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[Introduction to] In the Eye of the Storm: Contemporary Theater in Barcelona

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Introduction: A Limitless Theatrical Geography

—We are rooted in a place, we are rooted in the absence of a place.
—Herbert Blau, *Take Up the Bodies*[1]

Transnational Transactions

Contemporary Barcelona aspires to become a European theater capital, often looking toward London, Paris, Berlin, or Milan in search of new artistic paradigms and modes of expression. Playwrights Josep M. Benet i Jornet (1940) and Sergi Belbel (1963); directors Lluís Pasqual (1951) and Calixto Bieito (1963); and experimental groups Sèmola (1978), Comediants (1971), La Cubana (1980), and La Fura dels Baus (1979) are just some of the representatives of the contemporary Barcelona theater scene whose names have begun to circulate throughout Europe and the Americas. The Parisian production of Belbel's *Després de la pluja* (*After the Rain*, 1993) was awarded the Molière prize for best comedy staged in France during the 1998–99 season. In 2002, the same play was awarded a special Premio Max (the Spanish equivalent of a Tony Award) for its extensive international diffusion. Bieito's recurrent participation in the Edinburgh International Festival and his frequent forays into opera, with productions staged at elite European venues (often, with a Catalan design team), have inspired both praise and indignation on the part of critics as a consequence of the powerful visual dimension and startling crudeness of his theatrical creations.[2] Sèmola, a multilingual theater troupe with a thirty-year history rooted in Catalunya, has been known to attract a wider audience in northern European cities than in Barcelona.[3] Comediants, one of Catalunya's oldest and most well-traveled theater companies, has engaged in transcultural collaborations with a Chinese acrobatic troupe, thus merging the rituals and iconography of the Mediterranean with those of Asia.[4] La Cubana has given triumphant performances at the Edinburgh Festival with its innovative and playful assaults upon the theatrical fourth wall.[5] Lastly, the Catalan company La Fura dels Baus, which began as three friends who traveled about

rural Catalunya by means of an old truck, now has multiple touring groups that simultaneously encircle the globe, featuring performers from several countries. La Fura is currently experimenting in a most sophisticated way with performance via the Internet in a virtual, borderless theatrical space that is both interactive and intercultural.

It is my hope that, with this brief sampling, it may be possible for one to grasp the extent to which the ontological limits that define the contemporary Catalan stage—far more than any other ethno-national, or "imagined," theater community within the Spanish state—extend well beyond the geopolitical borders of Catalunya per se, having already acquired a large measure of protagonism on the international stage.[6] To be sure, in the nation without a state that is Catalunya, success in the theater is often measured as a function of international reach and reputation. Historically, far from displaying the provincialism often ascribed to so-called minoritized or peripheral cultures, modern Catalan drama has frequently exhibited, since its origins in the nineteenth century, a cosmopolitan and even transnational impulse, engaging in an artistic dialogue with international theater traditions of both past and present, and forging its identity vis à vis its intercultural associations.

In 1983, to cite one contemporary case in point, British director/producer Peter Brook traveled from Paris to Barcelona in search of an empty space in which to stage his version of Georges Bizet's nineteenth-century opera *La tragédie de Carmen* (*The Tragedy of Carmen*, 1983). Brook's decision to appropriate the vacant Mercat de les Flors, a surviving structure from the Barcelona International Exposition of 1929, would prompt this city's municipal government, under the leadership of mayor Pasqual Maragall and cultural *regidora* (manager) Maria Aurèlia Capmany, to transform this locale into a major point of reference for visiting performers and companies from the international stage. The Mercat, which was officially inaugurated as a theater in 1985 with the premiere of Brook's epic *Mahabharata*, today is a component of Barcelona's Ciutat del Teatre. The centerpiece of the building is an impressive *noucentista* cupola containing a magnificent fresco painted by contemporary Mallorcan artist Miquel Barceló. Since its inauguration—and as a result of the creative insight of Joan Maria Gual (1946), who served as the theater's artistic director from 1986 to 2002—the Mercat, in addition to its regular programming of Catalan theater, has served as a showcase for several works by Brook and has also been the site of memorable appearances by a series of world-renowned luminaries who have left a lasting imprint upon the evolution of this city's contemporary theatrical avant-garde. These include Pina Bausch, Cheek by Jowl, Patrice Chéreau, the late Vittorio

Gassman, Tadeusz Kantor, Lindsay Kemp, Robert Lepage, Harold Pinter, Ariane Mouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil, Simon McBurney and Complicite, and Elizabeth LeCompte and the Wooster Group.

As early as the 1890s, modernist painters/playwrights Santiago Rusiñol (1861–1931) and Adrià Gual (1872–1943) played significant roles in the translation, performance, and dissemination of international drama in Catalunya (their translations and productions of works by Henrik Ibsen and Maurice Maeterlinck are just two examples), and since that time, Barcelona has arguably functioned as the predominant "gateway" to Spain for the European theatrical avant-gardes.[7] Referring to the post-Civil War period, John London has demonstrated how, from the 1940s onward, it was "precisely the translation of non-Spanish plays into Catalan which would lead to the re-establishment of the language as a working theatrical idiom, rather than a folkloric tradition."[8] Throughout the period of the Franco dictatorship, in effect, it was often through translation that members of the Catalan independent theater movement—namely the Agrupació Dramàtica de Barcelona (established in 1955) and the Escola d'Art Dramàtic Adrià Gual (established in 1960)—were able to introduce, explore, and thoroughly immerse themselves in the dominant currents of the twentieth-century international stage.[9] During this period, the use of Catalan on the stage emerged as a crucial marker of identity and a sign of resistance to oppression, a refusal to yield to the centralizing force of the Spanish language and all its implications. The nonprofessional, nonofficial pedagogical spaces of the independent theater would serve as breeding grounds for many of the actors, directors, playwrights and designers who would go on to become the most vibrant members of the post-Franco theater scene.

In democratic times, the presence of the Catalan language as a vehicle of theatrical expression has continued to hold symbolic value as a sign of identity and a vindication of Catalan culture. For many contemporary Catalan dramatists, innately conscious of the oppressive realities of the past, the linguistic distinction appears to take precedence over all other thematic or aesthetic indicators of identity. To write and/or to stage a play in Catalan is, in effect, to inscribe and reclaim a specific cultural space.

