sign, and she once again refuses, as she prepares to receive the Friday telephone call. Knepp tears the telephone cord from the wall, but, as he and the policeman watch, stunned, the unplugged telephone begins to ring.

The 1983 premiere was met with mixed reviews. The playwright Goldenberg has stated that the production received harsh criticism from several human rights organizations because of its portrayal of the wife of a desaparecido as something less than a long-suffering saint.⁵⁴ One reviewer (Berruti 1983b) criticized Laura Yusem's staging for wavering between the need for an emotional release and the search for equilibrium. I argue that it is precisely this vacillation, essentially a moral splitting of realities between the past and the future, that gives *Knepp* its power. María Elena is caught between the worlds of the future, a country moving toward democracy, and the past, a dictatorship that abducted her husband. If she chooses to deny the past, she not only gives up hope of finding her husband but also abandons the project of finding out what happened, and in the process, she frees Raúl's abductors of any blame. Surrendering the future denies her the possibility of a relationship with Luis and continuing with her post-Raúl and post-Proceso life. The two people

closest to her are also divided, and each opts for one of the two alternatives. Luis leaves María Elena to her search; her Mother stays behind to support her. María Elena jeopardizes her future in her commitment to completing her past. She elects to remain split in the present.

Nevertheless, the play's title foregrounds not the victim but the victimizer. *Knepp* tells the story of a middle-management technocrat who, under an assumed name, uses psychological torture to force a woman into absolving his superiors of any responsibility for the disappearance of her husband. Staged at the very end of the dictatorship just as the military junta was issuing its own self-amnesty law, *La Ley de Pacificación Nacional* [The Law of National Pacification], *Knepp* is a powerful denunciation of a government scurrying to cover its tracks and a murder mystery that is left unresolved. *Knepp's* lack of resolution serves as a cautionary tale to those who would deny the past; and the title centers on the object of resistance, the Knepps who would helpfully assist in putting the past behind us in the interests of "national pacification."

Thus, as the nation made the transition from military dictatorship to tenuous democracy, Argentine theater, too, experienced a shift. Sociopolitical change influenced the creation of theatrical texts that sought synthesis and resolution, evident in the predominance of tragedies and comedies. New voices were heard, and structures were devised to allow for both dialogistic and temporal multiplicity. In an attempt to understand the country's immediate history and the individual's complicity in Argentina's past and future, thematic focus shifted to the relation between the individual and society. Split and doubled characters were utilized to embody internal and external conflicts, and the metadramatic technique of role-playing within the role was employed as a means of portraying individual conformism and co-optation by a corrupt social order. In presenting the dominant social ethos as negative, many texts modified the traditional tragedy by locating the negative flaw in the society instead of the individual. Additionally, by opening up the dialogic field, these plays participated in a dismantling critique of the monological "official" story.

The absence of parody suggests a widespread desire within the theater community for reconciliation, a settling of accounts with the country's immediate historical past. It is only in 1985, with the nation's euphoria receding while its economic problems grew, that satire would make a comeback, evident in the 1985 "repremiere" of Eduardo Pavlovsky's *Telarañas*.

FRAMING PROCESO THEATER:

TWO PRODUCTIONS OF EDUARDO PAVLOVSKY'S *TELARAÑAS*⁵⁵

The aesthetic, and sociopolitical, distance between the 1977 and 1985 stagings of Eduardo Pavlovsky's *Telarañas* affords us the opportunity to measure the transformations that took place in Buenos Aires theater produced during those years. Pavlovsky has characterized the difference between *Telarañas'* two productions as "theoretical," with the 1985 version playing satirical anti-Oedipus to 1977's Freudian tragedy. Indeed, there can be noted a switch in focus: Alberto Ure's 1977 necessarily countercensorial *mise en scène* emphasized the Oedipal trinity of the father, the mother, and the son in a ritualized filicide. On the other hand, in a 1985 redemocratized Argentina already disillusioned with its two-year-old government, Ricardo Bartis set into onstage motion the various forces at work in Argentine society. If, in 1977, *Telarañas* was staged as a brutal family tragedy,⁵⁶ by 1985 it had become a satirical exposé of the totalitarian state.

In 1977, *Telarañas* achieved a certain notoriety through its prohibition by written decree.⁵⁷ The play had gone into rehearsal in 1976, but, because of the playwright's concerns about possible repercussions, the premiere was postponed until the following year, at which time it was scheduled for low-profile performances during the Teatro Payró's noontime experimental theater series.⁵⁸ The play had two performances. When Pavlovsky chose not to respond to the municipal secretary of culture's request that *Telarañas* be voluntarily withdrawn, the text was prohibited by official written decree (Decree 5695 of the Municipality of the City of Buenos Aires) for its distortion of junta-supported traditional "spiritual, moral, and social" values upheld in the institution of the family. The decree,⁵⁹ entering into theater criticism, noted that an attempt had been made to clothe these distortions in symbolic imagery but added that these images were too transparent, that the language was offensive, and that there were structural problems within the text.

From the published text's opening "Overture/Fascist Scene" to the final scene, "He was a hero . . .," we observe the attempted indoctrination of a child by his parents through the following socially codified rituals: the family meal, the father-son boxing matches and trips to soccer games, reminiscences over the family photo album, and a birthday celebration. We also witness other, more overtly sinister, techniques of instruction: The *pibe* [kid] plays roulette *croupier* to his father's compulsive gambler, and he later plays sadistic client to his

mother's masochistic prostitute. These are not, however, the opposed worlds of goodness and evil, for even the seemingly innocent quotidian routines acquire a perverted and perverting aura. In *Telarañas*, the pibe is force-fed a monodiet of mashed potatoes; his father, a supporter of the Lanús soccer club, becomes Hitler, as his son is transformed into a Hitler Youth; and the pibe's birthday party ends in a torture rite: his parents throw wooden balls at his face, which is covered by a black metal mask, and then they masturbate each other to orgasm.

With the central familial trinity established, the outside world intrudes, in the persons of two men who enter the house while the family is eating. Carrying machine guns, Beto and Pepe (their names immediately recognized by anyone familiar with Pavlovsky's *El señor Galíndez* as those of the 1973 play's technocrats of torture) are clearly middlemen in a repressive order. As they set about their expected activity of harassing the family, another inversion (and perversion) of anticipated roles occurs when the father enthusiastically joins in, beating and stabbing his own son with such violence that Beto is compelled to stop him. The transformations continue when the two torturers are drawn into the oneiric world of the family's role-playing, as Beto and Pepe put on women's clothing and examine themselves in the mirror in what the text calls a "fetishist metamorphosis" (153). They then enter into a game of roulette with the father and the pibe while the mother serves sandwiches to everyone. The game is interrupted when Beto receives a message on his walkie-talkie from a certain *señor* (Galíndez?). The two men discard their female drag and return to their roles as torturers, insulting their hosts as they leave.

Over the course of the play's action, the pibe spends more and more time in front of the wardrobe mirror, looking at himself and playing alone. His father becomes increasingly upset with this self-absorption and with what he interprets to be his son's growing femininity. The pibe makes a final, fatal error when his father takes him to a soccer match and, during the incident's re-creation for his mother, the pibe cheers for the opposing side. The pibe has become both more antisocial, by withdrawing into his mirror, and more rebellious, by refusing to eat the potatoes or support his father's soccer team. The parents respond in the next-to-the-last scene ("El Paquete" [The Package]) by giving the pibe his birthday present: a rope with a noose. As the mother reads the instructions, the father suspends the rope from the ceiling. The mother has the pibe climb onto the chair, and in a last desperate attempt at rebellion, the pibe tries to keep his father from putting the noose around his neck. The father eventually succeeds, the two parents pull the chair out from under

the pibe, and his convulsing body bounces around the room, shattering the mirror and all vestiges of his self-created world.

The final scene is the postclimactic creation of the dead son's memory: Beside the hanging corpse is placed the pibe's framed photograph, symbolic of the parents' now-absolute control over their son's image, his mirror having been destroyed. The parents argue over their own culpability and the possibilities of social change. The play ends in a final inversion when the father, contradicting the mother's pessimistic "no," affirms that "sí, el mundo va a cambiar" [yes, the world's going to change] (178). This "yes" itself is transformed into a "no" (by way of a children's "sí-no-sí-no-sí-sí-no" game)—a cynical negation that perhaps masks a subversive affirmation of change.

The written text of *Telarañas* comprises eighteen scenes of varying lengths: some are developed dramatic scenes, others modified variations of previous scenes, and still others silent snapshots. Daniel Altamiranda (1992) has pointed out that, characteristic of many Pavlovsky texts, as a "fragmentary [re]presentation of reality" (32),⁶⁰ these scenes are not given a realistic treatment. Rather, they are scattered about, with only occasional interconnections. Thus the spectator is forced to extrapolate any plot that may be present. The varied structure also serves to accelerate the text's rhythm, creating a tension that is not released until the play's penultimate scene when the pibe is hanged, his swinging body shattering the wardrobe mirror and creating one of the spiderwebs of the play's title.

The 1977 staging was intimately affected by the repressive forces surrounding it. The play's premiere had originally been announced for 1976 but was postponed while Pavlovsky reworked several scenes, in particular the controversial "Invasión" [Invasion] by the two paramilitary agents.⁶¹ The resulting countercensorial 1977 representation of the two torturers as gas meter readers would lead to another inversion three months after the play's opening/closing, when Pavlovsky's office was invaded by men dressed like the two gas meter readers/torturers of the 1977 production: "The people who came in looking for me said they were gas meter readers [like the ones] in the original [production of] *Telarañas*, not the written one, rather the one we tried to sneak by [the censors] in order not to portray torturers."⁶²

Aside from the countercensorial strategies undertaken in order to get the play staged in 1977 Argentina, of interest also are the socio-political and aesthetic differences between the two versions. Ure (who, by 1977, was already well known in Buenos Aires for his direction of, among other plays, Griselda Gambaro's *Sucede lo que pasa* in

1976) is noted for his use of psychodramatic techniques and a theatrical emphasis on perversion and cruelty. Francisco Javier (1992) writes that, in Ure's stagings, "the dramatic situations always stand out with a violent precision" (56).

On the other hand, the 1985 *Telarañas*⁶³ was Bartis's directorial debut, the young director having already proved himself to be a fine actor.⁶⁴ He would appear the following year in Pavlovsky's *Pablo* and continue to work throughout the 1980s and 1990s as an actor and director, staging the immensely popular *Postales argentinas* [Argentine Postcards] in 1988, the controversial 1992 Shakespearean adaptation, *Hamlet, la guerra de los teatros* [Hamlet, the War of the Theaters], and a very free version of Armando Discépolo's *Muñeca* [Doll] in 1994. Bartis has been frequently identified with Buenos Aires's "underground theater" movement,⁶⁵ born during the country's return to democracy and known for its eclectic performance techniques, use of unconventional spaces, and postmodern tendencies. Bartis's productions are typified by the purposeful deformation of the realistic character and the use of parody as a way to, in his words, "overcome naturalism and realism in performance" (Zayas de Lima 1991, 37). In a 1991 interview, he stated, "Irony questions much more than tragedy does" (Seoane 1991, 113).

The playwright Pavlovsky contrasted the directors' approaches in the following manner:

Ure went after the Oedipal psychoanalytical expression, in terms of the mother, the father and the son; [Bartis, on the other hand,] didn't try to dazzle [us] with a triangularization or any really marked conflict regarding incest because [his staging] was a kind of war machine. It was like abrupt comings-together and fallings-apart without there being an individual subject, son, father, mother, but rather there were large-scale desires that these persons intercepted, much more like Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus than Ure's Freudian Oedipus.⁶⁶

In Pavlovsky's description of the evolution of the 1977 Oedipal family tragedy into a 1985 anti-Oedipal social satire, we can also perceive the larger thematic and structural transformations taking place in post-Proceso Buenos Aires theater.

The 1977 production functions as yet another example of family violence as a metaphor for the larger repression of the early Proceso years. Many plays of the period, such as Roberto Mario Cossa's *La nona* and Ricardo Monti's *Visita*, employed the family unit as a microcosmic substitute for the nation. Playful amusements were transformed onstage into a ritualized violence that almost always resulted

in parricide or filicide. *Telarañas* portrays the legitimization of ritualized filicide as the parents destroy the child in the name of family values and, by extension, national and cultural values. According to Pavlovsky's 1976 prologue, the play seeks to "explore, through drama, the violence in family relations in order to make visible the invisible ideological structure underlying every family relation" (125). Ure's confrontational directing style forced family relations to a visceral extreme, and the actors' performances pushed the limits (and obviously, for the military government, exceeded them) of physical, emotional, and verbal savagery. The production exploded family dynamics with such violence and brutality that, in the words of one spectator, "not a plate in the house was left unbroken, not a puppet was left unbeheaded . . . it was a healthy kick to the pit of the spectator's stomach" (Fernández 1988, 162).

In *Telarañas'* relationship of familial triangulation, the pibe is, as Charles Driskell (1982) notes, "the evasive, alienated axis of the dramatic action" (575). Although never explicitly referred to as *hijo* (and portrayed in both productions by adult male actors), the pibe is clearly the child of the other two nameless characters, defined by their functions within the nuclear family: *Madre* and *Padre*. The pibe is constantly manipulated by his parents; not even the words he speaks are his, for he either recites texts given to him by his father or speaks the lines of the characters he portrays in the family role-playing sessions (such as the roulette scenes).

This behavior would appear to be consistent with traditional psychoanalysis's explanation of the father as stand-in for the authority figure. Nonetheless, even in the production of *Telarañas* staged during the Proceso, this asymmetrical relationship of power transcends the usual Freudian explanation. For example, in the initial scene of the play, the pibe follows his father around the room while the mother controls the taped applause and cheers as the two men celebrate a 1932 defeat of Boca Juniors by the father's preferred soccer team, Lanús. As the two march around the room, they are transformed into Adolf Hitler and a Hitler Youth, and their march becomes a goose step. Suddenly, without warning or apparent justification, the father interrupts the celebration and runs the pibe offstage, yelling: "You'll never learn, moron. Get outta here!" [No aprendés nunca, imbécil. Rajá de acá, ¿querés?] (129).

René Girard (1977), in his study of violence and ritual, inverts the Freudian justification and explains what in the scene appears to be a completely irrational act in terms of the model-disciple relationship:

The disciple's position is like that of a worshiper before his god; he imitates the other's desires but is incapable of recognizing any connection

between them and his own desires. In short, the disciple fails to grasp that he can indeed enter into competition with his model and even become a menace to him. (174)

Thus the pibe becomes a victim of a double bind⁶⁷ when he is expected to model himself after the father, only to be punished for doing it too well when he becomes a threat to the father's ego. It is therefore the father's own insecurities that are projected onto the pibe, not any mistake that the pibe has committed. This follows Girard's general critique of Oedipalism, in which he notes that the oracle put the ideas of incest and patricide into the father Laius's head, not Oedipus the son's. Hence, the tragic flaw resides within the parent, who projects it onto the child during the latter's apprenticeship to the parental model.⁶⁸ As a result, the child is sacrificed to purge the parent of his own error. This is exactly the principal inversion undertaken in the written text and in the 1977 production: repositioning the blame onto the parent for having turned the child into a helpless scapegoat, victimized and punished for the parent's sins.

The playwright's program notes for the 1985 post-Proceso production exhibit a modified goal:

Telarañas does not pretend to be a play that speaks about family, nor does it attempt to explore traditional incestuous triangles. . . . Rather, it refers to the decentering of the family at the hands of agents of power. (quoted in Fernández 1985)

Telarañas' family-as-social-entity, its Oedipalization already having been repositioned onto the parent by the 1977 staging, underwent another transformation in the 1985 production when its closed, triangular formation was opened up. In the early 1970s, French theorists Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari proposed an anti-Oedipal project of "schizoanalysis" as a means of moving away from the Western anthropomorphizing tradition of explaining all social events from the perspective of the individual ego. Schizoanalysis deterritorializes and focuses on the flows and forces that create the larger *socius*, or social reality and production.⁶⁹

It is the *socius* that Bartis's staging of *Telarañas* foregrounded when, for example, Beto and Pepe, who were onstage only in the "Invasion" scene of the dramatic text and 1977 staging, remained present throughout the play, observing the family from a special, raised performance area. The two men, now openly dressed as paramilitary agents, commented on the family's actions. The two actors improvised dialogues and experimented with a self-parodic distancing by

speaking and then being frightened by the sound of their own voices. In this way, Bartis returned to the text an element overlooked in the municipal prohibition of the 1977 production for its betrayal of "family values": what the Argentinean theater critic Luis Mazas (1985) termed the "sorry tentacles of power," the institutions present in social production and reproduction (Deleuze/Guattari 1983, 173). The 1985 staging contributed an expanded reading of the play's title. In addition to symbolizing family relations and the child's destruction at the hands of the parent (captured in the final image of the shattered mirror), the *telarañas* extended all the way to the *socius*, thus exposing the network of power relations that control the individual within an authoritarian society. Bartis's staging therefore constituted a critique not only of the earlier military Proceso but also of the continuing presence of repressive structures in redemocratized Argentina.

Additionally, the 1985 production attempted to demonstrate this social network to be operating within the Teatro del Viejo Palermo itself. Bartis stated, at the time of the premiere, that he wanted to express the reality of a younger generation living in a fractured reality ("Otra imagen del presente" 1985). In contrast to the 1977 staging's attempts at confronting, even offending, its public, Bartis's fragmented staging sought to create a certain complicity in a younger, post-Proceso audience. The *chiaroscuro* lighting forced the spectator to enter further into the action. An engaging suspense was attained when the actors executed "phantasmal gestures that had nothing to do with reality, only later to confess what was hurting them inside" (Mazas 1985). The result was an atmosphere at once hypnotic and ominous.

The tragic structure of the 1976 written text was exploded by the 1985 theatrical text, with the addition of distancing, fragmenting, and self-parodying techniques that would become basic elements of Buenos Aires's post-Proceso theater. In 1985, Pavlovsky summed up the shift in focus, away from the individual toward the collective: "[T]he enemy isn't each one of the characters but rather the type of human relations produced within a determined system" (Fontana 1985). In the above comparison of *Telarañas'* two stagings, the changes in Buenos Aires theater from 1977 to 1985 can be clearly noted: after eight years, the 1977 countercensorial, heavily metaphorical theatrical sign could finally be opened up, affording a move away from a totalizing, static, and hermetic triangulation of the nuclear family toward a post-Proceso satirical critique of the movements of, and complicity in, social production and continuing repression.

* * *

Not surprisingly, this return to satire would parallel a re-working of the traditional *sainete*⁷⁰ and the rise of what Osvaldo Pellettieri (1987b) has called the "theater of rupture," often referred to in Buenos Aires as "young theater" or "underground theater." Argentina's continuing problems found themselves mirrored in its theater, in an ongoing state of crisis at once thematic and aesthetic.

Conclusion:

1976–1985:

From a Reactive Theater to a Theater in Crisis

There's been an atomization at the theatrical level, one that has produced a great quantity of monologues, small performances that don't pretend to be works of theater, a certain disdain . . . toward the idea of [even making] a play, the fragmentary has been reclaimed, the instantaneous taken to extremes. . . . There has appeared a concept of theatricality based more on transgression than on the expression of themes per se.

—Ricardo Bartis

During the first years of the Proceso, the junta's nightmarish program of annihilation of all opposition, combined with its economic policy of extreme monetarism, forced the theater to close in on itself and create hermetic worlds that metaphorically alluded to the destruction going on outside. The fact that any nonescapist theater was produced during those early years is a tribute both to Buenos Aires's enduring theater traditions and to those practitioners who were able to create vital productions in a climate of terror. The further fact that many of these plays are now included in the porteño theater canon testifies to the triumph of individual and collective self-expression over state repression.

By 1979, the military regime had effectively destroyed all overt sources of opposition, through the disappearance or forced exile of individuals and through the destruction of perceived adversarial movements, such as labor unions, resistance organizations, and university departments. The country's economy was well into its downward slide toward 1980's near collapse, and with it declined the junta's credibility. Theater was thus able to open up slightly. Playwrights became less reactive as they actively worked to unmask, and therefore address and analyze, their nation's "myths" that had contributed to recent Argentine events. This demythologization would signal theater's first steps toward a later self-critique of the middle-

class intellectual. In the final years of the dictatorship, theatrical texts still exhibited countercensorial strategies, but by foregrounding those strategies themselves, playwrights began to draw attention to their texts' (self)censored status as they adopted a self-critical distancing.

By the early 1980s, many exiled theater practitioners had returned to Argentina, and to their renewed presence was added that of younger and less-known playwrights and directors. This multiplication of voices, in conjunction with the loosening of the (self) censor's grip, contributed to two strong Buenos Aires theater seasons in 1980 and 1981, which were in turn capped by the overwhelming success of Teatro Abierto in 1981. Teatro Abierto was a collective response to continuing repression, a choral demand for and demonstration of theater's potential for survival and self-expression within a "closed" totalitarian regime.

However, this very self-definition in opposition to an "enemy," characteristic of Teatro Abierto's early years (1981 and 1982), contributed to the movement's demise. When the country returned to democracy in 1983, Teatro Abierto was still perceived by others, and apparently still saw itself, as a theater of opposition. With the defining "Other" ostensibly defeated, and despite great efforts to evolve both thematically and aesthetically beyond this previously established binary Self/Other relationship, Teatro Abierto did not survive past 1985. One could argue that it was never intended to do so.

Other theater produced in Buenos Aires during the first years of "redemocratization" (1983–85) echoed Teatro Abierto's search for a post-Proceso identity. These plays attempted to digest recent events and thus examine individual and collective participation in and responsibility for what had happened. Moreover, they exhibited a desire to synthesize, and reconcile, past conflicts. The nation's euphoria at the return to democracy collapsed after these first years. By 1985, the populace was deflated and confused by continuing economic problems and Alfonsín's ongoing concessions to the military. Once again, Argentina's problems were mirrored in its theater, with parody and satire making a comeback in an "atomized," postmodern theater.

This prevalence of ironic humor, conscious character deformation, and such molecularized theater structures as monologues, short pieces, skits, and the use of performance-generated scripts,¹ present even in the reworkings of such conventional genres as the sainete and grotesco, has continued well into the 1990s in Buenos Aires theater. Parodic distancing has predominated, together with an elevation of *transgresión* for its own sake. Theater critics and practitioners

alike speak of a crisis in the Buenos Aires theater today. It is a crisis of content, form, and even ideology. Frustration and pessimism abound, as Alberto Ure noted in a 1992 interview:

I believe we're [living] in a strange time, in which the Argentine way of thinking seems to be melancholy because it hasn't found any answers during the last ten years. And since it hasn't found any [answers], it's become more conservative. (Pacheco 1992a, 10)

In the midst of serious concerns, such as those noted above, and complaints about a diminishing audience, theater in Buenos Aires continues to enjoy a high level of production. Most remarkable among recent developments in porteño theater has been the so-called *teatro de ruptura* [theater of rupture], known also as *teatro joven* [young theater], *teatro underground*, and *nuevo teatro* [new theater].² Born during the euphoria of the nation's return to democracy, its many different theatrical projects reflect the early excitement, the later disenchantment, and the current frustration with the continuing social, political, and economic problems. Groups such as *La Organización Negra* and its offshoot, *De la Guarda*, became known for their physical feats,³ while others such as Alejandro Urdapilleta, Humberto Tortonese, and the deceased Batato Barea have relied on poetry, a physically and verbally violent comedic style, and transvestism for their indictments of social mores.⁴ Younger theater practitioners experiment with hybrid styles and multimedia: mixing puppets and performers (*El periférico de objetos*; Eva Halac); staging neighborhood *murgas* [parades] with actors and local residents (*Catalinas Sur*); combining rock and roll, clown techniques, theater, film, and video games (*Los Macocos*). In recent years, some of the teatro de ruptura's best-known practitioners have achieved national and international recognition, appearing on television programs, in the national and municipal theaters, and performing at international theater festivals.

This has been a theater of unconventional show times (rarely before 1:00 A.M.), unusual venues (nightclubs, abandoned warehouses, streets, subways, cultural centers), and eclectic techniques (clowning, contact improvisation, puppetry, acrobatics, dance, video, and film). Its critics claim that this new theater is a pale imitation of North American and European postmodern performance, seeking to transgress and destroy without proposing any alternatives. Nevertheless, it has been successful at attracting audiences unaccustomed to attending plays. Although still lacking a unifying name—this absence itself is an excellent indication of its "molecularized" nature—the

"new" theater has become an established and, for some, already fossilized element on the local and national theater scenes.

