

**In the Wake of Tragedy: Citation, Gesture, and
Theatricality in Griselda Gambaro's *Antígona
furiosa***

Patrick Dove

In recent decades there has been a surge of interest in memory and history in Southern Cone cultural production. This interest can be understood in the context of two transitions taking place in the 1980s and 1990s: from political violence and repressive military dictatorship during the 1970s to representative democracy on the one hand; and from state to market, or from the modern state form in its various manifestations (liberal, populist, national security) to the neoliberal state of privatization and financial speculation on the other hand. The rise of memory politics in the decades following dictatorship is propelled by conflicts left unresolved by these transitions. To the extent that Francis Fukuyama's characterization of the market as the overarching *telos* that guides all of modern history has been accepted as the obligatory point of departure for post-dictatorship political reason, then a fully accomplished transition—one in which the market has been inscribed as the *sine qua non* for any participation in the political—would mean the disappearance of any traces of historicity from the social landscape of postdictatorship Southern Cone societies. Memory politics aims to forestall the erasures that accompany this reinscription by looking to the past for material that would revitalize our sense of history today. Its strategies are myriad and include both the goal of salvaging old libidinal investments and that of shattering the post-historical mirror of the present.

My focus in this essay is Griselda Gambaro's play *Antígona furiosa*, written in the wake of Argentina's 1976–83 military dictatorship and first performed under the direction of Laura Yusem at the Instituto Goethe in Buenos Aires in September 1986. I am interested in how Gambaro appropriates Greek tragedy as a framing device for her reflections on dictatorship, state terrorism, and resistance, while at the

same time raising questions about literature's capacity to heal the wounds of history and restore unity to a society that has been torn asunder by political conflict and terror. First, I offer a sketch of what Gambaro's play shares with Sophocles' *Antigone* while also indicating where and how the two differ. Then, I turn to a discussion of how tragic form has been appropriated as a model by modern artistic and philosophical projects which seek meaning in events that would seem to exceed our capacities to understand. Finally, I will propose that Gambaro's use of theatrical technique sheds new light on what is at stake, ethically and politically speaking, in the focus on memory in post-dictatorship Argentina. *Antígona furiosa* makes an important contribution to memory work during the initial years of the transition by calling into question the use of traditional artistic frames and concepts to address what is new in the experiences of militancy and state terror in 1970s Argentina.

Gambaro's theatrical appropriation of Antigone clearly points to the public presence of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo during the time of dictatorship. Gambaro's *Antígona* metonymically represents a group that, in its weekly occupations of the symbolic center of Argentine civic space, effectively transformed remembrance and maternal love—traditionally regarded as private and as “women's work”—into political signifiers. Creonte, the principle antagonist, embodies the quasi-totalitarian logic of the military state. His decree against burying the body of Polinices provides a theatrical image of terror as the projection of state reason beyond the limitations imposed by constitutional law—indeed, beyond any limit whatsoever. In Greek tragedy the chorus represents the *polis*; in Gambaro's play Corifeo and Antinoo similarly stand for Argentine society as a whole, albeit with one important difference: their attitudes also attest to a crisis whereby civic institutions and public space are unable to provide effective countermeasures against the worst tendencies of twentieth-century government. Gambaro's chorus embodies the worst tendencies of certain sectors of Argentine society: internalizing the logic of state terror, blaming its victims, and disqualifying those who speak out against it—as in the well-known characterization of the Madres as “las locas de la Plaza” (the madwomen of the Plaza).

The trope of madness, echoed in the title's *furiosa*, plays a double function in the relation between Madres and Argentine society. In the mouth of unsympathetic observers it seeks to disqualify the public presence of middle-aged women by imputing a lack of rationality to their demands. In a less unsympathetic light, allusions to “madness” suggest that, in a society that has been terrorized into complacency, the “madwomen” who reject conformism and silence may be the only sane ones left. The term *furiosa* also recalls the Erinyes, the female personification of the terrible forces of vengeance in Greek mythology who keep watch over the natural laws of the earth, the laws of kinship.

When the curtains open we see a large cage made of iron bars resembling a prison cell. Inside hangs an apparently lifeless Antígona. Outside the cell, Antinoo and Corifeo sit at a modern café table. When the action begins it is as if time had begun to deviate from its customary trajectory. Antígona slips her neck out of the noose and springs to life, beginning to speak. Her choice of words, together with the fractured rhythm of her speech, indicates that she may not be fully of the here and now. First, she recites lines spoken by Ophelia in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* following the death of the King; then she turns to Antinoo and Corifeo and asks what they call the "dark liquid" they are drinking; only then does she align her words and actions with the well-known plot of Sophocles' *Antigone* by announcing her intention to bury the body of Polinices. Corifeo and Antinoo respond by mocking her disjointed, disoriented speech while declaring that her proposed transgression of Creonte's edict is proof of her madness. The subsequent action roughly mirrors the plot line of Sophocles' *Antigone*, including Antígona's attempt to bury her brother's corpse, Creonte's verbal exchanges with Antígona and Hemón, his sentencing of Antígona to be buried alive, the reporting of Hemón's death, and Creonte's reversal of his decision, which comes too late to prevent Antígona's suicide. The play ends where it began, with Antígona—who never leaves the cage—"furiously" taking her own life in defiance of the tyrant's law.

