

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE JOURNEY IN THE DESERT

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The grandeur of deserts derives from their being, in their aridity, the negative of the earth's surface. . . . The silence of the desert is a visual thing, too. A product of the gaze that stares out and finds nothing to reflect it . . . for there to be silence, time itself has to attain a sort of horizontality; there has to be no echo of time in the future, but simply a sliding of geological strata one upon the other giving out nothing more than a fossil murmur.

—Jean Baudrillard, *America* (2010)

Deserts, as the French cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard beautifully describes them, are magnificent. Their grandeur derives from a paradox that is intrinsic to deserts' magnificence: their austerity. For deserts are arid spaces, wastelands, desolate and unprotected. Deserts are the negative of the earth's surface, places where silence and time intermingle and become simultaneously visual and fossilized. Once time freezes in deserts, there is no echo of a future. Yet, Hannah Arendt observes that the greatest danger in the desert is that there are sandstorms, for the desert is not always as quiet as a cemetery. In the desert, everything is possible, and thus even autonomous movements might begin.<sup>1</sup> Initiating a journey in the desert, then, is a daunting task. We are forced to ask: How do those who traverse the desert do it? Do all of those who traverse deserts—places marked by loss, emptiness, and even exile—find an oasis in them? Catalan drama, one of the artistic manifestations most deeply rooted in Catalan cultural and intellectual tradition, traversed during the long decades of Francoism a vast deserted land.<sup>2</sup> The prominent Barcelona playwright Josep Maria Benet i Jornet refers to this crossing of the desert in his essay titled “Del desert a la terra promesa”:

El segon llibre de la Bíblia es diu “Èxode.” Com sabeu en ell s'explica com els jueus van fugir de la captivitat que patien a Egipte i van

viatjar durant quaranta anys pel desert, perduts i a la recerca de la Terra Promesa—una terra que sovint dubtaven de poder abastar mai. Però hi van arribar. Encara que arribar-hi, contra allò que havien imaginat, no va a ser el final feliç de la seva història va ser el començament de noves lluites externes i de nous conflictes interns. Bé, voldria establir un paral·lelisme . . . entre aquella travessia del desert i la història del teatre de text a Barcelona durant 40 anys. (Benet i Jornet 2004, 231)

(The second book of the Bible is called “Exodus.” As you know, in it the story is recounted of how the Jews fled from the captivity that they suffered in Egypt and traveled for forty years across the desert, lost and in search of the Promised Land—a land they often doubted that they would ever reach. But they did arrive there. Although arriving there, unlike what they had imagined, was not the happy ending of their story. It was the beginning of new external battles and internal conflicts. Well, I would like to establish . . . a parallelism between that desert crossing and the story of text-based theater in Barcelona for forty years.) (Feldman 2009, 11)<sup>3</sup>

Regardless of its origin, text-based drama was very vulnerable to censorship in postwar Spain. In his rendering of the crossing of the desert, Benet i Jornet declares that the Promised Land was a portent of riches but also of the real possibilities of having to cross the desert again. The journey in the desert thus symbolizes the history of drama and performance in Catalonia. It is a history intimately related with the memory of a society that has been determined by a series of internal and external conditions, especially during the Francisco Franco dictatorship, a period in which any expression of Catalan culture was proscribed.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the absence of written Catalan drama in Franco’s Spain had its origins in the late 1940s. As Enric Gallén points out, the Catalan scene during these years

did not show sufficient signs of artistic renewal, with the exception of various isolated attempts by Josep M. de Sagarra—in plays such as *La fortuna de Sílvia* (*Silvia’s Fate*) (1947) and *Galatea* (1948)—to mirror the sort of moral drama that was prevalent in Europe in the late 1940s. The publication of Salvador Espriu’s important *Primera història d’Esther* (*The Story of Esther*) in 1948 was, on the other hand, an exceptional event. (Gallén 1996, 17)<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, at the same time the Teatro Piccolo di Milano was founded in Italy and theater in France was becoming decentralized Catalan theater’s

artistic scene was limited and inward looking until the mid-1950s (Gallén 1996, 20). The common impression was that of “a regional and rural culture supplied by commercially-oriented authors, thus reminding Catalans of the exact measure that separates [them] from European culture, and therefore from Europe” (Ibid.). Regarding the status of the playwright in postwar Catalonia, Maria M. Delgado has affirmed: “I’m not sure that post-war Spanish theatre has produced any great writers or plays. You can’t just blame Franco, but neither he is completely blameless. . . . We shouldn’t judge, but we haven’t produced any great dramatist[s], and no one can really say why” (Delgado 2003, 10). However, Gallén has demonstrated that at the end of the 1940s, manifestations of an authentic, popular, Catalan theater at the Paral·lel (for many, the Montmartre of Barcelona) were destroyed (Gallén 1996, 19). Other examples of the obliteration of Catalan theater were the forced exile of theatrical figures such as Josep M. de Sagarra, Carles Soldevila, and Joan Oliver; isolation from different aesthetics in foreign theater; and censorship of specific translations of foreign plays, something that lasted until the 1950s (Ibid., 20–25). In fact, public performances of plays in Catalan were prohibited in professional theaters in Barcelona until the late 1950s (Ibid., 25). Gallén relates that in effect, already by December 1939, “when faced with a request that the traditional Catalan Christmas Nativity play *Els pastorets* be performed, the Civil Governor of Barcelona cynically decreed that the performance should not constitute a public spectacle, but an exclusively family-based religious affair” (Ibid.). As Gallén lucidly asserts, “The political message of this injunction was quite clear: Catalan language was to be confined to private and family use” (Ibid., 26). In this political climate, access to cultural and theatrical manifestations in Catalan were clandestine, and for those devoted to the theater, the alternatives were to go into exile or endure and await better times (Ibid.). Yet John London has shown how “the translation of non-Spanish plays into Catalan [led] to the re-establishment of the language as a working theatrical idiom, rather than a folkloric tradition” (1998: 7). To grasp the nature of the repression of difference under Franco, let us now turn to a brief sketch of Francoism’s cultural politics. It is worth noting that from the pulpit to newspapers and radio, the regime’s official propaganda preached essentialist discourses about the Hispanic race and culture, intertwined with the demonization of everything considered foreign. The intended effect of these discourses was nothing less than forcing obedience to the rules of conduct considered convenient by the Spanish government and the Catholic Church (Martín Gaité 2005):