The nation's post-Proceso crisis, from the early euphoria, the later disenchantment, and the current frustration with continuing social, political, and economic problems, has found itself clearly mirrored in the identity confusion and paralysis of the Argentinean stage of the 1980s and '90s, from commercial to experimental theaters. The phenomenon of national authoritarianism remains intact. As a consequence, Buenos Aires theater remains at an impasse: although its practitioners may experiment with new forms, these forms are constructed over a bipolar authoritarian foundation.

Foucault's dilemma holds: How to overcome the tendency to totalize? And in Argentina's case, how to evolve from being a theater of opposition and break the cycle of, to use Diana Taylor's phrase, "damnable iteration"? How to create a committed theater with popular appeal in a country that seeks to deny and evade its present situation and past history, working within a contemporary Western tradition that has transformed unique spontaneous acts into repeated meaningless rites, where there already exists a tradition of rupture, and where neoconservatism has co-opted the expressive means once belonging to those who would question?

Chilean critic Fernando de Toro (1991) has proposed that Argentina's theater resolve this crisis by abandoning its worries about what is "traditional," "modern," or even "Argentinean," and focusing instead "on the theatrical task at hand, investing it with all the knowledge that universal theater culture can contribute" (90). I disagree. This is not a matter of simply joining the "world theater," of actively seeking outside influences, but rather it requires an attempt at what Foucault would call "de-individualization," of leaving behind hierarchies, subdivisions, and false oppositions such as, in Argentine theater's case, Realism versus the Avant-Garde. Hybridization, as Néstor García Canclini describes intercultural and intergeneric heterogeneity, is already here; and it gives Argentine theater and its audience the opportunity to transcend polarized compartmentalizations.

An authoritarian episteme still manifests itself individually and collectively in contemporary Argentine theater and acts to depoliticize and carnivalize. At the same time, there is a resisting action that operates to politicize the theater, through historical and aesthetic revisions, and with a plurality of voices. In post-Proceso theater we see this heterogeneity, a dialogical search for ways to evaluate the country's recent past. Theater's role as critical historian has entered into the debate, together with the problem of how to narrate and

review the country's recent history. During the last years of the dictatorship, Argentine theater undertook the task of examining the power dynamic and the mythohistorical structures that perpetuated it; in early postdictatorship, this project became more self-critical as theater began to digest recent events and look at individual and collective participation in and responsibility for those events. Theater production in the past fifteen years has moved toward a critical distancing in the use of satire and parody. Yet this tendency, too, has a neoconservative face: "underground" theater's recent fascination with transgression for its own sake suggests a return to depoliticized carnivalization.

These two supposedly divergent tendencies—to pluralize or to totalize—have intermixed and have ultimately produced an Argentine theater that does not know what nor how to dramatize, a theater that finds itself in a state of crisis both thematic and aesthetic. The comic playwright, director, and actor Enrique Pinti (1990) has called Argentina "a country of deformed mirrors." One wonders: what mirrors will Buenos Aires theater finally hold up to Argentinean national reality?

Appendix 1:

SELECTED PLAYS STAGED IN BUENOS AIRES (1976–1985)

1976

Argentine plays premiered

- Parra*. Luis Macchi. Teatro Ateneo. Dir. Macchi. Based on the life of Argentine actor Florencio Parravicini.
- Sucede lo que pasa*. Griselda Gambaro. Teatro Popular de Buenos Aires. Dir. Alberto Ure.
- La Gallo y yo*. "Juego teatral" by Carlos Gorostiza. Casa de Castagnino. Dir. José Antonio Gallo. Actress María Rosa Gallo.
- Fifty fifty*. Jorge Goldenberg, based on improvisations with actors. Teatro Eckos. Dir. Goldenberg.
- Una pareja (que es mío y que es tuyo)*. Eduardo Rovner. Teatro Payró. Dir. Manuel Lillo.
- Segundo tiempo*. Ricardo Halac. Teatro Lassalle. Dir. Osvaldo Bonet.
- Juegos a la hora de siesta*. Roma Mahieu. Teatro Eckos. Dir. Julio Ordano.
- Las mil muertes de Matías*. Alfredo Megna. Teatro Grupo de Teatro DAR. Dir. Megna.
- ¡Qué porquería es el glóbulo!* Collective creation based on homonymous book by José María Firpo. Casa de Castagnino. Los Volatineros.
- Gente muy así*. Mauricio Kartun. Teatro de la Cortada. Dir. Armando Coti.
- Arena que la vida se llevó*. Alberto Adellach. Teatro Payró. Dir. Angel Ruggiero.
- El gran deschave*. Sergio de Cecco and Armando Chulak. Dir. Carlos Gandolfo. (Run continued from 1975.)

Stagings (foreign plays) and Restagings (national plays)

STAGINGS

- Un hombre cabal* [A Man for All Seasons]. Robert Bolt. Teatro Municipal General San Martín. Dir. Mariano Volpe.

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- El farsante* [The Rainmaker]. Richard Nash. Teatro El Nacional. Dir. Agustín Alezzo.
- El hombre deshabitado*. Rafael Alberti. Agonistes Teatro del Actor/Los Teatros de San Telmo.
- Viaje de un largo día hacia la noche* [Long Day's Journey into Night]. Eugene O'Neill. Teatro Chacabuco. Dir. Jorge Petraglia.
- Historias risueñas* (two one-act plays). Sean O'Casey. Teatro Planeta. Dir. Luis Cordare.
- Despertar la primavera* [Awakening of Spring]. Frank Wedekind. Grupo de Repertorio/Teatro Olimpia. Dir. Hedy Crilla and Agustín Alezzo.
- Tiempo de vivir* [The Skin of Our Teeth]. Thornton Wilder. Grupo de Repertorio/Teatro Olimpia. Dir. Agustín Alezzo.
- El rapto de Medora*. Lope de Rueda. Teatro Nacional Cervantes. Dir. Juan José Bertolasco.
- Palabras calientes* (texts by Villon and Rabelais, edited by Patricia Esteve). Teatro Popular de la Ciudad. With Walter Santa Ana.
- La reina blanca* [The White Queen]. Joyce Beggar. Teatro Odeón. Dir. Alberto Ure.
- Vidas privadas* [Private Lives]. Noël Coward. Salón de las Américas. Dir. José María Paolantonio. (Run extended into 1977.)

One-Person Shows and Revues

- Gasalla for export* (revue). Antonio Gasalla. Teatro Estrellas.

Note: In 1976 there were two aborted premieres of interest, both because of censorship problems: *Telarañas* [Spiderwebs] by Eduardo Pavlovsky and *Dorrego* by David Viñas. The premiere of *Telarañas* was postponed until 1977; the play was banned after two performances. *Dorrego* had the additional technical problem of a cast of forty-two actors. Both would be staged after the country's return to democracy.

189 plays registered with **ARGENTORES** (includes national plays, children's theater, musical comedy, productions of foreign plays with new translations).

1977

Argentine plays premiered

- ¡Qué porquería es el glóbulo 1977!* Collective creation by Los Volatineros. Casa de Castagnino. Dir. Francisco Javier.
- Visita*. Ricardo Monti. Teatro Payró. Dir. Jaime Kogan.
- María Lamuerte*. Roma Mahieu. Teatro Payró.

- Extraño juguete*. Susana Torres Molina. Teatro Payró. Dir. Oscar Cruz.
- La nona*. Roberto Mario Cossa. Teatro Lassalle. Dir. Carlos Gorostiza. Grupo de Trabajo.
- Telarañas*. Eduardo Pavlovsky. Teatro Payró. Dir. Alberto Ure. (Two performances.)
- Una foto . . . ?* Eduardo Rovner. Teatro Payró. Dir. Mirta Santos.
- Lo frío y lo caliente*. Pachó O'Donnell. Teatro del Centro. Dir. Manuel Iedvabni.
- Familia se vende*. Eugenio Griffero. Teatro Payró.
- Dúo de flauta y batería*. Roberto Perinelli.
- La noche de la basura*. Beto Gianola.
- Casamiento entre vivos y muertos*. Patricio Esteve. Teatro Municipal General San Martín.

Stagings (foreign plays) and Restagings (national plays)

STAGINGS

- El primero* [Leader]. Israel Horovitz. Grupo de Repertorio/Teatro Eckos. Dir. Julio Baccaro. (Run extended into 1978.)
- El proceso* [The Trial]. Franz Kafka. Teatro Estudio IFT. Dir. Raúl Serrano. (Run extended into 1978.)
- Don Juan*. Molière. Teatro Municipal General San Martín. Dir. Omar Grasso.
- La casa de Bernarda Alba*. Federico García Lorca. Teatro Municipal General San Martín. Dir. Alejandra Boero.
- Hamlet*. William Shakespeare. Teatro Nacional Cervantes. Dir. Rodolfo Graziano. Adapt. Emilio Stevanovitch.
- Crónica de adolescentes* [Philadelphia, Here I Come]. Brian Friel. Trans. and dir. Juan Freund. Teatro Molière.
- Equus*. Peter Schaffer. Teatro El Nacional. Dir. Cecilio Madanes.
- Sólo 80* [Harold and Maude]. Colin Higgins. Grupo de Repertorio/Teatro Olimpia. Dir. Agustín Alezzo and Hedy Crilla.

RESTAGINGS

- Mustafá*. Armando Santos Discépolo.
- Narcisa Garay, mujer para llorar*. Juan Carlos Ghiano. Teatro Armando Discépolo.

One-Person Shows and Revues

- Gasalla 77* (revue). Antonio Gasalla, Pinti and Alé.

Visits by the **Comédie Française** and Ladislav Fialka's **Prague Mime Theater**.

224 plays registered with **ARGENTORES**.

1978

Argentine plays premiered

- Vecindades*. Máximo Soto. Teatro Payró. Dir. Laura Yusem.
- La máscara (Una familia, un tiempo)*. Eduardo Rovner. Teatro Payró.
- Encantada de conocerlo*. Oscar Viale. Teatro Regina. Dir. Carlos Gandolfo.
- El gallo azul*. Roberto Perinelli. Teatro Payró.
- El ex-alumno*. Carlos Somigliana. Teatro Lassalle. Dir. Héctor Aure. Grupo de Trabajo.
- Cajamarca*. Claude Demarigny. Dir. Francisco Javier. Grupo Los Volatineros. (Text written by Demarigny, cultural attaché for the French Embassy, but developed in rehearsal by Los Volatineros.)
- Marcelo el mecánico*. Diana Raznovich. Teatro del Globo. Dir. Mario Rolla.
- El destete*. Ricardo Halac. Teatro del Globo. Dir. Alfredo Zemma.
- Los hermanos queridos*. Carlos Gorostiza. Teatro Lassalle. Dir. Gorostiza.
- Esa canción es un pájaro lastimado*. Alberto Adellach. Teatro Payró. Dir. Hernán Aguilar.
- El hambre da para todo*. Mauricio Kartun.

Stagings (foreign plays) and Restagings (national plays)

STAGINGS

- Doña Rosita la soltera*. Federico García Lorca. Teatro Liceo. Dir. Cecilio Madanes.
- Lorenzaccio*. Alfred de Musset. Teatro Blanca Podestá. Dir. Omar Grasso.
- Posdata, tu gato ha muerto* [P.S. Your Cat is Dead]. James Kirkwood. Teatro Ateneo. Dir. Emilio Alfaro.
- Nuestro pueblo* [Our Town]. Thornton Wilder. Grupo de Repertorio/Teatro Olimpia. Dir. Agustín Alezzo.
- Butley*. Simon Gray. Teatro Olimpia. Dir. Agustín Alezzo.
- El desperfecto* [Die Panne]. Friedrich Dürrenmatt. Dir. Roberto Durán.
- El zoo de cristal* [The Glass Menagerie]. Tennessee Williams. Dir. Hugo Urquijo.
- El jardín de los cerézos* [The Cherry Orchard]. Anton Chekhov. Teatro Municipal General San Martín. Dir. Omar Grasso.

- Anna Christie*. Eugene O'Neill. Teatro Municipal General San Martín. Dir. Santángelo.
- El abanico* [The Fan]. Goldoni. Teatro Nacional Cervantes. Dir. Rodolfo Graziano.
- Escorial*. Michel de Ghelderode. Taller de Garibaldi. Dir. Juan Antonio Tríbulo. (One of three Ghelderode plays staged in 1978 in Buenos Aires.)
- Ubú Rey* [Ubu Roi]. Alfred Jarry. Teatro Payró. Dir. Roberto Villanueva.
- La cantante calva* [The Bald Soprano]. Eugène Ionesco. Teatro Payró. Dir. José Luis Thenon.

RESTAGINGS/ADAPTATIONS

- Martín Fierro*. Adapt. of José Hernández text. Teatro Nacional Cervantes. Dir. Rodolfo Graziano.
- Réquiem para un viernes a la noche*. Germán Rozenmacher. Grupo de Trabajo/Teatro Van Riel. Dir. Héctor Aure.
- El reñidero*. Sergio De Cecco. Teatro Municipal General San Martín.

One-Person Shows and Revues

- El emperador Gynt*. Based on Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*. Dirs. Héctor Bidonde and Oscar Cruz. One-man performance with Franklin Caicedo.

Visits by **Hosho School's Noh Theater**, the **Oxford Company**, and **Frankie Kein** (impersonating Liza Minelli—ran many months first in the Margarita Xirgu, moving later to El Nacional). Carlos Mathus's *La lección de anatomía* [The Anatomy Lesson] celebrates five years (and will go on to become Buenos Aires's longest-running show).

322 plays registered with ARGENTORES.

1979

Argentine plays premiered

- Convivencia*. Oscar Viale. Teatro Regina. Dir. Roberto Durán.
- No hay que llorar*. Roberto Mario Cossa. Auditorio Buenos Aires. Dir. Héctor Aure. Grupo de Trabajo.
- La luna en la taza*. Beatriz Mosquera. Teatro del Centro. Dir. Luis Rossini.
- El invitado*. Mario Diamant. Teatro Eckos. Dir. Víctor Mayol.
- Ultimo set*. Eduardo Kerman.
- Miembro del jurado*. Roberto Perinelli. Teatro Payró.
- Gotán*. Julio Tahier.

- Frank Brown*. Alfredo Zemma and Roberto Torres.
- ¡Hola, Fontañarrosa!* Collective creation by Los Volatineros. Based on texts/cartoons by eponymous author. Dir. Francisco Javier.
- Ciudad en fuga*. Alicia Muñoz.
- Cosméticos*. Bernardo Carey. Teatro Payró.
- ¿Qué quiere decir siempre?* Diego Mileo.

Stagings (foreign plays) and Restagings (national plays)

STAGINGS

- Caja de sombras* [The Shadow Box]. Michael Christopher.
- Los emigrados* [The Emigrants]. Slawomir Mrozek. Los Altos de San Telmo (with Carlos Carella, who won, and rejected, 1979 Molière prize). Dir. Héctor Tealdi. (Restaged with same cast in 1981.)
- Edipo Rey* [Oedipus Rex]. Sophocles. Teatro Nacional Cervantes.
- El alcalde de Zalamea*. Lope de Vega. Teatro Municipal General San Martín.
- Papá* [Da]. Hugh Leonard. Dir. Emilio Alfaro.
- 1519 Originario*. Texts by Carlos Fuentes and chronicles of the Conquest. Dir. Víctor Mayol.
- Drácula*. Bram Stoker. Restaging of New York production.
- El príncipe idiota* [The Idiot]. Dostoyevsky. Dir. Inda Ledesma.
- Julio César* [Julius Caesar]. William Shakespeare. Dir. Jaime Kogan. Teatro Payró.

One-Person Shows and Revues

- Cipe Lincovsky como Isadora*. Dir. José María Paolantonio. One-woman show with Cipe Lincovsky.
- ¿Y por casa cómo andamos?* Paco Hase/Alain Nugar (or Nugar—anagram for Osvaldo Dragún). One-woman show with Mabel Manzotti. Dir. Carlos Gandolfo.
- Revue with Antonio Gasalla. Gasalla and Enrique Pinti. Teatro Maipo.

278 plays registered with ARGENTORES.

1980

Argentine plays premiered

- Llegó el plomero*. Sergio de Cecco. Teatro Regina. Dir. Agustín Alezzo.

- Marathón*. Ricardo Monti. Equipo del Teatro Payró in Los Teatros de San Telmo. Dir. Jaime Kogan.
- La gripe*. Eugenio Griffero. Teatro Municipal General San Martín. Dir. Luis Agustoni.
- Un trabajo fabuloso*. Ricardo Halac. Teatro Lassalle. Dir. Inda Ledesma.
- Perdóneme, pero estoy muy nervioso*. Eduardo Kerman. Sala La Cebolla. Dir. José Bove.
- Chau Misterix*. Mauricio Kartun. Teatro Auditorio Buenos Aires. Dir. Carlos Catalano.
- El viejo criado*. Roberto Mario Cossa. Teatro Payró. Dir. Cossa.

Stagings (foreign plays) and Restagings (national plays)

STAGINGS

- Al fin y al cabo es mi vida* [Whose Life is it Anyway?]. Bryan Clark. Teatro Ateneo. Dir. Agustín Alezzo.
- Boda blanca* [White Wedding]. Tadeusz Rozewicz. Trans. Rubén DiPietro. Dir. Laura Yusem.
- Hamlet*. William Shakespeare. Adapt. Luis Gregorich. Teatro Municipal General San Martín. Dir. Omar Grasso. With Alfredo Alcón and Graciela Araujo.
- Fando y Lis*. Fernando Arrabal. Los Teatros de San Telmo. Dir. David Amitín. (Run extended into 1981.)
- Lisistrata* (*La rebelión de las mujeres*) [Lysistrata]. Euripidés. Adapt. Patricio Esteve. Los Teatros de San Telmo. Dir. Villanueva Cosse.
- La Celestina*. Fernando de Rojas. "Versión libre" by Enrique Dacal. Teatro Popular de la Ciudad.
- Historia del zoo* [Zoo Story]. Edward Albee.

RESTAGINGS

- El conventillo de La Paloma*. Alberto Vacarezza. Teatro Nacional Cervantes. Dir. Rodolfo Graziano.
- Los siete locos*. Roberto Arlt. Adapt. Carlos Antón, Rubens W. Correa, Pedro Espinosa. Teatro del Picadero. Dir. Correa. Grupo Acto.
- Nuestro teatro de siempre* (selection of scenes from various Argentine plays). Teatro Nacional Cervantes.

One-Person Shows, Musicals, and Revues

- Maipo made in Gasalla* (revue). Antonio Gasalla. Teatro Maipo.
- El imaginario* (children's theater). Hugo Midón.

- Homenaje*. With Pepe Soriano.
- Del rey a la Reina del Plata* (musical comedy). Carlos Perciavalle.
- Están tocando nuestra canción* [They're Playing Our Song] (musical comedy). Adapt. Oscar Cruz and Eugenio Zanetti.
- A Chorus Line* (musical drama).
- Siete veces Eva* (one-woman show). Adapt. and dir. Beatriz Seibel.
- Bésame . . . público* (one-woman show). With Edda Díaz.

293 plays registered with ARGENTORES.

1981

Argentine plays premiered

- El mundo está meshigue* ("sainete judío"). Agustín Cuzzani. Teatro Ateneo. Dir. Villanueva Cosse.
- Tute cabrero*. Roberto Mario Cossa. Los Teatros de San Telmo. Dir. Raúl Serrano.
- Cámara lenta*. Eduardo Pavlovsky. Teatro Olimpia. Dir. Laura Yusem.
- Cena de bachilleres*. Jorge Grasso. Sala del Claustro (Manzana de las Luces). Dir. Sara Vitali.
- Trilogía* (*Los días* and *¿Y fue?* by María Cristina Verrier; *Somos Pájaros* by Andrés Balla). Teatro de la Sociedad Hebraica. Dir. María de las Nieves Burotto.
- Chocó lo cinco, chocá*. Oscar Núñez. Teatro Popular de la Ciudad. Dir. Núñez.
- Teatro Abierto*. (See listing that follows.)

July–
September

- Ultimo premio*. Eduardo Rovner. Teatro Payró. Dir. Néstor Romero.
- Domesticados*. Aída Bortnik. Teatro Astral. Dir. Luis Agustoni.
- La roña*. María Cristina Verrier. Teatro Margarita Xirgu. Dir. Verrier.
- . . . *y a otra cosa mariposa*. Susana Torres Molina. Teatro Planeta. Dir. Torres Molina.
- Don Elías Campeón*. Hebe Serebrisky. Teatro Municipal General San Martín. Dir. Salvador Santángelo.
- Buena presencia*. Víctor Winer. Teatro Payró. Dir. Héctor Kohan.
- Paternoster*. Jacobo Langsner. Teatro Payró. Dir. Agustín Alezzo.
- El visitante extraordinario*. Eugenio Griffero. Teatro Municipal General San Martín.

Teatro Abierto—1981 Cycle

- Note:** Performances of all plays took place in the Teatro del Picadero, later moving to the Teatro Tabarís.
- Monday**
 -*Lejana tierra prometida*. Ricardo Halac. Dir. Omar Grasso.
 -*Coronación*. Roberto Perinelli. Dir. Julio Ordano.
 -*La cortina de abalorios*. Ricardo Monti. Dir. Juan Cosín.
- Tuesday**
 -*Decir sí*. Griselda Gambaro. Dir. Jorge Petraglia.
 -*El que me toca es un chancho*. Alberto Drago. Dir. José Bove.
 -*El nuevo mundo*. Carlos Somigliana. Dir. Raúl Serrano.
- Wednesday**
 -*Criatura*. Eugenio Griffero. Dir. Jorge Hacker.
 -*Tercero incluido*. Eduardo Pavlovsky. Dir. Julio Tahier.
 -*Gris de ausencia*. Roberto Mario Cossa. Dir. Carlos Gandolfo.
- Thursday**
 -*El 16 de octubre*. Elio Gallipoli. Dir. Alberto Ure.
 -*Desconcierto*. Diana Raznovich. Dir. Hugo Urquijo.
 -*Espacio abierto* (readings of texts by Argentine authors).
- Friday**
 -*Chau, rubia*. Víctor Pronzatto. Dir. Francisco Javier. With Los Volatineros.
 -*La oca*. Carlos Pais. Dir. Osvaldo Bonet.
 -*El acompañamiento*. Carlos Gorostiza. Dir. Alfredo Zemba.
- Saturday**
 -*Lobo . . . ¿estás?* Pacho O'Donnell. Dir. Rubens Correa.
 -*Papá querido*. Aída Bortnik. Dir. Luis Agustoni.
 -*For export*. Patricio Esteve. Dir. Carlos Catalano.
- Sunday**
 -*Mi obelisco y yo*. Osvaldo Dragún. Dir. Enrique Laportilla.
 -*Cositas mías*. Jorge García Alonso. Dir. Villanueva Cosse.
 -*Trabajo pesado*. Máximo Soto. Dir. Antonio Mónaco.

Stagings (foreign plays) and Restagings (national plays)

STAGINGS

- El cruce sobre el Niágara*. Alonso Alegría. Teatro Olimpia. Dir. Omar Grasso.
 -*La buena persona de Sechuan* [The Good Person of Szechwan]. Bertolt Brecht. Trans. Lucio Costa. Teatro IFT. Dir. Miguel Cardella and Horacio Medrano.
 -*La boda* [The Wedding]. Bertolt Brecht. Teatro del Centro. Dir. Luis Rossini.
 -*Madre Adán* [Mother Adam]. Charles Dyer. Trans. and adapt. Augusto Rave. Teatro Altos de San Telmo. Dir. Juan Freund.
 -*La señorita de Tacna*. Mario Vargas Llosa. Teatro Blanca Podestá. Dir. Emilio Alfaro. With Norma Aleandro.
 -*Sarah Bernhardt*. John Murrell. Teatro Liceo. Dir. Mario Morgan. With Cipe Lincovsky.
 -*Bodas de sangre*. Federico García Lorca. Taller de Garibaldi.

- Cándido* [Candide]. Voltaire. Adapt. Bernardo Carey and Mario Baizan. Los Teatros de San Telmo.
 -*Emily* (*La bella de Amherst*) [The Belle of Amherst]. William Luce. Trans. Federico González del Pino and Fernando Maslloréns. Teatro Regina. Dir. Alejandra Boero. With China Zorrilla.
 -*Atendiendo al señor Sloane* [Entertaining Mr. Sloane]. Joe Orton. Trans. Roberto Scheuer. Teatro Payró. Dir. José Santiso.
 -*Bent*. Martin Sherman. Adapt. Julio Ordano. Teatro Gran Corrientes. Dir. Ordano. With Gerardo Romano and Juan Leyrado.
 -*Travesties*. Tom Stoppard. Adapt. Manuel Gómez Ortiz. Taller de Garibaldi. Dir. Julio Piquer.
 -*Capítulo segundo* [Chapter Two]. Neil Simon. Dir. Hugo Urquijo.
 -*Opera del malandra*. Chico Buarque. Teatro Bambalinas.
 -*Hay que salvar a los delfines*. Santiago Moncada. Adapt. María E. Gorostiza and Cecilio Madanes. Teatro Blanca Podestá. Dir. Madanes.