Certain differences between Gambaro's and Sophocles' texts help us to see the influence of local traditions in Gambaro's work. The demeanors of Corifeo and Antinoo—who project cynicism, impertinence, and sarcasm under the guise of slapstick humor—have little in common with the Greek chorus and are more in tune with the character types found in the theater of the grotesque tradition of the Río de la Plata region. This tradition, first cultivated by Armando Discépolo and others during the first decades of the twentieth century, responded to conflicts that arose with the arrival of large waves of European immigrants. Akin to its Italian counterpart, the Argentine grotesque was shaped by a mixing of traditional theatrical genres such as comedy, farce, and tragedy. Wolfgang Kayser, writing about the European grotesque, describes its aesthetic as the presentation of a world that has become estranged from itself. Its aesthetic is governed by "a structural law according to which the world is presented as being out of joint. The forms that are familiar to us now appear as deformed, natural proportions are altered, the accustomed order is disarranged both temporally and spatially, the laws of identity are suspended, and the separation of spheres is repressed" (qtd. in Azor Hernández 29). Gambaro borrows from this regional tradition and its manner of placing into question ideas that we ordinarily accept at face value. At the same time, she also revises some of the tradition's tendencies, generating a new theatrical form that critics have dubbed the neogrotesque. As Gambaro describes it:

Este grotesco que escribimos hoy se emparenta con el otro, pero será indudablemente más ácido, y más nostálgico; la imaginación recupera una realidad más fragmentada y termina de completarla en la obra con un lenguaje muchas veces más ácido que el de Discépolo y significados menos transparentes. (Azor 167)

(This grotesque that we write today is related to the traditional grotesque, but it is undoubtedly also more acerbic and more nostalgic. The imagination today grapples with a reality that is more fragmented, and ends up completing this fragmented reality in the work through a language that is much more acerbic, and whose meanings are far less transparent, than those of Discépolo.)

If the social reality of late twentieth-century Argentina is more fragmented than early twentieth-century Argentine society, this historical difference no doubt impacts what Kayser describes as the grotesque's tendency to transform prevailing social sensibilities so as to present in disjointed form what ordinarily passes for common sense. But in a situation where social fragmentation is not only patent but—under the auspices of flexible labor, for example—indistinguishable from the prevailing logic of the social, what is left for theater as far as producing feelings of estrangement and opening its audience's eyes?

An important formal distinction between the neogrotesque and the grotesque can be found in the way each period conceives of its relation to theatricality. As Lilián Azor Hernández puts it, while the grotesque characteristically guided the spectator to the realization that a given character was hiding his or her true face behind a mask, the neogrotesque in turn calls into question the very distinction between mask and face, inviting us to consider that "face" itself—understood as the portal of the soul or true self—is already a kind of mask, one which seeks to reconsolidate old distinctions (truth and appearance, originality and repetition) that have been rendered unstable. Theatrical reflection on the mask takes an interesting direction in Gambaro's use of prostheses such as the cask and ventriloquism. By calling attention to the trope of masking—deploying the trope while suspending the traditional distinctions they enforce—Gambaro invites us to visualize a link between theatrical techniques and certain kinds of ideological effects. The essence of a mask is dissimulation: it hides the face while masking the fact that it is only a mask. With the cask, however, Gambaro obliges us to consider that what lies concealed behind mere appearance is neither substance nor truth but rather a void. It may be that what theatrical masks conceal is not the true self but the fact that, when it comes to our social reality, *there is nothing hidden*—at least, nothing that could subsequently be rendered visible. In this way, Gambaro's theatrical work demystifies the distinction between the visible and the concealed. Her work operates at a meta-theatrical level by exposing an

illusion that was perhaps originally a product of theater itself: the dream of a truth that lurks hidden beneath the surface and its false appearances.

Another key difference between the two plays has to do with their respective way of positioning Antigone and Creon. Are the concerns, claims, and demands they articulate reconcilable with one another, at least on an ideal plane, as Sophocles' tragedy could be read as asserting? Or are they fundamentally irreconcilable, as Gambaro's play suggests? During the first part of Sophocles' play everything hinges on the unfolding antagonism between Creon and Antigone and between the respective places from which they speak. However, through the mediating presence of the chorus, the Sophoclean tragedy also opens up a space in which one can see both Antigone's claim and Creon's reasoning to be equally justified and equally necessary in their own right. In Gambaro's rewriting of the Antigone story, meanwhile, the spotlight remains on Antígona and her singular motives. If *polemos* and its blind spots are the tragic themes of Sophocles' text, Gambaro's text stages Antígona's defiant perseverance as precisely incomparable and irreconcilable with Creonte's tyrannical intransigence.¹ Gambaro's rewriting of the *Antigone* tragedy ruins the dialectical promise of reconciliation that drives modern receptions of Greek tragedy. While Sophocles' plot continues long after Antigone has met her untimely end, in Gambaro the heroine remains alive in her cage until the terrible conclusion. Like the Madres, Antígona's struggles are not confined to her dealings with Creonte as sovereign authority but also involve her positioning within a network of social forces and significations, many of which work in complicity with state reason. Her battle is waged against the infiltration of social discourse by a powerful tendency to naturalize or rationalize the state of exception and the repressive apparatuses it introduces.

The distinction drawn by Michel Foucault between classical monarchy and the modern biopolitical state can help to situate Gambaro's theatrical reflections on dictatorship, even if the Argentine national security state threatens to supersede the epistemic boundaries drawn by Foucault.² The military junta does not operate like the classical monarch, whose sovereign power was consolidated spectacularly in the moment of deciding over the life or death of subjects. Nor, for that matter, does the military state limit itself to the mundane task of administering over the daily lives of citizens (birth, education and professional training, health, etc.), as does the modern state in Foucault's account of governmentality and biopolitics. With the routinization of state of emergency decrees suspending constitutional law and its guarantees, the Southern Cone dictatorships of the 1970s sought to extend the biopolitical state's penetration of everyday life beyond all traditional lines of demarcation. Under this new rubric, state power is no longer restricted to administering over the living but lays claim to what becomes of the living in death. The state of exception seizes sites lying on the border of social life—the tortured, dying, or dead body and its

afterlife as social memory—and transforms them into a battleground in the war against “subversion.” The state of exception asserts its absolute power over both the corpse and the memory of the disappeared, and thus, as Felipe Victoriano puts it, deprives the disappeared of their own deaths (40).

