

## Open Theatre Revisited: An Argentine Experiment

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At the end of the seventies, Argentine theatre scholars were ready to lament the lack of emerging new talent on the stages of local theatres. Luis Ordaz noted in the last of a set of four monographs reviewing Argentine theatre:

Pensábamos intentar como broche de este trabajo, algunas reflexiones concernientes a nuestro teatro de estos días. Lamentarnos, por ejemplo, ante la cantidad de autores nuevos, escasamente conocidos o desconocidos por completo, que no pueden llegar al escenario, sin comprenderse que se está castigando con el silencio a casi una generación, y habremos de echarlos de menos y advertir la gravedad de lo que sucede, a poco más que avancemos sin saber hacia dónde. No asistimos a relevos importantes porque carezcamos de creadores, sino porque no los conocemos ni les damos la oportunidad para manifestarse.<sup>1</sup>

On this pessimistic scene burst Teatro Abierto, a theatrical event which took place in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and has so far delivered three installments, the first from July 28 through the end of September 1981, the second spanning October through November, 1982, and the third from October 2 through December 9, 1983. The significance, causes, and implications of the event point to the close relationship between the creation of playscripts and their production, as well as to the influence of the social, political, and economic context on this relationship and on the existence of a national theatre.

Even though the generators of the idea acknowledge no awareness of any relatedness between the Argentine Teatro Abierto and the United States Open Theatre, the temptation to make a comparison is hard to resist. Both emerged as a reaction against commercialized theatre, both dealt (at least in part) with nonrealistic material to be performed by actors trained in doctrines of naturalistic representation and psychological realism, and both were concerned with social and political issues. Most importantly, in both of them, playwrights functioned as active members of a performing ensemble.<sup>2</sup> The

differences between them reside in their organizational format and their long-range objectives. The Open Theatre, founded by Joseph Chaikin in 1963, was mainly an ensemble devoted to the exploration of new acting techniques in response to non-naturalistic material. Scripts evolved collectively, with playwrights such as Jean-Claude Van Itallie and Megan Terry fitting words to actor impulses as opposed to dictating those impulses. The initial goals of Teatro Abierto were to provide a showcase for Argentine contemporary theatre as a means of reaffirming its existence and of providing a forum for its artistic expression, and in the wake of it, to recover for the national theatre-as-art an ever-dwindling audience.

Teatro Abierto was the brainchild of a group of playwrights led by, among others, Osvaldo Dragún and the late Roberto Durán. The clearest statement of goals is contained in the preface to the collection of 21 plays published on the occasion of the event in 1981:

En principio, la idea fue organizar una muestra representativa del teatro argentino contemporáneo, reveladora de su vitalidad y vigencia tantas veces negada o soslayada; promover el encuentro creativo de la gente de teatro; ejercitar en fraterna solidaridad nuestro derecho a la libertad de expresión; recuperar para el teatro de arte un público en permanente disminución, por razones que vienen o no al caso, pero que sería largo y engorroso explicar aquí; investigar en la práctica nuevas formas de producción que nos liberen de un esquema chatamente mercantilista. En una palabra: crecer juntos.<sup>3</sup>

This is not the first close cooperation between playwrights, actors and directors. Roberto Arlt largely owed his first steps as a playwright to Leónidas Barletta's Teatro del Pueblo, which marked the beginning of the independent theatre movement in Argentina with its founding in 1930. Ever since then the connection between the independent theatre movement and the evolution of Argentine dramatic literature has been constant, an illustration of the innate unity and continuity of the thespian family within a constantly changing society. Teatro Abierto is the latest in a series of loosely orchestrated moves in Argentine theatre. Like many of the previous milestones in its trajectory, Teatro Abierto resulted from a spontaneously coordinated response to immediate needs rather than from any masterminded design. Quoting Osvaldo Dragún: "Teatro Abierto operated within a marvelous, healthy, and integrative anarchy."<sup>4</sup> It came at a moment when Argentine theatre was registering an apparent halt in creative expression in its literary and performing branches, and when economic and sociopolitical factors seemed to doom a whole generation to silence.