Que sea español nuestro amigo y nuestro criado y nuestra novia,  
que sean españoles nuestros hijos. Que no haya sobre la bendita  
tierra de España otras costumbres que las nuestras. Y si esto es un

feroz nacionalismo, pues mejor. Y si el que defiende esto es un absurdo retrógrado, pues mucho mejor. (Our friend, our servant, and our girlfriend must be Spanish; our children must be Spanish. Let there be on the blessed land of Spain no other customs than ours. And if this is a fierce nationalism, even better. And if the person defending this is an absurd reactionary, so much the better.) (Castro Villacañas, quoted in Martín Gaité 2005, 29)

The cultural redefinition of Spain was one of the concerns of the new regime. “We do not wish to demand a hasty creative activity, but only to draw attention to the responsibility—the glorious responsibility—of those in whom all hopes are set,” wrote music critic Federico Sopena in the newspaper *Arriba* on the last day of 1941 (quoted in Moreda Rodríguez 2008). Hereafter, this would be the official propaganda used to define the appropriate forms of artistic expression in postwar Spain. For the regime, literature, art, and film, as Sebastià Juan Arbó declared, ought to embody “una nueva orientación más acorde con nuestra cultura y nuestra tradición . . . , con nuestra moral y nuestro concepto de familia” (a new direction more in line with our culture and our tradition . . . , with our morals and our concept of family) (quoted in Martín Gaité 2005, 32). During the occupation of Barcelona in 1939, as Manuel Vázquez Montalbán highlights in his book *Barcelonas*, the Francoist authorities ordered that “There was to be no Catalan-lorries, which had arrived with manifestos, and leaflets written in Catalan were intercepted. No political or union organization, no *sardanas* or popular assemblies. Barcelona has been a sinful irreligious city. What had to be done during the following weeks was to organize a series of Masses and acts of expiation” (Vázquez Montalbán 1992, 142). Furthermore, in postwar Spain, any comment about politics, capital punishment, or the country’s misery was prohibited. The new regime had established as a rule “la obediencia, el cuidado de no murmurar, de no concedernos la licencia de apostillar . . . la formula [era] esta: el silencio entusiasta” (obedience, care not to mumble or to allow any kind of supplementary statement . . . the formula [was] this: enthusiastic silence) (quoted in Martín Gaité 2005, 18). In Franco’s view, war had made it possible for Spain to return to its essential being, “*españolidad*” (Spanishness), which—along with the spiritual values of austerity, obedience, and silence—consisted in the Hispanic race, the Spanish language, and the rejection of different cultures and languages.<sup>6</sup> Authentic Spain, Giménez Caballero impassionedly cried out, was embodied by Franco: “¿Quién se ha metido en las entrañas de España como Franco . . . hasta el punto de no saber ya si Franco es España o si España es Franco?” (Who has gotten into the heart of Spain like Franco . . . to the point of no longer knowing whether Franco is Spain or Spain is Franco?) (quoted in

Ibid., 19). Franco proclaimed himself “el Caudillo de la última cruzada y de la hispanidad” (the leader of the last crusade and of the Hispanic world) and “el Caudillo de la guerra de liberación contra el comunismo y sus cómplices” (the leader of the war of liberation from communism and its accomplices). Accordingly, the consistent elements in Franco’s long rule included primarily authoritarianism, nationalism, the defense of Catholicism and the Catholic family, anti-Freemasonry, and anticommunism. All these elements conjoined within this period of Francoist Spain and produced an interplay of universal and particular elements; that is, between the creation of the nation-state and a redemptive “españolidad.” “The doctrine of ‘Hispanismo,’” as Henry Kamen has observed, “included, among many other postulates, ‘the existence of a unique Spanish culture, lifestyles, traditions and values, all of them embodied in its language; the idea that Spanish American culture is nothing, but Spanish culture transplanted to the New World; and the notion that Hispanic culture has a hierarchy in which Spain occupies a hegemonic position’” (Kamen 2007, 393, quoting del Valle and Gabriel-Stheeman).<sup>7</sup> By privileging the Spanish language—whose objective, based on the linguistic ideology of the Real Academia de la Lengua Española (1713–1714) was “Limpia[r] fija[r] y da[r] esplendor” (To clean, set, and give splendor to) the Spanish language—Franco’s regime significantly slowed down the development of professional Catalan theater.