Victoriano’s formulation should be heard in a Heideggerian key, even as it presses against the limits of Heidegger’s notion of being-toward-death. For Heidegger, death stands as *Dasein*’s own-most possibility. More than just as a moment to come, death imposes *a priori* a condition of mortality that defines human existence from its very birth as the potentiality to anticipate non-being. This anticipation and its consequences distinguish the human from all other life. While death is conceptualized as something that cannot be avoided, neither can it be grasped or made into the property of a subject. We cannot know in advance when or how we will die, nor can we know “what death is like” insofar as it marks the end of sentience and consciousness. The incalculable but unavoidable facticity of death has always already inscribed itself twice over in the human’s horizon: as its unknowable condition of possibility and as its limit. Mortality, in the double sense of an always present possibility and an impossibility of calculating and knowing, makes us what we are (without mortality there would be no experience of time, no need for language, and no sense of history) while also dividing us from ourselves, since death—even when it is our “own” death—cannot be known, possessed, or mastered. To deprive the disappeared of their own deaths by destroying all traces of their fates illustrates an organized effort to negate past and future, history and finitude, singularity and universality. It is to rob the disappeared of something that nobody can ever own: the improper limit at which language, sociality, and life begin.

Paraphrasing the argument developed by Giorgio Agamben in *Homo Sacer*, I propose that the state of exception does not break with the modern biopolitical tradition (whose origin Foucault situates with the birth of modern democracies) so much as it enacts an extreme instance of this tradition, exposing an inner possibility that biopolitics had previously kept under wraps. The secret truth of biopolitics entails not only the silent politicization of “bare life” that Agamben discusses but also the state’s attempt to extend its administrative rationale and its laws beyond the limits of (biological) life itself. In this light, Gambaro’s turn to the Antigone myth invites the thought that biopolitics is always also a thanatopolitics. Biopolitical terror seeks to annihilate the support which death lends to life—individual life as well as the social life of the community—through the symbolic production of naming, mourning, and memory.

Gambaro’s rewriting of the Antigone story is made even more interesting by the possibility that state terror, torture, and disappearance might not be material suitable for tragedy. In order to pursue this idea it is first necessary to posit a point where tragic aesthetics and ethics touch

on one another, or to situate tragedy and the history of its interpretation in the broader context of literary treatments of violence, destruction, and loss. For a certain philosophical tradition that begins with Aristotle and runs through German idealism, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, tragedy has been seen as a bridge that leads from pure loss to meaning, or which works to make sense of an event that would otherwise exceed our capacity to understand. In returning to old stories of violence, transgression, and destruction, tragedy also lays the foundation for new beginnings, e.g., the birth of Athenian democracy. Let us call this the memorializing understanding of tragedy. Perhaps the most influential instance of memorialization is found in the appropriation of Greek tragedy by German idealist philosophy in the early nineteenth century, which has been analyzed brilliantly by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe in essays such as “Caesura of the Speculative” (*Typography*). For thinkers like Hegel, Schelling, and Hölderlin, Greek tragedy serves as a model for the dialectical structure of thought itself. What Aristotle termed *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis* become, for Hegel and his contemporaries, a mapping of the trajectory of thought in its becoming self-conscious by way of grappling with the negative. Tragedy puts on display what Hegel describes as spirit’s tendency to split itself in two and go against itself, while also enacting its yearning to rejoin itself in becoming One. The Aristotelian theory of catharsis, a purging of the negative emotions of fear and pity, is translated by the Hegelian *Aufhebung*, understood both as negation of negation and as elevation or sublimation. This modern translation of tragic theory is informed by a double movement, one side of which corresponds with the Greek *polemos*—or rending and splitting—while the other anticipates the rejoining of what has been torn asunder. German idealism sees this tragic double movement as the avatar of speculative thought, defined by an economy of negation and recovery from which nothing can escape. It is an economy that leaves nothing unaccounted for—not even death itself.³

I have just sketched very briefly what Heidegger would call the ontotheological reading of tragedy.⁴ I will now argue that Gambaro’s rewriting of *Antigone* is marked by a thought of the impossibility of staging the experience of state terror as tragedy. To put it bluntly, it would be obscene to juxtapose a torture victim or *desaparecida* (disappeared one) with her or his repressor in the way that Hegel positions Antigone and Creon: as two sides of the same dialectical coin who remain tragically blind to what they have in common, and who thus await a philosophical accounting of their reflected relation. That would be to erase or level the many well-documented logistical, juridical, political, and ethical distinctions between guerrilla violence and state terror, as well as the distinction between political violence (the armed Left, here represented by Polinices) and political dissidence (the Madres or Antígona). I want to take this point about the incompatibility of tragedy and state terror even further, however, and propose that what the Aristotelian and Hegelian readings of tragedy aim at—theater as a

machine for producing catharsis or the *Aufhebung*, the purging or negation of negation and the reconciliation of difference as specular opposition—simply does not work with the situation of the disappeared and its traumatic resonances in post-dictatorship Argentina. It does not work for ethical and aesthetic reasons. Or it only works too well, and thus it precisely misses the point. Gambaro's text announces the need for new ways of thinking about art, theater, and literature and their roles in the wake of societal disaster and historical trauma, ways of thinking that are attuned to what resists reason's need for stable categories and calculable processes.

As both Jacques Derrida (*Glas*) and Joan Copjec have shown, it is also possible to find in Sophocles's *Antigone* a thinking of what escapes the negating and sublimating movement of the *Aufhebung*, a thinking of what causes the dialectical economy to stutter, or of what negation remains unable to grasp. For both Derrida and Copjec, the major motifs of this thinking are the questions of burial and sexuality. These topoi—the tomb, sexual difference, and memory—provide a chance to develop the motif of memory in Gambaro's work by opening onto a thought of singularity as a non-negatable excess of the dialectic. Singularity, as I am using the term, is not something that simply falls outside dialectics altogether, nor does it allow us to be done with dialectics tout court. The singular is *of* the dialectic but without being explainable in terms of negation and recuperation/elevation.