Today, the so-called "new" Europe of evaporating cultural, political, and physical boundaries is, like Catalunya, a bewildering entity, rife with tension and uncertainty, which eludes any fixed definition and can be envisioned as a constant flow and substitution of images, peoples, technologies, and ideologies.[10] The contemporary technological revolution, coupled with the deconstruction of the nation-state,

the spread of cosmopolitanism, and movements of mass migration have, in the words of Montserrat Guibernau, "transformed the world into a singular place where processes of cultural integration and disintegration take place."[11] Social theorists, such as Arjun Appadurai, have suggested the existence of a world-historical shift, of imprecise periodicity, signaling a move from modern to postmodern, and from national to transnational (and, in turn postnational, postcolonial, and postidentity). Appadurai, in particular, has observed that "the very system of nation-states is in jeopardy" and points to the formation of ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes as symptoms of a contemporary subjectivity that naturally would inspire us to reflect upon long-established relationships between the local and the global.[12] It is also, in a sense, this ambiguous space of refection and subjectivity that in recent years has enabled Catalan culture in general, and theater in particular, to question the sovereignty of the Spanish nation-state while inserting itself within a European, and even global, context.[13]

In his written précis for the Barcelona public theater project known as the Ciutat del Teatre, Lluís Pasqual (1951), perhaps the most transnational of Catalan directors (a founding member of Barcelona's Teatre Lliure and former director of the Centro Dramático Nacional in Madrid and the Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe in Paris), reminds us of the intrinsic relationship between performance and identity, observing how the theater continues to preserve its primordial function as a place where members of a freely united community can reveal themselves to each other and to others.[14] Fundamental to most theories of globalization is the often-cited paradox whereby the drive toward universal integration, while enabling cultural legitimacy and international recognition, may also engender a kind of transnational homogenization, a dreaded sacrifice of difference. Thus, returning to the context of the theater, one might ask: how does the Catalan stage negotiate this dialectic of the universal and the particular? In an age in which "cultures overlap and mingle, enmeshed in a global struggle for self-determination," how does contemporary Catalan theater participate in this struggle?[15] Expressed in more pragmatic terms, how can a play, playwright, performance, or director "reveal"—to use Pasqual's phasing—or conserve markers of Catalan identity and, at the same time, transcend that identity to engender an international appeal? In the remaining pages of this introduction, I shall outline the complex set of circumstances that frame these questions. Then, in subsequent chapters, I shall describe the often-paradoxical ways through which several contemporary dramatists and companies have searched for a solution.

Public and Private Dramas

During the 1980s, as Spain's central government shifted toward the left, a vast move toward decentralization ensued throughout the Spanish theatrical landscape with the emergence of several national "drama centers" funded by local governments in Andalusia, the Balearic Islands, Catalunya, Extremadura, Galicia, and Valencia. These generally well-endowed public institutions (some of which were only short-lived ventures) were created according to varying principles of international projection, nationalism, and protectionism. In principle, they were established in order to promote and showcase autochthonous theater from distinct historical repertoires, as well as the work of contemporary playwrights. During this period, the Catalan equivalent of a national drama center was the Centre Dramàtic de la Generalitat de Catalunya (CDGC), founded in 1981 (dissolved in 1998) and housed in the historic Teatre Romea (the cradle of modern Catalan theater, established in 1863).[16] As Enric Gallén recounts, after a brief period under the stewardship of theater historian Xavier Fàbregas, actor/director Hermann Bonnín (who, from 1970 to 1980, had been director of the Institut del Teatre de la Diputació de Barcelona) assumed the role of artistic director of the CDGC in 1982. Domènec Reixach replaced Bonnin in 1988, and his appointment, according to Gallén, "signified a conscious decision to opt for contemporary Catalan drama, through new productions and the periodic awarding of grants aimed at promoting playwriting." During his tenure at the CDGC, Reixach, "restored dignity to writers of earlier decades" and created a myriad of opportunities and incentives for young and/or up-and-coming Catalan dramatists. In addition, as Gallén notes, the Centre Dramàtic organized a highly successful program of "classical" Catalan drama as part of the cultural activities planned in conjunction with the 1992 Olympic games. The program included works by Josep Maria de Sagarra (1894–1961), Francesc Fontanella (1622–1681/85), Àngel Guimerà (1845–1924), Carles Soldevila (1892–1967), Caterina Albert ("Víctor Català," 1869–1966), and Santiago Rusiñol (1861–1931).[17]

With the arrival of the 1990s, two ostensibly lavish public theater venues, the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya (TNC) and the new Teatre Lliure, emerged on the Barcelona theatrical landscape as crucial sites of contention.[18] Each became an artistic-political battleground, a prominent subject of debate and discussion, and at times a place of public spectacle. Perhaps the most carnivalesque public drama to emerge during this period is that which was protagonized by the indelible presence of Catalan actor/director Josep Maria Flotats (1939), whose unsuccessful period of sovereignty at the helm of the TNC,

which ended with his humiliating dismissal shortly after the official inauguration of the theater in 1997, for several years filled the pages of the daily press with a delirium of "politics, architecture, money, theater, insults, vanities, vindications and even a physical blow or two." In sum, it was "pure Shakespeare," as Víctor-M. Amela aptly suggested on the pages of the *La Vanguardia.*

Derived from what had been the Centre Dramàtic de la Generalitat de Catalunya, the TNC, situated on the Plaça de les Arts (near the Plaça de les Glòries), adjacent to the Auditori Nacional de Catalunya, is, in physical-spatial terms, an imposing edifice of pristine marble and glass, a variation on postmodern Greek revival as conceived by famed Catalan architect Ricardo Bofill. In the Barcelona press, "monumental" is the word that has been most often used to describe it—as though the building itself were capable of visually reaffirming the presence and experience of Catalan nationalism, specifically that which was promoted by President Jordi Pujol, who governed Catalunya from 1980 to 2003. The TNC is actually a theater complex containing three performance spaces (the nine-hundred-seat Sala Gran, the three-hundred-seat Sala Petita, and the four-hundred-seat Sala Tallers), and while it may be spectacular on a visual level, there was, throughout the period of its construction during the 1990s, a growing fear among members of the Barcelona theater community that, when all was said and done, the spectacularity of the gesture—the grandiose façade—may be all that would remain.[19]

Flotats is a vastly talented artist who, for several years, was considered a cultural prophet of Catalan president Pujol's right-centrist coalition Convergència i Unió (and of the Catalan and Catalanist bourgeoisie). He studied acting and worked in France throughout the decades of the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s, becoming an accomplished member of the Comédie Française in 1981. As early as 1979, he proposed his concept of a national theater to Max Cahner, then *Conseller* (minister) of Culture for the Generalitat (the Autonomous Government of Catalunya), and in 1984, he returned to Barcelona, where he was granted the opportunity by the Generalitat to direct his own eponymous company. The Companyia Flotats was based at Barcelona's Teatre Poliorama, a theater that was then subsidized by the Catalan government. Flotats would remain there until 1994, when construction began on the TNC.

