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| Teatro del Pueblo |
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| *Teatro del Pueblo* [The People’s Theatre] was the first ‘independent’ theatre in Argentina and launched the *teatro independiente* movement in Buenos Aires. Founded on November 30, 1930 by the writer Leónidas Barletta (1902-1975), Teatro del Pueblorejected both popular and commercial precedents in its promotion of a modern but socially conscious theatre available to all. Barletta pushed against popular genres such as the *sainete* one-act plays, which he believed, as he asserted in 1938, ‘rendered a people without moral values, a youth both crude and without ideals’ (cited in Verzero 2). Instead, taking cues from French dramaturge Romain Rolland’s essay *The People's Theatre*, he sought a movement that would restore theatre’s function as socially productive art. To this end, Barlettasupported original playwriting that resisted established models while broadening the cultural offering to include conferences, concerts and lectures open to the public. Two magazines, *Metrópolis* (*‘Of those that write to say something’*)and *Conducta* (*‘In the service of the People’*), also provided a forum for discourse on the theatre. |
| File: I - Barletta\_Portrait-\_metropolis.jpg  Figure Leónidas Barletta, as sketched in the fifth issue of *Metrópolis*.  Source: *Metrópolis* #5, 1931 Harvard University Archives  *Teatro del Pueblo* [The People’s Theatre] was the first ‘independent’ theatre in Argentina and launched the *teatro independiente* movement in Buenos Aires. Founded on November 30, 1930 by the writer Leónidas Barletta (1902-1975), Teatro del Pueblorejected both popular and commercial precedents in its promotion of a modern but socially conscious theatre available to all. Barletta pushed against popular genres such as the *sainete* one-act plays, which he believed, as he asserted in 1938, ‘rendered a people without moral values, a youth both crude and without ideals’ (cited in Verzero 2). Instead, taking cues from French dramaturge Romain Rolland’s essay *The People's Theatre*, he sought a movement that would restore theatre’s function as socially productive art. To this end, Barlettasupported original playwriting that resisted established models while broadening the cultural offering to include conferences, concerts and lectures open to the public. Two magazines, *Metrópolis* (*‘Of those that write to say something’*)and *Conducta* (*‘In the service of the People’*), also provided a forum for discourse on the theatre.  File: 2 - logo from conducta.jpg  Figure The logo of *Teatro del pueblo*, painted by the artist Guillermo Facio Hebecquer, shows a man pulling the rope of a heavy bell. The image alludes to Leónidas Barletta himself, who was known as el *hombre de la campana* (the man of the bell) because he would come out with a bell to alert the audience that the show was about to begin.  Source: *Conducta* #3, October 1938, Harvard University Archives  Teatro del Pueblo was founded at a moment of both local and international unrest. Argentina’s first military coup deposed President Hipólito Yrigoyen in September of 1930, following the global economic crash of 1929. Barletta, a member of the anti-capitalist Boedo group of Argentine writers, viewed the global crisis as an opening for a socialist theatre movement. Specifically, he envisioned a group theatre model in which the actor would double as activist. Members would participate in all aspects of theatrical production including acting, costume, set design, and ticket sales (Foster Wallace ix). Teatro del Pueblo’s democratic organization was manifest in its pledge to serve all social classes, as was reflected in a photo collage in a 1938 issue of the *Conducta* magazine. There, two pictures were juxtaposed, one with the caption ‘Clara Leloir Unzué and Eduardo Cernadas attend an audition of *Catita* for certain members of the aristocracy’ while the other described ‘common people attending a communal performance of Shakespeare in the Teatro del Pueblo’ (cited in Puga, 32).  File: 3 - una\_de\_dos-\_conducta.jpg  Figure 'Una de dos' [One or the Other] was a regular photographic feature of the *Conducta* magazine that compared *Teatro del Pueblo*'s offering to other cultural events in Buenos Aires. This image comes from the first issue in August 1938.  Source: *Conducta* #1, August 1938, Harvard University Archives  In addition to staging contemporary European authors such as August Strindberg and Eugene O’Neill alongside classics by Shakespeare and Lope de Vega, Teatro del Pueblo emphasized the promotion of original works. Most influentially, Barletta convinced Argentine writer Roberto Arlt to try his hand at playwriting and went on to produce Arlt’s first play *Trescientos millones* in 1932 as well as *Saverio el cruel* (1936), *La isla desierta* (1937) and others. The theatre also provided important venue for other Argentine writers such as Roberto Mariani, Nicolás Olivari, and Ezequiel Martínez Estrada.  File: 4 - Arlt publicity\_-\_metropolis.jpg  Figure This notice advertised Roberto Arlt's production of *Trescientos millones* (300 million) in *Metrópolis* magazine with the tagline, ‘The fabulous dreams of a poor servant.’ The handwritten publicity promises ‘two hours of fantasies, compassion and laughter.’  Source: *Metrópolis* #15, 1932, Harvard University Archives  The productions were unified by what theatre scholar Osvaldo Pellettieri characterizes as a realist aesthetic that was not aligned with the historical avant-garde. The theatre, according to Pellettieri, aimed to modernize by rejecting previous Argentine theatrical traditions in favour of European models (70-71). Arlt himself lauded the modernizing potential of Teatro del Pueblo in a 1932 conference, proclaiming that within a few years, the theatre would enjoy ‘all the requirements of the modern theatre’ such as set, costume and lighting designs customized for each production, which he hoped would ‘create a national theatre, in consonance with our problems and our sensibility’ (cited in Puga 35).  Despite the determination to found a national and modern theatre, Teatro del Pueblostruggled to establish a permanent location in Buenos Aires. For the first number of years the theatre floated between venues, and in 1936 moved to a space on Corrientes Avenue with authorization to remain for twenty-five years. However, in 1943 authorities forced the group to vacate the space, which was turned into the Municipal Theatre of Buenos Aires. Teatro del Pueblothen settled in its current location a few blocks away in the basement of a building on Diagonal Norte.  During Juan Domingo Perón’s first presidency (1945-1955), Barletta actively opposed the government, and in particular its policies of censorship and State propaganda, leading Silvia Sigal to suggest that he was ‘one of the main leaders of the anti-Peronist coalition of the left’ (cited in Verzero 5). At the same time, due to the emergence of other independent theatres,such as La Máscara (1939), Fray Mocho (1951) and Teatro de los Independientes (1952), Alicia Aisemberg argues, ‘Teatro del Pueblono longer occupied a central place in the independent theatre movement’ (101). The operations of the theatre were managed personally by Barletta, and when he died in 1975 the theatre also closed. However, in 1987, through the efforts of several playwrights, Teatro del Puebloactivities recommenced once again under the name Teatro de la Campana*.* In 1996, the theatre returned to its original name under the leadership of the Foundation of Playwrights Carlos Somigliana (SOMI). Since then, along with serving as an important site of cultural heritage, the theatre has staged both original works by Argentine playwrights as well as revivals of the now classic plays that were premiered by the Teatro del Pueblo*.* |
| Further reading:  (Aisemberg)  (Foster)  (Pellettieri)  (Puga)  (Rolland)  (Sarlo)  (Verzero) |