For the approaches developed by Derrida and Copjec, the tragic conflict is between Creon's imposition of the *nomos* and Antigone's assertion of the rights of the dead, which responds to a law that is irreducible to the spatial and temporal divisions of the Greek state. Antigone describes it as an originary call that is prior to any political partitioning (Greek/other, friend/enemy).⁵ Antigone's responsibility is not, as Hegel thought, to the tomb understood as cradle of the specular economy but to an excess that calls to her from the site of Polyneices' unburied, unmourned body, which is, we should recall, also a remnant of a certain tortured family history. I am alluding here to the strange explanation she offers for her insistence on performing the funeral rites even though it means risking her own life: it is the fact that Polyneices is irreplaceable for her—in the context of her family history, "brother" is no longer simply a general, relational category but a name for what cannot be substituted—that drives her to honor his memory and his name. Singularity here is not a synonym for particularity, individuality, or uniqueness. The singular is that which resists being subjugated under the universal—for instance, by the absolutist tenor of Creon's law. This may help explain why Antigone seems to privilege Polyneices over Eteocles. But it is somewhat misleading to say only that the singular struggles against universality, since the singular is *nothing* outside of this antagonism, this struggle against annihilation in the dialectical machine. Whereas particularity presupposes self-identity—a particular is defined by its difference from other particulars—the

singular is already different or separated *from itself*: it has no existence prior to coming into contact with others. Antigone is moved to action by the image of Polyneices lying there under the sovereign ban, stripped bare and left exposed to the forces of corruption and oblivion. She is called to action by the thought of what has not yet been reincorporated into the earth and made part of a shared memory and lexicon through symbolization and repetition. If singularity first makes itself seen, heard, or felt as bare life exposed to nature, it also names a point that is irreducible to biology or biopolitics: singularity is the cut that ties Polyneices to language and makes him a speaking being, a member of a linguistic community for whom his being was always already split or shared. In other words, singularity refers to the fact that, in having been named, in having entered into the social by assuming a place within language, he has already been marked for death. After all, there would be no reason to name that which could not become absent. Singularity thus names the mark or cut that constitutes each of us as a speaking being in relation to others, while also making us separable from ourselves (i.e., able to be cited in our absence). Singularity makes us infinitely more and less than One. For Lacan, this zero-degree sociality is called castration, which marks the separation of the subject from all plenitude while also providing access to the symbolic as order of shared meaning. What is singular for Lacan is every speaking being's struggle with and against the symbolic. Singularity names that excess—it can be a silent or noisy excess—or that secret part of the speaking being that has not been successfully interpolated by the law of the father but which, as excess, cannot be said to exist outside of the confrontation with this universal order.

Earlier I asserted that Creonte's prohibition takes aim at the support that death lends to life. We can now see exactly what this means. The state of exception together the political use of terror as an instrument for the repartitioning of social order in 1970s Argentina is, among other things, a war waged against the spectral quality of singularity. What the military junta termed *el Proceso* (the Process) was an attempt to purify the social of all residual singularity, which the authoritarian state defined as instances of "subversion"—neither inside nor outside, neither properly Argentine nor identifiably foreign—that prevent society from coalescing as One. This "process" leads to the invention of a new political category, *los desaparecidos*, which marks an extreme limit for the biopolitical distinction between life and death. In the sinister words of General Videla, speaking on television in 1979, "un desaparecido . . . no está, ni muerto ni vivo, está desaparecido" (qtd. in Bayer 14) (a disappeared person . . . is gone; neither alive nor dead, he is disappeared).

I want now to bring the discussion of universality and singularity in tragedy back to Gambaro by looking at the use of citation in *Antígona*. Just as the singular names something divided from itself in its struggle with and against the universal, the structure of citation requires us to

think repetition as both sameness and difference, i.e., as the possibility of finding transformation within the same or of seeing the same differently. Citation exposes the way in which the linguistic concept of the sign, as Derrida has shown, is always already “split” or divided between an origin that is only constituted retroactively and the risk of errancy and mutation that accompanies all communication. The nonlinear structure of citation (i.e., the retroactive constitution of the origin) illuminates the temporal dimension of singularity or, if one prefers, it highlights the singularity that inhabits our everyday experience of time as linear and sequential. One form of citation employed by Gambaro is generic in nature: in lieu of staging the entire cast of Sophoclean characters, she uses only three characters, two of whom act as ventriloquists, giving voice to lines associated with another character. Many of the key moments in Sophocles’ *Antigone*—such as Creon’s verbal sparring with Haemon and Tiresias—do not make it onto the stage as such in Gambaro’s rewriting but are related to us by Antígona, either retrospectively as having already happened (in the case of Tiresias and Creonte) or proleptically (in the case of Hemón and Creonte). The use of ventriloquism as theatrical procedure has interesting implications for thinking about theatricality and politics.

Diana Taylor, emphasizing that Gambaro has a woman speak for men, proposes that ventriloquism provides a vehicle for feminist cultural politics. In Taylor’s view, this substitution operates at a metatheatrical level by inverting traditional configurations of gender and authority. By having Antígona give voice to lines that are proper to Haemon or Tiresias, Gambaro parodies the social construction of tradition, a tradition that we moderns conceive as having begun with the Greeks and as having been passed down through the patriarchal concepts of inheritance, logos, authority, truth, property and propriety. Ventriloquism tropologically provides women with access to the canon of what Corifeo calls a “frase maestra” (*Antígona*, line 249) (masterly saying), a tradition that has always been considered the rightful property of the masculine. This traditional association between the male and mastery of the proper has served to bolster masculinity’s association with reason, truth, knowledge and presence or constancy. The result is not just a feminine appropriation of authority but the *re-appropriation* of a prior appropriation; what this theatrical technique shows us is that the link between masculinity and authority was never natural or necessary to begin with. At the same time, through repetition the contingency behind such authorizing gestures tends to become naturalized and forgotten as such. In Taylor’s words, this act seeks to reposition women “not as echo but as a subject with agency who uses the words for their own needs. It is no longer Haemon who is furious, heroic, and individuated, but Antígona who, at least, is meant to be” (Taylor 221).

