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IDENTITY, DIGNITY AND MEMORY: PERFORMING/RE-WRITING *ANTIGONE* IN POST-1976 ARGENTINA[1]

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Sophocles' *Antigone* has always held a very special place in Argentine theatre. The troublesome history of the country has allowed every audience in turn to make a new association, to connect the play with some new aspect of their present situation. However, nothing compares with the kind of reception that the play has had during the last quarter of the twentieth century. After 1976 the whole essence and meaning of *Antigone* changed completely.[2]

I would like to discuss in this article the distinctive qualities of some Argentine versions and performances of Sophocles' *Antigone*, in particular those taking place after Argentina's most recent period of military rule (1976–1983), the so-called 'La Dictadura' [The Dictatorship] or 'El Proceso' ['Proceso de Reorganización Nacional', Process of National Reorganization, as the armed forces themselves used to call the new regime].

It is impossible to wholly understand the way audiences react to certain themes, characters, plays or performances without previously trying to understand the historical background of the audiences themsleves. Certain plays appeal more strongly to certain audiences because of their closeness to those audiences' experiences; because audiences can find points of contact between what they see onstage and their social/political/economical and/or historical reality. What happened then in Argentina during the 'Proceso' that made *Antigone* appeal so strongly to a post–1976 Argentine audience?

THE CONTEXT[3]

There are thousands of graffiti covering the walls of Buenos Aires city in Argentina. One of the most popular reads 'Juicio y Castigo' (Trial and Punishment), referring to the period under consideration here. There is another one, a little more complex, but as popular as the former, reading 'Nunca más' (Never again), and below: '150.000 millones deuda externa, 30.000 deuda interna'; a phrase meaning '150.000 millions (money) of external debt; 30.000 (*people*) of internal debt'. And indeed, after seven years of military rule, Argentina was left with the highest amount of external debt in its history, and with an internal debt that was regrettably not just economic but also related to human losses.

When President Juan Domingo Perón died in 1974, his wife and vice-president Isabel Perón took over as Argentina's President. Armed conflicts between left and right-wing parties were shaking the country at the time. By a decree of the presidency in 1975, the Armed Forces were allowed to annihilate subversive activities all over the country. The illegitimate dictatorial government that followed exploited the existence of this decree to give justification for their use of violence against people. Later, in a pathetic attempt to escape justice once the military government was over and the dreadful truth was made widely known, they claimed they had been authorized to perform such horrors by the previous democratic government.

A military coup d'état deposed Isabel Perón on 24th March 1976. The violence and repression that followed resulted not only in countless deaths and exiles, but also in about thirty thousand missing people. When relatives of those missing started demanding their beloved ones, many of them went missing as well. They all remain to-date under the category of 'desaparecido'.

THE *DESAPARECIDOS*

The following text is a transcript from a radio broadcast published on 14th December 1979 by an Argentine newspaper, *Clarín* (Buenos Aires), where the definition of the term *desaparecido* is given by *de facto* president Lieutenant General Jorge Rafael Videla himself:

> …but as long as (somebody) is missing (*desaparecido*), they cannot have any particular treatment, they are an enigma, a *desaparecido*, they do not have an entity, *they are not there*, neither dead nor alive, they are *desaparecidos*...[4]

A *desaparecido* 'is not there', neither dead nor alive. As Videla defines the term, it looks like in a way the person has magically vanished, disappeared leaving no trace behind. However, the

person did not disappear by his/herself, he/she was *made* to disappear, and most important of all, he/she was made to disappear by agents of the government itself. By cleverly denying *desaparecidos* a legal entity, even a reality, the government washed their hands of the problem, declining the possibility of giving a particular treatment to the case of abducted people.

Due to the lack of response and information by the government, in a desperate attempt, on 30th April 1977 mothers of *desaparecidos* started marching around a square called 'Plaza de Mayo', located opposite the Government house, demanding their children. They were later known as 'Madres de Plaza de Mayo' [May Square Mothers]. The mothers identified themselves by wearing white headscarves embroidered with the names of their children. They became the most important group fighting against the violation of human rights during the dictatorial regime. Many of the mothers were in turn kidnapped and they themselves 'disappeared' as well. However scared and threatened they were, they never stopped marching and demanding their children; every Thursday, for 30 years.

About twenty years after the coup, Videla admitted publicly in an interview that making people disappear had been a carefully planned strategy, and that had even been considered as an 'easy' or practical solution:[5]

> No, we could not execute (people). Let's say a number, let's say five thousand. Argentine society would not have coped with executions: two yesterday at Buenos Aires, six today at Córdoba, four tomorrow at Rosario, and so on up to five thousand. There was no other way. We all agreed on that. And those who did not agree left. Making known where the mortal remains are? But, where can we point to? The sea ... the river of La Plata ... the Stream? We thought, at that time, of making the lists known (i.e. the lists of missing people). But then we thought: if we acknowledge them dead, then there will come questions we cannot answer: who killed, where, how ...