In fact, according to Eric Hobsbawm, the nineteenth century witnessed what he denominates “the principle of nationality” (Hobsbawm 1997, 103), which was closely related to the first phase of capitalism. This correlation between capitalism and national development, as José del Valle and Luis Gabriel-Stheeman have indicated, “has a clear corollary: only those territories in which economic growth was possible could be considered nations” (del Valle and Gabriel-Stheeman 2002, 2). This is, del Valle and Stheeman remind us, what Hobsbawm refers to “as a *threshold principle*” (Ibid.). After 1880, however, a new form of nationalism, “which ignored the threshold principle, began to emerge.” This new nationalism “based its discourse in linguistic and ethnic criteria” (Ibid., 3). Spain thus had “to define itself not only as an effective unit of political action, but also as a social and cultural unit” (Haugen, quoted in Ibid., 7). In fact, the aforementioned forms of unification that nation building entails “require homogenization, that is, the minimization of internal differences, individual and local idiosyncrasies must be subordinated—even sacrificed—for the sake of the nations’ identity”(Hobsbawm, quoted in Ibid.). “From a national perspective . . . diversity had to be overcome not only materially but also ideologically” (Ibid., 5). In this way, the state’s ideological practices intervened in order to configure “a homogenous space that guaranteed the linguistic, cultural and national unity of Spain” (Ibid.). “The identification of the state,” as

Hobsbawm has observed, “with one nation . . . implies a homogenization and standardization of its inhabitants, essentially, by means of a written ‘national language’” (Hobsbawm, quoted in *Ibid.*). The cultural project implicit in “hispanismo” (Hispanicism) consisted in “the persistence of cultural empire” (*Ibid.*, 7) by means of the preeminence of a univocal Spanish identity and culture. This project was one among many aspects (recalling the continuities between Enlightenment and late-modernity in Spain discussed in the introduction) that would make Spain a modern nation.

When Franco became head of state by embracing the idea and project of nationalist Spain, he considered himself the great Catholic crusader. Victory, Paul Preston has observed, “gave substance to his carefully constructed self-image as the medieval warrior-crusader, defender of the faith and restorer of Spanish national greatness, with his relationship to the Church as an important plank in the theatrical panoply” (Preston 1996, 323). During the nearly forty years that Spain was ruled by an authoritarian government, “cultural manifestations were closely monitored and controlled by the military authority and the Roman Catholic Church. Control of text production, both native and translated, was exerted by *juntas de censura* (boards of censorship), committees composed of Church representatives, lower-rank officials and men of letters” (Merino and Rabadán 2002, 125). Even when different types of state censorship can be traced back in Spain to the time of the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella, “under Franco it acquired a new contour, with the religious tints typical of any authoritarian regime that also purports to be defending the true and only religion” (*Ibid.*, 127). Moreover, “members of the pro-Franco political party, the Falange, and the most fundamentalist members of the clergy became willing censors who protected Spaniards from ‘contamination’ by ‘dangerous’ products, whether Spanish or foreign in origin” (*Ibid.*).<sup>8</sup> For instance, the Spanish translation of *The Compliant Lover*, written by the English author Graham Greene, was subjected to censorship by José María Pemán, a proregime Catholic writer, before it finally was allowed to reach the stage in 1968. The plot of the play, a *ménage à trois*, was not accepted by the censors because the official belief was that adultery did not and, moreover, could not exist in Spain. Peter Shaffer’s *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* was another play whose plot the Spanish censors objected to because Shaffer’s exploration of the Black Legend (the conquest of the Americas) was completely the opposite of the official attitude in regard to the days of the Spanish conquest of Peru and thus called it into question. Homosexuality was even more consistently eliminated than adultery (*Ibid.*, 134–36). For instance, Edward Albee’s *The Zoo Story* “was immediately banned when first submitted to censorship in 1963. After making all of the changes required by the censors, only one performance was permitted in *Teatros de Cámara y Ensayo*, which were small

experimental theatres registered as non-profit organizations” (Ibid., 136). Moreover, it was not until “after the adapter had made the modifications and had toned down the indecent language as requested by censors, that another Albee play, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, reached Spanish commercial stages thanks to its huge success abroad and to what the censors denominated as a less morally damaging plot” (Ibid.). At the onset of Dale Wasserman’s musical *The Man from La Mancha*, which was a successful production on Broadway that won five Tony Awards, “a preliminary document was sent to the authorities arguing in favor of the potential of such a production which, they said, could be positive propaganda for Spain, if the musical were staged in Madrid just after its New York premiere” (Ibid.). Despite few objections to the treatment of the character of Don Quixote, the production became a box-office success in Madrid. However, the same reasoning did not help much when Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber’s musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* was submitted to censorship. The religious content of the musical was too obvious for the censors. Thus the play waited three years before reaching the Spanish stage (Ibid.). Censorship of theatrical pieces considered foreign by the regime had an impact both on cultural expressions in the non-Hispanic regions of Spain and on important artistic works produced abroad.