In 1995, the Generalitat appointed Flotats artistic director of the TNC in a gesture that inspired dissatisfaction among a large sector of the Barcelona theater community. In the press, he frequently defined the TNC as "el Barça del teatre català" (the Barça of Catalan theater), referring to the iconic Barcelona football club, and assured everybody

that the supreme desire of the Generalitat was to give Catalunya a resplendent cultural center and company, similar to the Comédie Française, the Piccolo Teatro di Milano, or the Royal Shakespeare Company. His treatise *Un projecte per al Teatre Nacional* (A project for the National Theater, 1989) was a brief précis (published with prefaces by Pujol and Barcelona mayor Pasqual Maragall) in which he attempted to outline his conception of "Un teatre de tots, per a tots, al servei de tots."[20] [A theater for all at the service of all.] In his view, the TNC was a public-service enterprise necessary for the expression of Catalan cultural identity: "Ha d'aportar, a imatge de les grans institucions culturals europees, una mostra de la tradició i de l'art teatral català" [It has to bring, in the image of the great European cultural institutions, an example of Catalan tradition and theatrical art].[21] His précis, however, did not provide a clear artistic vision regarding the type of programming that he planned to offer at the TNC, and the absence of such a vision was a sign that did not portend well for the future of autochthonous Catalan drama.

The chagrin that spanned many sectors of the Barcelona theater community with regard to the Generalitat's appointment of Flotats as artistic director of the TNC, in effect, stemmed in part from his apparent preference for international, rather than Catalan, theater. During the nine years that his company inhabited the Poliorama (1985–1994), Flotats produced relatively few Catalan plays. Moreover, his twenty years of experience in Paris contributed to the prevailing sentiment that he was rather disengaged from the contemporary evolution of the Barcelona stage and that he had not "paid his dues" during prior years of struggle and oppression. In his memoirs, Albert Boadella (1943), founder and director of Els Joglars, Catalunya's oldest theater collective, refers to the Generalitat's direct "importation" of Flotats from France:

> La casi totalidad de los recursos económicos públicos del teatro catalán fueron automáticamente destinados a sus montajes, dejando para el resto del gremio una ridícula proporción de ayudas. Las iniciativas escénicas de los grupos que habían levantado el teatro en Cataluña a finales del franquismo no le merecieron suficiente crédito."[22]
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> [Almost the whole of public economic resources for Catalan theater was automatically destined to his productions, leaving for the rest of the profession a ridiculous proportion of funding. The performing arts initiatives of the groups that had built the theater in Catalunya at the end of Francoism were not deserving of credit in his eyes.]

Although Boadella's statement may be imbued with hyperbole, it is indicative of the atmosphere of apprehension that enveloped Flotats's

appointment. Such concerns peaked when Flotats announced his decision to launch the first (preinaugural) season of programming at the TNC with North American dramatist Tony Kushner's award-winning play *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches* (1991).

Flotats's mise-en-scène of Kushner's play, translated by the skillful hand of Josep Costa, premiered in November 1996 in a makeshift performance space that would later become the Sala Tallers of the TNC. The cast was composed of a prestigious group of actors that included Pere Arquillué, Montserrat Carulla, Ramon Madaula, Sílvia Munt, Vicenta Ndongo, Francesc Orella, and Josep Maria Pou. They were members of a burgeoning resident company at the TNC that would never completely come to fruition. Despite Flotats's imaginative staging of *Angels*, which he set in the allegorical space of a Jewish cemetery, the premiere was heralded with cries of public outrage by members of the profession who insisted that it was inappropriate to initiate programming at Catalunya's national theater with a North American play.

To this end, one of Barcelona's most emblematic playwrights, Josep M. Benet i Jornet, published the following reproach, steeped in sarcasm, in the Catalan supplement of *El País* in September 1996:

> Aleshores, el que demano, el que quasi bé exigiria als responsables pertinents de la Generalitat de Catalunya, fóra que, ja que tenen molt de sentit de la nostra història i dels seus moments claus, ja que han muntat fins i tot un museu per mostrar qui som, d'on venim i on anem, facin el favor de continuar en la mateixa línia y col·locar una placa a la entrada del nou local al fi que, per sempre més, . . . tothom pugui recordar amb goig y llàgrimes als ulls que el Teatre Nacional de Catalunya va engegar . . . amb *Angels in America* del gran autor americà Tony Kushner. Que se sàpiga sempre! Que no s'oblidi mai! Que quedi gravat dins la nostra memòria col·lectiva! . . . Ens trobem davant un nou fracàs, davant una nova oportunitat perduda. . . . A canvi, Broadway desembarca definitivament a Catalunya. Jo vull la placa. Preferentment en anglès, a fi que s'entengui.[23]
>
> [Therefore, what I'm asking for, and what I would practically demand of all those responsible at the Generalitat de Catalunya, be it that they have a great sense of our history and of its key moments, since they've even built a museum to show who were are, where we come from, and where we're going, do us the favor of continuing in the same direction and put up a plaque at the entrance to the new locale so that, forever more, . . . everybody can remember with tears of joy in their eyes that the National Theater of Catalunya got its start . . . with *Angels in America*, by the great American author Tony Kushner. Let it be forever known! Let it never be forgotten! Let it be forever engraved in our collective memory! . . . We find ourselves facing yet another failure, facing another lost

opportunity. . . . In exchange, Broadway has definitively disembarked in Catalunya. I want the plaque. Preferably in English, so that it can be understood.]

If Dublin had the Abbey; Paris, the Comédie Française; London, the Royal Shakespeare; and Berlin, the Volksbühne, then, according to Benet i Jornet, Barcelona, likewise, could aspire to create a public "platform" through which the Catalan people would be able to "project," or reveal, who they are to the world at large. Benet i Jornet has long been a staunch defender of text-based drama, and it bears recalling that, several years earlier in 1978, he had been involved in a similar dispute with the Teatre Lliure when he alleged that, in privileging the so-called "universal" theatrical repertoire, the Lliure had not put forth a sufficient effort to sustain and nourish the art and profession of playwriting in the Catalan language.

