PROPOSAL
Because this is one of the first works with which we open the 1st International Forum of Critics and Researchers of Theatre for Children and Young People, our goal is to define what theatre is, and what is its specificity, according to the discipline of the Philosophy of the Theatre. Next, we examine what theatre for children is, and finally we define the relationship existing between theatre for children in Argentina and the subject of taboos. Our goal is to make a starting point, a door to such an interesting and complex matter, which we believe will be completed by the work of all the researchers present here during the next few days, either because their work defines in detail what a taboo is, either because they provide a thorough analysis of specific cases in the city of Buenos Aires, either because they provide knowledge about the theatre in the provinces of Argentina or because they bring experience and theories from around the world.
1. What is Theatre?

In Argentina, there is a line of study called Philosophy of Theatre, to which we adhere as researchers. The Philosophy of Theatre has emerged as a theatrological discipline currently being developed in Argentina, linked to the theoretical reflection on theatrical practice in its specific context. The Philosophy of Theatre is both related to and different from Philosophy and Theatrical Theory. If Philosophy is concerned with the knowledge of the totality of being, the Philosophy of Theatre focuses on the knowledge of a specific object, circumscribed, limited: the theatrical event. Unlike Theatrical Theory —which approaches the theatrical object in itself and for itself—, the Philosophy of Theatre explores the relation between the theatre and the whole world in the concert of the other entities: the relation theatre has with being, with reality and real objects, with the ideal entities, with life as a metaphysical object, with language, with values, with nature, with God, the gods and the sacred, etc...

Taking the theatre back to the theatre: the ontological question

We have thus come to an unavoidable question: what is theatre? This means to ask what theatre is as an entity, how it is in the world, what is that which exists as theatre. The Philosophy of Theatre says that theatre is an event (in the double meaning that Deleuze attributes to the idea of event: something that happens and something in which the construction of meaning is located), an event that
produces entities in its happening, linked to living culture and to the auratic presence of bodies. Theatre is a complex entity that is defined as an event, theatre is something that happens, that takes place through the action of human labour. We recover the Marxist idea of art as human work: theatre is an event of human labour (Marx and Engels, 1969 and 2003; Sánchez Vázquez, 1985; Serrano, 2009). Work produces a event–entity: an ontological event produced in the human realm but which transcends it, a sensible, conceptual, temporal, spatial, historical entity. If Théatron (Greek) connects with the idea of a viewpoint, of a place to watch, the root shared with the verb théáomai refers to watching appear: theatre as an event is a viewpoint where we watch ephemeral poetic entities appear, complex entities. And as an event, theatre is internally complex, because the theatrical event is constituted by three sub–events: convivio, poiesis and spectation.

At least two types of definition express the specificity of the theatre: a) a logical–genetic definition of theatre as a triadic event, b) a pragmatic definition of the theatre as a zone of experience and construction of subjectivity.

**Convivio, poiesis and spectation**

We will point out briefly some of the aspects of each of these components.

We give the name of convivio or convivial event to the gathering of artists, technicians and spectators in present body and without technological intervention at a crossroads which is territorial, chronotopic (unit of time
and space) and part of everyday life (one room, the street, a bar, a house, etc., in present time). The convivio, a manifestation of the living culture, makes theatre different from television, cinema and radio since it requires the auratic bodily presence of artists together with the technical staff and the spectators, in the manner of the ancient banquet or symposium (Florence Dupont, 1994). The theatre is the auratic art *par excellence* (Benjamin); it cannot be “de–auratized” (as it happens with other art forms) and it refers us to an ancestral order, an ancient human scale of man, linked to its own origin. We are not the same when we are gathered with others, since bonds and convivial affectations are established, even if they are not perceived or made conscious. In the theater you live with the others: shared and vicarious bonds are established and they multiply the group’s affection and involvement. Theatre’s big difference with literature is that there is no “cranial”, “solipsistic” theatre: it requires an encounter with the other and a division of labour that cannot be assumed only by one person. The convivio multiplies the activity of giving and receiving on the grounds of encounter, dialogue and mutual stimulation and conditioning, which is why it is linked to the event of the *company* (from the Latin, *cum panis*, companions, those who share the bread). The theatre as an event of convivio is subject to the laws of the living culture: it is ephemeral and thus it cannot be preserved, for the living theatrical experience cannot be captured by any type of *in vitro* media.