As the foregoing discussion has made clear, dual censorship was a central characteristic of Franco’s authoritarian regime. One can argue, however, that authoritarian states did not completely reach their ultimate goal, for individuals and groups have always performed acts of dissidence and disobedience from within.<sup>9</sup> In that regard, Spain was not an exception.<sup>10</sup> In Barcelona, for instance, the 1950s produced new authors such as Manuel de Pedrolo (1918–1990), representative of the theater of the absurd, and Joan Brossa (1919–1998), who constantly renovated theater by means of his staged poetry and his interdisciplinary tendencies in Catalan performance. Actually, as Jordi Coca indicates, Brossa “was the key to the ‘Dau al Set’ movement, where he coincided for a time with Antoni Tàpies, Joan Ponç, Modest Cuixart and the philosopher Arnau Puig. A prolific creator, Brossa was soon recognised as much for his literary as for his visual poetry, as well as for his installations and performances from 1970 onwards” (Coca 2007, 446). Additionally, the official theater produced during the dictatorship, in the Teatre Romea (1963), changed when new voices brought about the so-called “teatre independent” (independent theater). Among the independent theaters were the Agrupació de Teatre Experimental (Association for Experimental Theater, 1953) and the Teatre Viu (Living Theater, 1956). As Feldman relates, “Ricard Salvat, Miquel Porter and Elena Estelles [were the creators of] the experimental group known as the *Teatre Viu*” (Feldman 2009, 48). These theatrical figures were interested in infusing the Catalan

stage with the most innovative twentieth-century artistic tendencies. For instance, their work developed within an environment of theatrical improvisation in which its participants draw from Jean-Louis Barrault's techniques of pantomime and gesture (Ibid.). Years later, the Teatre Viu began to collaborate with Agrupació Dramàtica de Barcelona (ADB, 1955–1963), another significant group in the alternative theater scene of the late 1950s and the 1960s. The group's central aim was, as Gallén relates, "to revive the artistic and social interest so as to enable Catalan theater to relate once more to the dominant currents of contemporary foreign theater" (quoted in Ibid.). Because of their interest in foreign theater, the group was dissolved in 1963 by government decree after a performance of Bertolt Brecht's *Three-Penny Opera* (Ibid., 49).<sup>11</sup> In fact, censorship had been a constant in the history of the Agrupació Dramàtica de Barcelona. The company was allowed to perform a very reduced number of plays, and some of these were only allowed to be performed once.<sup>12</sup> Even so, "in 1960, [Ricard] Salvat and Maria Aurèlia Capmany had already created the Escola d'Art Dramàtic Adrià Gual (EADAG), a school named for the Catalan playwright-poet-painter Adrià Gual" (Ibid.). This school was the "cradle" of state-of-the-art Catalan theatrical activity. By the time the school closed, in 1976, its creators had already played an important role in the training of the most prominent figures of the independent theater in Catalonia (Ibid.).

More favorable events began to unfold with the appearance of independent theater companies during the end of the 1960s and the last years of Francoism, when the seeds of a counterculture began to be scattered in Spain. In Barcelona, the following companies appeared: Adrià Gual (1960),<sup>13</sup> Els Joglars (1962), Grup d'Estudis Teatral d'Horta (1964), Los Cáraros (1967–1974), La Claca (1967–1988), Comediants (1971), Dagoll Dagom (1974),<sup>14</sup> and L'Escorpí (1975). This set of developments fostered a different theatrical life in the 1960s, which was also exemplified by the appearance of professional journals such as *Primer Acto*, founded in 1959, and *Yorick*, created in 1965. Additionally, in the 1970s, a seminal institution for the study of the art of theater, the Institut del Teatre, was founded.

The performances and representations of the independent theater companies were in opposition to the dictatorship and thus provided a reflection of politics in Spain at the time of the regime's crisis of authority—that is, when workers and intellectuals protested against repression during the Asturian mining strikes of 1962–1964, when the mass exodus of the rural Spanish to industrial cities such as Barcelona took place, when Franco suffered great physical decay, when Carrero Blanco succeeded Franco as head of the government and the press gained relative freedom. Press criticism of the regime, as Raymond Carr observed, "drove the extreme right into a frenzy" (Carr 1994, 733) and, for the first time, Carr adds, "the general



public gained some knowledge of the programme of the opposition and of the reformists within the régime” (Ibid.). Censorship of theater in Catalonia during Francoism was a constant, and yet, Iago Pericot relates: “hi havia un doble joc interessant: fins on es podia arribar abans que la censura no actues? La gent sabia llegir entre línies, el subtext era conegut. D’aquesta manera l’espectador era còmplice perquè sabia que tu volies dir una cosa que estava prohibida i que tenies el pebrots de dir-la” (There was an interesting double play: how far could one go before the censors acted? People could read between the lines; the subtext was known. Thus the audience was complicit, because they knew that you wanted to say something that was forbidden and had the guts to say it) (Pericot 2006, 125). Also, apropos of how Catalan theater interrogated the prescriptions and moral values of the Francoist regime, Pericot relates how he and Sergi Mateu, both creators of the Teatre Metropolità in 1975,<sup>15</sup> conceived the theatrical piece *Rebel Delirium* (1977), which was performed in an abandoned subway tunnel (Ibid.). Pericot and Mateu decided to visit the president of the psychologists of Catalonia, and they said to him:

Escolti’ns, estem fent una obra de teatre sobre l’homosexualitat—hi haurà un judici i tot—necessitem informació sobre els mètodes que vostès van servir contra l’homosexualitat. . . . Si accepta, nosaltres volem sotmetre’ns al reflex condicionat per saber exactament com funciona aquesta teràpia. Ara, sàpiga que tot els que ens digui i nosaltres experimentem, anirà a la obra de teatre. . . . Accepta o no? Va dir que sí. Aleshores em posaren un sensor a les mans i projectaren imatges, si sortia una noia despullada no passava res, però quan sortia un noi despullat sentíem una descarrega elèctrica a les mans. Amb això ja en teníem prou. (Listen to us, we are doing a play about homosexuality—there will be a trial and everything—we need information about the methods you use against homosexuality. . . . If you accept, we want to try the conditioned stimulus in order to know exactly how this therapy works. Now, you need to know that anything you tell us and anything we experience will appear in the play. . . . Do you accept or not? He said yes. Then, while projecting images, they put a sensor on my hands; if the image of a naked woman appeared nothing happened, but when it was the image of a naked man, we would feel an electric shock on our hands. With that we already had enough.) (Pericot 2006, 133–34)