Argentine repression was not something unplanned or accidental; it was a very well devised scheme. The government's policy of making people disappear had a very clear and practical objective: to deny the right to mourn the dead, to spread fear and to preserve the effects of repression for years to come. One of these effects has to do with the loss of identity. The problem of identity has been at the core of Argentine thought since 1976, including not only those *desaparecidos*, who lost their identity in death, who became 'neither dead nor alive', but also thousands of children who were deprived of their true identity, having being abducted together with their parents and then snatched by members of the armed forces who raised them as their own. A group of mothers of *desaparecidos* who knew they had been deprived of their grandchildren as well,[6] started demanding them, and was later known as 'Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo' [May Square Grandmothers]. To date they have been able to find many of those children and to restore their true identities. However, most of them are still missing, believing themselves to be the children of the people who were actually responsible for the torture and death of their real parents.

The families of those missing have kept their own dignity throughout the years by tirelessly continuing to search and claim for their *desaparecidos*, by demanding their right to be mourned and buried, and by remembering them every single day. Memory is the answer, they say, but maintaining memory is also a burden.[7] Remembering is a way of restoring identity; it is also a way of preserving dignity. Moreover, memory is essential to prevent horrors like this one from happening again. However, remembering also anchors the families in the past, stopping them from moving on, from forgetting. The absence of the corpse, the lack of a proper funeral, results in the constant recollection of the missing person. They are neither dead nor alive. Families can neither forgive nor forget. "Ni perdón ni olvido" is one of their most recurring slogans. Without forgiveness there is no possibility of forgetfulness; there is no closure, and therefore no chance to reach inner peace.

ANTIGONE

There are three words that stand out in the title of my paper: identity, dignity and memory. They are the key to understanding the relationship between the historical facts and the performance, interpretation and reception of *Antigone* in Argentina.

As far as I am aware, there is no record of any significant or polemical production of *Antigone* during the period of the dictatorship,[8] or at least no record of any officially prohibited or censored production of the play.[9] Theatre productions were either more focussed on national classics by Argentine writers and on plays dealing with clearly contemporary subjects (these plays being closely monitored by the censors) or, on the contrary, kept to foreign, 'safe' plays by, for example, Wilde, Shaw, Williams and Ibsen, or to classic works by Shakespeare, Garcia Lorca or Calderon.[10]

There have been, however, many performances of *Antigone* in Argentina *after* the dictatorial regime. It seems that when the dictatorship was finally over, writers and directors not only realized that the play had many things to say about the repression suffered by the people but also that, due to the remoteness of its plot in terms of time and place, it possessed a much more powerful way of expressing and effectively communicating them to an Argentine audience. It was easier to reflect on the recent events by 'showing' them as having occurred long ago and far away.

Some of the performances/adaptations/rewritings have remained absolutely faithful to the Sophoclean version. Others have subtly adapted the play to allude to the historical facts, to refer to those *desaparecidos*; and a few have simply rewritten the play to make it a crude account of the events which occurred during that period. However, as we shall see, there is certainly no need to historicize or update a play that in fact contains in itself every single element an Argentine audience needs to recall the military rule, the *desaparecidos*, and the horrors suffered by the people at the time.

Even if the performance of *Antigone* follows the version of Sophocles word for word, an Argentine audience is bound to make certain associations that would lose some of their impact if they were alluded to explicitly, as it certainly happens in some modern rewritings of the play. Sometimes, as they say, 'less is more'.

Sophocles' Antigone

The number of connotations that can be activated in the minds of an Argentine audience during a performance of Sophocles' version is striking. To begin with the corpse, denied a funeral, is deprived of being mourned and buried. Or, on the other side of the coin, the family deprived of mourning and burying the dead, deprived of the possibility to forget and move on:

> But as for the unhappy corpse of Polynices, they say it has been proclaimed to the citizens that none shall conceal it in a grave or lament for it, but that they should leave it unwept for, unburied, a rich treasure house for birds as they look out for food. (*Ant* 26–30)[11]

Secondly, the opposition between women and men. Women are supposed to be submissive, to obey the power embodied by men, but women are in fact those resisting power, those exposing the abuse of power and trying to fight against against it, as did the mothers and grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo.

> Why, we must remember that we are women, who cannot fight against men, and then that we are ruled by those whose power is greater, so that we must consent to this and to other things even more painful. (*Ant* 61–4)[12]

Thirdly, Creon, as new ruler of the land, begins his 'government' by producing a public statement that violates not human but divine laws, and the human right to be mourned, buried and forgotten. This statement is made as a way to establish a new power, to change the manner in which things are done and to 'settle things down'.[13]

Later in the play, a very strong connotation is activated by the speech of the guard carrying Antigone. It does not matter to him whether Antigone is right or wrong or what will happen to her; his own safety is far more important:

> For to have escaped oneself from trouble is most pleasant, but to bring friends into danger is painful. But all this matters less to me than my own safety! (*Ant* 437–40)[14]

Many Argentineans denounced their friends or acquaintances to the armed forces in order to keep things quiet at home. Needless to say, most of those denounced are now *desaparecidos*.