Eventually, the debate over Kushner's work took an additional ironic turn when many of the Catalan bourgeois spectators aligned with Convergència i Unió realized that *Angels in America* is, on one level, a disdainful examination of their own conservative politics. Flotats, in effect, had made a rather venturesome move in choosing to stage such an unequivocally political play, which candidly confronts the problem of AIDS and the issue of homosexuality, especially when his greatest supporters were most likely expecting to see a more conventional melodramatic work. On the night that I attended the production in November 1996, half the spectators vacated the house during intermission and did not return for the second half of the show. The Catalan production of *Angels in America*, nevertheless, ran at the TNC until April 1997 and was seen in Barcelona by approximately 13,000 spectators before touring Spain in its Spanish version.

Following *Angels in America*, Catalan taxpayers witnessed the premiere of the Broadway musical *Company*, by Stephen Sondheim and George Furth, at their national theater. (Sondheim's piece contains a scant reference to Barcelona, but nothing more.) By the spring of 1997, the outrage did not diminish when Flotats announced that the "official inauguration" of the "Sala Gran" of the TNC would take place on September 11, 1997 (Catalunya's National day) with the mise-en-scène of a Catalan classic, Rusiñol's *L'auca del senyor Esteve* (Mr. Stephen's *auca*, 1917), a play that treats the relationship between the figure of the artist and bourgeois Catalan society.[24] The production was regarded by some to be a safe (even amusingly obvious) selection, lacking in originality and vision, and the fact that Flotats's choice of a director to stage the play was Adolfo Marsillach, a Catalan born in

Barcelona who had built much of his career in Madrid, did not inspire widespread favor.

Shortly after the "official" inauguration of the theater in the fall of 1997, Catalan cultural minister Joan Maria Pujals asked Flotats to vacate his position as director of the TNC (effective July 1, 1998).[25] The true reasons as to why Flotats was asked step down were never explicitly and unequivocally established; yet, undoubtedly, he did not help his case when he made a widely-quoted public speech on the night of the inauguration in which he unabashedly flaunted his ability to act upon his own volition, independent of the desires of government officials, whom he referred to as "quatre gats baladers que no compten, que no són ningú" [four whining cats who do not matter, who are nobody]. Pujals, shortly afterward, was quoted in the press as pointing out that Flotats's actions and declarations has caused the cultural minister to lose confidence in his willingness and/or capacity to follow the officially dictated government standards of devoting 35 percent of the TNC's programming to the work of Catalan companies.

Following the dismissal or *desistiment* (which was the word widely employed by Catalan government officials) of Flotats, Domènec Reixach, artistic director of the CDGC, was appointed to replace him. The CDGC was consequently dissolved in 1998, when the presence of both this entity and the TNC was deemed to be redundant. Reixach presided over the TNC until July 2006 (when he was relieved by Sergi Belbel), and during his eight years as artistic director, he and his carefully chosen advisory board continued to emphasize the programming of Catalan theater and dance, focusing upon four primary objectives: "to bring the creation of contemporary dramaturgy to its highest potential, revise the classical tradition, create incentives for contemporary dance, and foment the creation of programming for young audiences."[26] In subsequent years, the Teatre Nacional, under the direction of Reixach, would launch several initiatives designed to cultivate and showcase the work of Catalan dramatists, directors, dancers, choreographers, and companies, young and old. In 2002, the TNC introduced a new project known as "T6," under the supervision of playwright-director Belbel, with the intention of nurturing and staging the work of six young dramatists and directors per year, mainly from Catalunya. There were, nevertheless, on repeated occasions, public critiques of Reixach's stewardship and programming decisions from notable figures that include writer/critic Jordi Coca and directors Joan Ollé and Richard Salvat. During the farewell party for Reixach at the TNC in June 2006, he acknowledged the theater's polemical past, noting how it had evolved from a project that had begun its trajectory

with everything against it, into one that, finally, has everything in its favor.[27]

In the aftermath of the "Flotats Affair," the Romea, in 1999, shifted into the private hands of the newly created Fundació Romea per a les Arts Escèniques and the supervision of "Focus," a production company with a large stake in Spain's commercial theater sector. Calixto Bieito was appointed as the Romea's artistic director and has since maintained an exceptional measure of aesthetic risk in his programming. Flotats eventually declared himself to be of French nationality, because, as he observed, he owes much more to the French government than to the Catalan Generalitat. Following his woeful expulsion from the TNC by the Generalitat's Department of Culture, he rode out of town and headed for Madrid, like the defeated cowboy in an old Western.[28] Once there, he made a triumphant comeback of resounding commercial success with his own awarding-winning mise-en-scène in Spanish of *Art*, a play by Yasmina Reza (who is also of French nationality).

The "Flotats affair," though it may have seemed frivolous or even amusing at times, is more than a mere private drama made public; rather, it represents a significant chapter in a longstanding series of contentious debates that, since the period of the democratic transition, have centered on the notion of "official culture" and the institutionalization of Catalan theater, the distribution of public subsidies for the performing arts, the hazy boundaries separating the public and private theater sectors, and the support given to autochthonous theater. In 1976, with the establishment of the Assemblea d'Actors i Directors (Assembly of Actors and Directors), the Catalan stage began the long road to "normalization": recuperating the professional legitimacy and visibility that it had been denied during the period of the Franco dictatorship, improving working conditions for theater professionals, and planning for the future. Significantly, this process of recuperation entailed the construction and reconstruction of theatrical infrastructures in Barcelona (and Catalunya, in general) whose existence had been thwarted by the dictatorship. It also included the remodeling and recovery of locales that had been transformed into cinemas, as well as several theater spaces that had lapsed into a lamentable state.