New expectations in the world of Catalan culture began to emerge shortly before the date of Francisco Franco’s death, entailing a *canvi de paradigma* (change of paradigm) in the scenic arts. Paradoxically, the change

of paradigm latent in the creation of independent theater companies suffered from a “limitation”: there existed an independent theater, critical of Francoism, and with the aim of recuperating Catalan culture, but this theater did not consist of written drama. This limitation, nonetheless, has its explanation. It is a particular instantiation of the larger dynamic of homogenization and censorship carried on by Franco’s regime. During the dictatorship, the value of Catalan language was obliterated, and for many of the Catalan independent companies, Feldman observes, “the word ceased to occupy an elevated position of authority . . . the presence of linguistic censorship appeared to encourage their prevailing fascination with nonverbal, gestural and pantomimic forms of performance” (Feldman 2009, 49). Linguistic censorship, to paraphrase Mercè Saumell, forced independent theater companies to use different nontextual forms of theatrical expression (Saumell 1998, 5), thus placing emphasis on “acoustic images and visual tableaux” (Feldman 2009, 49) that emphasized the pictorial dimensions of the performances. The cultural and political panorama of theater in Catalonia becomes even more complicated when one considers how, in the context of the Spanish transition to democracy, the theatrical scene suffered a kind of regression in terms of what had been accomplished during the 1960s by the creation and performance of independent theater companies. This regression is concomitant with one of the significant continuities that remained in place between the dictatorship and the newly inaugurated democracy after the transition. During this period, the political and legal framework still in place was that promulgated by Franco; hence, the old, repressive system of censorship did not really disappear until approximately 1983–1985. As Merino and Rabadán observed:

The last years of the dictatorship (1970–1975) bore witness to unsuccessful attempts to regress to more conservative political attitudes. Franco’s regime and the structure that sustained it did not die with the dictator in 1975, but underwent drastic changes during the period of transition to democracy. In 1977, freedom of expression legislation was passed, followed in 1978 by legislation enshrining the freedom to perform in theatres. Formally, however, the bureaucratic machine that had so efficiently served censorship purposes survived until 1985 (after three years of Socialist government), giving way to the establishment of new bureaucratic structures in the newly established autonomous regions. During the period 1975–1985 . . . cultural products continued to be subjected to the same formal constraints by virtually the same government offices, although their names changed more than once: from censorship to “ordenación” to “calificación.” (Merino and Rabadán 2002, 130)

In 1977, for instance, members of the independent company Els Joglars were incarcerated for performing *La torna*, a play that denounced militarism.<sup>16</sup> Regarding the restaging of *La torna*, Helena Buffery observes:

*La torna de La torna . . .* played deliberately with the double-meaning of the title, to justify a return to Els Joglars' controversial satirical farce [*La torna*] on military corruption as an opportunity to revisit the events of 1977 in the light of new evidence about the trial and execution that inspired the play. Rehearsed in the Institut del Teatre . . . it represented the return of a particular theatrical memory to the Catalan stage, that of a rooted, political theatre capable of deconstructing "empty" monuments. (Buffery 2007, 387)

Indeed, Els Joglars is one of the most acclaimed theater companies in Spain. Throughout its trajectory, the company has never given up its political commitment. With Albert Boadella, the form of political commitment has changed. Over the last few years, he has been an outspoken critic of Catalan nationalism. Despite the repressive system still in place, more theatrical companies, which have continued to play a significant role in the history of the Catalan stage, were founded: Tricycle (1979) and the internationally acclaimed experimental theater companies La Fura dels Baus (1979) and La Cubana (1980). These three independent companies—created in democratic times—represent the apogee of what has been, since the 1960s, a long trajectory of experimental theater in Catalonia.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, reforms such as the Moncloa Pact and the constitution of 1978 were decisive in Spain's insertion into the world market economy during the transition to democracy, an insertion that affected the life of the less commercial and more intellectually driven expressions of Catalan theater. These reforms would make the transition from dictatorship to democracy possible, based upon a pact between the most representative political forces after the general elections of 1977.<sup>18</sup> One of the outcomes of the pact was the proclamation of Adolfo Suárez, a former official of the Francoist regime, as the Prime Minister of the democratic government. Accordingly, the Spanish transition entailed the initiation of an economic and administrative rationalization as well as a transformation of Spanish culture and education. Eduardo Subirats explains the relationship that Spain established with its Francoist past during the transition:

En nombre de la estabilidad o la paz sociales se concertaban alianzas políticas y morales con las instituciones, los valores y las representaciones más sombrías del reciente pasado autoritario. . . .