The feeling of guilt and shame for those who helped the armed forces at the time or who simply carried on with their lives as if nothing was happening is something that will remain in Argentina's collective conscience for generations to come.

Compliance with authority is obviously related to fear. Antigone tells Creon that the people of Thebes would certainly approve what she has just done were they not afraid of him.[15] 'Fear shuts their mouths', she says. Fear prevents people from acting, from committing themselves, from doing the right thing.

Creon describes later what he is going to do to Antigone:

> I shall take her to where there is a path which no man treads, and hide her, still living, in a rocky cavern, putting out enough food to escape pollution, so that the whole city may avoid contagion. And there she can pray to Hades, the only one among the gods whom she respects and perhaps be spared from death; or else she will learn, at that late stage, that it is wasted effort to show regard for things in Hades. (*Ant* 773–80)

It is impossible, as an Argentine spectator, to attend a performance of Sophocles' *Antigone* and not to react to this passage. Creon is not saying that he is going to punish Antigone by *killing her* because of what she has done. He is going to *hide her*. It is not just about killing, it is also about *hiding*. It is about preventing others from *seeing* her, from being witnesses of her fate. He will 'hide' her from view in a cave, still living, so that, as Antigone herself says at lines 850–52, she will be neither dead nor alive: 'Ah, unhappy one, living neither among mortals nor as a shade among the shades, neither with the living nor with the dead'. Neither with the living nor with the dead, 'ni vivo ni muerto, *desaparecido*'.

Later on, Tiresias warns Creon against continuing to desecrate the corpse:

> Give way to the dead man, and do not continue to stab him as he lies dead! What is the bravery of killing a dead man over again? (*Ant* 1029–30)

The man is already dead so there is no gain in doing him wrong now. Similarly, not handing over the bodies of those *desaparecidos* was a way to continue to harm them as well as their families, to keep killing them over and over again. So, what was the right thing to do? Surely, to release the prisoners and return the bodies, so as to allow the families to mourn and bury their dead. When Creon cries for advice, the chorus' reply is no other but this: 'Go and release the girl from the subterranean dwelling, and make a tomb for him who lies there' (*Ant* 1100–1). The correspondences are certainly striking.

At the end of the tragedy, Creon not only admits he was wrong but also regrets his decisions, which he now realizes were mistaken. He proclaims he has learned, even if it is too late:

> Woe for the errors of my mistaken mind, obstinate and fraught with death! You look on kindred that have done and suffered murder! Alas for the disaster caused by my decisions! (…) Alas, I have learned, unhappy as I am. (*Ant* 1261–5; 1271–2)

However terrible the ending of this tragedy might appear, to an Argentine audience it seems, on the contrary, quite a positive one. The person responsible for the death of innocent young people, the person who established a law against gods and humans alike, mistaken as he was, at the end learns his lesson and tries to repair his mistakes. This is the dearest dream and hope of every single relative of a *desaparecido*: that the murderers finally admit they were wrong, ask for forgiveness and 'give way to the dead'.

MODERN ARGENTINE REWRITINGS/PERFORMANCES

I would like now to move on to some recent examples of rewritings and performances of *Antigone* in Argentina. There are two sets of examples. In the first set the examples are in marked contrast to each other. I have selected them precisely because of that. The first example is a rewriting of *Antigone* that in a very subtle way alludes to the events which occurred in Argentina during the period in question. The second example is another adaptation, but this time the author has crudely included far too many obvious references to the historical facts. With the second set of examples I will attempt to show the relevance of *unipersonal* performances of *Antigone* in Argentina and their power to activate entirely new connotations in an Argentine audience.

What to say?

Griselda Gambaro's rewriting, *Antígona Furiosa* (*Furious Antigona*), brings to mind every subject just mentioned regarding Sophocles' *Antigone*. She obviously understood that these connotations were bound to be activated in the minds of an Argentine audience and cleverly did not put any extra emphasis on them than was needed. The play, directed by Laura Yusem, premiered at the Goethe Institute in Buenos Aires in 1986,[16] once the 'dictadura' was over, precisely the year in which the historical 'Trials to the Junta' came to an end.[17]

The play was well received by both the public and the critics, not only because of its matter but also because of its restraint in dealing with the recent history of the country. Gambaro has been sometimes criticized by her fellow dramatists for being too 'intellectual' in her treatment of Argentine repression, for concentrating almost exclusively on the relationship of victim/victimizer in a general sense, and Yusem for being too focused on the visual aspects of the play. However, it seems that *Antígona Furiosa* was more appreciated precisely because it was not too explicit about the horrors just suffered by the people thus allowing a somehow more mature and more detached space for the audience's reflection on these events. The moment for its premiere was also well chosen, since all the excitement and mixed feelings (relief, guilt, disbelief, disappointment) which had arisen in the population from the trials of the members of the Junta were in the air.[18]

In Gambaro's version, Antigone, the Coryphaeus and a character called Antinous play all the characters of Sophocles' version. The play opens with a hanged Antigone, who after a moment removes the rope from her neck and approaches the other two characters, chatting at a coffee table. All the events in Antigone's story seem to belong to the past now. Some of them, however, are re-enacted by Antigone onstage (i.e. the battle between brothers, the debate with Creon, her own death) as occurring in the present time of the performance, while others are alluded to as if they had not happened yet.