Inspired by European paradigms that include Jean Vilar's Théâtre National Populaire and Giorgio Strehler's Piccolo Teatro di Milano, Catalan theater professionals, especially during the democratic transition, were motivated by a seemingly utopian view of the theater as a "public service" for "the people."[29] (Flotats's vision, therefore, as outlined briefly in his précis, did not represent a new stance, but was derived from a prevailing attitude that characterized the Catalan theater

scene throughout the period of the transition.) According to this view, they did not, and *still* do not, consider culture to be a luxury, but instead, a necessity for the spiritual well being of society. Hence it was deemed the responsibility of public administrations to provide for this necessity and make it accessible to the largest audience possible. Emphasis was placed on "an aesthetic and ethical commitment," rather than commercial and economic interests.[30] With these concerns in mind, the Assemblea launched an appeal in 1976 for the creation of a Teatre de Barcelona, a Teatre de Catalunya, and a Llei del Teatre (theater law). Although the demands put forth by the Assemblea were initially denied, it did nevertheless succeed in inciting public debate and exerting pressure upon the municipal government (the *Ajuntament*) to establish the Grec summer festival, an event that continues to thrive and whose opening night each June serves as a reminder of past struggles.[31]

The year 1976 was also a key moment in that it marked the birth of the Teatre Lliure, Catalunya's most stable, accomplished, and distinguished repertory theater company. The Lliure was founded under the direction of Lluís Pasqual, Pere Planella (1948), Fabià Puigserver (1938–1991), and Carlota Soldevila (1929–2005) as a private collective with public aspirations. "Un teatre privat amb vocació de teatre públic" (A private theater with the vocation of a public theater) was the theater's often-cited maxim.[32] Its original performance space, still in use today, is located in the Gràcia district of Barcelona, in a late-nineteenth-century building that once belonged to the Catalan workers cooperative La Lleialtat.[33] Joan-Anton Benach recalls with emotion the inaugural night of the Lliure, on December 1, 1976, when moments prior to the opening of Pasqual's *Camí de nit* (Night road), the audience stood before an empty stage and burst into spontaneous applause in anticipation and celebration of what had been achieved and what was to follow: To the nothingness that hadn't occurred. To everything that we sensed was about to occur. The ovation was dedicated, simply, to a set of walls, to a camp of operations that was about to premiere.[34]

Faithful to its name and to its establishment during the transition to democracy, the Lliure—both the building and the resident company—has always stood as an emblem of freedom of expression, a vindication of Catalan-language theater productions, and a laboratory for experimentation. Its unique view of the creative process has emphasized the notion of artisanship—as opposed to authorship—in its innovative readings of classic plays drawn from an international repertoire. The Lliure, to this end, has played a key role in the process through which the post-Franco Catalan stage has struggled to recover

and reconstitute the professional legitimacy and visibility that it had lost during the period of the dictatorship. It has also functioned as a creative workshop and training ground for many of the most talented members of the Barcelona theater profession.

Yet the Lliure has also been a key site of contention. In 1988, the theater finally became a public entity, the Fundació Teatre Lliure-Teatre Públic de Barcelona, with the support of the Barcelona municipal government. One year later, through the perseverance of the late director and scenic designer Fabià Puigserver, the Barcelona City Council granted the Lliure its dream of a world-class theatrical space: the Palau d'Agricultura, a historic *noucentista* building situated along the slope of Montjuïc, originally designed by Josep Maria Ribas and Manuel M. Mayol for the Barcelona International Exposition of 1929.[35] During the late 1990s, the socialist *Ajuntament*, along with Barcelona's left-of-center provincial government (the *Diputació*), began converting the lower part of Montjuïc into the Ciutat del Teatre, a multispace "theater city" that would comprise the new Lliure, along with the Mercat de les Flors (specializing in international productions of theater and dance), the Teatre Grec (centerpiece of the Barcelona summer arts festival, also built for the 1929 Exposition), and the new headquarters of the Institut del Teatre de la Diputació de Barcelona (inaugurated in 2000). Barcelona's municipal and provincial governments, as well as the Generalitat de Catalunya and Spain's central government, all provided funding for the new Lliure and the Ciutat del Teatre, motivated by cultural-political aspirations to transform Barcelona into a European theater capital.

It did not come as a surprise, then, when in 1997, at the beckoning of mayor Maragall, Lluís Pasqual, one of the most internationally recognized Catalan directors, returned to Barcelona, leaving behind his position as director of the Théâtre de l'Odéon in Paris, to coordinate the Ciutat del Teatre project. Pasqual had been artistic director of the Odéon since 1993; he had also been one of the central creative motors behind the Lliure since the time of its humble inception in Gràcia. Having accepted Maragall's invitation, Pasqual was to serve as artistic director of the new Lliure upon completion of the restoration of the Palau. Unfortunately, the Lliure was fraught with a series of financial dilemmas and administrative clashes that led Pasqual to announce, during the summer of 2000, his imminent departure from the project.

Less than one year later, during the spring of 2001, Pasqual's successor, director Josep Montanyès (1937–2002), who was frustrated over the Lliure's faltering economic situation, announced his resignation, as well. The destiny of the theater dangled indeterminately for a period of several weeks, but ultimately, Montanyès, who had been

involved with the project since the early stages of acquisition and construction of the new site at Montjuïc, agreed to return to his position overseeing the Lliure and the Ciutat del Teatre consortium.[36]

Ultimately, the Palau d'Agricultura did undergo a stunning transformation, revamped by architect Manuel Nuñez Yanowski, who made impressive use of the plans that Puigserver had left behind. Today, the new Lliure contains two performance spaces, the eight-hundred-seat Teatre Fabià Puigserver and the two-hundred-seat Espai Lliure. The larger of the two spaces, fittingly named to honor the memory of Puigserver and his enormous contributions, boasts a state-of-the-art modular stage that is unique in Europe. It has enabled the Lliure to continue to evolve along the same artistic lines that have shaped much of its trajectory: specifically, an always-distinctive, polyvalent use of scenic space, varied in its relationship to the audience with each successive artistic undertaking.[37] When the two spaces, the Teatre Fabià Puigserver and the Espai Lliure, however, finally opened their doors in November 2001 and February 2002, respectively, Pasqual was notably absent.

Moreover, after a twenty-five-year artistic odyssey, much of what had been the Lliure's stable resident company had since dissipated, and what was originally conceived as a private collective still faced a rather uncertain future as a pricey public institution whose fiscal destiny rested in the hands of four different government administrations with diverse political agendas. Following the news of Pasqual's resignation, theater critic and chronicler Marcos Ordóñez alluded to these prevailing winds of uncertainty when he published, in *El País*, the following commentary in an article that he aptly titled "El follón del Lliure" (The Lliure's fiasco): "I still don't know what the plan is, and what the *real* assets of the Lliure (directors, actors, works) will be when the time comes to assume the challenge of filling the Palau, of going from a space of 300 seats to one of many hundreds. It's a question that all the theater people—including the audience members of course—ask ourselves. But in a hushed voice. So as not to hinder the negotiations, I suppose. We are *fans* of the Lliure, of course; the problem is we don't really know what or who the Lliure is."[38]