In a personal interview, Osvaldo Dragún sketched the genesis of Teatro Abierto. The project was conceived toward the end of 1980/beginning of 1981 by a group of playwrights who had collaborated within the independent theatre movement since its inception, and had kept meeting regularly on an informal basis not only to exchange ideas and discuss issues, but primarily to fertilize the ground for aesthetic creativity through the meeting of minds. Three or four dramatists within this group eventually started to give concrete shape to the Teatro Abierto idea. Two lists were drawn containing the names

of 21 playwrights and 21 directors, and an alternate list was drawn in case any of the individuals on the first two lists refused to participate in what, at the time, seemed a rather crazy venture. However, none of those called upon did bypass an opportunity to participate. The 42 artists were then called to a meeting during which more definite goals were established and dramatists and directors were matched by a system of multiple expressions of preferential ranking. After that, each playwright-director team worked together toward the creation of a script specifically written for Teatro Abierto. Next, performers were suggested and called in by author and director on the basis of an existing list of actors and actresses drawn up by all of the participants in the project at that stage. The composition of any of the above lists answered no particular plan. As the preface to the book *Teatro Abierto 1981* states:

La propia naturaleza caótica del proyecto, hizo que la convocatoria a participar en él fuera también caótica y precipitada. Si hubo una selección ella se vio inevitablemente influida por afinidades, afectos, urgencias y hasta encuentros fortuitos en una esquina o un café. Afirmamos rotundamente que no hubo exclusiones deliberadas.<sup>5</sup>

Accordingly, the list of authors, directors, producers, designers, actors, and actresses boasts of some noted names but also includes some less well-known ones, and others which were completely new to the public.

A total of 300 individuals gathered to "hold a mirror up to reality," a mirror in which Argentine audiences might find an honest and challenging reflection of themselves and their circumstances. Of the 21 short pieces especially written for the event, 20 were premiered at the rate of three pieces per performance.<sup>6</sup> In addition, as a bonus to attract audiences, several performers of note held staged readings of various texts by Argentine authors.

Opening the cycle, Jorge Rivera López, President of the Sociedad Argentina de Actores, read a statement of principles that qualified the project as a response to the sociopolitical and theatrical climate of the times. The goals of the participants were the following:

- to prove the often ignored or denied existence and vitality of Argentine theatre;
- to recuperate a massive audience for theatre-as-art;
- to cooperate with rather than compete against fellow-artists;
- to exercise the freedom of expression;
- to explore innovative production schemes;
- to honor the country through their art; and ultimately,
- to express their joy in working together.<sup>7</sup>

Economic obstacles were overcome by several means: first and foremost, all of the artists involved in the project, no matter how well-recognized, agreed to forego any kind of monetary compensation. Tickets could therefore be kept at exceptionally low prices. Fifteen hundred season tickets were sold in less than 15 days and, a week before opening, the entire cycle had been sold out. Full houses and the unusually high excitement turned the audience into the leading performer of the cycle. In Dragún's words: "At a time of corruption, audience response to the project demonstrated an impulse to mobility in an

apparently immobile society.”<sup>8</sup> In fact, similar projects—Danza Abierta, Música Siempre, Cine Abierto—were soon generated in a kind of chain reaction.

In addition to audience endorsement, the project received financial assistance from the Instituto Internacional de Teatro, the Sociedad Argentina de Autores (Argentores), the Sociedad Argentina de Actores, the Banco Credicoop, and Abel Santa Cruz, a well-known local author of radio and TV scripts, who also added his sizable contribution.