In the theatrical “between”, the convival multiplication
of artist and spectator generates a subjective field, which does not mark the dominance of the first nor the second, but a steady state of mutual benefit of a third. It is constituted in and throughout the zone of experience. In the company there is more experience than language.

**Work: poiesis and spectation**

Within the *convivio* and on the grounds of a necessary division of labour, the other two sub–events are produced: a sector of the participants begins to produce *poiesis* with their bodies through physical or physical–verbal actions, in interaction with lights, sounds, objects, etc., and another sector begins to spectate that production of *poiesis*. These are, respectively, the poietic event and the spectation event. We give the name of *poiesis* to the new entity that is produced and that exists in the event as a result of body actions. The poetic entity constitutes that possible zone of theatricality (not only present in it) that defines the theatre as such (and makes it different from other *non–poietic* theatricalities) since it implies an ontological leap: it creates a world parallel to the world, it configures an *alter–entity* which is different from daily life, a poetic body with unique characteristics. Example. We use the word *poiesis* in the restrictive sense with which it appears in Aristotle’s *Poetics*: manufacturing, elaboration, creation of specific objects, in this case belonging to the realm of art. Theatrical *poiesis* is characterized by its ephemeral temporal nature, but the fact that its duration is brief does not mean that it has less ontological entity. The primary function of *poiesis* is not
communication but ontological founding: getting an event and an object to exist in the world.

**Spectation**

The event of spectation implies the consciousness, at least relative or intuitive, of the *alterity* of the poetic entity’s nature. There is no spectation without ontological distance, without awareness of the ontological leap or *otherness* of *poiesis’* entity, even if that awareness is intermittent (as in “participatory theater”), for example. Beyond all the possible variants of spectation (fourth wall, participatory theatre, performance art), the conduct of spectators varies at this time: a) The spectators can be “taken”, incorporated by the poetic event by certain mechanisms of participation and work that add them into the poetic body. b) They may voluntarily “enter” and “exit” the poetic event in performance experiences. c) They can achieve a position of simultaneity in the “inside” of the poetic event and in the “outside” of the spectatorial distance, fully preserving the observing distance and being seen by other spectators as part of the poiesis. d) They can be “taken” by the poetic event through the experience that Peter Brook has called “sacred theatre” in his *The Empty Space*: the access to a mythical/mystical time that stops the profane time, the connection with the Absolute, the theater as *hierophany* or manifestation of the sacred (Mircea Eliade, 1999). The truth is that, in the theatrical convivio, the space of spectation never disappears completely. It takes only one spectator persisting on the primary function of spectation
—observing the *poiesis* with ontological distance, with awareness of the separation between art and life—for the spectator’s work to be fulfilled. There is no theatre without spectatorial function. Etymologically, theatre means “place to watch”, “viewpoint”, “observatory”, but it does not only involve sight or vision (either in a strictly sensory or metaphorical sense). One is in the theatre with all the senses and with each one of human capacities. Theatre is a place to live, according to the concept of *convivio* and living culture. *Poiesis* is not only watched or observed but it is lived. Therefore, spectation must be considered as a synonym for living—with, for perceiving and letting oneself be affected in all the spheres of human capacities by the poetic entity in coexistence (*convivio*) with the others (artists, technicians, spectators). Due to its dialogical nature of encountering with others, theatre requires company, friendliness and availability.

**Pragmatic definition:**

**theatre is zone of experience**

But in addition, it is also important to note that the theatre, in its pragmatic dimension, generates a mutual multiplication of the three sub–events in such a way that it is impossible to distinguish them clearly within the dynamics of the theatrical event. What constitutes theatre is a zone of experience of living culture necessarily determined by the presence of these three components. Theatre is, according to this second definition, the zone of event resulting from the experiences of *convivio, poiesis* and spectation.
Because we believe that this is what theatre is, we are convinced that theatre is of great importance in the education and life of child spectators.