El dolor que acompañaba la memoria de una dictadura sangrienta desde sus inicios hasta sus últimos días, se borró en nombre de las glorias esperadas en un indefinido futuro politicoeconómico. (In the name of stability and social peace, moral and political alliances were reached with the darkest institutions, values, and representations of the recent authoritarian past. . . . The pain that accompanied the memory of a bloody dictatorship from its beginning to its last days faded from view in the name of the glories of an ill-defined political and economic future.) (Subirats 2003, 346)

Erasing the Francoist past for the benefit of an ill-defined political and economic future prepared the ground for the spectacular decade of the 1980s. In fact, the victory of the Spanish Left in 1982 led to a technocratic Spain. Hereafter, the pact of oblivion regarding the recent past would lead Spanish society to anchor itself in a continuous present with no relationship to the past. In this way, a memory crisis came about precisely because of the desire to establish a rupture with the dictatorship. In the desire to slay the father (Franco), Spain's recent past became, to echo David Lowenthal's felicitous phrase, "a foreign country" (Lowenthal 1999, xvi). In this rejection of the past, Spain's entry into the modernizing logic of the market played a significant role. As Resina affirms, Spain's insertion into the market economy goes a long way toward explaining the transition's temporal imprecision and the confusion of those who insist on anchoring it in politically significant events. Failure to understand the market's mnemonic logic accounts for the widely divergent assessments concerning the transition's span (Resina 2000b, 93). By virtue of being anchored in a continuous present for the benefit of what was considered the real political and economic future, that logic entailed the erasure of the Francoist past. The mass media was a central agent in this process, for they contributed to erasing the memory of the Francoist regime by creating a mirage of apparent harmony in the newly established political transition. Salvador Cardús's sharp assertion is apposite here: "The media managed to recreate Franco's regime free from Franco's supporters and to promote the imaginary of a transition that left an entire era behind" (Cardús i Ros 2000, 22). Moreover, after this process of democratization, Spain began to forge its ultramodernization. The Olympic Games that took place in Barcelona, the celebration of the *Quinto Centenario* (Fifth Centenary) of the Conquest of America in 1992, and the Seville Expo in 1992, whose theme was "The Age of Discovery," all had a decisive role in the constitution of Spain's new political and cultural landscape. Apropos the Olympic Games of 1992 and the role La Fura dels Baus and the Comediants had in them, Maria M. Delgado states:

In this capital city of a nation awakening from the nightmare of a dictatorship which negated its identity and its language . . . the diversity of the “alternative” performance practices that emerged during the 1960s and the 1970s were later taken up and developed by the companies founded during the transition to democracy and the decades that followed. While these had, in fact, developed out of street theater and the appropriation of “found” spaces, the high-profile presence of La Fura dels Baus and Comediants, choreographing, respectively, the opening and closing ceremonies of the 1992 Olympic Games, placed their work into a global stage. . . . La Fura dels Baus and Comediants had toured internationally before the Olympics, but the events of 1992 served to associate them firmly with the geographical landscape of Barcelona, converting them into visible cultural trademarks. . . . The Olympics demonstrated how the “local” might be “packaged” for consumption on a global stage. (Delgado 2012, 174)

Broadly speaking, the foregoing discussion provides an overall historical background for understanding the travails and tribulations of theater in Spain from 1940 to the present. My contention is that four elements of this theatrical history dominated both Catalan theater’s journey through the desert and its landscape of memory: (1) Spain’s distance from the rest of Europe in the immediate postwar period, (2) the effect that censorship of the Catalan language had on independent theater companies, (3) the impact that the centrality of independent theater companies during the 1960s had on playwrights and on non-text-based performances, and (4) the “spectacular turn” that Spain assumed during the transition to democracy. In the Catalonia of the transition, theater began to mirror Spain’s political map, and based on a politics of social peace, theatrical successes were accomplished. From that moment on, Catalan playwrights and their reflections about both the Francoist past and the democratic present were disavowed. These complex political and cultural contexts—from the postwar era to the transition to democracy, up to the middle of the 1980s—are precisely what constitute the *travesia del desert* (the journey in the desert) referred to in the title of this chapter. It was in these contexts that prolific contemporary Catalan playwrights such as Josep Maria Benet i Jornet, Jordi Teixidor, Rodolf Sirera, Manuel Molins, Ramon Gomis, and Narcís Comadira, among others, struggled to claim a space for their creation. Yet it was precisely in the second half of the 1980s that Catalan theater showed signs of extraordinary diversity and vitality. These can be attributed to a decay of the dominance of non-text-based theater and to a qualitative change brought to text-based

drama by a combination of prestigious private and public institutions in Catalonia. These were the years in which Catalan text-based drama questioned the logic of the market and the pact of oblivion that characterized the transition to democracy in Spain. Catalan theater also reinitiated the dialogue it had had—dating back to the nineteenth century—with a variety of European theatrical traditions.<sup>19</sup> What Catalonia certainly gained back with the transition to democracy was its openness and closeness to European artistic and intellectual traditions. For instance, in 1985, Feldman relates, the British director Peter Brook decided “to appropriate the vacant *Mercat de les Flors*, a surviving structure from the Barcelona International Exposition of 1929 . . . for his representation of *Mahabharata*” (Feldman 2009, 24). Regarding the *Mercat de les Flors*, Lourdes Orozco writes:

During the 1980s and 1990s, with the Romea and the Poliorama in the hands of the Generalitat de Catalunya and staging mainly Catalan and European classics, the Liceu concerned with traditional stagings of the European operatic tradition, and the Lliure building up its international profile on the strength of a solid ensemble structure, the *Mercat de les Flors* became the city’s only public auditorium—attached to neither a company nor a repertory—keen to stage works from all over the world. Crucially, the *Mercat* was also the only venue in the city which embraced the performative arts in a hitherto unprecedented manner. (Orozco 2007a, 360)<sup>20</sup>

Today, the *Mercat de les Flors* is part of Barcelona’s *Ciutat del Teatre*, a place that brings together a number of theater spaces. The year of 1985 can indeed be considered the date of the recovery of text-based drama in Catalonia. Sergi Belbel played a leading role in reinvigorating text-based drama in Barcelona when he received the annual *Marqués de Bradomín* prize in 1985, which was the first time the prize was granted. During the first years of the recovery of text-based theater, the vast majority of playwrights were writing about themes that explored the complexities of the human psyche. With the passage of time, they started to create theatrical texts that reflected simultaneously upon the cultural and sociopolitical situation of Catalonia and the predicaments of contemporary society at large. The point of reference and the influences for the creation of their dramatic proposals were authors such as Samuel Beckett, Thomas Bernhard, Harold Pinter, David Mamet, and Bernard-Marie Koltès. In the specific case of Josep Maria Benet i Jornet, one also thinks of Antonio Buero Vallejo, Salvador Espriu, Bertolt Brecht, Arthur Miller, and Eugene O’Neill.