The event was initially housed in the Teatro del Picadero, an old warehouse turned theatre, where performances started on July 28, 1981. However, around 4 a.m. on August 6, 1981, the Picadero burned down in an “accidental” fire due to as yet undetermined causes. A press conference immediately called by the organizers of Teatro Abierto turned into an assembly in which all those present pledged to take the necessary steps to rebuild the Picadero, continue with Teatro Abierto, and enroll official aid to achieve both ends. Ernesto Sábato endorsed the assembly with his presence and Jorge Luis Borges with a note of support. Even the foreign press echoed the incident. Jacques Desprès vented his concern in an article in *Le Monde*, on August 13, 1981. At the same time, Dragún announced that 17 theatres had offered their space to the Teatro Abierto project. Thus, after a one-week break used to reconstruct some essential props, costumes, and technical paraphernalia destroyed in the fire, the Teatro Abierto performances were resumed in the Teatro Tabarís. Whatever its causes, the result of the fire was a wider awareness and an increased interest of the public in the project. Reflecting upon the experience, the organizers were able to write in their 1982 brochure “*Reseña y Proyectos de Teatro Abierto*.”

La crítica especializada se vio superada por el eco que desde las páginas editoriales de los diarios más tradicionales y otros medios de comunicación, saludó alborozadamente los fines de movilización cultural propuestos y en plena ejecución, aun cuando en algunos casos, no estuvieran identificados con la filosofía del movimiento. Fueron dos meses en los que se trastocó día a día, la chatura y el quietismo y se habló un lenguaje distinto: no nuevo pero sí renovador.<sup>9</sup>

In short, the outcome of the Teatro Abierto project looked promising at the close of its initial phase. First, Teatro Abierto reaffirmed the close connection between Argentine dramatists and the independent theatre movement. Second, Teatro Abierto showed that sociopolitical and economic factors may badly hamper, but can never totally silence a national theatre with a solid performance tradition. Third, Teatro Abierto brought out a latent audience ready to respond enthusiastically to what sought to be an honest artistic endeavor. Last, Teatro Abierto paved the way for a new stage in the evolution of Argentine theatre: while consecrated dramatists consolidated and found a showcase for their art, some of the lesser known authors present in the cycle were, for the first time, given the opportunity to test their creation in performance.

The success of the 1981 phase of Teatro Abierto became the launching pad for a second cycle. On December 21, 1981, at a meeting called by the

organizers—Roberto Cossa, Leonor Manso, Jorge Guglielmi, Juan Roldán, Nora Cullen, Víctor Watnik, and Osvaldo Dragún—the latter outlined the guidelines for the next cycle: the encouraging results of the first phase prompted an expanded version for 1982, which was to run from September 1 to November 30, 1982. The most important change was the opening of the Teatro Abierto project to all interested theatre practitioners, playwrights as well as performers and performing ensembles. The deadline for submitting entries was March 15, 1982. Plays of a maximum one hour duration could be entered by Argentine playwrights living at home or abroad, or foreign playwrights with at least five years residency in Argentina. Plays were to be submitted under a pseudonym and would be judged by a jury composed of nine individuals. This committee would make its decision known by May 3, 1982. The nine-member body included distinguished designers, actors, and directors but, strangely enough, not one playwright.<sup>10</sup>

The second installment of Teatro Abierto planned fourteen hours of shows, a timetable which would force the presentation of two, three, or four pieces daily, depending on their length. In addition to two regular performance schedules at 6:30 p.m. and 8:30 p.m., a special 9:30 - 11:30 schedule was instituted for non-conventional, experimental theatre. A plan to take some of the plays to neighborhoods of suburban Buenos Aires and to the interior of the country was part of the expanded 1982 version. Seminars, lectures, short courses, workshops, and round tables were envisaged as parallel activities. Volunteers interested in assisting with production work were invited to register. Financial assistance, was, of course, also welcome.

In short, the scope of Teatro Abierto was expanded on every level. The new features were: wider participation through democratization of the selection process, expanded performance schedules, and an increased number and greater variety in the style of performances. The theatrical community was riding high and the press and Argentine public joined in the optimism. Jaime Potenze, a noted critic, diagnosed in *La Nación* of October 25, 1981:

El logro principal de esta experiencia ha sido inyectar optimismo a una comunidad donde el escepticismo había calado muy hondo.