**Theatre for Children**

Theatre for children and youth is the area of the theatrical field linked to the phenomena of childhood culture. “Childhood culture” is any activity, knowledge, belief, etc. of a society referred to childhood. As for “childhood” (*infancia*), we define it following the Spanish sociologist Ferrán Casas, who in his book *Infancia: perspectivas psicosociales* states that this term comes from the Latin “in–fale” —he who does not speak, who does not have word— which is the baby. Over time, the reference field of the term was extended to denominating a certain period in the life of man measured by a range of age. This interval is totally conventional, so each culture and each historic moment determine the age period covered. We can define childhood as a set of psychobiological characteristics of subjects in a state of development. Every society, throughout its history, builds a different representation of childhood, draws up different images of childhood. Nowadays it is said that there is no “childhood” but there are “childhoods” or “children”. Therefore, we prefer to talk about *theatre for children*. How is the theatre involved in childhood culture? We believe that theatre for children acquires it entity as such in the event of child spectation, in the fact that children are the audience. As it is a living event, with spectators constantly changing, the different conceptions
We thus call theatre for children the one that involves a child or young audience that spectates from its own specific cultural regime of experience, from its particular way of being in the world.

**Taboo Topics or “No One Runs to Get a Bucket of Water When They Read the Story of a Fire”**

Given the characteristics of theatre for children, we believe this issue is of fundamental importance. Beyond the definition of taboo (which many will resume in this forum as a concept that extends to the conducts or actions which are prohibited or censored by a group of people due to cultural, social or religious matters) we refer to the installation, in this zone of experience which is the theatre for children, of topics that are awkward, dense, nuanced, dramatic, contradictory, absurd and painful, and (all of which) “can bring out doubts and questions”, involving an existential, living, challenge for the spectator. These topics had been historically left out of the art for children since they were considered by adults to be harmful and inappropriate. This attitude of adults towards the arts for children was denominated by the writer Graciela Montes the corral for children, which could be reproduced in this attitude of the adults: “For years, patient and reasonable adults made sure to put up fences [in the arts for children] to stop the overwhelming power of fantasy and the juggernaut of reality. They had a relative success because
the monsters and truths managed to trickle in, they came in and out. Today there are clear signs that the corral is tottering, that adults and children are inevitably mixed" (27). Deep down, this attitude of the adult hides certain ideological mechanisms of revelation/concealment that serve adults to tame and subdue, “to colonize” children (p. 16). The origin of this attitude of the adult is that the relationship between adults and children is a difficult and rugged region where "winds and tensions blow", says Montes. A complex and central world to our whole culture (p. 18–19). Adults assume poses in front of children: caretakers, watchmen, seducers, kidnappers, rapists, censors, teachers, etc., depending on their levels of personal and historical consciousness, on their life conditions, on the past, the family history, on the image of the child, on the childhood canon (41). However, protecting does not mean imprisoning or usufructing children's right to have contact with these topics.

For the Mexican playwright Jaime Chabaud, avoiding taboo topics is underestimating the child spectator: “The current child’s ability to decode fiction is brutal and to prove it to me I have resorted to my own son since he was 4 or 5 years old. [...] The outcome has been the same more than once: a few minutes into it he has already managed to make a map of the fiction or has generated a number of hypothesis that complete that map. That is, he has exercised his ability to structure, his internal playwright, to
effectively rebuild the fictional links. We often have little confidence in our young spectators without realizing that they are ahead of us” (p. 95).

The French specialist Marc Soriano, meanwhile, believes that taboos in art for children stem from adult’s need to “preserve the paradise of childhood”.

However, each social context defines what the taboos in the arts for children are. The writer Sandra Comino says: “In today’s world, the production of literature for children and youth is connected to the social conditions that allow the appearance or absence of certain topics. And these respond to what society believes is understandable and appropriate to the interests of children or teenagers”. (p. 92)

**Taboo Topics in Argentine**

Argentine theatre in the last twenty years has been characterized by fragmentation, diversity and peaceful coexistence of various poetics and aesthetic conceptions. It is said that the theatrical field today is defined by the “canon of multiplicity”. An outstanding feature of current theatre is the coexistence of different models and reference authorities. There is no single trend in the theatre for children, but instead we find a proliferation of worlds. Josefina Ludmer summarizes this form of cultural experience with the saying: “*Cada loco con su tema*” (“Each crazy man doing his own thing”).