Gambaro's play refers very subtly to some new associations not found so explicitly or not found at all in Sophocles, particularly the significance and relevance of memory. The role of memory is emphasized by Antigone herself:

> *Antigone*: Brother, brother. I will be your body, your coffin, your earth!
>
> *Coryphaeus*: Creon's law forbids it!
>
> *Antigone*: Neither God nor justice made the law. (She laughs.) The living are the great sepulchre of the dead! This is what Creon does not know! Nor his law!
>
> *Coryphaeus* (softly): As though he could know.
>
> *Antinous* (softly): What?
>
> *Coryphaeus*: Except for Polynices, whose death he redoubles, Creon kills only the living.[19]
>
> *Antinous*: The sepulchres are linked! (laughs) One to the other.
>
> *Coryphaeus*: Wisely. In a chain.
>
> *Antigone*: Memory also makes a chain. Neither Creon nor his law knows this. Polynices, I will be sod and stone. (141–42)[20]

In this version Antigone's words possess rich implications and allusions. To begin with, references to earth, grass and stone, on the one hand, and to the grave, on the other, reappear constantly all through the play. They represent not only a clear allusion to the lack of a proper burial as in the original version, but they also emphasize the tangibility and corporeality of these elements as opposed to the insubstantiality and immateriality of the bodies of the *desaparecidos*. The body the Argentine Antigone is trying to bury is not even there; that is the reason of the emphasis Antigone places on her own body. Thanks to her memory of the missing, she will become her brother's grave; he will be *inside* her mind/heart/thoughts forever. Not surprisingly Antigone never leaves the stage: the play starts with her onstage and finishes with her onstage, visible and tangible.[21] Like a defying counterpart to those *desaparecidos*, she stands onstage furious, refusing to disappear.[22]

The noticeable association between this Antigone and the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo has been underlined by several scholars.[23] They became the 'great sepulchre' of their missing children. Their children live in them through memory. 'Memory also makes a chain', affirms Antigone. Antinous and the Coryphaeus joke about the sepulchres being linked 'wisely' in a chain. But they are referring to something completely different. They may be alluding to the fact that, since the living form chains made of the people they know and/or they are related to, Creon is able to 'wisely' extend death – like rust – from one link to the other. Many friends, relatives and acquaintances of *desaparecidos* were abducted in turn. Having known/been in touch with a *desaparecido* was something very dangerous, as the government wanted – and certainly achieved, to make clear. The chain the two characters refer to is a chain of death, hatred and terror. But the same chain can be one of memory and love, as Antigone says. Memory of the dead spreads as well from one link to the next one, tenderly preserved and protected. Both Antigone and the Mothers are the living memory of the dead. Their tangible bodies constitute a living memorial, the visible moving extension of their non-visible, non-tangible, unmoving and missing beloved ones.

Many testimonies heard at the 'Trials to the Junta' talked about a common fate suffered by many *desaparecidos*, about one of the ways in which thousands of bodies of abducted people were eventually made to disappear. There is a very subtle reference to this in Gambaro's version. Antigone says 'Polynices cries out for earth. Earth is what the dead ones ask for, not water or contempt' (145). After being tortured and kept in detention camps for some time (days, weeks, months), some of the victims were drugged and taken on aeroplanes to the River of La Plata, in Buenos Aires, where they were dropped with tied hands and feet. These were called 'flights of death' and came to light because some of the corpses washed up on Uruguayan and Brazilian shores. Polynices 'cries out for earth', Antigone says. This new reference to earth implies by a metonymy not only the grave the *desaparecidos* did not have, but also the 'grave' they actually obtained (i.e. the river). Earth and water also have significant properties. Earth is a solid, water a fluid. Bodies in the earth stay still, they somehow remain. Their grave can be visited again and again, always in the same place. Bodies thrown in water are carried away by the current; they disappear. Bodies of the missing, bodies of those remaining. Absent bodies, present bodies. Water, earth. Oblivion, memory.