Comments by critics and artists confirmed Potenze's conclusion:

El acontecimiento de 1981 fue Teatro Abierto, una idea tan osada como de compleja concreción cuya repercusión no se limitó al hecho (de por sí auspicioso) de abarrotar las dos salas: . . . concitó un fervor, un entusiasmo y una entrega pocas veces vistos en los últimos años. La segunda edición ya fue anunciada y comenzará en setiembre del 82. (Rómulo Berruti, critic, in *Clarín Espectáculo*, December 27, 1981).

The same newspaper, taking stock of the performing arts activities at the end of the year, got these responses from two performers:

Creo que el hecho teatral más saliente del año fue el Teatro Abierto, que superó todas nuestras expectativas. El público se expresó con su apoyo, con su solidaridad y con una cierta euforia (Luis Brandoni, actor, *Clarín*, December 31, 1981). Creo que hay una revitalización en la gente de teatro. Ha aparecido todo un criterio de ir hacia el público

masivamente. De reemplazar la tarea que debía ser institucional o estatal con nuestro esfuerzo, desinteresado en muchísimos casos (Inda Ledesma, actress, in *Clarín*, December 31, 1981).

Four hundred and twelve authors and 75 experimental projects competed for Teatro Abierto 1982, together with 1,500 directors and actors, and about 400 designers and technicians. Due to obvious production limitations, not all of those who volunteered their efforts were able to actively participate. Nevertheless, 48 shows were scheduled to run over a seven-day period through the months of October and November 1982, while some three hundred members of the general public, interested in the movement, formed the "Círculos de Amigos de Teatro Abierto" to collaborate toward the new cycle. In addition, as an offshoot of the project, the first issue of a quarterly magazine was scheduled for publication.

In its final form, the 1982 cycle was structured as follows:

- thirty-three plays were staged from the 412 entries;
- fourteen "experimental theatre" performances were selected from 75 projects submitted;
- each play had a different director;
- directors, casts and crews were chosen from the 1500 performers, 124 directors and 400 technicians registered;
- seminars, short courses, talks, round tables, and other activities were planned parallel to the run of the cycle;
- the "Círculos de Amigos de Teatro Abierto" helped with production, publicity, and the raising of funds;
- two theatres, the downtown Teatro Odeón and the Teatro Margarita Xirgu - the latter located in the traditional district of San Telmo - were set to house the cycle.<sup>11</sup>

The first issue of the *Revista de Teatro Abierto* also reached the newsstands in October, 1982. The magazine, directed by Ricardo Monti and an Advisory Board of other theatre practitioners (among others Roberto Cossa, Osvaldo Dragún, Griselda Gambaro, Carlos Gorostiza, and Eduardo Pavlovsky), was conceived as a forum for theatrical activity. Its stated purpose was to document the creative process of plays (not necessarily of the Teatro Abierto cycle) from conception to production and review, including interviews with participants in the process. In addition, the complete text of a contemporary Argentine play was to be included in each issue.

When the 1982 cycle came to a close and a balance was drawn, the results were mixed. The mood was not as euphoric as that of December 1981. Nevertheless, much of the previous success had been repeated with plays by well-known playwrights as well as by some newcomers to the scene. Some shows, on the other hand, made audiences and reviewers raise questions regarding the wisdom of the selection process.<sup>12</sup> Financially the 1982 cycle was certainly not a success, even though with respect to 1981 audience attendance doubled and a larger number of successful plays, not less than five by new playwrights, were staged. The cycle left a deficit which was eventually covered with generous contributions from theatre organizations in France and Venezuela, plus private funds from Argentine sponsors.

Sociopolitical factors contributed their share to a less overwhelming success. When everything was optimistically planned to repeat and surpass the 1981 experience, the anachronic war between Argentina and Great Britain struck like a tornado. Once more reality proved to be more dramatic and unbelievable than the most daring and surrealistic piece of theatre. In its aftermath, Argentinians were faced with two facts: a traumatic war experience to live down, and a crumbling government which, under popular and circumstantial pressure, released some of its tight grip. As a consequence, some of the plays seemed, if not tame, at least less provocative and certainly less unsettling than the reality just experienced. Thus once again, the context contributed, negatively this time, to the theatrical outcome.