RESTAGINGS

- Las paredes*. Griselda Gambaro. Teatro de la Piedad. Dir. Elio Gallipoli.
 -*La noche de la basura*. Beto Gianola. Teatro Armando Discépolo. Dir. Gianola.
 -*¡Hola, Fontanarrosa!* Collective creation of Los Volatineros. Teatro Planeta. Dir. Francisco Javier.
 -*Encantada de conocerlo* (revised by author). Oscar Viale. Teatro Lassalle. Dir. Héctor Aure.

One-Person Shows, Musicals, and Revues

- El hombre de la Mancha* [Man of La Mancha] (musical drama). Dale Wasserman/Mitch Leigh. Trans. Saúl Alejandro Romay. Teatro El Nacional. Dir. José María Langlais.
 -*Amor sin barreras* [West Side Story] (musical drama). Arthur Laurents, Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim. Teatro Presidente Alvear.
 -*Rosaluz* (musical comedy). Zulema Alcayaga. Teatro Astral. Dir. Agustín Alezzo.
 -*La revista de las super estrellas* (revue). Teatro Metropolitan. Dir. Hugo Sofovich.

Visits from Russian Group **Maxim Gorki Theatre** and the **English Teaching Theatre** (Teatro Municipal General San Martín). First year of Award "Pe-

pino el 88" (named after character made famous by Argentine actor-director José Juan Podestá), sponsored by the secretary of state of national culture. The director Roberto Durán dies (4 March). The Teatro del Picadero is destroyed in a fire in September.

349 plays registered with ARGENTORES (Note: None of Teatro Abierto 1981's twenty-one plays appears in ARGENTORES's 1981 registry.)

1982

Argentine plays premiered

-*Matar el tiempo*. Carlos Gorostiza. Teatro Regina. Dir. Omar Grasso.

-*Al perdedor*. Osvaldo Dragún. Teatro IFT. Dir. José Bove.

-*Ya nadie recuerda a Frederic Chopin*. Roberto Cossa. Teatro Planeta. Dir. Rubens Correa.

-*La malasangre*. Griselda Gambaro. Teatro Olimpia. Dir. Laura Yusem.

October–
November Teatro Abierto. (See listing that follows.)

-*Líderes*. Alfredo Zemma. Teatro Bambalinas. Dir. Zemma.

-*Off Corrientes*. Juan José Campanella and Fernando Castets. Teatro Popular de la Ciudad. Dir. Julio Ordano.

-*Yrigoyen*. César Tiempo and Ulises Petit de Murat. Teatro Liceo. Dir. Julio Piquer.

-*El fondo*. Germán González Arquati. Pequeño Teatro. Dir. Malena Lasala.

-*Simón Brumelstein, el caballero de Indias*. Germán Rozenmacher (posthumous, written 12 years earlier). Dir. Omar Grasso. With Luis Brandoni.

-*Elvira*. Julio Mauricio. La Comedia Nacional in Teatro Nacional Cervantes. With Perla Santalla.

-*Periferia*. Oscar Viale. Teatro Municipal General San Martín.

-*El enganche*. Julio Mauricio. Dir. José María Paolantonio.

Teatro Abierto—1982 Cycle

In the Teatro Margarita Xirgu (opening 7 October):

Thursday -*La cuerda floja*. Roberto Ibáñez. Dir. Horacio Medrano.

-*Príncipe azul*. Eugenio Griffiero. Dir. Omar Grasso.

Friday -*Arrabal amargo*. Jorge Boccanera. Dir. José Bove.

-*El tío loco*. Roberto Mario Cossa. Dir. Laura Yusem.

Saturday -*Un tal Macbeth*. Jesús Berenguer. Dir. Lorenzo Quinteros.

-*Un amor esdrújulo*. María Segovia. Dir. Julio Tahier.

-*El malevaje extrañado*. Oscar Quiroga. Dir. Sergio Renán.

Sunday -*Los jueves de la Plaza Mayor*. Carlos Acosta. Dir. Víctor Bruno.

- Monday -*Hasta que hagamos el sol*. Gustavo Masó. Dir. Luis Rossini.
-*La casita de los viejos*. Mauricio Kartun. Dir. Agustín Alezzo.
-*Reíte Carlitos*. Carlos Antón. Dir. Conrado Ramonet.
- Tuesday -*Prohibido no pisar el césped*. Rodolfo Paganini. Dir. Juan Cosín.
-*Ana y las langostas*. Alicia Dolinsky. Dir. Víctor Mayol.
-*El bombero, o Hay que apagar el fuego*. Carlos Gorostiza. Dir. Héctor Tealdi.
- Wednesday -*Varón V*. Elio Gallipoli. Dir. Alberto Ure.
-*El tendadero o los trapos al sol*. Pedro Costa. Dir. Carlos Thiel.

In the Teatro Odeón (opening 14 October):

Thursday -*País cerrado*. Estela Dos Santos. Dir. Julio Ordano.

-*Sobremesa*. Orlando Leo. Dir. Luis Agustoni.

Friday -*Solo, muy solo*. Alejandro Briner. Dir. Antonio Rodríguez de Anca.

-*Por la libertad*. Adolfo Casablanca. Dir. Néstor Romero.

Saturday -*Seis ratones ciegos*. Carlos Serrano. Dir. Osvaldo Bonet. (Delayed opening.)

-*Una historia que cuentan*. Antonio Planchart. Dir. Manuel Iedvabni.

-*Oficial Primero*. Carlos Somigliana. Dir. Beatriz Matar.

Sunday -*De víctimas y victimarios*. Aarón Korz. Dir. José María Paolantonio.

-*Levia*. Andrés Bazzalo. Dir. Enrique Laportilla.

-*El corso*. Manuel Cruz. Dir. Julio Baccaro.

Monday -*Chorro de caño*. Gerardo Taratuto. Dir. Jorge Hacker.

-*Al vencedor*. Osvaldo Dragún. Dir. Jaime Kogan.

Tuesday -*Despedida en el lugar*. Beatriz Mosquera. Dir. José Santiso.

-*El examen cívico*. Franco Franchi. Dir. Alfredo Zemma.

-*Viejas fotos*. Néstor Sabatini. Dir. Roberto Castro. (Delayed opening.)

Wednesday -*Paredes altas, paredes grises*. Alberto Borla. Dir. Yirair Mossian. (Delayed opening.)

-*Bar La Costumbre*. Carlos Pais. Dir. Rubens Correa.

Sección experimental (Teatro Margarita Xirgu):

Thursday -*Experiencia*. Gustavo Kortsartz.

-*Las paredes*. Griselda Gambaro. Dir. Héctor Posetto.

Friday -*Kermese de máscaras*.

-*El barco (teatro fantástico)*. Silvia Vladimivsky.

Saturday -*Apuntes sobre la forma*. Dir. Carlos Veiga.

-*El jorobadito*. Adapt. of text by Roberto Arlt. Grupo de la Provincia de Santa Fe. Dir. Jorge Ricci.

-*Cantata*. Víctor Proncet and Chico Novarro.

Sunday -*Principio de incertidumbre*. Malena Marechal.

-*Vereda sucia*. Diego Velazco. Dir. Juan Carlos Rosetti.

- Monday
 -*La medium*. Jorge Roca.
 -*Espectáculo*. Bernardo Carey.
 -*La tigre*. *El desalojo*. Based on Florencio Sánchez text. Dir. Hugo Viviani.
- Tuesday
 -*El otoño y la primavera*. Lilia Moglia.
 -*Génesis*. Víctor Ríos Mendoza.
- Wednesday
 -Performance by the Taller de Mimo Grupal.
 -*Ese circo*. Víctor Ríos Mendoza.
 -*El jorobadito*. Adapt. of text by Roberto Arlt. Dir. Oreste Lattaro.

Stagings (foreign plays) and Restagings (national plays)

STAGINGS

- Medea*. Based on Euripides. (Actually premiered end of 1981). Los Teatros de San Telmo. Dir. Inda Ledesma. With Ledesma as Medea.
 -*El emperador Gynt*. Los Teatros de San Telmo. Dir. Oscar Cruz and Héctor Bidonde. With Franklin Caicedo. (Restaging of 1978 production.)
 -*Fedra* [Phaedra]. Racine. Adapt. Manuel Mujica Láinez. Teatro Nacional Cervantes.
 -*El burgués gentilhomme* [The Bourgeois Gentleman]. Molière. Teatro Municipal General San Martín. Adapt. and dir. José María Paolantonio.
 -*Ivanov*. Anton Chekhov. Teatro Payró. Dir. Jaime Kogan.
 -*Santa Juana* [Saint Joan]. G.B. Shaw. Teatro Municipal General San Martín. Dir. Alejandra Boero.
 -*En familia*. Florencio Sánchez. Teatro Municipal General San Martín.
 -*Los cuernos de don Friolera*. Valle Inclán. Teatro Municipal General San Martín. Dir. Jorge Petraglia.
 -9-B. Franz Xavier Kroetz.
 -*Los hijos del silencio* [Children of a Lesser God]. Mark Medoff. Dir. Sergio Renán.

RESTAGINGS

- Las de Barranco*. Gregorio de Laferrere. Teatro Nacional Cervantes. Dir. Rodolfo Graziano.
 -*Un guapo del 900*. Samuel Eichenbaum. Teatro Nacional Cervantes. Dir. Rodolfo Graziano.
 -*El casamiento de Laucha*. Adapt. of short story by Roberto J. Payró. Teatro Municipal General San Martín.
 -*Amor al portador (Poemas y relevancias)*. Oliverio Girondo.

One-Person Shows, Musicals, and Revues

- El resuscitado*. Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Adapt. and dir. Roberto Villanueva. One-man performance by Lorenzo Quinteros.
 -*Siempre vuelvo*. One-woman performance by Cipe Lincovsky. Teatro Odeón (continuing through 1983).
 -*Vamos a votar* (political revue). Hugo Moser. Teatro Maipo. Dir. Moser.
 -*Romeo y Julieta* (rock opera based on Shakespearean play). Teatro Coliseo. Book and dir. Matilde Bensignor.
 -*Annie* (musical). Trans. Graciela Hermida.

Visit by **Stary Teatr** of Cracovia, directed by Andrzej **Wajda** (*Nastasia Filipowna*, by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and *Los emigrados* by Slawomir Mrozek) for four weeks. Nélica Lobato (revue actress), Saulo Benavente (set designer), and Andrés Lizarraga (playwright) die. The Teatro El Nacional is destroyed in a fire.

398 plays registered with **ARGENTORES**.

1983

Argentine plays premiered

- Camino negro*. Oscar Viale and Alberto Alejandro. Teatro Blanca Podestá. Dir. Laura Yusem.
 -*Real envido*. Griselda Gambaro. Teatro Odeón. Dir. Juan Cosín.
 -*Lavalle, historia de una estatua*. Carlos Somigliana. Teatro Margarita Xirgu. Dir. Somigliana.
 -*Disparen sobre el zorro gris*. Agustín Cuzzani. Teatro IFT. Dir. Pedro Asquini.
 -*El señor Laforgue*. Eduardo Pavlovsky. Teatro Olimpia. Dir. Agustín Alezzo.
 -*El descenso*. Horacio del Prado. Teatro Larrañaga. Dir. Jorge Macchi.
 -*Equinoccio*. Mario Diament. Teatro Payró. Dir. Víctor Mayol.
 -*Subterráneo Buenos Aires*. Jorge Huertas. Teatro Municipal General San Martín. Dir. José Bove.
 -*Bienaventurados*. Jorge Hayes. Teatro Municipal General San Martín.
 -*Knepp*. Jorge Goldenberg. Teatro Olimpia. Dir. Laura Yusem.
 -*Mario contra la guita*. Elio Gallipoli. Teatro Popular de la Ciudad. Dir. Lorenzo Quinteros.
 -*Nocturno del pueblo macho*. Carlos Lozano Dana. Auditorio Buenos Aires. Dir. Lozano Dana.
 -*Tiempo de morir*. Leonardo Bisso. La Manzana de las Luces. Dir. Jorge Guzmán.

- October–December
- Haciendo tiempo*. Eduardo Pogoriles. Teatro Municipal General San Martín. Dir. Rubén Szuchmacher.
Teatro Abierto. Teatro Margarita Xirgu. (See listing that follows.)
- Pitágoras, go home*. Agustín Cuzzani. Dir. Roberto Nicolás Medina.
- Los solos*. Rosa Ana Correa y Romibolá. Teatro del Centro. Dir. Daniel del Valle.
- Las horas inútiles*. Juan José Cresto. Teatro Municipal General San Martín. Dir. Néstor Sabatini.
- El corruptor*. Martín Vives and Rio Saa. Teatro Armando Discépolo.
- Octubre en el Paraíso (Eva Perón después de su muerte)*. Edmundo Kulino. Teatro del Centro. Dir. Hernán Aguilar.
- El pobre Franz*. Alicia Muñoz. Auditorio de Buenos Aires. Dir. Ernesto Torchia. Based on Kafka's "Letter to the Father." Grupo Taller.
- La bolsa de agua caliente*. Carlos Somigliana. Teatro Contemporáneo. Dir. Jorge Amicarelli.
- Esta noche, Drácula (Grand Guignol)*. Habegger. Teatro del Este. Dir. Habegger.
- Vincent y los cuervos*. Pacho O'Donnell. Teatro Catalinas. Dir. Víctor Mayol.
- El hombre de hielo*. Bernardo Carey. Teatro Payró. Dir. Alberto Cattán.
- Antes de entrar dejen salir*. Oscar Viale. Teatro Blanca Podestá. Dir. Emilio Alfaro. (Premiere of play written for Teatro Abierto 1981 but unstaged.)
- Jugar a partir*. Jorge Grasso. Centro Cultural General San Martín (and almost all of 1984 in La Manzana de las Luces). Dirs. Luis Diego Pedreira, Marta Sánchez, Constantino Juri and Eduardo Arguibel.
- Papi*. Carlos Gorostiza. Teatro Atlas (Mar del Plata), later moved to Buenos Aires. Dir. David Stivel.
- La tristeza de cualquier sábado*. Vicente Buono Scotti. Teatro Contemporáneo. Dir. Arnaldo Strasnoy. (Part of series "Teatro de la gorra.")
- Jardín de otoño*. Diana Raznovich. Teatro Payró.
- Un país muy verde*. Jorge Goldenberg. Teatro Payró. Dir. Felisa Yeny.
- El beso de la mujer araña*. Manuel Puig. Dir. Mario Morgan.

Teatro Abierto—1983 Cycle

In the Teatro Margarita Xirgu (beginning 24 September with parade; plays opened 2 October):

- Monday (Group 1)
- Ahora vas a ver lo que te pasa*. Oscar Viale. Dir. Beatriz Matar.
-*Los derrocamientos, or Blues de la calle Balcarce*. Carlos Pais, Sergio de Cecco and Gerardo Taratuto. Dirs. Villanueva Cosse, Francisco Javier and Enrique Molina.
-*Espacio abierto* (performances and readings of texts by Argentine authors).
- Tuesday (Group 2)
- El pino de papá*. Julio Mauricio. Dir. Julio Ordano.
-*De a uno*. Aída Bortnik. Dir. Juan Cosín.
-*Yo estoy bien*. Jorge Goldenberg. Three monologues with Mañel Manzotti. Dir. Laura Yusem.
- Wednesday (Group 3)
- Alto en el cielo*. Aarón Korz. Dir. José María Paolantonio.
-*El viento se los llevó*. Roberto Cossa, Jacobo Langsner, Eugenio Griffiero and Francisco Ananía. Dirs. Omar Grasso, Julio Baccaro, Roberto Castro and Alberto Catán (Cattan).
- Thursday (Group 4)
- Según pasan las botas*. Rodolfo Paganini. Dir. Miguel Guerberoff.
-*Ruido de rotas cadenas*. Ricardo Halac. Dir. Néstor Romero.
-*Para amarte mejor*. Elio Gallipoli. Based on idea by Alicia Denegri and Enrique Mazza. Dir. Gallipoli.
- Friday (Group 5)
- Ensayo general*:
-*Cumbia morena cumbia*. Mauricio Kartun.
-*El señor Brecht en el salón dorado*. Abelardo Castillo.
-*Honrosas excepciones*. Víctor Winer. Dirs. Héctor Kohan, Néstor Sabatini, Raúl Serrano and Alfredo Zemma. With *Están deliberando* (commentary on three plays). Julio César Castro. With Oscar Núñez and Julien Howard.
- Saturday (Group 6)
- Inventario*. Carlos Somigliana, Hebe Serebrisky, Susana Torres Molina and Peñarol Méndez. Dirs. José Bove, Rubens Correa, Alejandra Boero, Javier Margulis and Andrés Bazzalo.
- Sunday (Group 7)
- Hoy se comen al flaco*. Osvaldo Dragún. Dir. Jorge Hacker.
-*Nada más triste que un payaso muerto*. Roberto Perinelli. Dir. Agustín Alezzo.
-*Concierto de aniversario*. Eduardo Rovner. Dir. Sergio Renán.

Stagings (Foreign Plays) and Restagings (National Plays)

STAGINGS

- Amadeus*. Peter Schaffer. Trans. Ana María Calabresse. Teatro Liceo. Dir. Cecilio Madanes.
-*Tierra de nadie* [No Man's Land]. Harold Pinter. Dir. Juan Cosín. With Jorge Petraglia and Leal Rey.
-*La Piaf (El gorrión de París)* [Edith Piaf]. Pamela Gems. Adapt. Roberto Cossa. Teatro Lorange. Dir. Rubens Correa. With Virginia Lago.
-*Muerte accidental de un anarquista* [Accidental Death of an An-

archist]. Dario Fo. Teatro Bambalinas. Adapt. and dir. Alfredo Zemba.

-*El ombligo* [Le nombril]. Jean Anouilh. Teatro Metropolitan. Dir. Osvaldo Bonet/Julio Ordano (discrepancies regarding direction credit).

-*Danza macabra* [Dance of Death]. August Strindberg. Adapt. and trans. Luis Gregorich. Teatro Municipal General San Martín. Dir. Laura Yusem.

-*María Estuardo* [Mary Stuart]. Friedrich Schiller. Adapt. Ernest Schóó and Mario Daian. Teatro Municipal General San Martín. Dir. Daian with assistance by Alejandra Boero.

-*Don Gil de las calzas verdes*. Tirso de Molina. Adapt. Osvaldo Bonet. Teatro Municipal General San Martín.

-*Esperando a Godot* [Waiting for Godot]. Samuel Beckett. Teatro Municipal General San Martín. Dir. Hugo Urquijo.

-*Sueño de una noche de verano* [A Midsummer Night's Dream]. William Shakespeare. Teatro Nacional Cervantes. Dir. Rodolfo Graziano.

-*Un círculo de tiza de Bertolt* [The Brechtian Chalk Circle]. Bertolt Brecht. Teatro Espacios. Adapt. and dir. Manuel Iedvabni.

-*La amante inglesa* [The English Lover]. Marguerite Duras. Teatro Payró. Dir. Marta Sánchez.

-*Reina de corazones* [Queen of Hearts]. Timochenko Wehbi. Dir. Carlos Mathus.

-*Federico*. Lorenzo Piriz Carbonell. Taller de Garibaldi. Dir. Julio Piquer.

-*Hoy ensayo hoy*. Teatro Nacional Cervantes.

-*Doña Flor y sus dos maridos*. Jorge Amado. Teatro Metropolitan. Dir. José María Paolantonio. (The production was censored because of nudity.)

-*Así es la vida*. Malafatti and De las Llanderas. Teatro Nacional Cervantes.

RESTAGINGS

-*Pasión y muerte de Silverio Leguizamón*. Bernardo Canal Feijóó. Adapt. Luis Ordaz. Teatro Municipal General San Martín. Dir. José María Paolantonio.

-*El juguete rabioso*. Adapt. of Roberto Arlt novel by Bernardo Carey. Teatro Contemporáneo. Dir. Hugo Massola.

-*El mago de Hoz*. Adapt. Roberto Feito.

-*La gran histeria nacional*. Patricio Esteve. Teatro Lassalle. Dir. Carlos Hugo Cordobez.

-*El gran deschave*. Sergio De Cecco and A. Chulak. Dir. José María Paolantonio.

One-Person Shows, Musicals, and Revues

-*La mujer del año* [Woman of the Year] (musical comedy). Teatro Maipo. Trans., adapt., and dir. Mario Morgan. (Lyrics trans. China Zorrilla.) With Susana Giménez.

-*Calígula* (musical drama). Pepito Cibrián. Cine-Teatro Metropolitan. Adapt. Norberto Campana.

-*La revista del prosexo* (revue). Teatro Tabarís.

-*La revista Multipartidaria* (revue). Teatro Astros.

-*Con censura o sin censura* (revue). Teatro Tabarís.

-*El show no está para bollos* (revue). Edda Díaz, Coco Romano, José Sbarra, Santiago Varela. Auditorio del Hotel Bauen.

-*El gran circo criollo* (puppets). Ariel Bufano. Teatro Municipal General San Martín. (Continuing as part of TMGSM repertory.)

-*Neruda, déjame cantar por ti* (poems and anecdotes). Merlyn Café Concert. With Franklin Caicedo

Visits from: **Teatro Circular** from Montevideo (*Doña Ramona*, José Pedro Bellán); **Rajatabla** from Caracas (*La muerte de García Lorca*, José Antonio Rial); **Teatro Popular ICTUS** from Santiago (*Sueños de mala muerte*, José Donoso; and *Renegociación de un préstamo relacionado, bajo fuerte lluvia, en cancha de tennis mojada*, Julio Bravo). From France the **National Theatre of Marseille, La Criée** (*Los tres mosqueteros; El caballero solo*, Jacques Audibert). Also the **Black Theatre** from Prague and **Cooperative Theatre Mobile** from Italy.

409 plays registered with ARGENTORES.

1984

Argentine plays premiered

-*Redes*. Hebe Serebrisky. Teatro de la Fábula. Dir. Liliana Sande.

-*De pies y manos*. Roberto Cossa. Teatro Nacional Cervantes. Dir. Omar Grasso.

-*En boca cerrada*. Juan Carlos Badillo. Teatro FUNDART.

-*Des tiempo*. Eugenio Griffero. Teatro Nacional Cervantes. Dir. José María Paolantonio.

-*Milagro en el mercado viejo*. Osvaldo Dragún. Teatro Margarita Xirgú. Dir. Rubén Benítez.

-*Al violador*. Osvaldo Dragún. Teatro Escuela. Dir. Federico Herrero.

-*Mater*. Vicente Zito Lema. Teatro Olimpia. Dir. Cristina Banegas.

-*Del sol naciente*. Griselda Gambaro. Teatro Lorange. Dir. Laura Yusem.

- Primaveras*. Aída Bortnik. Teatro Municipal General San Martín. Dir. Beatriz Matar.
 -*La casa junto al arroyo*. Alberto Borla. Teatro Larrañaga.

Stagings (foreign plays) and Restagings (national plays)

STAGINGS

- Todos eran mis hijos* [All My Sons]. Arthur Miller. Teatro Municipal General San Martín.
 -*Galileo Galilei*. Bertolt Brecht. Teatro Municipal General San Martín. Trans. Gerd Colacius. Adapt. Gerardo Fernández. Dir. Jaime Kogan.
 -*Memorias del subsuelo* [Notes from the Underground]. Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Dir. David Amitín. Grupo FYL.
 -*Kaspar*. Peter Handke. Teatro Sala Planeta. With Francisco Cocuzza.
 -*Los rayos gamma sobre las caléndulas* [The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds]. Paul Zindel. Teatro Payró.
 -*La historia de Adán y Eva* [The Diary of Adam and Eve]. Mark Twain. With China Zorrilla and Carlos Perciavalle.

RESTAGINGS

- La muñeca*. Eduardo Pavlovsky. Teatro Payró. Dir. Raúl Mereñuk. Grupo Sol.
 -*El campo*. Griselda Gambaro. Teatro Nacional Cervantes. Dir. Alberto Ure.
 -*Vincent y los cuervos*. Pacho O'Donnell. Los Teatros de San Telmo. Grupo El Bosque (La Plata).
 -*Juegos a la hora de siesta*. Roma Mahieu.
 -*Chau Misterix*. Mauricio Kartun.
 -*Moreira* . . . (Adaptation). Adapt. Sergio De Cecco, Carlos País and Peñarol Méndez. Teatro Nacional Cervantes. Dir. Alejandra Boero, Rubens Correa and José Bove. (Commissioned by the Comedia Nacional as a special homage to Teatro Abierto.)