What to do then? Shall we choose water or earth? Shall we remember or forget? Shall we speak out or keep silent? In Gambaro's version of the play, unlike in Sophocles', the conflict in the heart of Antigone between fear and duty is expressed openly:[24]

> *Antigone*: Before Creon I was afraid. But he didn't know. My king, my sire, I am afraid! I am bowed down with this ignoble weight called fear. Don't punish me with death. Let me marry Haemon, your son, know the pleasures of marriage and motherhood. I want to watch my children grow, to grow old slowly. I am afraid! (144)

Antigone's/the Mothers' choice and their claims to dignity are expressed again at the end of the play. Antinous tells Antigone that Creon repented 'at the last moment' and forgave her. But Antigone replies:

> No. I still want to bury Polynices. I will *always* want to bury Polynices. Though I a thousand times will live, and he a thousand times will die. (158)

She will *always* want to bury her dead, as many times as she is born and he is killed, because that is the cyclical, absolute and everlasting validity of what is right. Whenever a totalitarian power emerges to repress and destroy, there will always be 'Antigones' ready to bury their dead, demanding identity, dignity and memory.[25]

Jorge Huertas' version, *Antígonas: linaje de hembras* (*Antigones: lineage of females*),[26] constitutes, unlike Gambaro's, a far too explicit allusion to Argentina's dictatorial past. Even though the play seems to be talking about human rights in Argentina throughout its history, not only during the 'Proceso', the references to the events which occurred during this recent period are by far more numerous.

The play, directed by Roberto Aguirre, premiered at the International Festival of Ancient Greek Drama in Greece in 2001.[27] Aguirre's production was well received by critics and the audience in general, but there were mixed views regarding Huertas' text. Columnist Carlos Pacheco, in a

review for the newspaper *La Nación* (7/06/03), praised the director and some of the actors, as well as the costumes and scenery, but commented sceptically on the text, which he found to be at times very eloquent but all too often full of polemical contradictions. There were also good reviews by other critics about the austerity of the production and the attractive visual effects achieved thanks to the use of tables with which the actresses played.[28] At certain moments in the production they stood on them with their long robes and their partially painted faces reminiscent of ancient Greek masks. Aguirre chose not to set the play in a contemporary Buenos Aires, but to keep it as far away as possible from modern times and, visually speaking, closer to its ancient Greek counterpart. This was a very good choice indeed, given the critical distance it offered to its audience.

Huertas' version gathers together a colourful mixture of Argentine traditions and narratives: tango lyrics, scripts from old radio shows, allusions to old television advertisements, political speeches, references to quarters and streets in Buenos Aires, references to political and social problems of twentieth century Argentina, long summaries of Argentine history, patriotic school songs and anthems, and images of very well known characters from Argentine history, like Eva Perón and Jorge Luis Borges for instance. Huerta preserves all the characters of Sophocles' *Antigone*, but instead of a chorus of elderly men, he chooses a chorus of women. In fact the play is full of women, given that females are at the core of his interpretation of the myth:

> *Chorus*: We, Antigones /Girlfriends of dirt/ Mothers of smell/ Stained, dirty/ Barbaric/ I know what my wound is called/ Females/ Bitches/ Witches/ Crazy/ Whore/ Always Antigones/ The one of fatal and "porteños" (i.e. from Buenos Aires city) fathers/ Sister of brothers/ Who empty themselves of blood. (62)

Women are mothers, grandmothers, sisters, daughters, wives and girlfriends, of both the dead and the murderers. They both obey and rebel against male power. They are both victims and accomplices. They are emptied of blood, but they are also dirty, stained and barbaric. They are indomitable and submissive at the same time. They are called bitches, 'crazy', just as the military forces used to call the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in their attempt to discredit them, to persuade society to rebel against them.

Huertas makes clear allusions to Argentine society's lack of commitment and its indifference to the suffering of their compatriots. He criticises those who turned a deaf ear to what was happening at the time: 'I saw nothing/ I thought of nothing/ I heard nothing/ Nobody told me anything/ I did not inquire/ Neither did I reply/ Nor did I ask'. (44) The chorus' words may be understood as a rephrasing of the Argentine expression 'No te metás' ("Don't get involved"). This was in fact the common reaction whenever somebody happened to witness a detention or disturbance. If a person was abducted, either because out of fear or indifference, most people used to keep quiet, faking sleep or pretending they had not seen or heard anything. They tried to silence their unease about the violence next door by recurring to the frequent 'Algo habrán hecho' ("They must have done something"). It was better not to interfere.[29]

Huertas' *Antígonas* seeks to represent the heart of Buenos Aires, with its traditional musical expression, the tango, and its characteristic landscape, the river. Buenos Aires is a port city, and the river has always been its most important source of trade. Together with the *bandoneón* (button accordion), the most characteristic instrument for the music of tango and a key element in this version, the river appears as a highly significant inanimate character. It is personified by the chorus of women as a natural force that has become so used to having human blood and human corpses floating in its waters that it wants more and more. Remembering the subtle reference to the bodies dropped into the river in Gambaro's version, the following quotation will appear as a far too explicit allusion: 'Pentothal, the air, the flight, the dive. Thanks to men' (43).