Osvaldo Dragún conceded, when asked about the reasons that prevented the 1982 cycle from repeating the 1981 success, that the production of 48 top quality shows was probably too ambitious a project. He nevertheless felt that the flaws of the 1982 cycle had been magnified by some observers and commentators. Dragún remarked that the lack of restraint in the scope of the cycle allowed for some innovative productions by professional directors as well as the emergence of new playwrights who were able to enjoy the wider and freer forum of Teatro Abierto. The playwright further noted that new talent in Argentine theatre has always flourished when creativity was given free rein instead of being constrained by commercial pressures which function within rigid and dogmatic canons.<sup>13</sup> Regarding creativity, however, Omar Grasso, one of the directors of the 1981, 1982 and the recently completed 1983 cycle, lamented the participants' reluctance to take risks, an attitude which he singled out as one of the basic flaws of the 1982 edition. Grasso remarked that productions seemed to remain halfway between commercially slick and truly stark or "poor" in Grotowski's terms. The result prompted Grasso's warning that "Teatro Abierto should not be the poor relative of commercial theatre," but rather that it needed to invent its own style.<sup>14</sup> In fact, at the end of this second phase of Teatro Abierto there was a definite feeling among all of its organizers and participants that a new format would invigorate the next edition of the ongoing process. That same feeling was echoed in the remarks of four participants in the 1983 cycle: "[Teatro Abierto] is a process and as such it is constantly moving and changing."<sup>15</sup>

The configuration of the 1983 Teatro Abierto cycle became the new format that the organizers searched for. The new edition tried to return to the essence of the 1981 project. Fully aware of the culturally militant role of Teatro Abierto, its organizers realized that the guidelines for the 1983 cycle had to match these expectations. The playwright Roberto Cossa identified three goals in the planning of Teatro Abierto 1983: (1) to increase the level of quality, (2) to reestablish communication among participants and with the audience, and (3) to emphasize austerity, using more imagination than funds.<sup>16</sup>

As for the sociopolitical context, the 1983 cycle played against the backdrop of the great political excitement generated by the imminent democratic elections after years of military rule. Appropriately, the cycle opened with a festive parade of "murgas"<sup>17</sup> which symbolically departed from the Teatro Picadero, the ill-fated theatre of the first cycle, and ended at

the Margarita Xirgu, home of the 1983 edition, with the burning of a huge marionette impersonating censorship, set on fire by a flaming torch symbolizing freedom. Along the course of the parade its participants, like minstrels of yore, performed music, dances, acrobatics and improvisations to the delight of the crowds who enthusiastically expressed their approval and joined in the merrymaking.<sup>18</sup> Several "murgas" already in existence, as well as one especially created by Teatro Abierto for the occasion, participated in the noisy and exuberant ritual.

The general production scheme of the cycle included seven shows, one per day of the week, each of them in charge of a team of playwrights and directors. For the team selection process, names of playwrights and directors were proposed and voted on by the Board of Directors of Teatro Abierto. Osvaldo Dragún noted with regret that some familiar and consecrated names were, as a result, absent from the 1983 lists. In return, however, he rejoiced at the fact that some talented newcomers were given an opportunity to prove themselves. Since some of the directors who were voted in did not participate due to previous commitments or disagreement with the concept of group work, their slots were filled with new appointees chosen by the remaining members of each team. Thus, talented but lesser known directors and playwrights who had not made the original lists were invited to participate. Some participants had to bow out at a later date due to unforeseen professional demands. It is important to remember that, just as for the two previous cycles, every participant in the 1983 project worked "for art's sake," i.e. with no financial compensation whatsoever. As the director Jorge Hacker notes, "production was accomplished under the most stringent conditions. It was truly 'poor' theatre even as regards time and space for rehearsals."<sup>19</sup>