Taylor’s reading has the merit of pointing out that repetition and citation do not automatically reinforce prior configurations of meaning, and that they also have the potential to transform sense and meaning.

However, her claim that a rearrangement of theatrical positions and discourses leads to transformation of the social configuration of authority could also encourage a problematic elimination of important distinctions between theatrical and non-theatrical spaces. Or, more precisely—since Taylor’s general position is that all social spaces are “theatrical” in their organization—her argument risks perpetuating a conflation of the differences between representation and sociality, ideology, and material relations of power. In order to see this pitfall it is sufficient to recall that the far less sympathetic Corifeo also gains access to these same “masterly sayings” whenever he speaks the lines of Creonte. Ventriloquism, no matter how transgressive, cannot substitute for concrete change in social and economic relations. In this light, the qualification Taylor adds at the end of the passage I just cited—“who, at least, is meant to be”—should be read as providing an important cautionary note for thinking through the relation between theatricality and politics.

While *Antígona furiosa* is unmistakably concerned with how sexual difference and gender emerge as ethical and political categories under dictatorship, the play also engages in a subtle destabilization of traditional ways of thinking about the political, and specifically of the tendency to reduce politics to struggles over power or identitarian assertions, and thus to what can be calculated and ordered. Gambaro’s exploration of the unhooking of the political from power and identitarian positioning is most evident in the rhetorical maneuvers through which Corifeo gives voice to Creonte’s lines. This ventriloquizing of the sovereign will is a catachrestic move in which an improper term (or a non-sovereign) stands in for something that has no proper name or voice of its own. While sovereignty as determination of law and order conceptualizes the unity of the proper, the tropes of ventriloquism (or prosopopeia) and catachresis invite us to examine sovereignty as presentation in the absence of any proper source that would authorize speech. The sovereignty of the sovereign is constituted through speech (or writing), but as soon as the will enters into language it can no longer guarantee what form its reception will take. By the same token, in this peculiar ventriloquism Gambaro also seems to be suggesting that in reflecting on sovereign power we must begin by looking elsewhere—not to what lies hidden off stage or inside the cask, but to what lies outside, hidden out in the open as it were. I am thinking of the complicity embodied by Corifeo and Antinoo, which is akin to what Slavoj Žižek calls cynical ideology. Cynical ideology is what happens when the discrepancy between ideological façade and reality has become quite clear to everyone, and yet we continue to act as if there were no distance between them: “They know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it” (Žižek 29).

Another example of theatricality in *Antígona* involves citation. The first and last instances of citation are taken from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. In her opening lines, Antígona recites a translation of the plaintive

uttered by Ophelia to Gertrude in act 4, scene 5, concerning the King's untimely death: "He is dead and gone, lady, / He is dead and gone; / At his head a grass-green turf, / At his heels a stone." The peculiar force of this passage in Gambaro's text stems from the fact that what it says, it says through inversion of contexts and meanings. These lines introduce a formal disjunction between saying or *decir* (the context of which Ophelia spoke) and meaning or *querer decir*, since with *los desaparecidos* there are of course no bodies, no gravestones or grass-green turf, and thus none of the material conditions for mourning. While the association of Antigone/Antígona with mourning is self-evident, we should not assume too quickly that this link provides an easy explanation of the use of the Antigone myth in Gambaro's play. Indeed, Antígona's refusal of reconciliation at the end of the play also evokes the radical demand, articulated by one faction of the Madres, that the military return the *desaparecidos* as they had found them ("*aparición con vida*")—a demand which clearly refuses the conditions for mourning. By demanding the impossible Madres sought to mobilize a narrative to counteract the power of repression, fear and complicity. The discourse of mourning, meanwhile, which seeks to acknowledge death and to place a firm distinction between the dead and the living, would be seen by some as a form of complacency. If mourning is impossible under the circumstances (no graves, no material remains, no knowledge concerning the destiny of the disappeared), it also becomes politically suspect insofar as it comes to be seen—rightly or wrongly—as a mode of capitulating to quietism. The citation of Ophelia's lines thus exposes what does not add up in literary analogy: it gestures, in the absence of proper words, to a problem for which the discourse of mourning alone cannot provide a satisfactory resolution.

The other citation from *Hamlet* is found in Antígona's final lines, prior to the act whereby she takes her own life. These lines precisely translate Hamlet's dying words in act 5, scene 2: "¡El resto es silencio!" (*Antígona*, 214) (The rest is silence!). Akin to what we just saw with Ophelia's lines, when grafted into Gambaro's text, these words engender an excess with respect to the transmission of meaning between one text and another. In Spanish, *el resto* means the "everything else" to which Hamlet refers, but it can also be a "leftover" or "remainder" in either the mathematical or material sense—such as a member of the community who has yet to be counted or a corpse that has yet to be given a proper burial. *Silencio*, meanwhile, alludes tropologically to disappearance as well as to the frequent disavowals of the true extent of illegal repression on the part of Argentine society (silence as a metaphor for censorship, disavowal, and complicity).⁶ As a trope, however, *silencio* acquires a curious trajectory in Gambaro's text. Similar to Ophelia's lament, it says what it does not mean to say, what it does not want to say. The phrase *el resto es silencio* attempts to give shape to an experience that was calculated to produce no witnesses, an "experience" that was not one because it did not leave any room for a subject, insofar as it was

calculated to destroy the faculties that the Western tradition has always associated with the ground of human experience: will, self-presence, consciousness, control of one's own body, mind, and voice, and so on. This phrase would provide the final words for those who have no words of their own. In attempting to speak of or for the absolutely other—which is to say, for a privation and a kind of subjective death that by definition cannot become the object of an experience—these prosopopeic words cannot avoid turning what they name into something infinitely more familiar and recognizable. The naming of this non-experience as *silencio* cannot avoid turning the unknown into a cliché. I make this point not as a criticism of Gambaro, who may or may not agree with what I am saying. My point is that the naming of the *resto*, of the singular or silent remainder, is necessarily subject to the same law of displacement and mutation that accompanies Gambaro's use of citation and other forms of repetition. Moreover, this slippage illustrates the complexity we confront in attempting to think about the play as a tragic work. If tragic form and tragedy as cultural signifier provide a blueprint for dialectical thinking, the words *el resto es silencio* seem to point in the direction of a rupture in the dialectic, a void from which nothing can return—not even theatrical vision itself.