Among other factors influencing the vitality and diversity of contemporary Catalan theater, one can identify the founding of certain theater

companies and the important role played by Teatre Lliure (1976) and the Sala Beckett (1988). The Lluire, one of the most experimental theater venues in Barcelona, founded by Lluís Pasqual, Pere Planella, Fabià Puigserver, and Carlota Soldevila, was a “private collective with public aspirations” (Feldman 2009, 34). The Sala Beckett was created by the Valencian playwright José Sanchis Sinisterra, not only as a rehearsal space for his Teatro Fronterizo (1977) but also to promote text-based theater workshops, as a place where young Catalan playwrights could develop their talent effectively. Since 1997, the Sala Beckett has been directed by Toni Casares. Apropos the Sala Beckett, Feldman writes:

Since 2004, the year of the Beckett’s fifteenth anniversary, Carles Batlle . . . has served as coordinator of the Beckett’s new teaching space known as L’Obrador (“the workshop”), which has rapidly become a place of encounter and interchange for veteran Catalan playwrights of long-standing affiliation with the Beckett, such as Pau Miró, Enric Nolla, David Plana, Josep Pere Peyró, Sergi Pompermayer and Victoria Szpunburg, as well as theatre practitioners from other countries such as Javier Daulte and Rafael Spregelburd of Argentina and Ahmed Ghazali of Morocco. Additionally, the celebration of the Beckett’s crystal anniversary coincided with the return of (*Pausa*), the in-house publication that Batlle was instrumental in launching in October 1989, and which faded from shelves during the mid-1990s. He and Casares resuscitated the journal after a nearly ten-year hiatus in publication. In 2005, the Sala Beckett received the Premi Nacional de Teatre (the National Theatre Prize) from the Generalitat de Catalunya in recognition of its promotion and support of contemporary dramaturgies. (Feldman 2007, 372)

The appearance of the so-called small-format theaters, such as Teatre Malic (1984–2002), Teatre Tantarantana (1992), and Sala Artenbrut (1993–2005), as well as the reorganization of the Festival de Teatre de Tàrraga, as spaces for alternative projects and proposals indicate the rich variety of contemporary Catalan theater. Meanwhile, under the direction of Josep Maria Flotats, the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya (TNC) inaugurated its programming in 1997 with a North American play, Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America*. Since its inception in 1997, it has been one of the most important venues of Catalan and international theater and performance in Barcelona.<sup>21</sup> From the time Domènec Reixach took over direction of TNC in 1998, he emphasized 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” (Feldman 2009, 32). In 2006, Reixach was succeeded by Sergi Belbel. Regarding what Catalan national theater should look like and its representation at the TNC, Jordi Coca’s critique of both Reixach and Belbel’s direction of this theatrical institution is appropriate here:

[It] seems to me that it must be said that Sergi Belbel has altered very little . . . the model that CiU [Convergence and Union] imposed on us through Domènec Reixach. Belbel has made a few aesthetics adjustments, as for example putting on a Brossa . . . but . . . Belbel is not aware of the rich variety of the names who are vegetating in the giant shadow of Catalan public theatre. (quoted in George 2010, 175)

Concerning this polemic, David George has argued that “because of his age, Belbel is more distant from the generation with which Jordi Coca feels more affinity” (George 2010, 177). However, “his directing career has included two plays by Àngel Guimerà” (Ibid., 177). Likewise, Helena Buffery has reflected on the impact of Josep Maria Flotats’s manifesto in 1989 for a Catalan national theater. She specifically addresses the issues that are associated with the notion of “national” and its influence on how theater in Catalonia has been understood as well as particular instantiations of the history of the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya:

Catalonia did not have a national theater institution of this type [like the national theater institutions in England, France, and Germany] until relatively recently; the only exception being the Teatre Nacional de Barcelona, reportedly put there by Manuel Fraga Iribarne, Spain’s minister for culture in the 1960s, in response to complaints in Barcelona that if Madrid had two national theaters, then Barcelona should at least have one. . . . In Catalonia, the words *teatre nacional* might mean, among other things, theater in Catalan, or the TNC, or Spanish theater, or the Catalan independent theater movements that are those most identified internationally with an authentic Catalan tradition. Furthermore, what the words mean to each individual may depend on social or geographical origin, as well as professional or political affiliations. Even before beginning to discuss the space of cultural identity, it is important to perceive national theater as a multiply realized and experienced site. Indeed, any picture of theater in Catalonia is dependent on diverse claims to legitimacy, reflecting the differential affiliations to culture in that area. Nonetheless, I would like to suggest that theater itself, at the crossroads of the political, economic, and aesthetic spheres, is a space



in which traces of these discourses and how they are experienced relationally and bodily can be found. (Buffery 2006, 196–97)