One-Person Shows, Musicals, and Revues

- El bochicho*. Emeterio Cerro. One-woman performance by Lidia Catalano.
 -*Nacha* (Café-concert). With Nacha Guevara.
 -*Hair* (Musical comedy).

Visits from: **Dario Fo** and **Franca Rame** from Italy (*Tutta Casa, letto e chiesa* and *Mistero Buffo*, Teatro Municipal General San Martín), met with violent attacks on the audience and theater house from ultranationalist groups on opening night; **Vittorio Gassman** (*Il teatro fa male*); **Teatro Popular ICTUS** (Chile); **Tadeusz Kantor** and the **Black Theater** from Poland (*Wielopole-Wielopole*); **El Galpón** (Uruguay). **Teatro Abierto 1984** with theme of "Teatro Abierto opina sobre la libertad," canceled.

1985

Argentine plays premiered:

- Los compadritos*. Roberto Cossa. Teatro Presidente Alvear. Dir. Roberto Castro and Villanueva Cosse.
 -Series "Nuevas propuestas" [New Proposals] in Teatro Espacios.
 -*El Cuis Cuis*. Emeterio Cerro.
 -*El sillico de alivio* (o *El retrete real*). Bernardo Carey. Teatro Municipal General San Martín. Dir. Lorenzo Quinteros.
 -*Top secret* (*Extraños . . . muy extraños*). Pedro Cano. Teatro El Depósito. Dir. Cano.
 -*Potestad*. Eduardo Pavlovsky. Teatro del Viejo Palermo. Dir. Norman Brisky. With Pavlovsky. Performed with *Telarañas* (see restagings that follow).
 -*Cierre del balance*. Segundo Carlos Gauna. Teatro del Este. Dir. Nora Depaoli.
 -Teatro Abierto 1985. (See listing that follows.)

September–
October

- Nosferatu*. Griselda Gambaro. Centro Cultural San Martín. Dir. Malena Lasala.
 -*Historia de un zurdo contrariado*. Agustín Cuzzani. La Manzana de las Luces. Dir. Alejandro Samek.
 -*Sueños de náufrago*. Eduardo Rovner. Teatro FUNDART. Dir. Sergio Renán.
 -*El argentinazo*. Dalmiro Sáenz. Teatro Nacional Cervantes. Dir. Francisco Javier. With Los Volatineros.
 -*Convivencia femenina*. Oscar Viale. (Mar del Plata). Dir. Viale. (Buenos Aires premiere: Teatro Lorange, January 1986.)
 -*La pestilería*. Alberto Félix Alberto. Teatro del Sur. Dir. Alberto.
 -*Poniendo la casa en orden*. Jorge Goldenberg (based on fragments from Goldenberg's Teatro Abierto 1983 *Yo estoy bien*). Teatro Presidente Alvear. Dir. Goldenberg. With Mabel Manzotti.
 -*Cuatro caballetes*. Eugenio Griffiero. Teatro Municipal General San Martín. Dir. Omar Grasso.

- La fabulosa organización de la momia*. Rubén Ríos. Teatro Municipal General San Martín.
- 008 *se va con la murga* (original title rejected by ARGENTORES: *James Bond se va con la murga*). María José Campoamor. Teatro Municipal General San Martín.
- Perro sobre perro*. Jorge Boccanera. Dir. Osvaldo Pellettieri.
- Siempre la misma milonga*. Carlos Vittorello. Dir. Santángelo.
- Encadenados*. Pablo Moretti. Centro Cultural General San Martín. Dir. Moretti.
- Metapherein*. Paolo Taddei. Centro Cultural General San Martín. Dir. Taddei.
- Caleidoscopio*. Claudio Hochman. Centro Cultural General San Martín. Dir. Hochman.
- América Macbeth* ("otra versión superlibre de la obra de William Shakespeare"). Centro Dramático Buenos Aires. Adapt. and dir. Máximo Salas and Ricardo Holcer.
- Una Margarita llamada Mercedes*. Jacobo Langsner. Dir. Omar Grasso. With China Zorrilla.

Teatro Abierto—1985 Cycle

1) Cycle **Otro Teatro** (results of interdisciplinary workshops researching subjects such as "Racism and the Working Class," "Street Children," "Traveling Vendors," "Veterans of the Malvinas," "Marginalization of Indigenous Peoples living in Buenos Aires," and "The Detained-Disappeared"):

-*Comunicado No. . . .* Collective creation by Taller Cultural Paco Urondo. Dir. Ricardo Miguez. In the Sindicato Gráfico Argentino. Result of workshop on "the Detained-Disappeared."

2) Cycle **Teatrzo** (48 hours of theater, 20–22 September): With the guideline "In defense of democracy, for national liberation and Latin American unity," simultaneous performances in streets, plazas, warehouses, clubs, theaters, libraries, trains, buses and "in any appropriate space in every neighborhood, city or municipality." The event culminated in a huge street party. Other countries scheduled to participate: Colombia, Costa Rica, Puerto Rico, Paraguay, Chile, México, Uruguay, Perú, Venezuela, Cuba, and Bolivia.

3) Cycle **Nuevos Autores y Nuevos Directores** (results of four workshops lasting seven months coordinated by Cossa, Kartun, Perinelli, Soto, Dragún, Rovner, Somigliana, and Pais):

- Té de tías*. Cristina Escofet. Dir. Eduardo Pavelic.
- Ultimo verso*. Carlos Bravi. Dir. Ricardo Bartis.
- Salir del pozo*. Juan Carlos Vezzulla. Dir. Quique Viaggio.
- El vuelo de las cimitarras*. Pedro Liscovich. Dir. Ernesto Torchia.
- Jazmín del país*. Susana Pujol. Dir. Alberto Cattan.
- Bailongo de gaucho y negro*. Américo Torchelli. Dir. Julien Howard.
- Viaje del ángel*. Francisco Bagalá. Dir. Andrés Bazzalo.
- Melodrama de amor y cadenas*. Julián Confetti. Dir. Justo Gisbert.
- Acadentro*. Luis Sáez. Dir. Eduardo Lamoglia.
- Cuarto cuarta*. Claudia Ferman. Dir. Felisa Yeni.

Stagings (foreign plays) and Restagings (national plays)

STAGINGS

- Las lágrimas amargas de Petra von Kant* [The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant]. Rainer W. Fassbinder. Trans. Nicolás Costa. Teatro Catalinas. Dir. Víctor García Peralta.
- El cepillo de dientes*. Jorge Díaz. Teatro de las Provincias.
- Las novelas ejemplares de Cervantes*. Adapt. Enrique C. Pérez. Teatro de las Provincias.
- Fuenteovejuna*. Lope de Vega. Teatro Municipal General San Martín. Adapt. and dir. Roberto Villanueva.
- Veraneantes* [Dachniki]. Maxim Gorky. Teatro Municipal General San Martín. Dir. Laura Yusem.
- A la diestra de Dios Padre*. Enrique Buenaventura. Escuela Nacional de Arte Dramático. Dir. Francisco Javier.

RESTAGINGS

- Telarañas*. Eduardo Pavlovsky. Teatro del Viejo Palermo. Dir. Ricardo Bartis. With *Potestad*.
- Viaje del invierno*. (Restaging of 1965 *Matrimonio*). Griselda Gambaro. Centro Cultural General San Martín. Dir. Oscar Barney Finn.
- Galileo Galilei*. (Continuation of successful 1984 production in Teatro Municipal General San Martín.)
- En boca cerrada*. (Restaging of 1984 production.)
- No hay que llorar*. Roberto Mario Cossa. Teatro Municipal General San Martín.
- Fin de diciembre*. Ricardo Halac. Centro Cultural General San Martín.

-*Esa canción es un pájaro lastimado*. Alberto Adellach. Centro Cultural General San Martín.

ONE-PERSON SHOWS, MUSICALS, AND REVUES

-*Salsa criolla* (revue). Written, dir. and performed by Enrique Pinti. Teatro Licéu.

-*En camiseta* (one-man show). Written, dir. and performed by Ricardo Talesnik. Teatro del Viejo Palermo.

-*Canto latinoamericano* (one-man show). Adapt. and dir. Beatriz Seibel. With Pepe Soriano.

-*Andar por la gente* ("collage"). With Inda Ledesma.

-*La mujer del año* [Woman of the Year] (musical). (Continuation of successful 1984 run.)

-Various productions by the Grupo de Titiriteros of the Teatro Municipal General San Martín: *El gran circo criollo* (Ariel Bufano, restaging), *El caballero de la mano de fuego* (Javier Villaña), and *Una lágrima de María* (Ariel Bufano)—first performed in the TMGSM and then in schools and neighborhoods.

Visits from: **Grupo Actoral 80** (Venezuela, directed by Argentine Juan Carlos Gené) with *Golpes a mi puerta* (Gené), *Humboldt y Bonpland, taxidermistas* (Ibsen Martínez), *Ardiente paciencia* (Antonio Skármeta), and *Variaciones Wolff* (various texts by Chilean playwright Egon Wolff).

Note: Because of a lack of federal funding, the Teatro Nacional Cervantes generated only one production in 1985 (*El argentinazo*). The theater was used for two theater festivals: "Festival Nacional del Teatro 85" (organized by the national secretary of culture, with 13 groups and 30 performances, attended by an audience of 17,337) and "Todos los jóvenes al Cervantes" (6 October–2 December) with eight stagings, most previously premiered in more experimental venues:

-*Una historia menor*, written and dir. Alba Ferretti.

-*El médico a palos* [The Doctor in Spite of Himself]. Molière, dir. Julien Howard and Grupo El Teatrino.

-*La magdalena del Ojón*, written and dir. Emeterio Cerro.

-*El difunto*, René de Obaldía, dir. Silvia Kanter.

-*Gagarín (Veo la tierra)*, written and dir. Gustavo Schwartz.

-*El hilván es un estilo*, Los Camaleones.

-*Porque sí*, collective creation, dir. Daniela Troianovski.

-*La tremebunda tragedia de Macbeth*, adapt. and dir. Luis Rivera López.

Appendix 2:

A CHRONOLOGY OF ARGENTINE EVENTS (1966–1987)

(Note: All monetary sums are given in U.S. dollars.)

1966

28 June: The military coup led by General Juan Carlos Onganía ousts democratically elected President Arturo Illia.

1967

— Onganía's implementation of his *Revolución Argentina* [Argentinean Revolution] program and the Krieger Vasena Economic Plan lead to a general strike by the *Confederación General de Trabajadores* [General Confederation of Labor] (CGT). It is put down by Onganía, dividing the CGT into factions.

1969

May: *El Cordobazo* breaks out, a forty-eight-hour massive riot initiated by automobile workers and university students in the industrial city of Córdoba, with consequences that include the following: (1) the army becomes divided between Onganía hard-line and General Alejandro Lanusse concessionary factions and (2) the influx of foreign capital is reversed.

June: CGT leader Augusto Vandor is assassinated; bombings increase. Onganía declares a state of siege.

September: A smaller version of the *Cordobazo* takes place in the city of Rosario.

1970

— Urban guerrilla groups (primarily composed of ex-students and middle-class professionals seeking a popular revolu-

tion) step up activities: bank robberies, kidnappings, assassinations, and ransoms. Uprisings continue in Córdoba (with students taking over the university and unions dissenting in the automobile plants). Counter-terrorism (reported to be carried out by off-duty police) also escalates. The peso is devalued.

—
May: The *Montoneros-Comando Juan José Valle* (a militant Peronist faction) kidnap (and execute on 1 June) former President Pedro Eduardo Aramburu. Other Peronist groups form: the *Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas* (FAP) and the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias* (FAR). All are headquartered in Buenos Aires.

13 June: After Aramburu's death, Onganía is replaced by General Roberto M. Levingston.

July: The non-Peronist *Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores* [Workers' Revolutionary Party] (PRT) forms, which in turn leads to the formation of its armed wing, the *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* [People's Revolutionary Army] (ERP), headquartered in Córdoba.

—
By the end of 1970, clandestine right-wing groups are "disappearing" students and Peronist, or leftist union militants at the rate of one person every eighteen days.

November: The banned political parties issue a joint manifesto, *Hora del Pueblo* [Hour of the People], in which they demand the restoration of civilian government.

1971

February: A second mass demonstration in Córdoba, *El víborazo*, increases dictatorship's concerns about a popular insurrection.

March: Levingston is replaced by General Lanusse, who disbands Onganía's *Revolución Argentina* and promises (but does not hold) open elections.

—
Throughout the year there is an increase in guerrilla operations, in the number of spontaneous demonstrations (by the working and middle classes), and in the involvement of all armed forces in their "war on subversion."

1972

July: Lanusse's *Gran Acuerdo Nacional* [Great National Agreement], calling for the nation to unite in a fight against "subversion" and the return to constitutional rule (with the general as the proposed coalition's candidate), is rejected by the other parties.

August: The Trelew "massacre." A group of 25 "subversives" es-

cape from Rawson penitentiary. 6 manage to board a plane to Chile. Of the 19 that surrender, 16 are executed (among them the wife of ERP leader Mario Roberto Santucho).

November: Lanusse lifts the ban on Peronism (in place since Perón's ouster in 1955), which leads to Perón briefly returning to Argentina, where he reorganizes the movement (and its factions) under the *Frente Justicialista de Liberación* [Justicialist Liberation Front]. Peronism experiences a rebirth in popularity.

—
By year's end, army pressure weakens labor unions, and the CGT is united under Buenos Aires's conservative Peronists.

1973

March: National elections are held. Héctor J. Cámpora, the candidate of the *Frente Justicialista de Liberación* wins 49 percent of the vote.

25 May: Cámpora takes office and declares political amnesty for and release of all imprisoned guerrillas.

—
The Peronist guerrilla groups unite under the *Montoneros* (led by Mario Firmenich and the other nine Aramburu kidnapers). Tension increases between the *Montoneros* and union leaders, leading to a *Montonero* campaign of annihilating union leaders.

June: Perón schedules his second trip to Argentina, and when half a million supporters go to greet his arrival at Ezeiza Airport, fighting erupts between the factions. Hundreds are killed.

13 July: When Perón withdraws his support of Cámpora, Raúl Lastiri becomes president pending the upcoming September elections.

September: Perón receives 62 percent of the vote in the presidential elections. The *Montoneros* assassinate the secretary-general of the CGT, and Perón supporter, José Ignacio Rucci.

2 October: Perón assumes the presidency for the third time, begins to implement programs similar to those of 1946 (income redistribution in favor of labor, expansion of employment, renewed social reform), and finalizes an agreement with the CGT.

—
Public support of Perón soars as the economy sees an overall improvement. The international commodity boom contributes to an increase in Argentine exports and reserves, and inflation decreases.

1974

January: The ERP attacks an army garrison in Azul.

- As right-wing violence continues, the *Acción Argentina Anticomunista* [Argentine Anticomunist Action] (Tres A or AAA) is formed (and widely believed to be under the supervision of the federal police and Minister of Social Welfare José López Rega).
- May: Perón publicly distances himself from the *Juventud Peronista* [Peronist Youth] and expels the Montoneros from his party.
- 1 July: Perón dies of heart failure, and his widow Isabel (María Estela Martínez de Perón) assumes control of the nation.
- September: After attempting to rejoin the Peronist party and being rejected by the president, the Montoneros return to clandestine operations. They receive a \$20 million to \$30 million ransom for two brothers, members of the wealthy industrial Born family.
- Guerrilla warfare escalates with bombings and assassinations of army and police officers, union leaders, and politicians. The armed forces prepare for war: the national security police's *Coordinación Federal* [Federal Direction] assists in creating networks for espionage and clandestine operations; and the definition of "subversion" is expanded to include all forms of protest. The number of *desaparecidos* [disappeared persons] grows rapidly, soon to be followed by the first sightings of corpses buried in dumps and floating in rivers. Film, television, and theater practitioners receive death threats from the AAA, and the number of Argentines going into exile increases.
- November: Chief of Police Alberto Vilar is assassinated, and President Martínez de Perón declares a state of siege, in the process giving the army almost complete authority.
- The national economy declines: Europe bans Argentinean meat after an outbreak of hoof-and-mouth disease; the 1973 Arab-Israeli War raises oil prices; and Argentine reserves dwindle, leading to a huge payment deficit. In trying to fight inflation and assuage the populace, the president oscillates between austerity and expansion, ultimately losing supporters (as Peronist factions continue their infighting).

1975

- January: *Festivales folklóricos* are suspended throughout Argentina because, according to an executive decree,

[s]uch festivals have not managed to translate to the present times . . . the true sentiment of the people nor have they succeeded in expressing the authentic joy, the renewed faith and

- the well-founded hope of the Argentine worker and [said hope's] realization. (*La Nación*, 29 January 1975)
- April: Artists continue to receive death threats from the AAA, as this excerpt from the nation's leading daily paper attests:
- We have been notified that more artists have been threatened with death by the AAA: Alfredo Alcón, María Rosa Gallo, Mari-lina Ross, Juan Carlos Gené, Sergio Renán, David Stivel, Luisina Brando and Leonor Manso. (*La Nación*, 28 April 1975)
- May: An austerity program instituted by new minister of economy, Celestino Rodrigo, (and thus called the *Rodrigazo*), is met in July with a general strike by the unions, forcing Rodrigo's resignation as well as the resignation of López Rega. The president retreats into self-seclusion.
- Economy Minister Antonio Cafiero indexes wages and controls prices (resulting in such inequities as a pair of shoes costing as much as two cows!). Tension increases within the CGT over free wage bargaining.
- December: The air force fails in an attempted military coup.

1976

- February: A new series of devaluations, amid allegations that the president diverted large sums from public charity into her own personal account, leads to open impeachment proceedings against the president.
- 24 March: The army arrests President Martínez de Perón and takes over government. The head of the armed forces junta is Army General Jorge Rafael Videla. Under their *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* [Process of National Reorganization], the military bans all political opposition, abolishes many recently created institutions, and embarks on the final and most violent phase of its *guerra ideológica* [ideological war]: Due process is eliminated, military patrols are ubiquitous, and as many as 30,000 *desaparecidos* will be taken to prisons and clandestine torture chambers (cf., the total number of guerrillas' victims during the previous six years estimated at 200–300.)
- José A. Martínez de Hoz (a banker from one of the nation's largest landed agrarian families) is named minister of economy, and, imposing his extreme market economist/monetarist policies (following Chicago economist Milton Friedman), attacks consumption and wages, while the military destroys the unions by abolishing the CGT and including union leaders and workers in its "war on subversion."

Public service rates and food prices increase while welfare benefits are cut. Money is invested in farming, resulting in a bumper harvest for 1976–77, but manufacturing and wages decline, as the state aspires to a free-market policy and the attraction of foreign investment.

— With the postcoup escalation of social, political, and economic problems, thousands of Argentines go into exile.

1977

March: Legislation is passed and restraints removed to attract foreign investment, new financial institutions (*casas financieras*) are created, programs financed for exploration of gas and oil, and hydroelectric and nuclear energy plans made.

1978

— Martínez de Hoz's program loses momentum; the junta is divided on its long-term political program: (1) military populists (led by Admiral Emilio Massera) seek dismissal of the minister of economy, support "Peronism without Perón" and extreme nationalism, particularly regarding the Beagle Channel (against Chile) and the Malvinas/Falkland Islands (against Great Britain); (2) extreme anti-Peronists (led by Generals Carlos Suárez Mason and Luciano Menéndez) support an indefinite military dictatorship and continued war on leftists and Peronists; and (3) moderates (led by Generals Videla and Roberto Viola) support Martínez de Hoz and favor leading the country to an economic recovery followed by gradual political liberalization.

— Army maintains control of the junta and takes over foreign policy control from the navy (and submits the Beagle Channel dispute with Chile to the Pope for arbitration).

May: Viola succeeds Videla as army commander in chief.

June: Argentina hosts the World Cup soccer championship, spending approximately \$700 million (10 percent of 1978's national budget). The Argentine team wins amid accusations of foul play.

1979

January: Martínez de Hoz eliminates a stipulation requiring banks and *casas financieras* to keep a reserve of 20 percent of funds received from abroad and institutes "crawling peg" devaluations of the peso. An overvalued peso and falling

tariff duties make for cheaper imports as the number of consumer goods increases.

October: General Menéndez and the anti-Peronist faction of the military stage a revolt, immediately put down by the junta.

1980

— With the peso overvalued there is high foreign investment, but foreign trade is disrupted as the Argentine trade deficit reaches \$500 million. The peso is devalued, causing massive withdrawals; the peso and reserves begin to collapse.

April: Between April and June, \$1.9 billion leaves Argentina; some *casas financieras* declare bankruptcy and the grain export conglomerate SASETRU fails.

July: Martínez de Hoz permits foreign investors to maintain month-to-month accounts, and \$700 million is deposited that same month. The balance of trade is again threatened with yet another influx of imports.

October: Argentina's financial system nears collapse.

— Adolfo Pérez Esquivel receives the 1980 Nobel Peace Prize for his work to expose human rights abuses in his native Argentina.

1981

February: There are more bankruptcies and a sudden unplanned peso devaluation. U.S. dollars continue to leave the country.

March: Foreign debt is at \$25.3 billion (compared with December 1979's \$8.5 billion).

April: When Videla's term expires, Viola assumes the presidency, and Martínez de Hoz resigns. Financial crisis and divisions within the military continue.

June: There are rumors of a coup to be led by General Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri (Viola's army commander in chief).

— The peso is devalued again, and reserves fall \$300 million in a single day.

August: Steel production is down 20 percent from the previous year.

December: A November run on the peso forces Viola to resign. He is succeeded temporarily by the minister of the interior, General Horacio T. Liendo, before Galtieri becomes president. Galtieri refuses any concession to Peronists, returns to Martínez de Hoz's earlier economic policies, and, after a November trip to Washington, D.C., seeks closer ties with the Reagan administration (reportedly offering the U.S. mil-

itary bases in Patagonia and technical and military support for the Central American *contras* in exchange for investing in the oil industry and a new pipeline).

1982

- January: Argentina remounts campaign against Chile over the Beagle Channel.
- February: There are rumors of Argentine military involvement in Central America.
- Argentina launches a diplomatic offensive against Britain regarding the Malvinas/Falkland Islands. Plans are made for an invasion (on either 25 May or 9 July) to be led by Admiral Jorge Anaya.
- March: Unions hold a mass demonstration to protest the state of the economy, causing the junta to move up its attack date.
- 2 April: Argentinean forces attack the Falkland Islands and seize the South Georgia and Sandwich Islands. General Mario Menéndez is proclaimed military governor of the *Islas Malvinas*. Action is almost unanimously hailed in Argentina, even among those critical of the regime.
- 25 April: After a first reaction of embarrassment (British intelligence's having failed to anticipate the attack and the subsequent resignation of Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington), Britain mobilizes naval task force and elite troops, retaking South Georgia Island.
- May: The United States condemns Argentina's "illegal use of force" and imposes trade sanctions.
- A British nuclear submarine sinks the Argentine battle cruiser *General Belgrano* outside the exclusion zone, killing nearly 400.
- 4 May: Argentina retaliates, and Exocet missiles sink the British destroyer *Sheffield*, killing twenty.
- International attempts at mediation fail.
- 11 May: The European Economic Community imposes trade sanctions against Argentina. Eastern Europe and Latin America (with the exception of Chile) support Argentina.
- 21 May: The British launch their amphibious assault.
- 29 May: At the first major land battle (of Goose Green), several hundred Argentine troops surrender. Great Britain now controls the islands except for the capital of Port Stanley.
- June: The foreign debt is at \$35 billion.
- 14 June: General Menéndez and 9,800 Argentinean troops surrender.
- 15 June: Galtieri delivers final address while Argentines openly fight with police in the Plaza de Mayo. All the armed forces, ex-

- cept for the air force, are discredited, especially the army for alleged corruption and abuse of troops.
- 18–23 June: The minister of the interior, General Alfredo Oscar Saint Jean, assumes temporary control of the country.
- 23 June: General Reynaldo Antonio Benito Bignone becomes president (the fourth in sixteen months) and agrees to open civilian elections. He is pressured by the military to avoid any public discussion of the *desaparecidos* as demands from human rights groups both within and outside Argentina grow.
- September: Bans are reinforced on any radio or television discussion of *desaparecidos*.
- 1 November: A mass grave of 300 bodies, all shot through the head, is discovered in La Plata.
- November: The *multipartidaria* (a joint association of political parties) rejects Bignone's proposal of the continued presence of armed forces in the new government and protection from investigations. Tensions increase, and there are rumors of another coup.
- 5 December: Human rights activist Pérez Esquivel leads a large demonstration opposing amnesty for the military. The CGT organizes the first general strike since 1975.
- 16 December: One hundred thousand participate in *multipartidaria* march.
- At a rally of the *Unión Cívica Radical* [Radical Party, Argentina's other leading party], 25,000 voice support for Raúl Alfonsín as presidential candidate.
- At the year's end, foreign debt is at \$43 billion, and inflation for the year is 209 percent.