It is tempting to insist that the central ambiguity of Gambaro's *Antígona furiosa* is found in the text's awareness and refusal of the tragic effects theorized by Aristotle and Hegel. The play calls into question the role of theater in restoring equilibrium between the passions and reason that characterizes a well-regulated polis, and it likewise renounces the association of tragedy with a passage from catastrophe to knowledge, from speechless awe to recognition, from pure negativity to the negation of negation. In the context of biopolitical terror, the promise of reconciliation only masks a more entrenched form of oblivion. However, I do not wish to minimize the importance of Gambaro's turn to tragedy as a merely negative gesture that exhausts itself in performing its own impossibility. The Aristotelian question of what genre would constitute the proper mode for shedding light on the problems of dictatorship and post-dictatorship is undoubtedly at the forefront of Gambaro's concerns. The turn to tragedy cannot avoid calling attention to tragedy's inability to do justice to the problem of the disappeared. At the same time, it is in part through this extended citation of Sophocles—and through the tremors and excesses it generates—that Gambaro's play bears witness to singularity.

We have seen that citation frequently derives its literary force from what does not quite fit or what sticks out in the transfer between origin and iteration. The transformative effects of repetition can be attributed in part to contextual differences. But the truism that all meaning is context-specific should not obscure the fact that the possibilities of displacement and mutation are presupposed by the very structure of language. As Jacques Derrida has shown, in order for language to convey meaning the sign must in principle be recognizable and repeatable for all speakers of

a language. Anything that could not be recognized and repeated—a grunt, a howl, an anguished or joyful cry—is by definition excluded from the concept of the sign. In order for there to be a first time, an original utterance which produces meaning, the *this-ness* and the *now-ness* of a given experience must already have been submitted to the law of iterability and the possibility of being repeated. There is no first time prior to the law of repeatability. Moreover, iterability also exposes the uniqueness of content to the risk of being altered. What can be repeated can also become garbled, be misunderstood, or be relocated into a foreign context. The risk of errancy and mutation are inscribed in the very structure of communication; they are both the conditions of possibility for communication *and* the conditions of its impossibility—that is, the constitutive impossibility of securing a stable connection that would guarantee a communicative economy without loss or excess.

I turn now to a brief discussion of gesture and citation in the writings of Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht. By way of conclusion, I will suggest that Brechtian epic theater also provides a partial framework for Gambaro's *Antígona furiosa*. In an essay on Brecht entitled "What is Epic Theater?" Benjamin states that "'to make gestures quotable' is the [epic] actor's most important achievement; he must be able to space his gestures as the compositor produces spaced type" (11). Benjamin's account of theatrical gesture and repeatability describes a literary process that establishes the possibility of discovering echoes between one moment in a dramatic sequence and another. Citation for Brecht is primarily an intratextual procedure. Citation names a double illumination in which we discover sameness where previously we saw only difference, while finding difference where at first glance we saw the same. Brechtian gesture aims to capture and freeze a scene taken from the flux of daily life, extracting a moment from its temporal chain in order to frame what Brecht calls its *Haltung*, or its socially inflected attitude, meaning and position. Gesture interrupts the linear continuity of plot, allowing the viewer/reader to make connections and see transformations between one moment and another. At the same time, it brings to light embedded social meanings which the spectator might otherwise pass over unawares. In Benjamin's terms, gesture arrests the seamless flow of daily life and illuminates the dialectic "at a standstill," as if it were a photographic snapshot and not theater (*Arcades Project* 462). Gesture as the staging of interruption is the theatrical equivalent of dialectical materialism's attempt to break with the understanding of time as "homogeneous" and "empty," which shapes thinking about history as self-consciousness and development from Hegel onwards (*Illuminations* 261).

In his essay "On Gestic Music," Brecht offers the following illustration of gesture as a framing of how the body and bodily relations acquire social significance:

Not all gests are social gests. The attitude of chasing away a fly is not yet a social gest, though the attitude of chasing away a dog may be one, for instance if it comes to represent a badly dressed man's continual battle against watchdogs . . . On the other hand a gest of pain, as long as it is kept so abstract and generalized that it does not rise above a purely animal category, is not yet a social one . . . The 'look of a hunted animal' can become a social gest if it is shown that particular maneuvers by men can degrade the individual man to the level of a beast; the social gest is the gest relevant to society, the gest that allows conclusions to be drawn about the social circumstances. (56)

The sociality of the body as gesture hinges on the possibility of linking bodily arrangements and movements with a lexicon that possesses social significance ("bum," "watchdog," etc.). Repetition and citation, the elements of gestic language, also play a key role in aesthetic experience. As Benjamin observes, in Brecht's play *A Man's a Man* the character Galy Gay twice finds himself ordered up against a wall: once for the innocuous purpose of changing his clothes and a second time when he learns that he is about to be shot. The manner in which Galy Gay is twice *cited*, albeit in what prove to be radically different contexts, of course turns out to be the same—and that identity is what makes it a gestural citation. Brechtian *gestus* thus combines and juxtaposes a recognizable, repeatable gesture with the singular, unrepeatable gist of a specific situation, while also underscoring the way in which social relations are legitimated and reproduced through ritual. The theatrical production of gesture does not limit itself to revealing hidden social content; it aims to produce astonishment in the spectator as the monotonous repetition at the level of the signifier suddenly and unexpectedly yields difference at the level of the signified. For Benjamin, astonishment acts like a bulwark against a prevailing historical temporality whose relentless tidal forces render us insensitive to the ways in which the present has been historically conditioned. In the first version of his essay "What is Epic Theater," Benjamin likens the astonishment that arises from gestic repetition to a "rock," against which "the stream of things" crash and shatter, allowing us to experience momentarily the present in its historicity, or as a contingent totality of circumstances that at one point could have turned out otherwise (*Understanding Brecht* 13).