The effect of diversity involves all orders of today’s theatre for children. This can be observed as much in the
amount of dramatic texts and performances, as in the variety of aesthetic ideologies, forms of production and audiences.

In the new theatre for children almost everything is permitted and the most diverse models and poetics can be applied. Artists do not need to be aligned in a certain school, tendency or movement to be accepted. Very different companies and practitioners can work in parallel with the same acceptance and recognition in the same theatrical field. Examples of this are the Grupo de Titiriteros del Teatro San Martín, La Banda de la Risa, Los Cuatro Vientos, El Grupo Mascarazul, Los Calandracas, Libertablas, Carlos de Urquiza, El grupo de la O, Gerardo Hochman y El Nuevo Circo, El Grupo Kukla, Marcelo Katz y El Grupo Clun, The Álvarez Brothers, Diablomundo, Hugo Álvarez, Purogrupo, El Grupo Tentenpié, Carlos Martínez, Hugo Midón, Héctor Presa, Marisé Monteiro, Pablo Bontá, Mimí Harvey, Leo Dyzen, Ornar Aíta, Claudio Hochman, Antoaneta Madjarova, Sergio Ponce, Marcelo Peralta, Carlos Grova, Gabriela Marges, Horacio Tignanelli, Eva Halac, Jorge Onofri, Gustavo Monje y Giselle Pessaq, Javier Zain, Daniel Zaballa, Enrique Federman, Teresa Duggan, Los Quintana, only to name those who present their work in the city of Buenos Aires.

As from the eighties, a variety of genres coexist in the theatre for children: theatre of actors, of puppets and objects, of shadows, black theatre, musical theatre, mime, dance, new circus and clown, for example. And there are performances that combine all of these genres.

In addition, all sorts of ideological conceptions of
the phenomenon of theatre for children share the field: those who work with the fourth wall concept and believe that everything must be stated on stage, without the complicity of the public; those that favour public participation and the constant interplay between acceptance and breaking of the fictional pact; and finally, those who work almost exclusively with the participation of the children in the audience.

This makes theatre for children in Argentina rich and thriving. The new authors have renovated the old conception of theatre for children. They are trusting artistic creations which are free from that educational attachment of previous decades.

The writers who stand out in our country as playwrights that specialize in works for children are Adela Basch, Silvina Reinaudi, María Inés Falconi, Aldo Julián, Juan Raul Rithner, Enrique Pinti, Rafael Curci, Laragione Lucía, Roberto Vega, Ana Alvarado, Andres Bazzalo, Horacio Tignanelli, Graciela Bilbao, Ricardo Talento, Eduardo Pavelic, Mimi Harvey, Gallardou Claudio, Cecilia Prolegs, and Liliana Bilbao Cappagli Graciela, Hector López Spinning, Patricia Suárez, Delia Maun, Alejandro Finzi, Rosa María Pfeiffer, Fabián Sevilla, Claudio Pirotta, Leonor Vila, María Romano, among others. These playwrights’ writing has been complemented by rated adapters such as Marisé Monteiro, Mauricio Kartun, Tito Loréfice, Graciela Montes and Eduardo Rovner.

Their great achievement has been the expansion of topics. It should be noted at this point that we should not
confuse the issue of the broadening of subjects that enter the theatre with the problem of taboo topics.

Clearly, in the field of theatre for children, the range of topics and its approach has evolved enormously, especially the representation of childhood, of children, of adults and of the relationships between them, but there has not been a strong trend, represented by many playwrights, to discuss taboo issues centrally.