Huertas' version is so explicit and open about its treatment of the subject of the crimes against humanity that took place in Argentina, that for an Argentine audience it appears not only shocking but also redundant and far too obvious. There seems to be little room for the audience to infer anything, their intelligence seems underestimated and as a result, the impact that the subject of Antigone may have had on them is unfortunately deadened. Nevertheless, even sensationalism on the subject of *desaparecidos* is always better than silence, and this play has undoubtedly the merit of speaking defiantly about *unspeakable* crimes.

How to say it?

Finally, I would like to allude very briefly to two recent *unipersonal* performances of *Antigone* in Argentina.[30] In the 'Latin-American Festival of Mar del Plata' that took place in Argentina in 2006, an award for the best unipersonal drama author was given to *El corazón de Antígona* ("Antigone's heart"), a co-production from Spain and Chile directed by Argentine Jorge López Vidal and Spaniard Pati Domenech. The directors of the play referred to their choice of a single actress to perform all of the characters as a well planned (and very worthy) strategy. They considered that:

> ...in contrast to the classical multiplicity in which every different aspect of the human condition is represented by a different character, we insist on the idea that in a single person it is possible to find every single psychosocial aspect and ambivalence of human beings.[31]

In their production, Antigone became the mother, the sister, the bride, as well as the son, the brother and the groom; both female and male, both powerless and powerful, both the rebel/victim and the tyrant/victimizer. The use of a single performer allowed them to offer a different interpretation on the subject of 'whose responsibility is this', i.e. everybody is responsible; everybody has to take their share of responsibility for what has been/ has not been done. The use of a single character allows Antigone to then become Ismene, the heroine and the coward, but what is more important, both the victim and the murderer.[32]

Carlos Ianni's production of José Watanabe's *Antigone* is a new example of the impact that a single actress can have on an audience.[33] Watanabe's version, written in 1999, was first staged in Lima in 2000 by the Peruvian company Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani. Although the play, unlike Gambaro's and Huertas' (both Argentinean), was written by a Peruvian dramatist, for whom Argentine history was surely less important, the production I am referring to was an Argentine production performed in Argentina by an Argentine actress and directed by an Argentine director.[34]

Ianni's Argentinian production received excellent reviews, as did actress Ana Yovino's performance. It was very well received by the public as well, who left the theatre deeply touched. Performances were described as very intense and moving. The choice of a unipersonal performance was praised by every single critic, since the actress achieved both the synthesis and the differentiation of all the characters, giving their words and roles a more complex meaning and a stronger impact.[35]

In Watanabe's version of the play, written as a long free verse poem, there are not as many characters as in Sophocles but only five: Antigone, Creon, Tiresias, Haemon and a narrator. Given the absence of a chorus, the narrator provides the spectator with the context of events in which the dialogues between the characters are to be understood. The narrator tells both what has happened and what is happening.

Unlike *El corazón de Antígona*, where the actress played with a wide selection of props and different pieces of clothing, the austerity of Ianni's production increased even more the impact the actress's monologues had in the audience. Antigone was dressed in white with no makeup at all. There were no props and no scenery but for a bare wall and three ropes.[36] The attention of the audience was therefore completely focused on her, on every word she said and every movement she made. This particular staging of the play made difficult demands on the actress, who had nothing to play with onstage but her own body and was only supported by a very well managed stage lighting.[37] Her facial expressions and body movements had obviously been very well studied and as a result transmitted plenty of meaning and emotion.

Drama critics from several newspapers emphasized the significance of the subject of human rights in the play.[38] Ernesto Schoo[39] underlined the fact that *Antigone* has been used throughout time not only as a means of speaking up against the oppression and abuses of power, but also as a testimony of the human fight for dignity. And, in fact, on the subject of human rights and human dignity unipersonal performances succeed in transmitting a truly powerful message. They manage to attain a fusion between the concepts of identity, dignity and memory. The same person can be the *desaparecido*, the mother, grandmother or the relative claiming their body, the coward who shuts their mouth out of fear, and the brave person who denounces the

crime despite their fear. They become the victim but also the murderer, all sharing responsibility for what happened. They also share and exchange identities. To become a *desaparecido* is something that could have happened to anybody, and to be alive is the burden for the living, the reason for their guilty feelings.

The ending of Watanabe's *Antigone* is a clear illustration of this point. The narrator has been there all throughout the play. Surprisingly, at the very end the spectator learns that this narrator was Ismene. Ismene's (and the play's) last words are addressed to her dead sister Antigone:

> *Ismene*: There in your high realm, ask Polynices to forgive me for the task I could not accomplish on time because the constraint of power frightened me, and tell him that I already have a huge punishment: remembering every day your gesture that tortures me and makes me feel ashamed of myself. (17)[40]

The fusion between Antigone and Ismene is inevitable. The spectator has just seen the actress performing one and now the other sister. They are not two characters but the same person: the obedient, fearful and coward as well as the rebel and brave. The one does not exist without the other.[41]

There is a phrase in Watanabe's *Antigone* that, in my view, summarizes what *Antigone* represents for an Argentine spectator; something I have tried to show in this paper:

> I want every death to have a funeral,
> and after, after, after that,
> oblivion. (7)

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[1] A first version of this article was presented at the 7th Annual Postgraduate Symposium on the Reception of Ancient Drama: 'Performing Identities', held in Oxford/London on 25–26 June 2007. I would like to thank the anonymous readers for *New Voices* and Dr. Anastasia Bakogianni for their comments on the revised version.