In closing, I want to explore the relevance of this link between theatrical gesture and historicity for Gambaro. While her rewriting of the *Antigone* places many of its scenes off-stage, it also enacts at least three scenes that were merely reported in Sophocles: Antígona's witnessing of the battle between her brothers, her unsuccessful efforts to bury Polinices' body and her own death in the cave. In Gambaro's play, the scenes surrounding the death of the brothers contain several gestures that are worth commenting on. The most obvious instance occurs as

Antígona witnesses and relates the deadly conflict between Polinices and Eteocles, who can be heard but are nowhere to be seen on stage. As the struggle comes to an end, Antígona falls to the ground. Her body moves in an increasingly spasmodic rhythm, as if it had itself become a battleground:

La batalla. Irrumpe entrechocar metálico de espadas, piafar de caballos, gritos y ayes imprecisos. Antígona se aparta. Mira desde el palacio. Cae al suelo, golpean sus piernas, de un lado y de otro, con un ritmo que se acrecienta al paroxismo, como si padeciera la batalla en carne propia. (199, italics in original)

(The battle. Irruption of the metallic clash of swords, stamping of horses, vague shouts and cries. Antigone moves away and observes from the palace. She falls to the ground, her legs thrusting back and forth with a rhythm that builds to a paroxysmal crescendo, as if the battle were taking place in her very flesh.)

Taylor interprets these stage directions as a theatrical statement concerning the feminine body as both material and metaphorical site for state power and domination, i.e., the body subjected to the brutality of repression and transformed into a vehicle for torture and rape; and the body as metaphor of a nation that remains vulnerable to the pathogens of “subversion” and thus evinces the need for the “antibodies” that are the state’s security apparatuses (277). While this reading seems perfectly correct, its correctness comes with a price: it must pass over the two little words—“como si” (as if)—that serve as a conduit between the visible and the invisible, between (just) acting and the real, between presence and absence, between metaphor and immanence. Ana María Llurba’s commentary on this scene can serve as a helpful addendum to Taylor’s reading. In Llurba’s view, Gambaro’s *Antígona* employs theatrical gesture to create a “visual icon” that would isolate certain aspects of the scene and highlight their social implications (27). Gesture, in Llurba’s reading, is an artistic abstraction that brings into view not only the dead body in its singularity, but also a fratricidal conflict played out on a gendered surface—and which only becomes discernible in public discourse as a conflict between what could be construed as “potency” and “lack,” and between “Western, Christian values” and the “subversion” of these values. Here is the important clarification of Taylor’s analysis: through the production of gesture Antígona’s own body is no longer just a body, nor is it as easily separated from language. The body begins to act as a signifier, establishing a link between what is present and visible on one hand, and what is absent or invisible on the other hand.

Shortly after this scene, Antígona enters into an exchange with Antinoo and Corifeo in which the motifs of state power and memory figure prominently. Here gesture is found not in corporeal movement but as a figure of speech first uttered by Corifeo and then taken up and

repositioned by Antígona. While the body in Gambaro's theater at times assumes linguistic features, we also hear the spoken word acting less like a vehicle for communicating ideas and more like a thing:

ANTÍGONA. Hermano, hermano. Yo seré tu cuerpo, tu ataúd, tu tierra.
 CORIFEEO. ¡La ley de Creonte lo prohíbe!
 ANTÍGONA. No fue Dios quien la dictó ni la justicia. (*Ríe*) ¡Los vivos son la gran sepultura de los muertos! ¡Esto no lo sabe Creonte! ¡Ni su ley!
 CORIFEEO (*dulcemente*). Como si lo supiera.
 ANTINOO (*idem*). ¿Qué?
 CORIFEEO. Salvo a Polinices, a quien redobla su muerte, Creonte sólo a los vivos mata.
 ANTINOO. ¡Corre las sepulturas! (*Ríe*) De uno a otro.
 CORIFEEO. Sabiamente. En cadena.
 ANTÍGONA. También se encadena la memoria. Esto no lo sabe Creonte ni su ley. Polinices, seré césped y piedra. No te tocarán los perros ni las aves de rapiña. (*Con un gesto maternal*) Limpiaré tu cuerpo, te peinaré. (*Lo hace*) Lloraré, Polinices . . . lloraré . . . ¡Malditos! (200)

(ANTÍGONA. Brother, brother. I will be your body, your coffin, your soil.
 CORIFEEO. Creon's law forbids it!
 ANTÍGONA. Neither God nor justice made the law. (*Laughs*) The living are the great tomb of the dead! That is what Creon doesn't know! Nor his law!
 CORIFEEO. (*Softly*) As if he could know.
 ANTINOO. (*Softly*) What?
 CORIFEEO. Except for Polinices, whose death he redoubles, Creonte kills only the living.
 ANTINOO. Bring the tombs together! (*Laughs*) One next to the other.
 CORIFEEO. Wisely. In a chain.
 ANTÍGONA. Memory also makes a chain. That is what Creonte and his law do not know. Polinices, I will be sod and stone. Neither dogs nor birds of prey will touch you. (*With a maternal gesture*) I will wash your body, I will comb your hair. (*She does so*) I will cry, Polinices . . . I will cry . . . Bastards!)