1983

- January: Portions are published of General (and Chief of Police for Buenos Aires Province under Videla) Ramón J. Camps's interview, wherein he claims that no *desaparecidos* are still alive.
- The *madres* travel to Spain and Italy. Several European countries submit names of citizens-victims to the Argentine government.
- April: Alfonsín reveals the *pacto militar-sindical* between the military and the political wing of Peronist unions (the 62 *Organizaciones*), in which the military promises to help the Peronists if they in turn aid in suppressing investigations and revelations regarding the *desaparecidos*.
- 28 April: The media publish the military government's *Documento Final* [Final Document], claiming legal authority per Presi-

- dent Martínez de Perón's decrees, suggesting that all "subversives" were armed criminals, and begging any discussion of trials.
- The military is divided regarding amnesty: junior officers favor amnesty for all except the leaders while the senior officers demand across-the-board amnesty.
- Two Peronists (rumored to be Montoneros) disappear in Rosario and are later found dead in Buenos Aires Province.
- 20 May: Thirty thousand march in Buenos Aires to denounce these murders and the military's continued presence.
- June–September: There are nearly weekly rumors of a military coup and imminent military conflict with Chile. The courts continue to hear cases regarding the desaparecidos.
- 25 June: Alfonsín announces his nine-point plan, which includes: antiterrorist legislation, no clandestine detentions, reinstatement of habeas corpus, amnesty for detainees held without trial, but holding guerrillas partially responsible, no state tribunals, and indictments of only those ordering the disappearances and those carrying out illegal acts.
- July: Alfonsín is named UCR's presidential candidate and runs on the Yrigoyen-like slogan of "democracia o antidemocracia." Nevertheless, general consensus is that the Peronists will win.
- August: The *abuelas* join the madres at the Plaza de Mayo to demand a response with respect to the more than 150 children disappeared with their parents, amid rumors (later confirmed) of children having been adopted by families associated with the regime.
- September: Peronists, after bitter infighting, choose Italo Luder as presidential candidate. *Radicales* and *peronistas* have nearly identical platforms regarding human rights, censorship, military spending, civilian government, and the Malvinas/Falkland Islands.
- 24 September: The media publish the junta's *Ley de Pacificación Nacional* [Law of National Pacification], its self-amnesty law, denounced by all political parties.
- 30 October: Alfonsín wins the election with 52 percent of vote (compared with Luder's 40 percent) but still faces potential opposition from the military, trade unions, Peronists, and the madres.
- November: In another published interview, General Camps admits responsibility for the disappearances and deaths of 5,000 people, all buried in unmarked graves.
- 10 December: Alfonsín takes office and immediately convenes Congress to discuss legislation banning torture.
- 14 December: Alfonsín announces legislation repealing the Ley de Pacificación

cación Nacional and orders junta leaders to stand trial before the armed forces' *Concilio Supremo* [Supreme Council] and further instructs that ERP and Montonero leaders are to be submitted to penal action. Many oppose a military trial and call for the preservation of the death penalty.

— Alfonsín establishes CONADEP (*Comisión Nacional Sobre la Desaparición de Personas* [National Commission on the Disappeared]) to investigate the fate of the desaparecidos and allows investigations and criminal indictments against several leading figures to be carried out.

1984

- January: Military spending is cut and the number of military personnel reduced. Nevertheless, Alfonsín's government does not deliver all cuts promised.
- In Rome, Chile and Argentina sign an agreement over Beagle Channel Islands, with Chile obtaining possession of three islands, thus allowing it direct access to the Atlantic.
- Minister of Economy Bernardo Grinspun issues a plan to control growth, increase wages, and reduce inflation.
- February: Alfonsín attempts to reform trade unions but is met with opposition in the Peronist-controlled Senate. His proposed legislation fails by one vote.
- May: The CGT holds a one-day strike to protest the government's policies and attempted trade-union reform. A later compromise with the government allows for unsupervised union elections to be held.
- Montonero leader Mario Firmenich is arrested in Brazil and extradited to Argentina.
- July: Alfonsín, responding to rumors of dissension among the armed forces, dismisses four generals, including Army Chief of Staff Jorge H. Arguinguui.
- September: CONADEP publishes *Nunca más* [Never again], in which it identifies 300 secret camps and prisons and implicates 1,300 armed forces members. The publication precipitates renewed public outcry against junta leaders, who are transferred to civilian prisons and whose cases are finally moved to civilian appellate courts after months of procrastination in the military council.
- 25 November: Responding to public reaction over the Beagle Channel decision, Alfonsín calls for a national referendum (the first ever in Argentina). The treaty is ratified by 80 percent of voters, interpreted as a vote of confidence in President Alfonsín's government.
- Problems with Great Britain continue as England strengthens its defenses in the Malvinas/Falkland Islands.

1985

- March: Grinspun resigns when hyperinflation reaches the four-figure annual rate and foreign debt grows to \$47 billion. The International Monetary Fund threatens to curtail any new credit.
- June: Alfonsín announces the *Plan Austral*: introducing the new currency (austral), freezing prices and wages, and promising to reduce debt. When inflation decreases immediately and speculation is renewed, the plan receives strong public support, despite a series of CGT union-sponsored general strikes opposing the plan's weakening of real-wage increases.
- October: Alfonsín's UCR party wins the congressional elections.
- April–December: The four Proceso leaders (Videla, Viola, Massera, and Galtieri) are tried for kidnapping, torture, and murder. One thousand witnesses testify and 700 disappearances are documented. The following sentences are decreed: lifetime imprisonment for Videla and Massera, seventeen years' imprisonment for Viola, and the acquittal of Galtieri (still under military detention for his incompetence in the Malvinas/Falklands War). Right-wing gangs protest with a bombing campaign, and the promilitary FAMUS (*Familias de los Muertos por la Subversión* [Families of those Dead Because of the Subversion]) accuses human rights organizations of being terrorist fronts.

1986

- April: The government announces construction (later postponed) of a new national capital in Viedma (in Patagonia) in an attempt to develop the southern region of Argentina and to decentralize governmental bureaucracy.
- August: Camps faces 600 charges of murder, is found guilty, and is given a 25-year prison sentence.
- Ex-Perón Minister of Social Welfare José López Rega is extradited from Miami to Argentina to be tried for his participation in the AAA.
- December: In a concession to the military, Alfonsín announces legislation for a sixty-day limit (*punto final* [full stop]) in bringing penal action against any military or police personnel for crimes committed during the Proceso. More than 50,000 participate in a public protest, but Congress passes the measure, thus "initiating the trend toward general amnesty and 'reconciliation'" (Taylor 1997, 13).

1987

- January–February: New accusations of torture and mass murder inundate the courts. General Luciano Menéndez is tried in federal court in Córdoba.
- There is serious unrest among the armed forces: the military's Supreme Council refuses to conduct hearings investigating activities at the *Escuela Mecánica de la Armada* [Army Mechanical School] (ESMA), considered to have been the largest clandestine detention center during the dictatorship.
- January: General Carlos Suárez Mason is discovered hiding in California, and procedures for his extradition begin.
- 23 February: The *punto final* deadline expires. The courts proceed to hear approximately 200 cases.
- 16 April: In Córdoba, there is a brief mutiny while in Buenos Aires, at the Campo de Mayo barracks, Lieutenant Colonel Aldo Rico and 100 officers stage another rebellion. Alfonsín, cutting short a trip to the United States, visits their stronghold and persuades them to surrender.
- Conceding to the rebel soldiers' demands, Alfonsín dismisses his military commander, Lieutenant General Héctor Ríos Ereñu. Courts suspend scheduled human rights violations trials.
- June: *La Ley de Obediencia Debida* [the Law of Due Obedience] is passed, thus dismissing charges against all military officers except for those in charge of tortures and executions. In December 1990, the Proceso leaders would be pardoned by President Carlos Menem, after yet another military attempt to overthrow the constitutional government.

"A familiar pattern was repeating itself: civilian politicians could establish successful coalitions to overthrow dictatorships, but they were unable to surmount the conditions from which dictatorship sprang" (Rock 1987, 403).

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Notes

PREFACE

1. Thus, for purposes of clarity, I follow Keir Elam's differentiation between the dramatic (written) text and the theatrical (staged) text in references to the plays produced.

2. Argentine dictatorships arose from military coups in the years 1930, 1943, 1955, and 1962 before the 1966 Onganía takeover. Additionally, as Alain Rouquié notes in his 1982 study of military states in Latin America, "From 1930 to 1973 no president elected in a normal succession completed his constitutional term" (272). Rouquié's end date for Argentina can be extended to 1989 given the fact that President Raúl Alfonsín chose to leave office early when popular criticism of the country's hyperinflation threatened Argentina's delicate newly reborn democracy.

3. Some studies of the period's cultural production have chosen 1981 as the year marking this loosening of the dictatorial grip, thus coinciding with the July announcement of a pending *apertura* [opening], a promise of future dialogue with the various political parties, by the junta's second president, General Roberto M. Viola. I have chosen to begin my discussion in 1980, the year in which many exiled theater practitioners began to return to Argentina; 1980 was also the year that Argentinean ex-detainee Adolfo Pérez Esquivel won the Nobel Peace Prize, the award an indication that international attention had finally turned to the junta's human rights abuses.

INTRODUCTION

In his preface to Gabetta (1983, 7–8).

1. This is the abbreviated term for the 1976–83 military government's *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* [National Reorganization Process], a project that will be described later in this study. It should be noted that others have appropriated the short form to emphasize the dictatorship's repressive nature, "a 'process' that devours its victims" (Rock 1987, 451); still other Argentines today refuse to use the term, considering it to be a euphemistic oversight of the regime's dictatorial, non-process-oriented nature.

2. The word *dictablanda* is a play on the Spanish word for dictatorship, *dictadura*. The neologism emphasizes the relative softness [*blandura*] of the Onganía and Lanusse regimes, especially in contrast to the extreme harshness [*dureza*] of the 1976–83 military dictatorship.

3. Inaugurated in 1946 as the *Partido Unido*, the party formed by Juan D. Perón and unified by his doctrine of *justicialismo* was renamed the *Partido Peronista* in December 1947. The *Montoneros*, led by Mario Firmenich, were based in Buenos Aires

and eventually subsumed the many Peronist guerrilla groups. See Rock (1987, 1993) and Waisman (1987) for discussions of the many complexities of Peronism.

4. For a detailed genealogy of the many guerrilla organizations, see *Todo o nada* (1991), María Seoane's biography of Mario Roberto Santucho, leader of the ERP.

5. Shortly after the coup, the first President of the junta, Army General Jorge Rafael Videla clearly defined as "subversive" anyone who questioned the state-determined value system (see, for example, *La Prensa* 13 May 1976, quoted in Avellaneda 1986, 1:137).

6. The phrase *guerra sucia* [dirty war] was the junta's term for one of its stated goals within its *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*: the national purge of *subversivos*, also referred to as "Marxist-Leninist," "traitors to the fatherland," "materialists and atheists," and "enemies of Western, Christian values" (quoted in CONADEP's 1984 report, *Nunca más*, 4). Just as with the term *Proceso*, many have resemanticized the phrase in their judgment that what the Junta carried out against fellow citizens was indeed a very "dirty war."

7. Popular estimates almost universally place the number of *desaparecidos* at 30,000. CONADEP (the Alfonsín-appointed commission headed by the writer Ernesto Sábato) registered the cases of 8,960 disappeared persons (1984, 10). Of those registered, 62 percent were arrested at night in their own homes in front of witnesses (11). The patotas' methodology rarely varied, as summarized by Sábato, in his prologue to the CONADEP report:

The abductions were precisely organized operations, sometimes occurring at the victim's place of work, sometimes in the street in broad daylight. They involved the open deployment of military personnel, who were given a free hand by the local police stations. When a victim was sought out in his or her home at night, armed units would surround the block and force their way in, terrorizing parents and children, who were often gagged and forced to watch. They would seize the persons they had come for, beat them mercilessly, hood them, then drag them off to their cars or trucks, while the rest of the unit almost invariably ransacked the house or looted everything that could be carried. The victims were then taken to a chamber over whose doorway might well have been inscribed the words Dante read on the gates of Hell: "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here." (CONADEP 1984, 3)

8. The following excerpt (29 September 1974) from even such a conservative daily newspaper as *La Nación* attests to the climate surrounding Argentine artists, well before the 1976 military coup:

Death threats announced in a communique from the AAA have prompted the following artists to leave the country: Nacha Guevara and Norman Briski. . . . The actor Héctor Alterio, in Spain at the time [of the threats], . . . has decided not to return to Argentina. Singer-composer Horacio Guarany has also made the decision to leave the country. The fifth artist threatened, actor Luis Brandoni, carried out his professional activities yesterday without any official protection. (Avellaneda 1986, 1:117)

9. Conversation with the author (Buenos Aires, 13 May 1992). *Soldados y soldados* was Bortnik's first play and starred the actor Víctor Laplace.

10. It should be remembered that over half the *desaparecidos* documented by CONADEP were workers (30.2 percent) and students (21 percent).

11. In his discussion of the Argentine film industry of the early 1970s, Steven Kovacs (1977) notes that, technically, it was not required for the script or screenplay to be submitted to the *interventor* [the official censor]. Nevertheless, it was advisable in order to "minimize the risk of the final product being turned down" (20). The effects of censorship and prohibition, compounded by those of a floundering econ-

omy, meant disaster to the film industry. Its production dropped "from forty features a year in the early seventies to thirty-three in 1975 and twenty-one in 1976" (20).

12. The Buenos Aires critic Gerardo Fernández (1988a) noted that, paradoxically, both the National Theater (the Cervantes) and the Buenos Aires Municipal Theater (the San Martín) attracted large audiences during these years, thanks in part to the low ticket prices but also because of the popularity of such "proven" foreign texts. These plays included, at the Cervantes (under the conservative direction of Rodolfo Graziano), Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* and Shaw's *Pygmalion*, in addition to national classics such as the staged version of Hernández's epic gaucho poem *Martín Fierro* as well as Laferrere's *Las de Barranco*. Opinion has remained divided regarding Kive Staiff's performance as director of the San Martín during the *Proceso* years: Some saw his programming (which included productions by the theater's Contemporary Ballet and Puppeteer Group, free concerts, and art film screenings, in addition to plays performed by the permanent repertory cast) as capitulating to "reorganization" demands; others considered the San Martín a "democratic island" (Fernández 1988a, 148) in a sea of dictatorship. Foreign plays staged in the San Martín during these years include *Saint Joan* and *Widowers' Houses* (Shaw), *Golden Boy* (Odets); *La casa de Bernarda Alba* (García Lorca), *The Marriage* (Gombrowicz), *Mary Stuart* (Schiller), *Dance of Death* (Strindberg), *Waiting for Godot* (Beckett), *Los cuernos de don Friolera* (Valle-Inclán), and *El alcalde de Zalamea* (Calderón). Among the national plays produced were *Barranca abajo* and *En familia* (Florencio Sánchez), *Pasión y muerte de Silverio Leguizamón* (Bernardo Canal Feijóo), and *Periferia* (Oscar Viale).

13. The reader is particularly directed to Avellaneda's two-volume compilation *Censura, autoritarismo y cultura: Argentina 1960/1983* (1986) as well as his 1989 article "Argentina militar: los discursos del silencio"; Graziano's book *Divine Violence. Spectacle, Psychosexuality, and Radical Christianity in the Argentine "Dirty War"* (1992); and Taylor's 1994 article, "Performing Gender: Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo," but especially her book, *Disappearing Acts. Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "Dirty War"* (1997), in which Taylor reads the *Proceso* as yet another reenactment of the Argentine national struggle between men staged on and through the "feminine."

14. Usually referred to as *café-concert* and bearing such names as "La Gallina Embarazada" [The Pregnant Hen], "El Gallo Cojo" [The Lame Cock], and "El Ombligo" [The Navel], these were small spaces (seating 50 to 150) where, in the reminiscences of Enrique Pinti (one of Argentina's best-known performers and the originator of the immensely popular *Salsa criolla*), "there was slightly more tolerance" (1990, 132).

15. The term "culture of fear," first applied to the Argentine situation by Guillermo O'Donnell (1983), "refers to the wholesale, everyday experience of human-rights abuse" (Lechner 1992, 26). As Lechner goes on to state, "We experience the imprint of authoritarianism as a culture of fear" (26).

16. The overwhelmingly negative review, entitled "Objectionable Play in the Payró Theater," ran in the 23 November 1977 edition of *La Prensa* and was signed by "E.F.R.," identified by Pavlovsky as Erwin Félix Rubens (1994, 71).

17. Pavlovsky, as quoted in Albuquerque (1991, 143).

18. Carina Perelli (1992) defines *inxile*, or *insile*, as "the marginality suffered by those who were either direct or potential victims during the authoritarian period" (232 n. 4).

19. *Clarín, Cultura y Nación* (16 August 1979), quoted in Avellaneda 1986, 2:184-85.

CHAPTER I

Quoted in Driskell (1979, 52).

1. These figures are taken from photocopies of the internal listings of plays registered with and provided to the author by ARGENTORES [Asociación Argentina de Autores]. The listings included all original national plays in addition to translations and adaptations of foreign texts; obviously, the translations and adaptations are not included in the figures cited.

2. *Porteño*, a Spanish term referring to any large port or its inhabitants, is commonly used to refer to Buenos Aires and its inhabitants.

3. Monti (1976c) begins his August 1976 review of Alberto Adellach's *Arena que la vida se llevó*. . . [Sand that has Gone with the Life] with the following words:

It's already a fact, at this point in the season, that 1976 has been an exceptional year for [theater. This not only has to do with the number of premieres, including those of plays by Argentine authors, nor with the growing interest that all this has generated in our audience (in spite of the economic crisis). It has to do more than anything with the diversity in [theater] trends that it is possible to note and with the maturity these experiments have attained. (68)

Two accounts written by foreign critics also support Monti's assessment: "It was a very good year, in spite of all dire predictions" (Schanzer 1976, 90) and "The theatre flourished . . ." (Driskell 1978, 103).

4. Estimates are almost universally given as 30,000 desaparecidos. CONADEP documented the disappearances of 8,960 persons in its 1984 report, *Nunca más* (1984, 16).

5. These expenditures constituted approximately 10 percent of the 1978 national budget, according to the *Latin America Economic Report* of 17 February 1978 (Larsen 1983a, 117).

6. Osvaldo Pellettieri posits the year 1972 as the moment of change in the avant-garde, specifically citing Gambaro's *Dar la vuelta* [Turnaround] (Pellettieri 1989a, 84–85). The year also figures as a pivotal one in Diana Taylor's analysis of Gambaro's work. As exemplified in the 1972 play *Información para extranjeros* [Information for Foreigners] (never staged in its entirety, in keeping with the playwright's wishes), Gambaro's plays of the 1970s shift their focus from the victim's experience to the "drama of disappearance [. . .]: the missing people, the absent values, the nonexistent judicial and moral frameworks, the unfathomable reasoning, the grotesque national and international indifference toward the situation" (Taylor 1991, 98).

7. It merits noting that as recently as 1992 the nation-as-house image was still being used as a metaphor for contemporary Argentina. I refer specifically to Gambaro's chamber opera *La casa sin sosiego* [The House Not at Peace], staged in the Teatro Municipal General San Martín that year.

8. *Segundo tiempo* premiered on 25 June 1976 in the Teatro Lassoalle, and was directed by Osvaldo Bonet, with set design and costumes by Emilio Basaldúa and lighting designed by Saulo Benavente. The cast was as follows: Luis Brandoni (Pablo), Marta Bianchi (Marisa), and Chela Ruiz (Mother). Jorge Prats was assistant director.

9. It should be remembered that Halac has been credited by more than one critic with ushering in this Milleresque form of *realismo reflexivo* [reflective realism] in 1961 with his play *Soledad para cuatro* [Loneliness for Four].

10. The set was designed by Adriana Straijer. Luis Rossini directed the following

cast: Arturo Bonín (Blas), Susana Cart (Alba), Carlos de Cristóforo (Luis), and Raquel Albéniz (Lucy).

11. *El destete* premiered in June 1978 in the Teatro del Globo. The production was directed by Alfredo Zemma, with set design by Olivo y Marchegiani, and the cast as follows: Jorge Martínez (Jorge), Adrián Ghio (Rudy), Mirta Busnelli (Clara), Chela Ruiz (Irma), Lucrecia Capello (Ofelia), and Juan Manuel Tenuta (Rafael).

12. *El ex-alumno*, a production of the *Grupo de Trabajo*, premiered on 21 March 1978 in the Teatro Lassoalle, the set designed by Rubén Trifiró, direction by Héctor Aure (with assistance by J.L. Baberis), and with the following cast: José María Gutiérrez (Professor García Chaves), Ulises Dumont (Horacio), Isabel Spagnuolo (Laura), and Luis Rivera López (Mario).

13. *Encantada de conocerlo* premiered on 7 January 1978 in the Teatro Regina and was directed by Carlos Gandolfo, with the set designed by Saulo Benavente and a cast as follows: China Zorrilla (Mamá), Carlos Moreno (Julio), Ana María Picchio (Beba), and Federico Wolff (Hugo).

14. The Grupo de Trabajo premiered *Los hermanos queridos* in the Teatro Lassoalle on 25 July 1978. The production was directed by the playwright himself, with the set designed by Leandro Hipólito Ragucci and a cast as follows: Carlos Carella (Juan), María de la Paz (Betty), Ulises Dumont (Pipo), Nidia Telles (Zule), Mariángeles Ibarreta (Alicia), and Oscar Rovito (Agustín).

15. The reader should bear in mind that, in scenographic reality, there is of course only one chair.

16. *Juegos a la hora de la siesta* premiered in July 1976 in the Teatro Eckos. The cast included Stella Ponce, Carlos Olmi, Gerardo Romano, Gustavo Luppi, Laura Moscovich, Virginia Lombardo, Carlos Urtizberea and Arnoldo Tytelman, with music by Raquel Meredif and direction by Julio Ordano.

17. Martha Martínez states that even the edition of *Juegos* prepared by the publishing house Talía was censored (Martínez 1980, 44). Unable to find this edition, I have relied instead on the nearly illegible photocopy of a typed manuscript held in ARGENTORES's library. ARGENTORES has no record of registration for *María La muerte* although it was staged in 1977 in the Payró Theater.

18. Said premiere took place on 28 April 1976, with the following cast: Virginia Lago (Teresa), Héctor Gióvine (César), Víctor Hugo Vieyra (Tito), Arturo Maly (Quique), and Onofre Lovero (Zamora). Set design and costumes were by Jorge Sarudiansky.

19. *Puesta en claro* was written in 1974 but not staged in Buenos Aires until post-Proceso 1986. The production was directed by Alberto Ure.

20. Monti (1976b) reviewed Gambaro's play in July 1976 while writing theater criticism for the Argentine magazine *Crisis*. In this review, he calls Gambaro's theater "one of the most profound and original in our national dramaturgy" and goes on to suggest that these very qualities are the reasons why her theater has rarely been understood, citing the examples of the "naturalism versus avant-garde" debate and Gambaro's "DiTellian" image.

21. *Extraño juguete* premiered on 20 July 1977 at the Teatro Payró, and Oscar Cruz directed the following cast: Beatriz Matar (Perla), Flora Steimberg (Angélica), and Eduardo Pavlovsky (Miralles). The set and costumes were designed by Eugenio Zanetti and Jorge Berardi.

22. Such as "E.F.R." in *La Prensa* (5 September 1977).

23. Even though the daughter frees herself of the mother, the play does not end happily. The mother has created a doll substitute to stand in for the absent daughter, just as she did with the father, and the pregnant daughter takes the mother's

needles with her. Both situations suggest repetitions: game playing in the former and, in the latter, parental violence inflicted on the child. Neither character will have broken free of the obsessive cycles. *Lo frío y lo caliente* premiered in the Teatro del Centro and was directed by Manuel Iedvabni.