The main innovation of the 1983 cycle was the concept of group work. As far as possible the four playwrights and four directors integrating each team were to share their work toward a common creation. This criterion was flexible and was abided by in only four of the seven shows, and then only partially. Other teams created three or four short plays around a unifying theme. In short, the shows did, in their final format, take on any of a variety of shapes, from short plays by individual playwrights, to a collective play by all playwrights on the team, as well as other creative patterns. The general thematic reference for the whole cycle was to be the illustration of the seven years of the "process," the name given by the militaries to their period of government. Within this broader thematic framework the various teams produced diverse allegories and symbolic representations of power, violence, military buffoonery, the complicity of silence, etc. Once each team had roughly agreed on a particular treatment of the theme, performers were chosen among those registered to meet the needs of each show. In the selection of performers a conscious effort was made to cast the best while also including young performers of less experience and renown. According to Omar Grasso, the possibility of experimenting with teamwork, which had not been a criterion in previous cycles, was the most stimulating innovation of the 1983 edition.<sup>20</sup>

Summarizing, the blueprint for the 1983 cycle was structured along the following general guidelines:



- seven shows were to be created for the event by an equal number of teams;
- each team would be composed of four playwrights and four directors;
- each team of playwrights/directors would create a collaborative show illustrating the general theme recommended by the organizers: the last seven years of the nation's political reality;
- the final shape of the different shows would remain open to the decision and creativity of each team;
- each team of playwrights/directors would select its performers among well-known and new talent;
- “Espacio Abierto” would be part of the Monday night runs of the cycle, including performances and presentations by well-known artists and personalities connected to the theatre; and
- one theatre, the Teatro Margarita Xirgu would house the entire 1983 cycle.<sup>21</sup>

The “Espacios Abiertos” deserve special mention here. According to Jorge Hacker, they constitute a sort of unconventional promotional tool for Teatro Abierto.<sup>22</sup> Some actors of note, who were unable to participate because of professional commitments, but who nevertheless endorsed the Teatro Abierto project wholeheartedly, volunteered their Monday nights toward “Espacio Abierto.” There were also some other Latin American groups who participated, and special programs were created on Nicaragua, Chile, and the Argentine “desaparecidos.”

Although the 1983 cycle could not capitalize on the shock value of challenging restrictions and instead had to compete with the great political euphoria sweeping over Argentina, it nevertheless managed to cover all expenses. Neither the 1982 nor the 1983 cycle, however, was able to fulfill the promise of taking the shows to neighborhoods and the interior of the country as planned after the 1981 cycle. The publication of the *Revista de Teatro Abierto* also had to be discontinued temporarily. Both omissions are to be ascribed to economic obstacles. The achievement of ending the 1983 cycle in the black can be attributed to the fact that instead of trying to lure audiences away from the pre-election excitement, the cycle inserted itself successfully in the process, not only through thematic illustrations of the recent past, but also through events like the parade of “murgas,” the holding over of the cycle to coincide with the end of the dictatorship on December 9, and the placement of the whole cycle under the catchy slogan: “For a popular theatre without censorship.”

Artistically, the 1983 cycle received mixed reviews from critics and audiences. Some felt that a thematic compulsion, however subtle, well-intentioned, and desirable, may not be a genuine source of inspiration. Accordingly, some treatments were felt to be dramatically forced and formally stilted. Other observers commented that once more, fervor and enthusiasm had replaced the profound revision the Teatro Abierto process needed in order to grow aesthetically. There is common agreement, however, that the experience continues to be valid and justified, and should be encouraged to continue against all odds. In the last analysis, there is a consensus that a theatrical creation, to be successful, results from the lonely confrontation of a

playwright and a blank sheet of paper, and it is toward that encounter that Teatro Abierto has to aim its reassessment.