Enlargement of the range of addressed topics is limited, among other things, to the following: 1) Childhood is no longer treated as an idea of service, benefit or preparation for the future, but as a specific stage, with its specific needs and ways of being in the world. 2) There are no uniformed social models, intolerant or marked by racist and sexist attitudes, as there were in the past, but instead plays reflect the right to individual differences (race, gender, hobbies, body image). 3) Plays no longer work with personal moral conducts that clearly distinguish right from wrong. Now, there is an opening to the plurality of moral norms prevailing in modern societies. 4) Before, represented external conflicts had very detectable causes and a clearly specified resolution. Now, there is an acceptance of the complexity of conflicts, which often have internal causes and difficult or impossible resolution. In other words, no happy endings are required. 5) Before, conflict resolution was carried out within art for children through the suppression or disappearance of the problem. Now, the conflict is overcome usually through verbalization, humour and imagination. 6) Before, there were very distinct
behaviours, good and evil. Now, there is an acceptance of ambiguity in human feelings and conducts. 7) Before, there was a description of two hierarchical and separated worlds (children and adults). Now, complicity and communication relations between children and adults have appeared. 8) Before, there were strongly marked conventions which were inviolable and restrictive in their definition. Instead, now we witness a predominant admission of broader margins for the breaking of the rules (greater tolerance to informality and disorder, the non–perfect).

The playwright that has more decidedly experimented with taboo topics has been María Inés Falconi, especially with her most recognized works, such as *Hasta el domingo*, *El nuevo*, *Chau, Señor miedo*, *Caídos del mapa* and *Cantata de Pedro y la guerra*, amongst others. Next to her there are other authors that we can name (Hugo Álvarez, Ana Alvarado, Hugo Midón and his inclusion of politics and social criticism, Adela Basch and her demythification of heroes, and all the directors that have staged throughout our history Argentine or foreign plays dealing with taboo topics) but, overall, a strong trend has not been generated. There are many hypothesis that we can risk to explain this lack of works and all of them are connected to the above-mentioned issue: the corral imposed by adults to children. But another factor that we should not leave unmentioned and that is very strong and decisive for all activities related to children in Argentina, is the importance of school in the non–progress on these matters and its role as censor of everything that “makes the institution uncomfortable”
(whatever the agent is: the State, the Church, the head master, the teacher or the parent) and therefore, its daunting role in encouraging this trend. Theatre for children is markedly dependent of the school: what is not read in class, is not sold at a large scale and, hence, it is not edited. On the other hand, if the plays, the performances, do not work with schools, they do not have their continuity ensured.

However, and in spite of this, taboo topics do not appear often in the plays designed for the winter holidays either, when they have no expectations of reaching the schools. Perhaps this is because these shows, leaving commercial ones aside (which we know have other purposes), are unconsciously mounted on a tradition that does not usually touch these subjects.

**Mexican Theatre**

We want to point out that the authors who do address these issues have a very strong model in the Mexican theatre. Mexican theatre marches at the forefront of these matters in Latin America. The influence of Canadian authors such as Suzanne Lebeau, Daniel Danis or Michel Marc Bouchard —writers who became known in Mexico thanks to the Franco–Mexican director Boris Schoemann— have determined these changes in Mexican theatre. And thus we believe that we need to establish an axis of comparison to evaluate how our theatre for children in Argentina is on this regard. The playwright and specialist Jaime Chabaud calls this the “New Theatre for Children”, which includes Perla Szuchmacher, Berta Hiriart, Enrique Olmos de Ita,
Amaranta Leyva, Maribel Carrasco, Monica Hot, Elba Cortés, Javier Maplica and many others.

We are not giving out positive or negative scores, we are only trying to describe the different processes that take place in different countries.

Finally, we would like to complete our work with a very nice example given by Jaime Chabaud in an article he wrote about taboo in Mexican theatre. Chabaud admits:

After stumbling a lot and tripping over and over again, the day I understood the kind of drama for young audiences I was interested in was during a performance of Don Quixote with puppets presented by the Mexican master Leonardo Kosta. It may sound stupid but it was like a kind of illumination: the moment in which Sancho is lashed a thousand times by his employer to remove the demon from him, he inquired the audience about the injustice that he was being subject to saying “because you do not get hit at home, right, children?” In the front rows, a young child, accompanied by his father, rose and with uplifted hands started screaming “I do! I do!”.

This is just one example, a case that shows that in the theatre (because of its specificity and the zone of experience it founds, and because of the importance the child spectator has in the theatrical event) the presence of taboo topics is cathartic for the child audience and, when carried out by artists who are committed and responsible,
it constitutes a unique experience. The theatre plays are thus configured as mirrors for their emotions, their problems and their lives, or windows where they can see the problems and emotions experienced by other children.

Jorge Dubatti & Nora Lía Sormani