24. The cast included: Antonio Mónico (later Patricio Contreras) as Equis; Felisa Yeny (Perla); Aldo Braga (Lali); Rubén Szuchmacher (Gaspar). Kogan also designed the set, Francisco Díaz assisted the director, and Graciela Galán designed the costumes.

25. *Historia tendenciosa* premiered on 25 October 1971 in the Teatro Payró and was directed by Jaime Kogan. The cast was extensive: Alfredo Allende, Francisco Armas, David Di Nápoli, Berta Dreschler, Felisa Yeny, Olga Ferreiro, Aída Laib, Roberto Megías, Mario Otero, Derli Prada, and Alberto Segado. Other production credits include Francisco Díaz (assistant), Kogan (lighting), Carlos Núñez (music), Carlos Cytrowski (set, costume, and makeup), and Lía Jelin (choreography). The play's lengthy title immediately reveals the influence of Peter Weiss's documentary theater on Monti.

26. Conversation with the author (Buenos Aires, 11 September 1992).

27. Almost all of Monti's plays, as well as many other plays of the period, are set in such hermetically sealed spaces. The additional symbolic importance of the house/home should not be lost on the reader. As Néstor Tirri (1973) states, in his discussion of the role of the family home in Monti's first play, *Una noche con el señor Magnus e hijos* [An Evening with Mr. Magnus and Sons], the home represents "an entire mental or ideological class structure; at the same time it is a protective environment" (189).

28. Foster (1979) quotes from a descriptive note appended to a copy of the then-unpublished manuscript in which Monti comments on the dwarf Gaspar: "This role could also be played by an actor with normal characteristics. In both cases, Gaspar would be a deformed replica of Equis, his grotesque mirror-image" (17). This description does not appear in the published text; one would suspect yet another decision on the author's part to withhold disambiguating information, especially the description of Gaspar as Equis's deformed mirror image.

29. *Magnus* premiered in Buenos Aires on 25 June 1970 in the Teatro del Centro (after having been staged the month before in Neuquén). Hubert H. Copello directed the following cast: Graciela Castellanos (Julia), Carlos Catalano (Magnus), Alfredo Sosa (Gato), Adolfo Bianciotto (Wolfi), Alberto Sosa (Santiago), and Raúl Manso (El viejo Lou). The set was designed by Leonor Puba Sabate.

30. Monti recalls:

When I finished the play, I held a meeting and read it to a group of friends, writers, and I myself sensed during the reading that the dramatic peak of the work was in that . . . final monologue of Equis's, that anything more than that was intolerable. The tension fell apart exactly because people were very captivated by that very emotionally charged moment. I realized that that was a way of leaving the play open. The other [ending] closed it. (Conversation with the author, Buenos Aires, September 1992.)

31. This is a process previously only adumbrated in *Una noche* in the role of Gato, the intellectual son.

32. This dialectic is also contained in Monti's juxtaposition of masks, or theatrical *pintarrejos*, to fleshly putrefaction.

33. Monti himself has stated, "I believe that in some way I tried to make it hermetic, it was a moment when everything had to be hermetic" (Conversation with the author, Buenos Aires, September 1992).

34. That is, *fabula* and *sjuzet*, the terms employed by the Russian formalists to differentiate between the spectator's logical ordering of the events (the *fabula* or story) and the events as they are organized in the play (the *sjuzet* or plot) (Elam 1980, 119).

35. The reader is referred to note 28 regarding Gaspar's description in the play's unpublished version. Foster (1979) also underscores the Equis/Gaspar antagonism, asking, "[I]s the former the latter's 'replacement' and the healthy image of what the dwarf had once been before his corruption at the hands of the decadent couple?" (18).

36. The reader will remember that this legend was revived in the 1970s in Peter Handke's eponymous play and in the Werner Herzog film *And God Against All: The Mystery of Kasper Hauser*.

37. The Classical references are suggested by Foster (1979, 18).

38. The production had the following cast: Ulises Dumont (later Juan Carlos de Seta) as Nona; Luis Brandoni (later Rudy Chernicof and Cacho Espíndola) as Chicho; Javier Portales (later Onofre Lovero and Pedro I. Martínez) as Carmelo; Mágara Alonso (later Carmen Llambí) as Anyula; María de Luca as María; José María Gutiérrez (later Omar Delli Quadri) as Don Francisco; and Lucila Quiroga (later Susana Hidalgo and Marta Degracia) as Marta. The set was designed by Leandro Hipólito Ragucci, and Héctor Gómez was in charge of production.

39. The play ran for one and a half years in Buenos Aires. It has been staged in other parts of Argentina as well as in Latin America, Spain, France, and the United States.

40. Cossa and the *Grupo de Autores* (Carlos Somigliana, Ricardo Talesnik, and Germán Rozenmacher) wrote *El avión negro*, a black comedy with a sketchlike structure about Perón's projected return in the 1960s. The original production was a box-office failure but has gone on to be one of the landmark Argentinean plays of the last thirty years.

41. Said group was formed in 1977 by playwrights Cossa, Carlos Gorostiza (who also directed *La nona*), Carlos Somigliana, set designer Leandro Hipólito Ragucci, director Héctor Aure, and producer Héctor Gómez. The group continued until 1979 with its project of promoting and producing national theater.

42. The five plays are: *Nuestro fin de semana* [Our Weekend] (1964), *Los días de Julián Bisbal* [The Days of Julián Bisbal] (1966), *La ñata contra el libro* [The Snout Smashed Against the Book] (1966), and *La pata de la sota* [Knave's Paw, or Something's Afoot] (1967). A fifth play, *Tute cabrero* [Pissed-Off Fight/Game], not staged until 1981 but written as a television screenplay in 1967, also fits thematically and aesthetically into this earlier period.

43. The title role of the Nona has usually been played by a male character actor, such cross-dressing serving to heighten the grotesqueness of an only slightly disguised patriarchy.

44. *Cocoliche* is a "deformed" dialect of Italian and Spanish spoken by the immigrant population in Argentina. It is also one of the many local dialects typical of the grotesco criollo theater.

45. For descriptions and analyses of this national genre, see the studies of Claudia Kaiser-Lenoir (1977), Luis Ordaz (1971), and David Viñas (1973). See also Osvaldo Pellettieri's preliminary study to the two-volume collection of Armando Discépolo's plays (1987–90).

46. The two decades correspond to a period of industrialization, followed by the nationalist revolution of 1945 and Peronism's apogee.

47. Not only was the grotesco reworked by contemporary authors of this period

but plays by the earlier playwrights finally entered the "intellectual canon." For example, Discépolo's *Obras escogidas* [Selected Works] was published with a prologue by Viñas in 1969, and when the author died in 1971, his play *Cremona* was staged at the Teatro Municipal General San Martín (Pellettieri 1989a, 94 n. 16), the first in the Teatro San Martín's series of restagings of Discépolo's best-known works.

48. It should be remembered that Cossa began writing *La nona* in early 1970 as an episode for a television program that was being written collectively with Carlos Somigliana, Germán Rozenmacher, Ricardo Talesnik, and Ricardo Halac, with whom Cossa would write *El avión negro* the following year (with the exception of Halac, who contributed the prologue to the play's first publication).

49. *No hay que llorar* had only a two-month run, and shortly thereafter the Grupo de Trabajo was disbanded. The play was restaged in 1985 at the Teatro Municipal General San Martín.

50. *No hay que llorar* had the following cast: Carlos Carella (Pedro), Marcelo Krass (Osvaldo), María Rosa Fugazot (Ester), Irma Roy (Graciela), Ulises Dumont (Gabriel), and Carmen Llambí (Luisa). The set was designed by Leandro Hipólito Ragucci, with lighting by Rubén Layafa and directing assistance from Oscar Palomeque.

51. The literal translation of the 1924 song made famous by Carlos Gardel (with lyrics by Gabino Coria Peñalosa) reads as follows: "Little road that time has erased,/ that one day watched us pass by together . . . / I've come here for the last time . . . / I've come to tell you of my misfortune. / [. . .] / Since she went away . . . / she never returned again . . . / I will follow your footsteps . . . / Little road, goodbye." Cossa has made great use of popular music (especially the tango) in other plays, including the 1980 *El viejo criado* [The Old Manservant]. Suffice it to say, in much the same way as Cossa reworks the popular theatrical genre of the *grotesco criollo*, he embraces popular music forms, hence the attention paid here to these lyrics.

52. All three presents are ludicrously impersonal: a lace *mantilla*, a shopping bag, and an umbrella.

53. Given the dates of *No hay's* writing and premiere, Gabriel (like many self-exiled Argentines) went "south" in the year 1976, a fact that would not have escaped an Argentine audience that lived through the years after the 1976 coup d'état and the subsequent military dictatorship.

54. The wedding celebration was always a central image in the play. Cossa recalls the origin of the text as television script: "I wrote *La nona* [as] a party, a gathering, a party that is a wake . . . there was always going to be a gathering, the marriage of the nona" (Conversation with the author, Buenos Aires, October 1992).

55. Conversation with the author (Buenos Aires, October 1992).

CHAPTER 2

Quoted in Pacheco (1983, 16–17).

1. Conversation with the author (Buenos Aires, 15 October 1992).
2. Between April and June alone, \$1.9 billion left Argentina (Rock 1987, 374).
3. Crucial to a reading of Ordaz's words is the date of the edition; this prologue was published in 1981, that is, *during* the dictatorship, hence the veiled allusive language. It should also be noted that in this 1981 edition, Cossa's text appears also to have been (self-)censored. In a later (1990) edition, the character Balmaceda (the play's "realist") says: "Since in this country no one's living / alive anywhere" [Como en este país no se vive en ninguna parte] (35). This line does not appear in the 1981 edition. The above circumstances should therefore be kept in mind when consulting

Ordaz's annotations to the 1981 edition, which, although instructive, are less than complete because of censorial pressures.

4. Barthes, fifteen years later, in his 1971 essay "Mythology Today," rejects his own "demythification" project, remarking that it has itself become a mythic discourse in need of a "shift." He goes on to question his earlier demystifying solution of merely reversing the mythic message's denotation and connotation, and concludes the essay with a call to abandon the sign and create an entirely new object. Barthes, significantly, does not abandon his project of linguistic repoliticization.

5. See Fernando de Toro's *Brecht en el teatro hispanoamericano contemporáneo* (1984) for an extended discussion of the Epic Theater's role in Latin American theater.

6. All these techniques are related to the concept of distancing, or "making-strange," as de Toro describes (1984): "Brecht had to think of a form that would objectify the scene in such a way that the spectator would be unable to identify with the character or the situation that might impede him from observing *objectively*" (28, his emphasis). De Toro goes on to supply three definitions for *Verfremdung*: "a) to make strange or surprising all that which would normally appear to be familiar; b) . . . to *historicize*, that is, to present all events and characters as historical, and therefore ephemeral; c) . . . to present the world as *manageable*, transformable" (28, emphasis his).

7. Also known as the "alienation effect" and, as described by Brecht in his 1948 "Short Organum for the Theater," "A representation that alienates is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar" (1964, 192). In an appendix to the "Organum" found after Brecht's death, he made the following comments on the bourgeois theater:

The bourgeois theatre's performances always aim at smoothing over contradictions, at creating false harmony, at idealization. Conditions are reported as if they could not be otherwise, characters as individuals. [. . .] If there is any development it is always steady, never by jerks; the developments always take place within a definite framework which cannot be broken through. [. . .] None of this is like reality, so a realistic theatre must give it up. (1964, 277)

8. An earlier version of this section appeared in *Gestos* (1995).

9. *Un trabajo fabuloso* premiered in the Teatro Lassalle on 13 July and was directed by Inés Ledesma, with directing assistance from Daniel Delbene and the set designed by Héctor Calmet. The cast was as follows: Hugo Arana (Francisco), Adriana Aizemberg (Lidia), Patricia Kraly (Virginia), Gonzalo Urtizberea (Diego), Marga Alonso (Antonia), José María Rivara (Vicente), Andrés Vicente (Julio), and Augusto Kreichmar (Guillermo).

10. Conversation with the author (Buenos Aires, 15 October 1992).

11. Perciavalle is a well-known Uruguayan producer and star of musical revues. His 1980 production was entitled *Del rey a la Reina del Plata*.

12. . . . *y a otra cosa mariposa* premiered on 10 November 1981 in the Teatro Pláneta, with direction by the playwright (assisted by Ana María Gómez), set design by Mabel Pena, lighting by Graciela Galán, costuming by Gioia Fiorentino, marionettes by Horacio Irigoyen, and makeup by Hugo Grandi. The cast was as follows: Analia Agulló (El Inglés), Silvia Baylé (Cerdín), Lina de Simone (El Flaco), and Elvira Onetto (Pajarito). Note also that in the published text, the only condition placed upon any subsequent production is that the four characters must be played by actresses.

13. See Laurietz Seda's article (1997) for a discussion of . . . *y a otra cosa mariposa's* use of the theatrical convention of transvestism, a mainstay of the Spanish-lan-

guage theater since the Peninsular Golden Age, as a masking device in order to stage and explore gay and lesbian relationships in Argentinean patriarchal society.

14. Rómulo Berruti writes in *Clarín* (1981): "It seems to us that this text might take on another level [of meaning] if four actors, deliberately chosen for their roundly masculine image, were to play the roles: that is, the game turned upside down wherein the progressive shirkings might have a terrible effect."

15. The reader should bear in mind that this would be a woman portraying a man who is dressed as a woman, what Marjorie Garber (1993) would call a "double-cross-dressing."

16. I focus here on the social Gestus, as distinguished from *Grund Gestus*, or the basic Gestus characteristic of a single action or the play in its entirety.

17. Torres Molina stated at the play's premiere, "I want to show that the boys are already speaking someone else's words, that they come from a context. It has to do with a cultural, social, economic phenomenon. It can be deduced from the play that women, too, share part of the responsibility for encouraging and promoting that things stay the way they are" (Sotó 1981).

18. ". . . [O]ne of the most important aspects of cross-dressing is the way in which it offers a challenge to easy notions of binarity, putting into question the categories of 'male' and 'female,' whether they are considered essential or constructed, biological or cultural" (Garber 1993, 10).

19. That is, when a model (such as what Hélène Cixous calls the "binary patriarchal order") that portrays itself as a "natural order" is destabilized, it is exposed as a fictional construct. As Judith Butler (1990) writes, "When the disorganization and disaggregation of the field of bodies disrupt the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence, it seems that the expressive model loses its descriptive force" (136). See chapter 3, "The Mythological Structure of the Imaginary," of Frank Graziano's *Divine Violence* (1992) for a description of the Argentine junta's version of Western patriarchy.

20. The theatrical text was based on the adaptation by Correa, Carlos Antón, and Pedro Espinosa. It included a cast of more than forty actors.

21. Space limitations restrict me to an analysis of only some of the plays that address these issues. The following plays also merit future extensive discussion: *Al perdedor* [To the Loser], Osvaldo Dragún; *Ya nadie recuerda a Frederic Chopin* [No one Remembers Frederic Chopin Anymore], Roberto Cossa; *Periferia* [Periphery], Oscar Viale; *Simón Brumelstein, el caballero de Indias* [Simon Brumelstein, Knight of the Indies], Germán Rozenmacher, written in 1970; as well as the previously mentioned *Matar el tiempo*, Carlos Gorostiza. All premiered in 1982.

22. The play premiered under the direction of Cossa himself in the Teatro Payró on 26 September 1980. The set was designed by Leandro Hipólito Ragucci, costumes and makeup by Adriana Straijer, and music composed by Rolando Mañanes. The cast was as follows: Humberto Serrano (Alsina), Pedro I. Martínez (Balmaceda), Julio González Paz (Carlitos), and Ruby Gattari (Ivonne). Néstor Sabatini provided artistic and technical support.

23. The two lines quoted by Cossa come from the famous 1948 tango by Enrique Santos Discépolo and Mariano Mores, "Cafetín de Buenos Aires"—clearly the bar/café evoked in the stage directions.

24. I am indebted to Francisco Jarque Andrés and his 1991 analysis of these references, as well as to Ordaz, who, in his notes to the 1981 edition of *El viejo criado*, locates references to two more tangos in addition to the nine noted by Jarque Andrés.

25. Jarque Andrés (1991) goes so far as to describe Carlos Gardel as a "personal mirror for imitation by the majority of Argentines" (480).

26. See, for example, Antonio Rodríguez de Anca's 1985 article published in the Teatro Municipal General San Martín's magazine *Teatro*.

27. Argentina's national hysteria surrounding the 1978 World Cup contributed to rumors of game fixing and payoffs, especially regarding the Argentine team's second-round match with Peru.

28. The 1978 World Cup itself spawned at least one violent act when the house of Finance Secretary Juan Alemann was bombed after he expressed his opposition to Argentina's hosting the international competition (Larsen 1983a, 118).

29. Umberto Eco (1986) rather cynically notes the reason for the success of such diversionary tactics in his 1978 essay, "The World Cup and its Poms":

There's no need to ask ourselves why the World Cup has so morbidly polarized the attention of the public and the devotion of the mass media. From the famous story of how a comedy by Terence played to an empty house because there was a trained bear show elsewhere [. . .] to the shrewd use that dictatorships (including the Argentinian) have always made of great competitive events, it is so clear, so evident that the majority prefers soccer or bicycle racing to abortion. (170)

30. *Marathón* was directed by Jaime Kogan, with set and lighting designs by Tito Egurza and Kogan, and costume design by Graciela Galán. The cast was as follows: Arturo Maly (Emcee), Jorge Fornes (Bodyguard), Miguel Guerberof (Homero Estrella), Lidia Catalano (Elena García), Carlos Sturze (Tom Mix), Marian Smibiansky (Ana D.), Jean Pierre Reguerraz (Héctor Expósito), Felisa Yeny (Ema Expósito), Oscar Boccia (NN), Rita Cortese (Pipa), Armando Capó (Pedro Vespucci), Norma Ibarra (Asunción Vespucci), Mónica Galán (Sister), and Leal Rey (Brother). Sergio Aschero composed the music.

31. Elsa N. Crites has interpreted the play's title as an allusion to the 490 B.C. battle between Persians and Athenians for control of the city of Marathon. For Crites, the triumph of the Greeks suggests the possibility for democracy's defeat of military absolutism in Monti's play.

32. Despite its consciously deformed spelling, *Marathón* would have the same pronunciation in Spanish as the standard *Maratón*; hence the *différence* is written, not spoken. The title often appears misspelled as *Marathon*, which anglicizes it completely and eliminates the desired alienating effect.

33. Monti casts his audience in several of the roles discussed by Diana Taylor (1997) regarding the act of watching violence. See especially her chapter on "Percepticide" and the analysis of Griselda Gambaro's 1973 play *Información para extranjeros*.

34. In his prologue to the 1981 edition of *Marathón*, Ordaz noted a contemporaneous adaptation of the McCoy novel to the Argentine stage, *Baile de ilusiones*, created and directed by José Bove (viii).

35. This analogy is reinforced by a reference found in Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain* (1985), wherein she notes that the act of being tortured was called "the dance" in Argentina (44). The most commonly used "theatrical" image was the *quirófano*, or operating theater/room, a medical metaphor. See Graziano (1992), chapter 2, "The Strategic Theatrics of Atrocity."

36. This event further enriches a reading of *Marathón* (and any Argentine play that alludes to the "Infamous Decade") if we remember that, since 1930 (with very few, recent exceptions), "all major institutional, constitutional, and electoral decisions have been made by colonels and generals" (Ranis 1986, 163 n. 3).

37. One example would be the bricklayer Pedro Vespucci's violence, expressed much as the *conquistador* Pedro de Mendoza does his in the first myth. Said example

can be further read culturally as a critique of the authoritarian tendency that manifests itself in violence.

38. *Expósito*, as a noun, means foundling and, as an adjective, abandoned.

39. Years later, Monti (1992b) explained his choice of hero:

What I wanted to say with that was: freedom isn't in avoiding the situation itself but rather in attaching oneself to it. You can't change countries the way you change a dirty shirt. My rejection of that superficial individualism is absolute. [. . .] One's country is also one's personal destiny. There's a relation of mutual pertinence: I'm part of it just as it's part of me. (251)

40. It must be remembered that most of those blacklisted at the beginning of the military regime remained prohibited from working openly in film, radio, and television until nearly the end of the dictatorship. Nonofficial theater continued to be their sole forum for (relatively) open artistic expression.

41. Although *Sarah Bernhardt* was considered a "safe" text, having been written by a foreign playwright and treating the life of a foreign actress, the production encountered problems, as this fragment of a 16 May 1980 *La Prensa* article, quoted in Andrés Avellaneda's 1986 study on censorship, confirms: "The evening performance in the Liceo Theater had to be interrupted when two disinfectant smoke-bombs were thrown into the theater during the second act of *Sarah Bernhardt*, the play by John Murrell, at the moment when the actress Cipe Lincovsky, wrapped in the French flag, was narrating the Dreyfus case" (2:214).

42. Bortnik (1992) tells of changing her plans and deciding to stay:

I realized that they weren't going to be able to throw me out no matter how much they threatened me or if I was blacklisted, so I stayed. I was blacklisted for one more year and I couldn't work anywhere, but then they let me do a television program one year, two programs the next, and afterwards I did a film. Then they blacklisted me again [for having signed a petition in support of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo]. (244)

Bortnik's artistic self-expression took two forms during the years of dictatorship: her plays and the short stories she published in the magazine, *Hum@*, a magazine whose importance to this period will be discussed in later chapters.

43. *Domesticados* premiered in the Teatro Astral and was directed by Luis Agustoni. The cast was as follows: Graciela Duffau (She), Hugo Arana (He), Bárbara Mujica (the Other Woman), Rodolfo Ranni (the Director), Nelly Prono (the Mother), Néstor H. Rivas (the Cousin), and Roberto Antier (the Son).

44. *La malasangre* premiered on 17 August in the Teatro Olimpia. The production was directed by Laura Yusem (with assistance by Ernesto Korovsky and Marisa Rouco), set and costumes were designed by Graciela Galán, and the cast was as follows: Soledad Silveyra (Dolores), Oscar Martínez (Rafael), Lautaro Murúa (Father), Susana Lanteri (Mother), Patricio Contreras (Fermín), and Danilo Devizia (Juan Pedro).

45. See, for example, the articles by Messinger Cypess (1989), Nigro (1989), Bolding (1989), Foster (1989b), and Giordano (1992).

46. *Cámara lenta* premiered on 21 April in the Teatro Olimpia. It was directed by Yusem, the set was designed by Galán, and the cast was as follows: Pavlovsky (Dagomar), Carlos Carella (Amílcar), and Betiana Blum (Rosa).

47. Pavlovsky readily acknowledges the production's success: "[I]t was done professionally in the sense of [running] Tuesdays through Sundays, from April to November . . . and it was quite successful" (Conversation with the author, Buenos Aires, 15 September 1992). The production also benefited from the participation of

two well-known actors (Carella and Blum) and a director (Yusem) who had been the "discovery" of the previous year's season for her staging of the play *Boda blanca* [White Wedding].

48. Conversation with the author (Buenos Aires, 15 September 1992). Pavlovsky, in an earlier interview (Giella 1985b), spoke of *Cámara lenta's* peculiar and intensely personal nature: "[P]erhaps it isn't representative of *my* theater in particular, or *my* theatrical language which is a language of action, violent. But surely, personally, it was representative as a kind of elaboration of my own deterioration, of my own losses, of my own anguishes during these years" (58, emphasis Giella's).

49. The only other play by Pavlovsky that surpasses *Cámara lenta* in self-analysis is his recent work, *Rojos globos rojos* [Red Balloons Red], which premiered in 1994 in the Teatro Babilonia.

50. *Ultimo match* premiered in the Teatro Municipal General San Martín in 1970.

51. Conversation with the author (Buenos Aires, 15 September 1992).

52. The thirteenth scene, "Sobre los sueños de Dagomar" [About Dagomar's Dreams], makes explicit Rosa's duality (and Amílcar's duplicity, too, as Dagomar's friend and Death's accomplice): Her nude back, a web of scars, is both treated and further wounded by Amílcar; he cleans and medicates her wounds with one hand while holding the towel in his other hand, now transformed into a hook. As he spreads Merthiolate across Rosa's back, it turns bright red. Dagomar, unable to watch and overcome by an internal buzzing sound, grabs his head and brings the dream to a close.

53. *Chau Misterix* premiered in the Auditorio Buenos Aires on 4 August. It was directed by Carlos Catalano (assisted by Tito Drago), with set design by Tito Egurza, and a cast as follows: Carlos de Matteis (Rubén), Susana Delgado (Titi), Cecilia Labour (Miriam), and Antonio Bax (Chiche).