[2] Being an Argentine myself, I cannot attend a performance of *Antigone* without remembering all the feelings, ideas, worries and questions I have regarding the *Proceso*. The play talks to us Argentineans in a very particular way; it tells us about repression and the memory of repression, connecting us very closely—unfortunately for the wrong reasons—with some other Latin-American countries that have suffered similar horrors. We may even talk about a 'Latin-American Antigone'.

[3] Due to the length and interests of this article, the historical facts had to be summarized and appear in a condensed format. For more information on the subject see Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos (2003) and CONADEP (1986).

[4] Translations from Spanish texts are my own unless otherwise noted.

[5] Statements of Lieutenant General J. R. Videla to María Seoane in an interview on 25th August 1998. The interview was published in Seoane and Muleiro (2001: 215).

[6] Many of the women who had been abducted were pregnant at the time and had their babies in detention camps.

[7] Memory is in fact so important that a 'Memory Committee' (Comisión Provincial por la Memoria) has been created in order to keep a record of the events that occurred during that period. Information on their aims and activities is available at www.comisionporlamemoria.org. Accessed 15/09/2006.

[8] I am of course focussing only on Buenos Aires' productions, not only because Buenos Aires was (and still is) the most important and leading cultural centre in Argentina, especially with regard to theatre, but also because it was there where repression was at its highest, that the military government had its seat and where the number of *desaparecidos* was higher. This is also the city where the Mothers of May Square started their activities.

[9] There is a very comprehensive record of plays staged at Buenos Aires during the period 1976–1985 in Graham-Jones (2000: 164–84).

[10] As Graham-Jones states (2001: 17), theatre was subjected to censorship after the play premiered, or sometimes during rehearsals. Scripts did not have to be approved first, for instance. Censorship in theatre was also more related to people than to plays. They were targeting certain writers, directors or actors known to be opposed to the regime or to have socialist ideas/acquaintances. Dramatists and directors escaped censorship by applying a kind of 'self-censorship', either by expressing their political views through metaphors, satires, complex intellectual associations, or by not expressing any political view at all. For information on the subject see Graham-Jones (2001).

[11] Translations of the Greek text are from Lloyd-Jones (1994).

[12] Cf. also lines 248, 484–5, 525, 678–80.

[13] Cf. Sophocles, *Antigone* 162–210. Actual proclamation at lines 198–206.

[14] Cf. contrast between his speech and Antigone's words at lines 463 ff.

[15] See Sophocles, *Antigone* 502–7. Cf. also lines 692 ff.

[16] It was also staged in September that year at Teatro Municipal General San Martín and, in 1987, at Teatro Nacional Cervantes, both located in Buenos Aires.

[17] Griselda Gambaro exiled to Spain during the dictatorship (1977) after a presidential decree banned one of her novels. *Antígona Furiosa* was written and staged under the democratic government, after Gambaro returned to Argentina.

[18] As far as I am aware, there were no conflicts or disturbances during any of the performances of the play. There was, on the other hand, no censorship at all (neither for this play nor for practically any other), since the new democratic government tried to dissociate itself as much as possible from any form of authoritarianism or constraint.

[19] The *desaparecidos*, like Polynices, were killed twice, once while being alive and once again when they were dead. Not handing over the bodies to the families/not allowing a proper burial means that the dead are wronged once more; their killings are restaged over and over again like a never ending cycle.

[20] Quotations from Gambaro's text belong to the excellent English translation by Marguerite Feitlowitz published in Feitlowitz (1992).

[21] I will not expand here on the connection between the character of Antigone, the performing space and the subject of *desaparecidos* and detention camps. For a detailed analysis on *Antígona Furiosa*, Argentine history and biopolitics, see Nelli (forthcoming).

[22] Cf. Wannamaker (2001: 80–81).

[23] See for instance Taylor (1997: 207–22), and Wannamaker (2001).

[24] In Sophocles' *Antigone* the conflict is never referred to explicitly; it appears only suggested or implied. See for instance 36–38, where Antigone refers to Ismene's choice between fear and duty, or 502–05 where she refers to the citizens' fear. See also 810–16, 867–70, 876–82 and

916–20 where she expresses repeatedly her longing for things she will never get, i.e. to get married and have children.