A “history of Catalan theater and what it has signified,” Buffery observes, “would be a difficult narrative to construct. . . . It is a history that is full of breaks, gaps, and sutures, where the difficult, differential location of Catalan culture is always evident at the surface: the different languages, the presence and influence of the foreign” (Buffery 2006, 198). Still, one might assert that if 1939 was, in many ways, a zero hour for Catalan theater and culture, since the 1980s, Catalan theater has experienced one of the richest periods of its history. The *Teatre Lliure*, the *Sala Beckett*, and the *Teatre Nacional de Catalunya* all formed part of a Catalan and European theatrical forum that promoted exchanges between playwrights from different parts of Europe and, more recently, from Latin America. Additionally, in 2002, the *Teatre Nacional de Catalunya* initiated a new project called the “T-6,” under the supervision of Sergi Belbel, with the intention of fostering and staging the work of six Catalan playwrights every year. This revival in Catalonia has had international resonance: contemporary Catalan theater is now performed in different European and Latin American cities. This crossing, from a national context (Catalan) to an international one (European and Latin American), has enriched Catalan theater and has allowed it to open up a favorable space for reflection about political, cultural, and ethical issues of our time. Josep Maria Benet i Jornet, Jordi Coca, Sergi Belbel, Beth Escudé, Calixto Bieito, Lluïsa Cunillé, Lluís Pasqual, Carles Batlle, Toni Casares, Josep Pere Peyró, Toni Cabré, Mercè Sàrries, Pau Miró, Marc Rosich, Jordi Casanovas, Calixto Bieito, Joan Ollé, Àlex Rigola, Mario Gas, Xavier Albertí, Carme Portaceli, Carlota Subirós, Teresa Canas, Gemma Rodríguez, Lurdes Barba, and also the musician Carles Santos are among the names on a long list of prominent contemporary Catalan playwrights, stage directors, and figures devoted to Catalan theater who have witnessed their works premiere at important international venues, including the Edinburgh and Salzburg Festivals, the *Teatro Piccolo di Milano*, the *Odéon-Théâtre de l’Europe*, the *Brooklyn Academy of Music* (Feldman 2002, 284), and many others in Latin America and the Hispanic Caribbean.<sup>22</sup> Catalan’s theater crossing in Catalonia’s cultural and political desert was similar to an actual journey in the desert. Like a voyager in an actual desert, Catalan theater crossed a broad land of high temperatures and dry surroundings. A silent land, at times violated by the brutal passing of sandstorms, and occasionally bound by some deep ridge. A broad land, where voyagers occasionally experienced joy when looking at the beautifully clear and perfect sky.<sup>23</sup> Those sandstorms in the desert are metaphors for authoritarian systems whose main characteristic is that they adjust very well to desert conditions.<sup>24</sup> To

paraphrase Hannah Arendt (2006), such authoritarian systems are the most adequate political form for desert life. Yet, as we have seen in the history of Catalan theater, inside that kind of political form, autonomous movements have the potential to begin. Its landscape of memory consists of striking images of social and political events. Memory figures largely as a hermeneutic of Catalan theater's past—that is, the cultural and political processes of its past sixty years—both from a historical perspective and in creative terms. Within these coordinates, Catalan theater rethinks its past—and the past of Catalonia—and forges its future inside and outside Catalonia. Today, contemporary Catalan theater does not need to cross any kind of desert. It traverses, on the contrary, different theatrical landscapes, and in doing so, it embraces the kind of *theoria* that takes the form of a journey to different lands in order to see—and stage—the world.<sup>25</sup> In this way, it also establishes transatlantic exchanges and connections. In this vein, Carles Batlle affirms that “after a long period of enthroning image-based theatre and collective creative theatre, after a period when suspicion towards text-based theatre—basically, plays by Catalan dramatists—was the order of the day, Catalan drama experienced a significant change” (Batlle 2007, 416).<sup>26</sup> Indeed, Toni Casares, the artistic director of the Sala Beckett, has established a compelling connection between theater and the city; that is, the relationship between the theatrical imaginary of the city of Barcelona and knowing and understanding the world:

El teatre . . . és un espai de trobada i de mutu reconeixement; un ritual de pactes i complicitats i, per tant, ha d'esbandir-se del damunt les pors i els complexos i ha d'oferir-nos als espectadors la possibilitat que ens hi reconeguem. Hem de trobar a l'escenari els nostres llocs, els nostres carrers, els nostres noms, les nostres paraules, les nostres pors, les nostres il·lusions, les nostres circumstàncies. . . . Volem trobar Barcelona a l'escenari. Mirar-la, redescobrir-la, reinventar-la, riure'ns d'ella o plorar-la. . . . Saber parlar de la nostre pròpia ciutat pot voler dir aprendre a comprendre el món. (The theater . . . is a space of encounter and mutual recognition; a ritual of pacts and complicities and, therefore, it has to rise above fears and complexes and has to offer us as spectators the possibility that we might be able to recognize ourselves in it. We have to find our places, our streets, our names, our words, our fears, our hopes, our circumstances there. . . . We want to find Barcelona on the stage. Look at it, rediscover it, reinvent it, laugh at it or cry over it. . . . Knowing how to speak about our city may mean learning to understand the world.) (quoted in Feldman 2009, 249)

Catalan theater thus is about itself and about the world. Today, Catalan playwrights, like the Greek *theoros* (an active spectator or observer), travel abroad in pursuit of new forms of knowledge and artistic cultivation. And while doing so, they carry in their luggage all the histories that compose their memories.<sup>27</sup>