54. Monti contributed a prologue to the 1983 publication of four plays written by his former students, which includes *Chau Misterix*. In the prologue, Monti describes the play as a "sexual tragedy, coated in humor and tenderness, that allows us to decode in its lower-case (hi)story a society and a period: its taboos, its repressions, its disguises" (11).

55. *Don Elías, campeón* was directed by Salvador Santángelo, in the Sala Cunill Capellas, with set and costume design by Juan Carlos Lancestremere, music by Jorge Valcarcel, and the following cast: Alfredo Duarte (Don Elías), Norberto Díaz (Hugo), Hilda Suárez (Zulema), and Héctor Pellegrini (Antonio).

56. *Ultimo premio* premiered on 4 September in the Teatro Payró. It was directed by Néstor Romero, with set design by Antonio Berni, and a cast as follows: José María Gutiérrez (Abelardo), Julio Chávez (Daniel), and Chris Morena (Patricia). Rovner's first play, *Una pareja (que es mío y que es tuyo)* [A Couple (That's Mine and That's Yours)], was also staged by Manuel Lillo in the Teatro Payró in 1976. In 1977, Mirta Santos staged Rovner's *¿Una foto . . . ?* [A Photo . . . ?] in the Payró during the same cycle of "Noontime Theater" as Pavlovsky's soon-to-be-prohibited *Telarañas*.

57. *La roña* was directed and produced by the playwright, playing in the Teatro Margarita Xirgu on 27 and 28 October. Set and lighting were by Rolando Fabián (assisted by Jorge Vairo), direction assistance from Nacha Yáñez and Juan Lescano, and the cast was as follows: Miguel Angel Paludi (Buyer), Ruth Higher (Chelita), Antonio Regueiro (Augusto), Guillermo Gross (Juan), María C. Paradiso (María), Marco Estell (Bibi), and Miguel A. Paludi (Albertito). In 1981 Verrier premiered two other one-act plays, *Los días* [The Days] and *¿Y fue?* [And it Was?] in the Teatro de la Sociedad Hebreaica.

Verrier, also a journalist and television/film writer, staged her first play in 1960

and consistently experimented with both avant-garde and realistic theater models. Although Verrier is the author of more than thirty plays, I have included *La roña* in this section on "new voices" because of its content and the author's apparently peripheral relationship to the Buenos Aires theater community.

58. Appended to the 1985 edition of the text is a United Press International article, "Desaparecidos: Tema de una obra," by John Reichertz, who discusses at length Verrier and her play.

CHAPTER 3

Quoted in Barone (1981, 5).

1. Griselda Gambaro, as quoted in Pellettieri (1992a, 7).

2. See the various articles by Osvaldo Pellettieri, the primary exponent of Argentinean theater's "periodization" (following the Russian formalist Yuri Tynjanov). The periodization model poses a system of subsystems in which the dominant system exists in a constant dialectic with a residual subsystem of continuation and an emerging subsystem of rupture. (See, for example, Pellettieri 1989a, 1992a, and 1992b, in addition to virtually all his preliminary studies or prologues to the plays published in Corregidor's "Colección Dramaturgos Argentinos Contemporáneos.")

3. This is the term employed by Miguel Angel Giella (1991b) to describe Teatro Abierto.

4. Osvaldo Dragún, in a conversation with the author (Buenos Aires, 10 August 1992).

5. The use of "vigilant/vigilante" in this chapter's title has a twofold purpose: First of all, it inverts the roles contained in the title to Giella's 1991 study of Teatro Abierto 1981 (*Teatro argentino bajo vigilancia*), which foregrounded the repressive vigilance of the military junta but failed to acknowledge Teatro Abierto's own active role achieved through a collective counter-vigilance; and secondly, it attempts to rework Diana Taylor's critique of "watching" as potentially empowering (because instructive) but just as possibly disempowering when reduced to scopophilia (1991, 139). Taylor develops this critique in her 1997 study; see especially the chapter on "Percepticide." I wish to expand the concept of watching to include "seeing" in two senses, witnessing and understanding. I also seek, in the case of Teatro Abierto, to include the concept of "vigil," suggesting a wakeful awareness, alert and openly responsive to activities that the military regime and its supporters might have preferred to have kept hidden.

6. Taylor (1997) dedicates an entire chapter to Teatro Abierto ("Staging Battles of Gender and Nation-ness"), in which she gives a brief overview of the national context within which Teatro Abierto 1981 took place. However, Taylor limits her analysis, in keeping with her book's general focus, to a study of how the first festival, in her words, "reenacted the struggle between men, staged on and through the 'feminine'" (238).

7. In "El teatro argentino y su historia" (22 July 1980).

8. Quoted in "Reclamo de Argentores," *Crónica* (24 October 1980).

9. The Actors' Union had met to discuss the topic "Regarding the Problems of Censorship" and specifically to respond to recent play closures: *Apocalipsis según otros* [Apocalypse according to Others] by the Compañía Argentina de Mimo in the Teatro del Picadero (the theater having been closed down for one day) and *La sartén por el mango* [The Upper Hand] by Javier Portales, which had been closed a few months earlier.

10. Quoted in "Los actores se reunieron," *La Razón* (24 October 1980).

11. Conversation with the author (Buenos Aires, 13 May 1992).

12. Reprinted in "Teatro Abierto 1981—la experiencia" (1982).

13. Only twenty plays were actually presented; Oscar Viale's *Antes de entrar dejen salir* [Let Us Out Before You Come In] was not staged because of "technical difficulties." Said "difficulties" were explained to me on various occasions to have been the result of last-minute exits by several principal cast members who feared reprisals in the commercial theater. The play was staged the following year but not as part of Teatro Abierto.

14. The curtain went up at 6:30 p.m., an unusually early hour for Buenos Aires theatergoers, but necessary so that some of the volunteering participants could still go to their paying jobs in the commercial theaters. The unconventional show time did not keep the audiences away.

15. The account that follows is reconstructed from a personal conversation with Dragún in Buenos Aires (10 August 1992). I include the following detailed narrative of Teatro Abierto's textual beginnings because, to date, histories of this important phenomenon have been inaccurate or incomplete. It is my intention to provide an overview of this movement and the factors that influenced its birth, growth, and demise, factors that affected *all* theatrical production during this period in Argentina.

16. Carlos Gorostiza, Agustín Cuzzani, Carlos Somigliana, Ricardo Halac, and Roberto Mario Cossa figured among the playwrights mentioned by Dragún. Taylor (1997) claims that Gambaro was the only woman playwright initially invited to participate, and that it was only after another playwright, Diana Raznovich, complained about the exclusion of women that she and Aída Bortnik were included (238).

17. Briefly, *Al violador* tells the story of an outlaw who attempts to transform himself from a socially unacceptable rapist into a socially acceptable murderer. The title plays with the double meaning of *violar*, to violate or break a law and to violate or rape another human being.

18. The Picadero opened as a theater in July 1980 and was located on the historic Pasaje Rauch in a 1926 building that had been transformed into a scenic space (black box) designed for experimental stagings.

19. Around the same time that the Picadero was burned down, another theater was destroyed by fire in Tucumán (Braceli 1981).

20. Jorge Luis Borges sent a telegram that read, "I am with you, in the name of culture." Sabato was quoted as saying, "[O]ut of a very sad, disastrous event came an episode of great importance for the national culture. A couple of fires and Argentine theater is saved" (quoted in "Seguirá Teatro Abierto" *La Nación*, 8 August 1981).

21. In newspaper accounts of the press conference, the following theaters are listed as having volunteered to host the festival performances: El Nacional, Margarita Xirgu, Del Bajo, Contemporáneo, Gran Corrientes, Del Centro, Payró, Lassalle, Sala Planeta, Sala Uno, Laboratorio, La Jaula, Tabarís, Taller de Garibaldi, Bambalinas, and Teatro Estudio IFT.

22. Many participants in Teatro Abierto told me of audience members and supporters spending the night outside the theater to protect the Tabarís from any future "accidents." This fear of reprisal was present even before the Picadero burned. Some participants left Teatro Abierto because of concern that they would be black-listed and denied work in film, television, or the commercial theaters. Several of those involved in Teatro Abierto told of one meeting held when it appeared that Teatro Abierto would end almost before it had begun because of fears of retaliation; nevertheless, the majority voted to continue on with the project.

23. The sexist underside of Teatro Abierto, as well as that of Argentinean culture in general, has been thoroughly exposed by Taylor (1997). I will forgo commenting here on the gendering of national culture and refer the reader instead to Taylor's intriguing study.

24. Arturo Balassa's full-length film, *País cerrado, teatro abierto* [Closed Country, Open Theater], in production from 1980 to 1989, was not released until 1990.

25. Unfortunately, because of financial problems, the magazine was able to publish only one issue (Giella 1991b, 43).

26. In *Clarín* (23 July 1981). In addition, the weekly magazine *Hum*® produced a series of cartoons about Teatro Abierto that centered particularly on the Picadero fire.

27. This became apparent when, at the press conference held after the Picadero fire, the statement read by Dragún included the following declaration: "Teatro Abierto initially belonged to a group of writers, directors, actors, and technicians that formed a part, an important part but only a part, of Argentinean theater. Today Teatro Abierto belongs to the entire country" (quoted in Murmo/Perinelli 1982). In a 1982 interview, Dragún was even more effusive: "If Teatro Abierto in 1981 was an experience previously unknown in Argentina, Teatro Abierto '82, with its collection of fifty-one plays by national authors, will be an experience not only unknown in this country but in any part of the world" (quoted in Giella 1982, 68).

28. Other commission members included: Juan Roldán, secretary; Víctor Watnik, treasurer; Carlos Somigliana, Halac, and Cossa, representing the playwrights; Martha Bianchi, Manolo Callau, and Onofre Lovero, representing the actors; Rubens Correa, José Bove, Villanueva Cosse, and Omar Grasso, representing the directors; and Gastón Breyer, representing the designers.

29. In a country such as Argentina, where the differences, and consequently the resentments, between the nation's capital and the provinces are so great and where "culture" is perceived to be generated from the nation's "center" and distributed to the "peripheral" provinces, this integrative desire was both ambitious and laudable.

30. A jury of nine nonplaywrights was selected, and each submission carried a pseudonym. According to an article entitled "El concurso" in the 31 December 1981 *La Nación*, the following actors, directors, and scenic designers constituted the jury: Breyer, Cosse, Osvaldo Bonet, Jorge Petraglia, Francisco Javier, Antonio Rodríguez de Anca, Graciela Araujo, Luis Brandoni, and José María Gutiérrez. The postmark deadline for submissions was 15 March 1982.

31. According to Giella (1991b, 60 n. 10), a thirty-fourth play was selected: *La otra orilla* [The Other Shore], by Alberto Rodríguez Muñoz. It was not staged in the 1982 season.

32. Among those excluded were Gambaro, Eduardo Pavlovsky, and Ricardo Monti. It should be noted that several well-known playwrights (such as Bortnik), whose works had been included in Teatro Abierto's first season, chose not to participate in the contest because of their disagreement with its methodology. Others, such as Halac, continued their involvement in Teatro Abierto, despite not having their plays included in the second season. The organizers attempted to rectify some omissions; in Gambaro's case, they included a new staging of her 1963 play *Las paredes* [The Walls] in the experimental program.

33. Although performances were canceled during the second year of Teatro Abierto, it should be noted that twice as many spectators attended the plays in 1982 as did the first year.

34. The satirical magazine *Hum*® *Registrado* [Registered Humor] began publication in 1978 and played an important role in communicating an oppositional mes-

sage during and after dictatorship. As Kathleen Newman (1992) notes in her analysis of Argentinean "cultural redemocratization," "The laughter of *Hum*® is a camouflage for a war of knowledge and wits between two nations that coexisted in the same space" (168). The ® [registered trademark] contained in the magazine's title (*Hum*®) allows for a play on the words *humor* and *humo* [smoke, hot air].

35. O'Donnell (1982) went on to condemn Realism-Naturalism as the "true cancer of our theater" (52).

36. In my research, I found that the only publication that made a concerted effort not only to see the seventeen "experimental" works but also to review them was the biweekly magazine *Hum*®. The daily newspapers largely ignored these events even though they managed to review all the "mainstream" productions.

37. The march was the first such demonstration during the Proceso. It was organized by various labor unions to protest the state of the economy and was violently put down by the government. Nevertheless, the March demonstration influenced the military junta in expediting its planned attack on the Malvinas/Falklands and moving the date up from May or July to April 2 (Rock 1987, 377). During 1982, prior to the Malvinas/Falklands offensive, the junta had made other excursions into foreign affairs, such as January's campaign against Chile over the Beagle Channel, and there were rumors of Argentine military involvement in Central America (375).

38. O'Donnell (1983) then responded to Cossa in "An Open Theater Closed to Criticism?" [¿Un Teatro Abierto cerrado a la crítica?] in the next issue, and in the following issue, *Hum*® solicited responses from other 1982 participants, published in Hugo Paredero's 1983 article "Teatro Abierto: Sumando voces . . ." [Open Theater: Adding Voices . . .].

39. This was an opinion shared by other Teatro Abierto 1982 participants, including the director Roberto Castro (as quoted in Paredero 1983, 69) and Dragún (expressed in a conversation with the author on 10 August 1992).

40. It should be remembered that in one year, Teatro Abierto had gone from one 600-seat theater (the Tabarís, which had provided 200 seats more than the original location, the Picadero) to two theaters with a combined capacity of 1,350. Teatro Abierto '82 was more than three times the size of Teatro Abierto '81 as it had originally been conceived.

41. Quoted in "Teatro Abierto 1983" (*La Prensa*, 22 September 1983).

42. For example, one group organized its individual plays around the common theme of a party, while another explored the theme of "Hoy se comen al flaco" [Today We Eat Up Skinny] (which became the title of group participant Dragún's contribution). Some groups had their plays presented on different nights; thus, Ricardo Halac and Eduardo Rovner, although participating in the same group, had works presented on separate bills.

43. Such are the cases of Group 1 (*Los derrocamientos, o Blues de la calle Balcarce* [The Topplings/Overthrows, or Balcarce Street Blues], written by Sergio de Cecco, Carlos Pais, and Gerardo Taratuto), Group 3 (*El viento se los llevó* [They Were Gone with the Wind], by Francisco Ananía, Cossa, Eugenio Griffiero, and Jacobo Langsner), and Group 6 (*Inventario* [Inventory], by Peñarol Méndez, Hebe Serebrisky, Somigliana, and Susana Torres Molina).

44. The plays were *Cumbia morena cumbia* [Dance Dark Woman Dance] by Mauricio Kartun, *El señor Brecht en el salón dorado* [Mr. Brecht in the Golden Salon] by Abelardo Castillo, *Honrosas excepciones* [Honorable Exceptions] by Víctor Winer, and the commentary *Están deliberando* [They're Deliberating] by Julio César Castro.

45. Dragún, in one interview, estimated that 15,000 people marched in the parade (quoted in "Teatro Abierto. Cuando la cultura vence a la represión," *La Voz*, 2 October 1983). Javier (1992) writes that 25,000 participated (47).

46. See Taylor (1997) for a gendered reading of the burning of *la Censurona*. Taylor asks, "How many more women must be burnt in effigy so that 'we,' the specular community, might live?" (254).

47. Thus the 1983 festival's run coincided with the elections, ending on the eve of Alfonsín's presidency.

48. Tickets cost less than one-half the price of a movie pass.

49. The invited playwrights had all participated in Teatro Abierto in previous years. They included Bortnik, Cossa, Cuzzani, de Cecco, Dragún, Gambaro, Jorge Goldenberg, Griffiero, Halac, Kartun, Julio Mauricio, Méndez, Rodolfo Paganini, Pais, Pavlovsky, Roberto Perinelli, Rovner, Somigliana, Taratuto, and Viale.

50. Halac eventually expanded his four pages into the 1984 play *El dúo Sosa-Echagüe*, to date unstaged.

51. Playwrights such as Gorostiza, Somigliana, Gambaro, Monti, Diana Raznovich, and Pavlovsky contributed plays during the first phase of Teatro Abierto (that is, the 1981 and 1982 seasons) but not in the later years. In the same way, Rovner and Goldenberg's 1983 plays must remain outside this study because they did not participate in the earlier festivals. Additionally, in an attempt to expand Teatro Abierto studies, I have chosen to study plays that are rarely included in critical analyses. For discussions of other Teatro Abierto plays, see, for example: *El acompañamiento* and *Lejana tierra prometida* [Distant Promised Land] (Giella 1991b), *La cortina de abalorios* [The Beaded Curtain] (González n.d., Sagaseta 1989, Trastoy 1989, Taylor 1997), *Decir sí* [Saying Yes] (Graham-Jones 1992) and *Desconcierto* [Disconcert (ed)] (Graham-Jones 1992, Taylor 1997), and *Concierto de aniversario* [Anniversary Concert] (Sagaseta 1992).

52. I specifically refer to Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of "dialogism," as applied to the theater by Ubersfeld (1977), not only in its heterogeneity but, as Ubersfeld notes, in its organization, be it montage, collage, juxtaposition, or confrontation (291–93). I find this concept compelling not only in its possible application to multiple viewpoints but also in its applicability to split or fragmented characters and the process of internalization. I return to this concept in my discussion of post-Proceso theater.

53. Kartun began his theater activities in the early 1970s, participating in various "committed theater" collectives with Carlos Carella, Juan Carlos Gené, and the Brazilian Augusto Boal. He has worked as a theater and film actor, director, and playwright. Today, he is one of the few Argentine playwrights able to support themselves exclusively from writing and teaching.

54. See, for example, Castagnino (1982) and the unsigned 1982 *La Nación* review ("Familia").

55. *La casita de los viejos* premiered in September at the Teatro Margarita Xirgu. It was directed by Agustín Alezzo (with assistance from Cora Roca and Jean Pierre Noher), set and costumes were designed by Gastón Breyer, and the following cast participated: Aníbal Morixe (Rubén), Elbio Fernández/Darío Paniagua (Rubencito), Claudia Potquin (Porota), Gabriela Giardino (Pocha), Sara Krell (Doña Rosa), Chany Mallo (Mother), and Alfredo Iglesias (Father).

56. *Cumbia morena cumbia* premiered in October 1983 at the Margarita Xirgu. It was directed collectively by Héctor Kohan, Néstor Sabatini, Raúl Serrano, and Alfredo Zemba (with assistance from Claudia Weiner). Gastón Breyer and Nereida Bar designed the set, and the cast was as follows: Ulises Dumont (Willy), Mario Alarcón (Rulo), and twenty-six *colados* [paraders].

57. The reader is directed to the unsigned reviews in *La Nación* ("Otra jornada" 1983), *Crónica* ("Creación Abierta" 1983), *La Epoca* ("Ensayo general" 1983), and

Luis Mazas (1983) in *Clarín* for different reactions to the 1983 Teatro Abierto production of *Cumbia morena cumbia*.

58. Lockhart (1992) interprets Rulo's illness as dating from the mass demonstration of 30 March 1982, with the subsequent military backlash including the Malvinas/Falklands debacle (83).

59. In a conversation with the author on 21 October 1992, in Buenos Aires.

60. For example, Pocha compliments Rubencito for being a little gentleman, and Rubencito proudly stands up on his chair, causing his mother to knock him down with a terrible slap (145).

61. *Papá querido* premiered on 1 August 1981 in the Teatro Picadero. It was directed by Luis Agustoni (with assistance from Silvia Kalfaian) with music by Rolando Mañanes. The cast was as follows: Beatriz Matar (Electra), Arturo Bonín (Carlos), Mirtha Busnelli (Clara), and Miguel Terni (José).

62. *De a uno* premiered on 18 October 1983 in the Teatro Margarita Xirgu, with direction by Juan Cosín (assisted by Ricardo Racconto), set design by Hugo de Ana, and music by Sergio Aschero. The cast was as follows: Lidia Catalano (Julia), Jorge Petraglia (Grandfather), Néstor Hugo Rivas, Mónica Villa, Antonio Ugo, Horacio Morelo, Manuel Bello, Daniel Ruiz, Eduardo Camacho, Elida Aráoz, and María Ibarreta.

63. "[T]he protagonist is the father who has just died and is evoked by his children" ("Despareja jornada" 1981).

64. Phallogocentrism, the term coined by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, is the conjuncture of "logocentrism," or the privileging of the "logos" as a metaphysical presence, and "phallogocentrism," the privileging of the phallus as the symbol or source of power (Moi 1985). Luce Irigaray (1987) echoes Derrida, "It is the man who has been the subject of discourse. . . . And the gender of God, the guardian of every subject and discourse, is always *paternal and masculine in the West*" (119, her emphasis).

65. Conversation with the author (Buenos Aires, 13 May 1992).

66. This climate of terror was intensified in the 1983 production through the use of violent winds to move the tablecloth (Rébora 1983).

67. Bortnik calls José "the typical desaparecido," and continues:

José goes there [under the table] because of the conscience of the rest. I believe that they are all those who don't believe that the disappeared exist, those are the ones who put José under the table. That's the reason for José's question: "Does the opinion of these young people really matter to us?" That's why he doesn't tell a story; he's the only one in the play who doesn't tell his story nor bring any memory because he is a desaparecido. He is really only a question. (Conversation with the author, Buenos Aires, 13 May 1992.)

68. *Oficial primero* premiered in the Teatro Odeón and was directed by Beatriz Matar, with set and costume design by Luis Diego Pedreira (assisted by Alfredo Oscar Sánchez, Osvaldo Ciuffo and Gustavo Anreotti). Music was composed by Roque de Pedro and choreography by Ruth Rodríguez. The cast was as follows: José María López (Official Number One), Elvira Onetto (office worker), Héctor Charrúa (office boy), and the following actors supplied the bodies of the disappeared: Susana Zoppi, Pedro Segni, Rodolfo Frangipani, Marcelo León, Norma Graziosi, María Olivera, Marisa Chamejovsky, Mirta Kanderer, Angeles González, Patricia Balado, Sofía Pérez, Ricardo Héctor Sussena, Rosario Rodríguez, Oscar Santos, and Pirucha de Martín.

69. *De víctimas y victimarios* premiered in the Teatro Odeón. It was directed by José María Paolantonio, with set and costume design by Nené Murúa, and a cast as follows: Claudio Gallardou (Pepo), Lucrecia Capello (Señora), Catalina Speroni (Ra-

mona), Osvaldo Tesser (Señor), Susana Delgado (Daughter), Salo Vasochi (Old Man), and Pablo Brichta (Young Man).

70. *La cortina de abalorios* premiered in the Teatro del Picadero and was directed by Juan Cosín (with assistance from Carlos Sturze). The set design was by Jorge Sarudiansky, costume design by Mené Arnó, music by Rodolfo Mederos, and the cast was as follows: Patricio Contreras (Servant), Cipe Lincovsky (Mamá), Juan Manuel Tenuta (Bebé Pezuela), and Miguel Guerberof (Popham).

71. *Prohibido no pisar el césped* premiered in the Teatro Margarita Xirgu. The production was directed by Juan Cosín, with set and costumes designed by María Julia Bertotto and music by Sergio Aschero. The following cast participated: Mónica Villa (Eva), Graciela Gramajo (Mecha), Lidia Catalano (Mother), Juan C. Posik (Conrado), Miguel Guerberof (Salvador), Patricio Contreras (Padre Julio), Jorge Petraglia (Amado), Noemí Morelli (Aunt Pedro/Great Grandmother), and Cynthia Paganini (Doll).

72. *El viento se los llevó* premiered on 5 October 1983 in the Teatro Margarita Xirgu. It was directed by Roberto Castro, Alberto Catán, Omar Grasso, and Julio Baccaro, with set design by Héctor Calmet, costume design by Marta Albertinazzi, and music by Jorge Valcarcel. The following cast participated: Alicia Zanca (Rosana), Raúl Rizzo (Felipe), Pepe Novoa (Antonio), Danilo Devizia (various roles), Miguel Kientak, Marcelo León, Lucrecia Capello (Alcira), Ana María Casó (Meneca), Mágara Alonso (Grandmother), José María López (Grandfather), Patricio Contreras (Foreigner), and Carlos Babyazuc (Dead Man).

73. The unsigned *La Nación* review is entitled "Vigórosa propuesta en Teatro Abierto" (7 October 1983).

74. The works of only two of *El viento se los llevó's* four playwrights are discussed in this chapter. Francisco Ananía and Jacobo Langsner are both well-known writers (the Argentine-Uruguayan Langsner for his hugely successful *Esperando la carroza* [Waiting for the Hearse] and Ananía for the 1983 *Reunión* [Reunion]), but they did not contribute plays to other editions of Teatro Abierto.