As it embarked upon a new stage in its artistic evolution, the Lliure conveyed a desire to transcend its controversial past and open itself with agility to the participation and collaboration of several generations of theater professionals from diverse sectors of the performing arts: theater, music, opera, and dance. The first season (2001–02) at the Palau d'Agricultura offered a varied program that was in keeping with the Lliure's tradition of favoring Catalan-language productions of international drama. It entailed the collaboration of directors Carles

Santos (1940), Àlex Rigola (1969), José Sanchis Sinisterra (1940), Theodoros Terzopoulos, Joan Ollé (1955), Jordi Mesalles (1953–2005), and Ricard Salvat (1934). (The only autochthonous Catalan works were those staged by Santos and Salvat.)[39] In the "Projecte artístic" that was published in the new Lliure's inaugural program, it appeared as though the theater and its corresponding foundation, presided over by Antoni Dalmau, had begun to confront the difficult task of constructing an artistic identity that would be, at once, compatible with the present realities of the profession, faithful to its past as a public theater of private origins, and conscious of its historic role in forging a contemporary theatrical life in Catalunya.[40]

Sadly, the segment of the Lliure's history that I have recounted here has a tragic denouement, for it culminated with the death in the fall of 2002 of Josep Montanyès, who collapsed as a result of a heart attack in the days following the inauguration of the theater's second season. Benet i Jornet had published an article in *El País* in the spring of 2001 titled "El Lliure y/o Josep Montanyès" (The Lliure and/or Josep Montanyès). When viewed in retrospect, it appears to have been a strange premonitory gesture, as though Benet had somehow sensed that the theater that his friend and colleague Montanyès had worked so hard to engender and nurture eventually would become the root of his physical demise. In March 2003, Àlex Rigola, a young director brimming with innovative energy, was named artistic director of the Lliure, and he has since taken the theater in new directions.[41]

This is not the Paris of *les valides*

In 2000, during the period of turmoil surrounding the new Lliure, there was a much-recounted moment of tension between Pasqual and Ferran Mascarell, director of the municipal government's Institut de Cultura. Pasqual defended the notion of creative autonomy, and Mascarell, in turn, responded that "the world of artistic creation is important, but we are not in the Paris of *les valides*."[42] It was a sobering rejoinder that, as Ordóñez pointed out, at the time rang strangely familiar to those who had witnessed the Flotats debacle at the TNC.[43] Considered in a historical light, it seems ironic that both Flotats and Pasqual, two Catalans who found great success abroad—in France, in particular—and whose transnational artistic trajectories embody the type of cosmopolitan openness that has shaped the evolution of the modern Catalan stage, would, upon returning "home" to Barcelona, find themselves at the veritable hub of conflict in an unrelenting spectacle of suspicion, covetousness, and theatrical politics.

As Teresa Vilarós has warned, "Catalan identity" may quickly become a commodity, an ideological simulacrum that can function strategically and seductively to "sell" or "negotiate" Catalan cultural capital.[44] Unlike the TNC, the Lliure was born "from below," out of the sheer desire of private citizens; it did not, in its original incarnation, materialize "from above," out of the resolve of public administrations. Still, public entities in modern Catalunya historically have shown a preference for investing in extravagant monumental projects and grand-scale cultural events as a way of garnering visibility and claiming legitimacy for Catalan cultural identity within a global sphere. The Barcelona Universal Expositions of 1888 and 1929, the Olympic Games of 1992, the TNC, the Auditori Nacional de Catalunya, the Ciutat del Teatre, and the Fòrum Universal de les Cultures of 2004 are among the many examples. While it may be taken as a manifestation of a strategic desire on the part of certain politicians, along with architects and urban planners, to leave their definitive, Mitterandian, signature upon the cultural map of the city, perhaps, more significantly, the tendency toward *grandeur* is an indication of an overt political consciousness with regard to the status of Catalunya as a stateless nation, and of a resultant impulse to underscore difference and, in some cases, even express self-determination. Viewed in this light, it is not surprising that politicians such as Pujol and Maragall would fixate on the international cachet of Flotats and Pasqual in order to boast the international profile of their projects.

Indeed the interest (even obsession) on the part of public entities with infrastructure often has more to do with global aspirations and the international projection of *catalanisme* than with the artistic vigor of the local theater profession or the cultivation and preservation of Catalan text-based drama. In "Casa nova, casa vella" (New house, old house), an article whose title constitutes a subtle allusion to the Palau de l'Agricultura (as well as Carlo Goldoni's *La casa nova* [1761]), Jordi Coca underscores the importance of recuperating theatrical performance spaces but also questions the relatively inadequate quantity of energy devoted to tending the fields of Catalan drama. As he points out, it remains unclear as to why there would be such great emphasis upon exterior façades and the physical improvement of facilities, and proportionally so little energy committed to what goes on inside each edifice: to "what has been and what is Catalan theater." Even among Barcelona production companies, Coca detects an "inexplicable aloofness" with regard to Catalan plays: "we could all stand to be more generous with our past and with our present. It is imperative that we do so if we don't want to be regarded as peripheral and provincial."[45]

Perhaps there has been no greater cynic with regard to the presence

of public theater institutions throughout the Spanish state than Albert Boadella. In 1989, the year that the Generalitat announced plans for the construction of the TNC, and one year after the Lliure became a public theater and lengthened its name to the Fundació Teatre Lliure-Teatre Públic de Barcelona, Boadella proclaimed, in a gesture of mockery, designed to undercut the prevailing notions of official culture, that he was renaming his company "Els Joglars-Teatre Nacional de Catalunya."[46]

The distinguished director Ricard Salvat has publicly offered his own critical voice, as well. On the eve of the inauguration of the TNC, Salvat, who—like Benet i Jornet, earlier—was riling against Flotats's decision to launch the first season of programming at the Teatre Nacional with Kushner's *Angels in America* and Sondheim's *Company*, felt compelled to ask, "Are we in Burundi or in the European Community?" and then to remark that, after twenty-two years of democracy, he had yet to see an adequate model of public theater that was even minimally compatible with the European Union.[47] Salvat called for an end to what he dubbed a "Hipermercat de l'Espectacle" (A hypermarket of spectacle) and made an appeal, instead, for coherent programming:

> Una "lectura" de la nostra dramatúrgia nacional i, a la vegada, de la dramatúrgia internacional. Un repertori que expliqui la "nostra història," la dels Països Catalans, en relació a la Península Ibèrica i a Europa. Una programació que . . . funcioni com un servei públic, no com un servei per a una o per a tres o quatre persones soles; i que a través d'aquest repertori es defineix el nostre ésser aquí, en el món, com a catalans. Es parli de les nostres inquietuds i de les responsabilitats d'un millor futur polític.[48]

> [A "reading" of our national drama and, at the same time, of international drama. A repertory that would explain "our history," that of the Catalan-speaking lands, in relation to the Iberian Peninsula and Europe. A program that . . . would function as a public service, not as a service for just one or just three or four people; and that through this repertoire our place here, in the world, as Catalans, would be defined. It should speak of our concerns and of the responsibilities of a better political future.]