[25] Wannamaker alludes to 'circularity and lack of closure' in Gambaro's play. The lack of closure refers to the impossibility of putting an end to the Mothers' mourning, search of, and demand for the thousands of bodies still missing. The circularity of the narrative, putting together past, present and future, unable to end or stop, is connected to the Mothers not only visually because of their marching in circles around the Square, over and over again, but also because of their demands and mourning, which does not end with the performance but continues for as long as it takes to recover the very last one of the missing bodies. See Wannamaker (2001: 77–78).

[26] Spanish quotations are taken from Huertas (2002); English translations are the author's. For a digital version see Huertas (2005). Special thanks to 'Biblioteca Teatral de La Plata *Alberto Mediza*, Argentina' for providing me with information about this version of *Antigone*.

[27] The play was performed in open air theatres in Kalamata, Pylos and Athens. In 2002 it was staged at the Teatro Argentino in La Plata and at the Biblioteca Nacional in Buenos Aires, and in 2003 at the Centro Cultural San Martín in Buenos Aires.

[28] See for instance Moira Soto (2003).

[29] Cf. Brysk (1994: 42–43).

[30] A 'unipersonal performance' should not be mistaken for a monologue or soliloquy. Monologues and soliloquies are defined by the absence of dialogue: there is no linguistic exchange between characters. In the former case, there is just one character speaking, in the latter, the character talks to himself, in a sort of exteriorization of an interior monologue. According to Wallace, a monologue constitutes a (very varied and multifaceted) *genre*, while a soliloquy constitutes a *dramatic device*. Wallace (2006: 4). On the contrary, 'unipersonal performance' alludes to a particular type of *performance* in which there is only one performer playing all the characters. A unipersonal performance does not depend on a particular type of play, even though many plays have been written with a view to a unipersonal performance. Unipersonal is '…the art form where all the expressive qualities of human beings meet to deepen into their innermost nature and into the significance of their presence in the world.' Cf. Ráez Mendiola (2006: 5).

[31] The quotation was taken from an article published at the company's website (Producciones Ábrego), where the directors of the play expressed their views on the play's meaning, production and stage management. Several photographs and a short video of one of the play's performances can be seen on the same website as well. Cf. www.teatroabrego.com/espectaculos/antigona00.html. Accessed 20/02/2007.

[32] María Vidal, the actress starring in this version of *Antigone*, resorted to various strategies in order to move from one character to another. There were many props onstage, from small candles to some sort of big trolley with which the play started and ended, masks, puppets, a knife, a cup, some vessels, a heap of bricks and some blankets, sheets, cloaks, etc. There were also many garments she put on and off in order to represent a new character or situation. The performance included the use of a male voice-over as well. The actress danced to a wide variety of music, including some ethnic, oriental and pop songs. All in all, a colourful, attractive and interesting performance.

[33] I would like to thank once more the people at 'Biblioteca Teatral de La Plata *Alberto Mediza*, Argentina' for their kindness in sending me information about Carlos Ianni's production.

[34] Ianni's production was staged at Teatro CELCIT in Buenos Aires in 2005, 2006 and 2007, and in the Taller de Teatro de la U.N.L.P. in La Plata in 2006 and 2007.

[35] Rago (2006) mentioned in her review some of the actress' views on the subject. Yovino described her performance as a personal challenge, given that she was forced to engage in debate with herself, putting forward some arguments as Creon and refuting them as Antigone.

[36] Some photographs of this performance have been published online on the website of CELCIT. Centro Latinoamericano de Creación e Investigación Teatral (Latin-American Centre for Dramatic Creation and Research): www.celcit.org.ar/espectaculos. Accessed 20/02/2007.

[37] Acosta (2006) called the production excellent. She praised not only Yovino's accomplished performance but also the simplicity and bareness of Ianni's production. The director, she said, using only some basic elements essential for theatre – an actress, a space, a good text and an audience, was able to create a beautifully expressive work of art. Of the same opinion was Luis Mazas (2006), who entitled his review accordingly: 'Menos es más' (Less is more).

[38] Cuban journalist, artist and theatre researcher Magaly Muguercia, who joined CELCIT when the play was in rehearsal, expressed her views on what she considered to be the most likely reaction of an Argentine audience to Watanabe's play. Her comments were included in the programme of Ianni's production as a general description of/discussion of the play. She insisted that although she was not Argentinean herself, and even if she could only speculate about the audience's response to the play, she felt pretty sure that Watanabe's text was going to pull on the Argentine people's heartstrings. Watanabe's verses were going to be interpreted as echoing Argentina's most recent dictatorship, and as speaking up for all those sisters, brothers, mothers, fathers, children, who were still trying to get their dead back and find justice for them.

[39] Cf. Schoo (2005).

[40] The Spanish text belongs to Watanabe (2003). English translations are the author's.

[41] Acosta (2006) in her review of the play wrote that Watanabe's version focused on an issue marginalised in Sophocles' version: Ismene's guilty feelings. The need to confess, to express, to be heard, would have urged Ismene to talk again through this new reception of the play, bringing *Antigone* from its tragic Greek past to the present day.