75. *Gris de ausencia* premiered in the Teatro del Picadero. It was directed by Carlos Gandolfo (assisted by Claudia Weiner), with music by Juan Félix Roldán and Arturo Penón and a cast as follows: Pepe Soriano (Grandfather), Luis Brandoni (Chilo), Osvaldo de Marco (Dante), Adela Gleiger (Lucía), and Elvira Vicario (Frida).

76. *El tío loco* premiered in the Teatro Margarita Xirgu and was directed by Laura Yusem (assisted by Ernesto Korovsky). Set and costumes were designed by Graciela Galán, and the cast was as follows: Mágara Alonso (Pepa), María Visconti (Mother), Manolo Callau (Son), Rita Cortese (Daughter-in-law), José María Gutiérrez (Father), Susana Yasán (Jacqueline), Ulises Dumont (Tío Loco), Fernando Iglesias "Tacholas" (Old Man 1), Norberto Pagani (Old Man 2), Ruby Gattari (Client 1), Marta Rodríguez (Client 2), and Carlos Weber (German).

77. *Príncipe azul* premiered in the Teatro Odeón and was directed by Omar Grasso. The set was designed by Héctor Calmet, costumes designed by Mené Arnó, Jorge Valcarcel composed the music, and the following cast participated: Jorge Rivera López (Juan) and Villanueva Cosse (Gustavo).

78. *Criatura* premiered in the Teatro del Picadero and was directed by Jorge Hacker (with assistance from Máximo Iaffa), with costuming by Delia Fabre and music by Roque de Pedro. Luz Kerz performed the title role.

79. Notice how the very word "criatura" itself possesses contradictory senses: the innocent creature coexisting with the monstrous creation.

80. Conversation with the author (Buenos Aires, 10 August 1992).

81. Karl Kohut (1990) also pointed out this tendency as he attempted to place

Teatro Abierto within the greater context of Buenos Aires theater production (224–25 n. 11).

82. Pellettieri (1992a) writes of an "aesthetic ideology nearing Teatro Abierto's" (7) that was employed throughout the 1980s in many Argentinean plays. By defining this "ideology" through its association with Teatro Abierto, he obfuscates the fact that this "aesthetic ideology" was already being practiced before the genesis of Teatro Abierto, in such plays as Monti's *Marathón* and Cossa's *El viejo criado*, both staged in 1980.

83. See Graziano (1992), especially chapter 3 ("The Mythological Structure of the Imaginary"), for a discussion of the Proceso's mythopoetic project. Taylor's 1997 study of Teatro Abierto 1981 (chapter 8 in *Disappearing Acts*) focuses on the binarizing reproduction of "gendered reality" in what she terms Teatro Abierto's masculinist organization and the positioning of the "feminine" in the movement's plays.

84. A few examples should suffice: Javier Margulis, who would become the Argentine director most closely associated with Theater of Image, participated as a director in the 1983 cycle. In 1985, the playwrights Cristina Escofet and Susana Pujol participated. Participating directors included Eduardo Pavelic, Ricardo Bartis, and Julien Howard, all of whom have continued as directors. Howard, together with other members of *Los Volatineros* (working together since the 1970s), has had a great influence on groups such as the Macocos and the Organización Negra, and Bartis is currently the most highly visible director of experimental theater in Buenos Aires.

CHAPTER 4

Gambaro (1989, 26).

1. Army General Videla and Navy Admiral Massera received lifetime sentences (only to be pardoned by President Carlos Saúl Menem in 1990); General Viola received a sentence of seventeen years; and General Galtieri was acquitted but kept under military detention for his incompetent leadership during the Falklands/Malvinas War.

2. "¿Un nuevo teatro para un nuevo país?" was the title of an article by Rómulo Berruti (1983a); it included a survey taken among the city's actors, directors, and playwrights. The article appeared on the front page of *Clarín's* 27 March 1983 Sunday entertainment supplement.

3. See Jorge A. Dubatti (1990, 1992, 1994, 1995) for overviews of this new theater movement. The inadequately termed "Teatro Joven" or "Teatro Underground" encompasses dance, theater of image, contact improvisation, performance art, stand-up comedy, and clowning. Dubatti (1990) gives 1983 as the year of birth for this innovative theater movement (6).

4. See Osvaldo Dragún's article (1987) for an overview of the state of Argentinean theater affairs and a discussion of the proposed law(s).

5. During the early postdictatorship years, many precoup plays, such as Gambaro's *El campo* [The Camp] and Pavlovsky's *El señor Galíndez* [Mr. Galíndez], were restaged as were plays which had been explicitly prohibited (e.g., *Telarañas* by Pavlovsky) or prevented from premiering because of censorship or self-censorship (e.g., David Viña's *Dorrego*).

6. These self-critical projects were not limited to the theater. As Kathleen Newman (1992) notes, "[D]uring the first three years of *alfonsinismo*, cultural production followed two tendencies: one, assessing the past, in particular the recent past; another, speculating on the present and the near future" (172).

7. It should be clarified that White's use of the term "anarchist" falls within the mode of "ideological implication," a taxonomy based on the writings of the sociologist Karl Mannheim. The reader might remember that Mannheim originally applied the term "fascist" to this category (White 1973, 22–26).

8. See René Girard (1977) and Jacques Derrida (1981) for discussions of the necessarily aporetic nature of the pharmakos.

9. This self-perception is obvious in the various publications, speeches, and decrees issued during the dictatorship. The following fragment from the dedication to the army's 1980 *El derecho a la libertad* [The Right to Freedom] should suffice as an example:

To the heroes and martyrs, both Argentine and foreign, immolated in the never-ending holocaust by the servants of the subversive Marxist ambition. . . .

To the "silent majority," the honest and generous people who work and deserve a better world, but who—perhaps because of this [honesty and goodness]—never are "news" and no one ever clamors for their rights.

To all of us who are willing to fight for our Faith, for our Fatherland and for a life of freedom for these forgotten good people, for our posterity, and even for those who are the puppets and slaves of Marxism. (5)

10. I have used the adverb "eventually" to underscore the Argentine upper and middle classes' initial widespread, albeit silent, support of the 1976 military coup as a return to order, after nearly a decade of social and political violence.

11. If we remember the antidictatorship stance of many Argentine theater practitioners, it is not surprising that they left the creation of Romances to the military junta. The reader may recall Gambaro's evaluation of the contributions of Teatro Abierto '81: "[W]e worked with the art of parody" (Pellettieri 1989a, 87).

12. Bakhtin expounds his theory of dialogism in the book *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* (1973), in which he states:

Here, we don't have a great number of destinies and lives developing within a single objective world . . . ; rather we have a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights, each with its own world, combining in the unity of an event but nonetheless without fusing. (8–9, emphasis his)

13. Dialogism is often inadequately subsumed under Julia Kristeva's concept of intertext: "The text is a permutation of texts, an intertextuality. In the space of a single text several *énoncés* [utterances] from other texts cross and neutralize each other" (Kristeva, quoted in Elam 1980, 93). Such a simple reduction removes dialogism's important actions of fracture and confrontation.

14. According to Ubersfeld (1977), "In *montage*, the heterogeneous elements take on sense in their combination, in the construction that is obtained with them; in *collage*, it is heterogeneity that constructs the meaning, not the combination" (292 n. 48, emphasis hers).

15. This discussion goes beyond a mere description of the context-of-utterance, as represented by a speaker, a listener, the here and now of the utterance, and the utterance itself. Ubersfeld's and Bakhtin/Vološinov's models incorporate the other spheres present in any utterance, such as ideology and real-world reference. These are issues of critical importance to any discussion of theatrical production.

16. Pertinent examples from Gambaro's 1960s plays would be the "splitting" of *El campo's* victim, Emma, into an agent of her own victimization and the "doubling" of the titular twins of *Los siameses* [The Siamese Twins].

17. "[Brechtian] protagonists . . . are exemplifications of human problems; they are primarily not individuals but dilemmas" (Sokol 1962, 134).

18. It is worth noting that all these "heterogeneities" support Brecht's assertion that "the smallest social unit is not one human being but two human beings" (Esslin 1971, 140).

19. *Real envideo* premiered in January 1983 at the Teatro Odeón. It was directed by Juan Cosín (with assistance from Dorita Madanes). The set was designed by Jorge Sarudiansky, with costumes by María Julia Bertotto and music by Sergio Aschero. The following cast participated: Leal Rey (King), Jorge Petraglia (Natán), Amparo Ibarlucía/Andrea Tenuta (Margarita), Lidia Catalano (Margarita 2), Rubén Szuchmacher (Sansón), Eduardo Camacho (Valentín), Juan Manuel Tenuta (Knight Felipe), and Ricardo Bartís (Doctor). Camacho, Bartís, and Carlos Frers also played the various roles of neighbors, knights, and servants.

20. For two analyses of *Real envideo*, see the articles by Becky Boling (1989) and Sharon Magnarelli (1989).

21. The restaging of *El campo* had the following principal cast: Franklin Caicedo (Martín), Alberto Segado (Franco), and Mirta Busnelli (Emma). As noted earlier, many national plays were restaged during this time period, often in the "official" theaters such as the Cervantes or the Teatro Municipal General San Martín. This return to the national theater can be interpreted as: (1) "official" theater's attempt at reconciliation, after years of not staging local plays precisely because they had been written by prohibited Argentine writers (bearing in mind, also, that many of the new national culture leaders came from this once-prohibited group); or (2) another example of the project of reviewing and revising recent Argentine history, including the restaging of earlier-produced plays.

22. Gambaro, quoted in Giella (1985a, 38).

23. *Del sol naciente* premiered in September 1984 at the Teatro Lorange, with set and costume design by Graciela Galán, music by Pablo Ortiz, staging by Laura Yusem and Bettina Muraña, and general direction by Yusem (with assistance from Tito Otero). The cast was as follows: Soledad Silveyra (Suki), Lidia Catalano (Housekeeper), Ulises Dumont (Obán), Pablo Brichta (Tubercular Man), and Mario Alarcón (Oscar).

24. The double reading is contained in the title's sun, the shared emblem of the Argentine and Japanese flags.

25. The theme of the desaparecidos as the dead not yet at peace, because they have not been acknowledged and accounted for by the living, continues to haunt and inform Gambaro's plays. It is the central theme of 1986's *Antígona furiosa* and 1992's *La casa sin sosiego*, both of which are revisions of classical texts, the former Sophocles's tragedy and the latter the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice.

26. *Mater* was directed by Cristina Banegas and starred Zulema Katz, recently returned from exile in Spain. *Mater* premiered on 7 August 1984 at the Teatro Olimpia. Music was provided by Carlos Villavicencio, lighting by Susana Torres Molina, and the three chorus members were Víctor Scorupski, Roberto Santocono, and Angel Frette. The play, in an expanded production, was taken that same year to factories, plazas, and union halls by the *Comisión de Artistas y Derechos Humanos* [Commission of Artists and Human Rights].

27. *Lavalle* premiered on 22 April 1983 in the Teatro Margarita Xirgu. It was directed by Somigliana (with assistance from Raquel Flotta). Set and lighting were designed by Héctor Calmet and Carlos Abreu, with costume design by Mené Arno, music by Sergio Aschero, and physical training and choreography by Silvia Vladimivsky. The following cast participated: Leonardo Odierna (Doctor I), Jorge Bazá de

Candia (Doctor II), Eduardo Gersberg (Doctor III), Mónica Galán (Dolores), Raúl Rizzo (Lavalle), Daniel Capellano (Aide), Guillermo Marcos (Paisano), Carlos Demartino (Halley), Pedro I. Martínez (Brizuela), and Beatriz Spelzini (Damasita).

28. I would thus agree with Ana Seoane's evaluation that the play's position, vis-à-vis Lavalle, "is neither in favor of nor against [him] but rather seeks out the political and social intrigues that led him to act as he did" (1989, 153).

29. *Equinoccio* premiered on 22 August 1983 in the Teatro Payró and was directed by Víctor Mayol.

30. As David W. Foster (1991) notes in his review of Diament's collected plays, Mariela does not appear until near the play's end and then only long enough to do little more than "suggest a counterdiscourse beyond angry negatives" (173). Foster further comments that it is up to the spectator to "be brave enough to disavow any sympathy with either the victims . . . [or] the victimizers" (174). If we accept Boal's theory of the function of catharsis, any empathy for Guido on the part of the spectator would stimulate the hamartia of fear, the tragic flaw that Guido acknowledges and to which he acquiesces, thus bringing on his own destruction. Yet, since society is also portrayed as corrupt, the spectator is distanced from the prevailing social ethos and forced to question the return to order and Guido's destruction. For Boal, then, the *Equinoccio* spectator's catharsis would be postponed.

31. In the play, O'Donnell experiments with erasing the boundaries between Vincent's present and his remembered past, much as an impressionist painter might blur the lines of his figures or a filmmaker might cross-fade one image into the next.

32. Directed by Víctor Mayol, *Vincent* premiered in the Teatro Catalinas on 28 November 1983, with costumes designed by Mabel Pena, masks by Hugo Grandi, physical training by Enrique Dacal, and music by Eduardo Segal. The following actors participated: Jorge Marrale (Vincent van Gogh), María Florentino, Daniel Marcove, Laura Moss, Jorge Sassi, Héctor Albarells, Juqui Berra, Roberto Lorio, Edgardo Nieva, Cecilia Labourt, Osvaldo Guidi, Hugo Men, Enrique Zani, Johana Berti, Laura Sepiurca, Victoria Lustij, Patricia Marrodan, Julio Suárez, José Moreda, Félix López, and Enrique Canellas.

33. The idea of a confederacy bears resonances of Eugenio Barba's floating islands, a creative strategy for individual artistic survival under negative conditions. The reader may remember that this was the image used by Osvaldo Dragún to describe the Teatro Abierto project.

34. *Redes*, written in 1978 but not staged until 1984, premiered on 20 January at the Teatro de la Fábula. It was directed by Liana Sande with the following cast: Beatriz Ambrosino (the Old Woman), Charo Antas (Marga), Ariel Bonomi (Leopoldo 2), Jorge Daus (Leopoldo 1), and Gabriel Mazzola (Luis). *En boca cerrada* premiered on 10 April 1984 at the FUNDART. It was directed by Agustín Alezzo, with music by Rodolfo Mederos, costume design by Marcela Polischer, and set design by Héctor Calmet. The following actors participated: Norberto Díaz, Chany Mallo, Beatriz Galán, Angela Ragno, Alberto Busaid, and Fernando Lúpiz.

35. The theme of homosexuality appears in Argentine plays staged during the dictatorship but in a far subtler fashion and as a subthematic vehicle for addressing a more pervasive social repression. See, for example, Oscar Viale's *Convivencia* [Co-habitation] and *Príncipe azul* by Eugenio Griffero.

36. *Primaveras* premiered on 29 November 1984 in the Sala Martín Coronado of the Teatro Municipal General San Martín. The production was directed by Beatriz Matar, with costume, set and lighting designs by Luis Diego Pedreira, music by Sergio Aschero, and choreography by Ruth Rodríguez. The following cast of principal actors participated: Graciela Araujo (Natalia), Rafael Rinaldi (Bernardo), Roberto

Carnaghi (Roberto), Juana Hidalgo (Delia), Alberto Segado (José), Jorge Mayor (Sergio), María Elena Mober (Lucía), Ingrid Pelicori (Paula), Elena Tasisto (Angélica), Marga Alonso (Clara), Emilio Bardi (Young Man), Emilia Mazer (Viviana), Alberto Peña (Enrique), and Horacio Roca (Alejandro). There were also eleven "shades" in the original production.

37. Bortnik, as quoted in an interview with Sergio Morero (1985b, 13).

38. As Bortnik said at the time of the play's premiere: "[Nineteen sixty-eight] was precisely the year in which everything that appeared to be part of a liberation movement began to be repressed throughout the entire world. . . . Many people who participated in guerrilla and liberation movements were later used (or their movement was used) in order to justify the repression" (Morero 1985b, 15).

39. *Papi*, premiering on 25 December 1983 in the Teatro Atlas in Mar del Plata, and later moving to Buenos Aires, was directed by David Stivel. The set was designed by Héctor Calmet, and the following cast participated: Martha Bianchi (Tatiana), Luis Brandoni (Papi), Julio De Grazia (Alducci), and Darío Grandinetti (L.L.).

40. *El señor Laforgue* premiered in May 1983 in the Teatro Olimpia, with direction by Agustín Alezzo and costume, set, and lighting designs by Héctor Calmet. Pavlovsky played the title role, and the rest of the cast included: Chani Mallo, Adolfo Yanelli, Chunchuna Villafañe, Santiago Garrido, Sara Krell, Alejandro Maci, Erika Schmid, Claudia Plotquin, Roberto Caminos, Roberto Marchetti, and Jacques Arndt. The production later moved to the Teatro Payró. Pavlovsky wrote the play in 1982, while the junta was still in power.

41. As Pavlovsky has stated, "Despite our wanting to repress oblivion with invented machinations, the forgotten will emerge through the return of the repressed" (Giella 1985b, 61).

42. Aldo becomes Alain on the advice of two trees, played by actors in a botanical variation on animalización, which was discussed earlier. Society's desire for the immobilizing codification of behavior is projected onto the two change-resistant trees.

43. Violador in Spanish means both "rapist" and "violinist," and the text consciously juggles both senses. Dragún's choice to make his protagonist a rapist, a highly controversial and certainly potentially offensive choice, was calculated to offend; the spectator sees not only the criminality but also the hypocrisy of society's acceptance of some crimes but not others. Rape poses a far greater threat to the established patriarchal order than does murder. Furthermore, Dragún, in choosing to present a rapist as "heroic" individualist, echoes Jean-Paul Sartre's defense of Jean Genet and indictment of bourgeois society: "The criminal does not make beauty; he himself is the authentic beauty."

44. Not surprisingly, one of the 1984 season's greatest hits, and extended into the following year along with a revisionist national play, *Juan Moreira*, was Brecht's *Galileo Galilei*, a classic example of the brilliant individual destroyed at the hands of conventional society. The production was directed by Jaime Kogan and staged at the Teatro Municipal General San Martín. Walter Santa Ana received that year's Molière prize for his performance as Galileo.

45. *De pies y manos* premiered on 28 March 1984 in the Teatro Nacional Cervantes. It was directed by Omar Grasso (with assistance from Alberto Cattán and Liliana Carro) with set design by Guillermo de la Torre, costumes by Maribel Sola, and music composed by Jorge Valcarcel (with arrangement assistance from Mariano Cossa). The following cast participated: Cristina Banegas (Girlfriend), Claudio Gallardou (Hernán), Lidia Catalano (Mother), Carlos Carella (Friend), and Alfredo Alcón (Miguel). Lidia Catalano won the 1984 Molière prize for best actress.

46. Yirair Mossian (1984). In a 1994 conversation with the author, the Argentine director and critic Francisco Javier called *De pies y manos* and Ricardo Monti's 1990 *Una pasión sudamericana* [A South American Passion] the most important plays to come out of post-Proceso Argentina.

47. Cossa has continued his exploration of the intellectual's role in subsequent plays: Professor Giménez Bazán (1985's *Los compadritos* [The Pals]) and the professor in *Yepeto* [Gepetto] (1987).

48. Cossa has acknowledged that he and Alcón come from two very different aesthetic backgrounds. He also believed that the audience was not prepared to see Alcón, the classical actor, perform in a Cossa play and stated that this reception problem contributed to the production's limited success (conversation with the author, Buenos Aires, 20 October 1992).

49. The friend is a variation of the *compadrito porteño* who frequents Cossa's plays and thus, like the *compadrito* or childhood buddy, suggestive of nationalistic conservatism and violence, as Susana Anaine has noted in her 1990 overview of Cossa's theater (88).

50. One of at least five *patotas*, or gangs, mentioned in the play. Each gang, like the characters in the play, has its own ideological agenda and seeks to punish those who would disagree. The reader will remember that the task forces responsible for many of the disappearances during the Proceso are also called *patotas*.

51. *Knepp* premiered in September 1983 in the Teatro Olimpia (and later moved to the Teatro Municipal General San Martín). It was directed by Laura Yusem, with costume and set design by Graciela Galán. The cast was as follows: Luisina Brando (María Elena), Lautaro Murúa (Knepp), Raúl Rizzo (Luis), Adela Gleijer (Madre), Juan Carlos Ricci (Policía), and Luis Brandoni (voice of Raúl).

52. This is the capsulized description that appeared in "Teatro para el fin de semana," *La Nación* (22 October 1983).

53. Excerpted from the description of the play contained in "Teatro: calendario" of the entertainment guide *Qué hacemos* (October 1983).

54. Conversation with the author (Buenos Aires, 4 November 1992).

55. A version of this section appeared in *Latin American Theatre Review* (1996).

56. Gerardo Fernández, in his review of the 1985 production of *Telarañas*, said the 1977 staging possessed "a rigorous outline of distorted Greek tragedy." The director of the original production, Alberto Ure (1991), has noted in himself a preference for the tragic in the classical theater, writing in a critical essay on the rehearsal process: "I cheer up more with the tragic. I think that it is my personal company, the remains of a religious education and of a psychotic family, in which I have never stopped believing and which I have never stopped ridiculing" (182).

57. Even as late as August 1983 (that is, on the eve of the country's return to democracy), the ban had not yet been lifted on the play (Giella 1985b, 62).

58. With Pavlovsky himself as the padre and Tina Serrano as the madre. Other cast members included Juan Naso, Arturo Maly, and Héctor Calori.

59. See the Introduction to this book for the text of the Decree (also quoted in Avellaneda 1986, 2:161).

60. Altamiranda (1992) studies the dramatic aesthetic elements of expressionism, absurdism, and realism present in Pavlovsky's "*realismo exasperante*" [exasperating realism] and exemplified in *Telarañas*.

61. *Telarañas* had its world premiere that year (1976) in Rome (Schanzer 1976, 93).

62. Pavlovsky in a conversation with the author (Buenos Aires, 15 September 1992). Pavlovsky left the country shortly thereafter. See Albuquerque (1991, 143) for Pavlovsky's 1985 account of the same incident.

63. *Telarañas* repreremied in the Teatro del Viejo Palermo on 29 April 1985. It was directed by Ricardo Bartis, with set design by Cristina Moix, costume design by Moix and Marlen Kipperband, makeup by Hugo Grandi, lighting by Andrés Barragán and Sebastián Acosta, and music by Juan Del Barrio. The cast was as follows: Luis Campos (Father), Marga Grajer (Mother), Jorge Luis Rivera (Pibe), Alfredo Ramos (Beto), and Pompeyo Audivert (Pepe).

64. Bartis had appeared in productions of Büchner's *Leoncio y Lena* [Leonce and Lena], Fernando Arrabal's *Fando y Lis* [Fando and Lis], and a staged adaptation of Dostoyevsky's *Memorias del subsuelo* [Notes from the Underground] (all directed by David Amitín).

65. This movement is the subject of discussion in this book's final chapter.

66. Conversation with the author (Buenos Aires, 15 September 1992).

67. This is Gregory Bateson's term "to describe the simultaneous transmission of two kinds of messages, one of which contradicts the other" (Deleuze/Guattari 1983, 79).

68. As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1983) put it, "The paranoiac father Oedipalizes the son. Guilt is an idea projected by the father before it is an inner feeling experienced by the son" (275).

69. Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of Oedipus as the "figurehead of imperialism" (Seem 1983, xx) and proposed anti-Oedipal approach of "schizoanalysis" are introduced in *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

70. The *sainete*, or one-act comic play, originated in Spain and often ridiculed local customs. The Buenos Aires variant, the *sainete criollo*, reached its height of popularity during the turn of the century as the theatrical meeting place of the creoles and the immigrants inundating the port. With an abundance of local dialects and stock types, the *sainete* staged the melodramatic and violent situations in which many porteños found themselves, as their city underwent dramatic changes.

CONCLUSION

Quoted in Ana Seoane (1991, 113).

1. As opposed to the author-generated play, the script is the theatrical text, often written down (if at all) after the staging or during the rehearsal period as an *aide-mémoire*.

2. I would direct the reader to the following texts for overviews of recent Buenos Aires theater production: Dubatti (1990, 1992, 1994, 1995), Carreira (1994), Graham-Jones (1997).

3. A case in point is La Negra's 1988 *La tirolesa* [The Tyrolean (Climb)], which took place on Buenos Aires's obelisk with the actors using mountain-climbing techniques to create a seemingly gravity-defying dance.

4. One example of their work is Tortonese and Urdapilleta's 1992 *Mamita querida* [Mommy Dearest], a cutting send-up of the institution of motherhood.

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