I have already discussed the conflict between singularity and universality that marks Antígona's defiant insistence that her responsibility is to something prior to any constituted power, something that we could perhaps call immemorial. I now want to focus on the motif of the chain, which Antinoo and Corifeo introduce as a metaphor of state power and its expansive tendencies. The chain as metaphor of unlimited

accumulation and expansion of state power becomes a gesture when it is cited by Antígona, who transforms it into a figure of social memory as articulation: as the joining of discrete moments into a shared narrative, and as grounding a collective practice of perseverance against subjugation under the bio-thanato-political state. The phrase “también se encadena la memoria” proclaims memory to be the proper site and temporal modality for honoring the singular in its struggle against the universal. Memory is charged here with the task of recovering singularity from oblivion and joining it with other singularities. This is certainly to put the singular at risk of being subjected to new totalizing hegemonic procedures. But in the absence of memory and its labors, the singular would remain completely isolated—and, as we saw with Polinices’ imminent fall into oblivion, it would thus cease to be singular. The figures of the chain and of enchainment cannot help but recall Saussure’s emphasis on the structure of language as a system of relational differences in which meaning depends on metonymic sliding and deferral along the chain of signifiers. The analogy invites us to think memory together with the logic of citation and iterability. We have already seen how the theatrical topos of citation sets in motion both repetition and difference. What if this same aporia were at the heart of Gambaro’s theatrical reflections on memory? On one hand, the claim of memory is to safeguard the singular against the forces of oblivion, and of recuperating the libidinal energies formerly invested in loved ones and cherished ideas. But in order to honor singularity, memory must expose the singular once again to its own divisions, to its fragile condition of being separable from itself—between past and future, between the origin and its exposure to the law of iterability.

A third instance of gesture I want to comment on briefly occurs in the concluding scene, in which Antígona hangs herself; in Gambaro’s words, she does so “furiously” (line 582). This act follows an exchange in which, while Antígona prepares herself for death, Antinoo advises her that Creonte has pardoned her. She responds by rejecting any possible reconciliation with her foe while declaring that, if she had it to do again, she would do exactly as she has done this time:

ANTINOO: ¿Oíste su llanto? Te perdonó.

ANTÍGONA: No. Aún quiero enterrar a Polinices. “Siempre” querré enterrar a Polinices. Aunque nazca mil veces y él muera mil veces.

ANTINOO: Entonces, ¡“siempre” te castigará Creonte! (214)

(ANTINOO: Did you hear his wail? He pardoned you.

ANTIGONE: No. I still want to bury Polinices. I will “always” want to bury Polinices. Even if I am born a thousand times and he dies a thousand times.

ANTINOO: Then Creon will “always” punish you!)

The first “siempre” is an index of Antígona’s fidelity to her own act. It marks a refusal, in Lacan’s terms, to give way or compromise concerning her own desire. It is a rejection of the false morality of reconciliation, which proclaims that life must go on at all costs and that the living must forget in order to move on. At the same time, the bracketing of “siempre” in quotation marks—to indicate an “as if” logic—also returns us to a thought of repeatability. Of course she only has it to do once, and it is precisely this *only once* that determines the stakes as incalculable and unexchangeable. But in embarking on what can only be done once, outside of all calculation, she already finds herself acting as if her decision would be replayed a thousand times. It is the friction between the *as if* of repetition and the *only once* of singularity that drives Antígona’s perseverance in relation to the singular and its struggle against annihilation.

The heterogeneous temporality of citation in Gambaro has much in common with Benjamin’s view of historicity as interruption of the teleologically governed flow of “empty, homogeneous time” that paradigmatically shapes modern thinking about history. In Benjamin’s terms, the interruption provoked by Brechtian gestic repetition has the potential to recall and rescue images from the past, illuminating new possibilities to which history had previously been unaware. Is this not analogous to what Gambaro does with the visual and sound images she cites from Sophocles and Shakespeare? Theatrical dialogue in Gambaro is infused with indicators of untimeliness and is haunted by echoes of both missed encounters and possible encounters still to come. I propose that this sense of “out of jointness,” which is derived from the intermingling of the plot of *Antigone* with citations from *Hamlet*, precisely embodies the strange, heterogeneous temporality of citation, an event that presents the paradox of thinking the first time as already repetition, and of thinking iteration as both repetition and singularity. Furthermore, alongside this paradox of an origin that is an effect of its reiterations there remains in the heterogeneous temporality of citation something that cannot be situated in any chronological sequence of before and after. In the necessity of making itself repeatable, the sign must relinquish something (its unity and uniqueness) while also gaining something (the countless possibility of future iterations that cannot be mapped out in advance). The sign thereby acquires an afterlife that it can never possess or master, a structural openness and a futurity that is always still to come. Citation in Gambaro is neither simple repetition nor pure transformation. It seeks to make audible something in the texts of Sophocles or Shakespeare that the Greeks and the Elizabethans were perhaps unable to hear. Citation brings to speech what those works said, without necessarily knowing how to say.

Notes

1. On the distinction between “perseverance” and “intransigence” see Copjec.
2. See Foucault for detailed analysis.
3. As Lacoue-Labarthe makes clear, tragedy also—at least for one of the German idealists, namely Hölderlin—provides a site for thinking the limits of the dialectic, an internal limit (which Hölderlin associates with the rhythmic caesura) at which the dialectical process trips over itself and loses its balance or—switching metaphors—proves unable to arrive at a remainder-free calculus.
4. Seen from a slightly different angle, Sophocles’s text poses problems for the reading I have just described. I discuss in more detail the tension between the speculative reading of tragedy and its deconstruction in *The Catastrophe of Modernity: Tragedy and the Nation in Latin American Literature*.
5. “It wasn’t Zeus, not in the least, who made this proclamation—not to me. Nor did that justice, dwelling with the gods beneath the earth, ordain such laws for men. Nor did I think your edict had such force that you, a mere mortal, could override the gods, the great unwritten, unshakable traditions. They are alive, not just today or yesterday: they live forever, from the first of time, and no one knows when they first saw the light” (82, 499–508).
6. “El silencio es salud” was also a catchphrase employed by government during the 1970s in Buenos Aires. While this phrase is ostensibly a recipe for improving the quality of life in a congested, noisy urban area, it also contains an unmistakable threat against those who would speak out against dictatorship—and thereby put their own wellbeing at risk. This fundamental ambiguity underscores the biopolitical dimension of military dictatorship. I thank Moira Fradinger for pointing out this connection.

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