It is beyond the scope of this article to deal critically with any or all of the plays of the Teatro Abierto cycles. Suffice it to say that some of the stylistic tendencies that characterized Argentine theatre during the previous decade were present in the three editions: a preference for an elaborate use of metaphor and symbol, sometimes as a free artistic choice, other times as a palatable packaging for controversial issues, in a kind of self-censorship meant to avert external censorship, particularly in the first two cycles. The symbolic vehicles conveying the message were variations on either the "grotesco criollo" or the avant-garde expressions akin to the theatre of the absurd. There was also a certain trend toward theatrical psychologizing. This is understandable since several of the playwrights (among them Eduardo Pavlovsky and Pacho O'Donnell) are also psychoanalysts, and are thus greatly concerned with the pathological workings of the human psyche, sometimes to the detriment of dramatic form.

Roberto Cossa condensed in a nutshell the essence of each of the three cycles: the 1981 cycle was more political than aesthetic, the 1982 cycle massified the process and lost quality, and the 1983 cycle aimed at recapturing the original qualitative standards.<sup>23</sup> Looking toward the future, Cossa notes that, with more freedom of expression, theatre in general will have to reflect the surrounding reality on a deeper, more transcendental level.

Only time will determine the shape that future editions of Teatro Abierto may take. At this point in its course, and despite its imperfections, Teatro Abierto has already yielded positive results. Paramount among these benefits are: first, a reconnection with, and an upsurge in audience participation; second, the promotion of new promising playwrights on the Argentine theatre scene; and third, the exploration of new experimental forms of creating and producing dramatic scripts. Operating in an increasingly freer political atmosphere, each new edition of Teatro Abierto has moved further along a road that started with a need for an outlet for stifled artistic expression, and has become fertile soil for the conception of dramatic scripts within original creative schemes. No less important, Teatro Abierto is also a space in which to ponder over recent national experiences and elicit enough awareness to hopefully turn past events into unrepeatable history. Another equally important role of Teatro Abierto has been to showcase abroad the evolution of Argentine theatre. Four plays of the previous 1981 and 1982 cycles represented Argentina in the Latin American Theatre Festival in Caracas, Venezuela: *El acompañamiento* by Carlos Gorostiza and *Gris de ausencia* by Roberto Cossa of the 1981 edition; *Príncipe azul* by Eugenio Griffero and *Oficial 1°* by Carlos Somigliana of the more recent 1982 cycle.<sup>24</sup> Three other plays, one from each cycle, were recently taken to the meeting of Latin American Theatre organized by the Centro Latinoamericano de Creación e Investigación Teatral (CELCIT) in Havana, Cuba, held during January 1984: *Decir sí* by Griselda Gambaro (1981), *Examen cívico* by Franco Franchi (1982), and *Concierto de aniversario* by Roberto Rovner (1983).

Teatro Abierto has shown that a concerted effort on the part of all of the participants in the collective event of a play may lead to the filling of some of

the silences Luis Ordaz alluded to. The noted American fiction writer Tillie Olsen, remarked that "not to have an audience is a kind of death," and pointed to the frequency with which silences do occur:

Literary history and the present are dark with silences: some the silences for years by our acknowledged great; some silences hidden; some the ceasing to publish after one work appears; some the never coming to book form at all.<sup>25</sup>

The question of what happens with the creator and the creative process during a period of silence is hard and painful to answer. Impulses like the one that originated Teatro Abierto fill those silences and help dramatists find their voices, a form, and a forum.