Salvat, in effect, was expressing the same concerns with international projection, self-determination, and protectionism that would later land on the agenda of the new administration of the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya (*après* Flotats). But the definition of the "we" (*nosaltres*) to which Salvat (and, also, Coca) was referring (as in "*our* national drama," "*our* history," "*our* place here, in the world, as Catalans," and "*our* concerns") is a rather imprecise construct, part of a

contemporary *nostreficació*, which has infiltrated popular discourse and political rhetoric in reference to an imaginary map of cultural distinctions.[49] Catalunya's status as a stateless nation has given way to an overt consciousness with regard to the space of Catalan culture and the curious tendency to define this space through the abstract use of personal pronouns. Performance theory has already shown, effectively, that the very notion of cultural identity—in this case, of *catalanitat*—can be construed as a subjective process. Consequently, for a community to "reveal" itself on stage, to bring to life a national narrative, the stage must be conceived as a site of conflict, struggle, and resistance, of cultural, social, and political negotiations and vacillations.[50]

Vicenç Villatoro describes the "terrain" of Catalan cultural hegemony as a symbolic space of emotion, perception, and subjectivity.[51] It is a place of individual, as well as collective, self-recognition whose parameters are established phenomenologically, in relation to different *cercles de pertinença* (circles of belonging), which include the Spanish state, Europe (and, I would add, Africa and the Americas).[52] Within this emotional, subjective space, the image of Europe is regularly evoked, albeit ambiguously, as a point of contrast with Spanish centralism and a context for a more autonomous Catalunya. (The slogan, which was especially popular during the 1992 Olympic games, "Catalunya, Un país d'Europa" [Catalunya, a country in Europe] is indicative of this point.) Hence, Villatoro situates the issue of cultural identity within a spatial arena, not only a linguistic-political arena, as is so often the case.

Such a gesture is particularly relevant to the theater, for the problem of place and the relationship between place and theatrical space are issues that traverse the entire trajectory of modern Western drama. Una Chaudhuri employs the term "geopathology" to describe this problematic, observing how it emerges throughout the realist/naturalist tradition as a "series of ruptures and displacements in various orders of location, from the micro- to the macrospatial, from home to nature, with intermediary space concepts such as neighborhood, hometown, community, and country ranged in between."[53] The play with spatial geography, especially with the image of home and the notion of locality, can be remarkably revealing in terms of a playwright's worldview and his or her sense of self, identity, and culture.

Catalunya invisible

Throughout the post-Franco period, politicians, architects, designers, cultural planners, urban developers, and even theater directors

continually reimagined and envisaged Barcelona's contemporary theatrical landscape, unabatedly preoccupied—even obsessed—with Catalan cultural identity and its international projection vis à vis varied manifestations of globalization and Europeanization. At the same time, the city, paradoxically, began to take on a nearly invisible, ghostly presence on the contemporary stage. Curiously, in the copious outpouring of Catalan plays written during the post-Franco period, Barcelona and/or Catalunya are, in general terms, conspicuously absent from the theatrical landscape. In the private, intimate space of theatrical writing, the dramatists themselves, especially throughout the decades of the 1980s and 1990s, appeared to elude for the most part any sort of cultural specificity.

There are, unquestionably, several Catalan performance groups, such as La Fura dels Baus, Comediants, and Sèmola, whose references to the culture of the Mediterranean are evocative of Catalunya in varying degrees. Other companies, such as La Cubana, Teatre de Guerrilla (1998), and Els Joglars, have portrayed Catalunya and Catalan identity through the lens of parody and caricature. In the literary realm of text-based drama of the 1980s and 1990s, however, seldom did Barcelona—or Catalunya, for that matter—as an image, notion, rhetorical figure, or poetic trope, make an appearance on the contemporary Catalan stage, and rarely was it addressed or even subtly invoked.

The traditional geographic place markers of a Catalan imaginary practically vanished from the settings of contemporary drama of this period. What one finds in these plays, then, is not the Catalunya grounded in the symbolic geography of Àngel Guimerà's late nineteenth-century *Terra baixa* (*Marta of the Lowlands*, 1896) or *Mar i cel* (*Sea and Sky*, 1888); nor does it resemble the popular-mythical Catalunya of Josep Maria de Sagarra's *L'hostal de la Glòria* (1931) and *El Cafè de la Marina* (1933), or the *costumbrista* portraits of Barcelona that surface in Sagarra's *La plaça de Sant Joan* (1934) or *La rambla de les Floristes* (The rambla of the florists, 1935).[54] Catalunya, it would seem, is rarely even referenced in a metaphoric or allegorical sense during this period, as was often the case in the politically-committed theater written during the years of censorship and dictatorship; for example, the allegorical-mythical evocation of Arenys de Mar/Sinera and Barcelona/Lavínia of Salvador Espriu's *Ronda de mort a Sinera* (Death around Sinera, 1966) and *Primera història d'Esther* (First story of Esther, 1948).

In stark contrast with their predecessors, a substantial cluster of contemporary playwrights, which includes Carles Batlle (1963), Sergi Belbel (1963), Josep Maria Benet i Jornet (1940), Toni Cabré (1957), Lluïsa Cunillé (1963), Albert Espinosa (1973), Jordi Galceran (1964),

Josep Pere Peyró (1959), David Plana (1969), and Mercè Sarrias (1966), began to play with a vacuous, nondescript spatial territory. Their plays, whether written in a realist vein or a more experimental mode, were generally characterized by a lack of spatial geography and by an evasion of geographic signs of identity. It would seem, therefore, that imbedded in their own geopathology has been a desire to transcend through the theater their own cultural space.