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## NOTES

1. *Capítulo: La historia de la literatura argentina. Fascículo 111: El teatro argentino. Cierre de un ciclo.* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1981), p. 594.
2. Joseph Chaikin, *The Presence of the Actor* (New York: Atheneum, 1972).
3. *Teatro Abierto 1981: 21 estrenos argentinos* (Buenos Aires: Argentores, 1981), Preface.
4. Press conference, Buenos Aires, Argentina, December 21, 1981.
5. *Teatro Abierto 1981*, Preface.
6. Miguel Angel Giella, "Teatro Abierto: Fenómeno socio-teatral argentino," in *Latin American Theatre Review*, 15/1 (Spring 1981), 89-93. Giella notes that, in spite of having been written for the cycle, due to technical difficulties Oscar Viale's *Antes de subir deben bajar* was not staged.
7. *Capítulo*, pp. 598-600.
8. Personal interview with Osvaldo Dragún in Buenos Aires, Argentina, January 12, 1982.
9. *Reseña y Proyectos de Teatro Abierto* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Teatro Abierto, 1982).
10. On the occasion of the above cited interview with Osvaldo Dragún (see Note 8), the playwright remarked that the original organizers of Teatro Abierto, mostly playwrights, decided that playwrights remain absent from the selection process for the 1982 cycle. This decision was meant to counter any possible claims of prejudice. In retrospect, however, the results of the 1982 cycle proved the abstention injudicious.
11. For further comments on the 1981 cycle and the organizational pattern of the 1982 edition, see Miguel Angel Giella, "Teatro Abierto 82: El comienzo de un sueño," in *Latin American Theatre Review*, 16/1 (Fall 1982), 67-69.
12. See Note 10 above.
13. *Clarín Espectáculo*, Buenos Aires (Sunday, 10 July 1983), p. 2.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *La Voz*, Buenos Aires (25 July 1983). Interview with four participants in the 1983 cycle: actress Adela Gleijer, directors Jorge Hacker and Alfredo Zemma, and playwright Elio Gallipoli.
16. *Clarín Espectáculo*, Buenos Aires. Interview with playwright Roberto Cossa (Friday, 29 April 1983).
17. *Murga*: Tin-pan band. According to the *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española* (Madrid: 1970): "compañía de músicos malos, que a pretexto de pascuas, cumpleaños, etc., toca a las puertas de las casas acomodadas, con la esperanza de recibir algún obsequio." In Argentina "murgas" are types of itinerant bands whose members dance, play music, and sing songs and slogans. Argentine "murgas" are usually formed ad hoc to participate in typical Mardi Gras parades; they are thus the poor relatives of the very famous and sophisticated Brazilian "Escolas de Samba."
18. *Diario Clarín*, Buenos Aires (Sunday, 25 September 1983).
19. Personal communication from director Jorge Hacker. Much of the information regarding the organization of the 1983 cycle comes from the same source.
20. *Clarín Espectáculo*, Buenos Aires (Sunday 10 July 1983).
21. See Miguel Angel Giella, "Teatro Abierto 83: La Vuelta a los orígenes," in *Latin American Theatre Review*, 17/1 (Fall 1983), 59-60, for further details.
22. Jorge Hacker, personal communication.
23. *Clarín Espectáculo*, Buenos Aires (Friday, 29 April 1983). Interview with Roberto Cossa.

24. Eduardo Márceles Daconte, "Y llegaron los comediantes a Caracas . . . ," *Latin American Theatre Review*, 16/2 (Spring 1983), 81-92.

25. Tillie Olsen, *Silences* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1965), p. 6.

## “Festival Internacional” in Los Angeles

This past summer Los Angeles, scene of the 1984 Summer Olympics, also hosted “Festival Internacional,” an eight-week festival of Latin American theatre sponsored and coordinated by the Bilingual Foundation of the Arts. Held from April 25 to June 17, the festival spotlighted contemporary plays by leading Latin American playwrights. The plays were performed by four major theatre companies from Mexico, Peru, Puerto Rico and Venezuela, in addition to the foundation’s own Theatre-Teatro. The festival began with La Compañía de Mexico who presented *En camino al concierto*, by Marcela del Río, a leading Mexican playwright. Venezuela’s El Nuevo Grupo then performed *Escribe una obra para mí*, written by Omar Quiaragua. The third contribution was from the innovative and controversial “Teatro del sol,” a Peruvian company who performed *El beso de la mujer arana*, a play based on Manuel Puig’s novel of the same name. *Los soles truncos*, by René Marqués, was presented by one of Puerto Rico’s leading companies, El Grupo Teatral de San Juan. The festival concluded with Theatre-Theatro performing *El juego*, written by Mariela Romero, a young Venezuelan playwright.