Batlle describes this situation of invisibility in relation to a self-deprecating attitude, or psychological complex, commonly referred to as Catalan *autoodi* (self-hatred), suggesting that the phenomenon may be linked to a desire following the dark ages of the Franco dictatorship to bring contemporary Catalan cultural production to a level comparable to that of the most civilized or sophisticated cultures and societies:

> Durant anys, els autors hem estat patint un cert complex que ens impedia situar les obres a les nostres ciutats, que ens obligava a disfressar els noms dels personatges per por que no semblessin massa locals. El complex—aquesta mena d'*autoodi*—probablement té alguna cosa a veure amb la sensació d'endarreriment que arrosseguem des de la postguerra i la transició democràtica. L'afany d'acostar-nos al món civilitzat ha provocat—si més no en l'ambit teatral—que rebutgéssim les marques de localitat; marques que, en cas d'aparèixer, semblaven posar en evidència un producte vell, poc cosmopolita, "catalanet" i fins it tot—quin pecat!—lligat a la tradició.[55]

> [For years, we authors have been suffering from a certain complex that impeded us from situating plays in our cities, that obliged us to disguise the names of characters for fear that they might seem too local. The complex—a type of *self-hatred*—probably has something to do with the feeling of backwardness that we've lugged around since the postwar period and the democratic transition. The desire to bring ourselves closer to the civilized world has provoked in us—at least in the theater world—a rejection of signs of localism; signs that, when present, seemed to point to a product that was old, not very cosmopolitan, *catalanet* and even—what a sin!—tied to tradition.]

In a move ostensibly in the direction of universalism, as well as a cosmopolitan yearning to project themselves and their work beyond local borders, many Barcelona dramatists virtually erased Barcelona from the stage, turning their backs on the city with a peculiar air of modesty or reticence, as though to name their place of origin or residence would have implied a sinful portrayal of local realism or an overtly gratuitous act of small-minded provincialism. Ironically, the democratic freedom that afforded the professional theater unrestricted use of Catalan as a "theatrical idiom" appears to have yielded a certain

complacency, ambivalence, or even neglect on the part of some directors and producers with regard to the staging and support of autochthonous drama. Hence, at times, it would seem as though Catalan drama itself were in danger of becoming invisible. Barcelona playwright/poet Joan Casas has even dared to pose the provocative hypothesis that the often-cited "new Catalan dramaturgy," in effect, may be merely a "mirage."

Perhaps, during these postdictatorial years, the mere gesture of writing or staging a play in the Catalan language served as a sufficiently crucial, or even politically charged, marker of identity. Or, perhaps, the absence of Catalunya was a way for many playwrights on the left to "write against" the politics of Pujol and Convergència. Or, was it that Barcelona's urban landscape—what literary critic and journalist Julià Guillamon calls an "interrupted city"—was changing so rapidly that it practically escaped concrete representation or description? Guillamon has described, in *La ciutat interrompuda*, a tendency among Catalan (and even Spanish) fiction writers of the 1990s to evade literary representations of Barcelona, transferring the "real" map of the city to a personal-mental imaginary. He borrows the notion of the "interrupted city" from an essay written by Giulio Carlo Argan (with Bruno Contardi) who observed in the late 1970s that Rome was no longer on the minds of writers and artists, but instead had passed into the hands of technocrats. For Guillamon, contemporary Barcelona is also an interrupted city, in that there is a vast gap, or inconsistency, between the fictionalized representations of the city and the images conjured during the post-Franco reconstruction (before and after the Olympic games) by politicians, urban planners, and architects.[56] Faced with the difficulties of portraying an urban landscape that is changing so rapidly that it practically eludes description, novelists and short story writers such as Quim Monzó, Sergi Pàmies, and David Cirici have given preference to interior "psycho-geographies" or to incomplete fragments drawn from the exterior urban scenery, or to anonymous "no-places" that are seemingly lacking in signs of identity. Reflecting upon this absence, Guillamon wonders if it might be possible at some point to reclaim these lost spaces: "Is it possible to reconquer the spaces of anonymity, is it possible to convert them into spaces of identity and of memory?"[57] Josep Miquel Sobrer, in turn, poses the notion of aporia, a "being at a loss for where one is, or where to begin or how to proceed," as an apt way of conceiving this problematic sense of Catalan identity, which he traces to the cultural *Renaixença* (Renaissance) of the 1890s and the "reinvention of Catalonia as nation."[58]

It is this same geographic loss, or sense of displacement—the para-

doxical presence of an "invisible Catalunya"—that became a defining trait of much of contemporary Catalan drama.[59] Many of the playwrights whose work I shall visit in this study inscribe Catalunya (its inclusion and exclusion) without offering us an essentialist vision; instead, the notion of Catalunya vacillates, it hovers and drifts in the background. It often lingers in a subliminal semantic void, undergoing constant formulation, reformulation, and displacement.

The strategy of displacement is often portrayed on the Catalan stage (and elsewhere) through the figure of America. As Chaudhuri notes with regard to modern drama in general, America is "the hinge, the turning point in more than a century-long neglect of the very principle that it seems to erase: space."[60] This tactic can be observed in plays such as the earlier-cited *Després de la pluja*, by Belbel, in which the setting, the lofty rooftop of a skyscraper owned by a transnational corporation, alludes to an uncertain abstract urban geography reminiscent of North America and resembling, in particular, New York City. In Belbel's play, "America" is reimagined as a placeless metaphoric space of idealism, and also of decadence, a "heterotopic" realm of desire, comprising, as Chaudhuri would have it, "many different, even incompatible places."[61] Batlle attributes this so-called "Americanization" of Catalan drama in part to a contemporary fascination with the theater of David Mamet, whose critical views of American society have provided Barcelona playwrights with a paradigmatic portrait of postindustrial decline. In addition, as Batlle notes, the influence of North American cinema has been a crucial element in the creation of a generic "collective imaginary" that entails abundant Hollywood film clichés, such as the presence of skyscrapers and evening mist wafting off a set of broad city streets.[62]

If the aesthetic and political evolution of the modern Catalan stage is conceived as a process of transnational transactions, the product of an attitude of openness with regard to international theater traditions, then the contemporary conditions surrounding the emergence of a postnational subjectivity have only served to facilitate this process. Yet, as Catalunya struggles to position itself within the space of cultural integration and disintegration that is the new Europe, it must also take into account the space of cultural pluralism that it calls home. Indeed, in the new millennium it appears as though Catalunya is gradually becoming visible on the stage once again, and, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, a new image of Catalunya, or Barcelona, has begun to emerge. Contemporary Catalan theater seems to thrive on the transnational transactions that I have described here, creating a limitless theatrical geography in which it manages to resist the absolute vanishing point.