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## A Hug to Humankind from Asturias: *Albentestate*



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Directors Harold Zúñiga and Ingrid López state: “Pensamos que todos los conflictos humanos, y sobre todo aquellos que acaban en tragedia, suelen tener un denominador común: la falta de compasión.” With the theatre company Nun Tris from Gijón (Asturias), Zúñiga and López presented in 2005 an adaptation of *Antigone* which condenses the pieces by Jean Anouilh and by Sophocles. A fundamental innovation is the Narrator as a framer of the piece, who evaluates the action and projects love towards the characters and audience through the gesture of the embrace. The hug is introduced as a kinesic sign, which starts as gestural and then becomes proxemic. Making one space of two personal spaces, the hug dissolves confrontation as an answer to tension. It generates meaning at the intersubjective level, not only as a possible link among the characters, but also between the performers and the audience, and more importantly as a relationship potentially extended beyond the performance to outside reality.

For centuries, theater in Spain has been concentrated in two major cities: Madrid and Barcelona. However, since the last two decades of the twentieth century, a meaningful movement has started in what is today called the autonomous communities, that is, in the provinces. This is the product of theater people’s will and effort, and the authorities have not acknowledged their work or needs.

When elections were celebrated in Spain for the first time after Francisco Franco’s dictatorship in 1982, actors hoped for a change favorable to culture in general, and especially to theater. However, the crisis that the Spanish theatre was going through continued during socialist Felipe González’s prime ministership and under conservative José María Aznar’s term of office, and has not seemed to subside since Socialist José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero was elected for prime minister in 2004. César Oliva, in his *Teatro español del siglo XX*, states that disappointment originated in the unfulfilled expectations of financial support, but mainly in the fact that the Socialist policy did not promote a socially committed theater (301-315).



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Despite the government's insensitivity, there are theater groups which do their best to be professional, to earn a living in theater, and to dedicate themselves to what Boni Ortiz defines as the "theater of creation": "El teatro de creación se define por contraposición al teatro que se estanca, que se reproduce y se hace amable con todo, con todos y consigo mismo. El teatro de creación arriesga, rompe sus límites sin temores ni pudores" (Ortiz 11).

Inmaculada Rodríguez and Antonio Caamaño, founders of Nun Tris (in the Asturian language: "quickly" or "in a blink of an eye"), undoubtedly embrace this view of theater of creation. Caamaño declares in his speech as the secretary of the Union of Actors of Asturias:

Yo pienso amás qu'el teatru, comu otre artes, requier de xente percítica con tolo que lo arro dia, y dao que se trata de transmitir cultura, de crear nueves realidaes, y de seducir a partir d'elles, l'actor tien que tener una mentalidá ya ideoloxía que permita a la sociedad vese espeyada y avanzar. ("Discursu")

Inma and Toño have had to fight against the circumstances in order to create this professional theater group in a city which allowed the Arango Theater, one of its main old theaters, to be turned into a cosmetic surgical clinic in 2005 (Lanza, "Re: Teatro Arango").<sup>1</sup> Nun Tris performs regularly at Antiguu Cine de

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<sup>1</sup> In Asturias, there are more than thirty theater companies, plus amateur groups, which perform for a population of one million inhabitants, but the opportunities and locales to perform are scarce (Caamaño, "RV: Albentestate"). Caamaño took part in a campaign against the closing of the Arango Theater: "Soy actor profesional. Malvivo de mi oficio hace dieciocho años; creo en el crecimiento de las personas y en la evolución de las cosas. Creo que mi trabajo (uno de los más hermosos que existen) contribuye a ello. Un tipo de vida y una profesión viva, todo lo contrario a la existencia cómoda, sedentaria, individualista y reaccionaria que nos quieren vender. Y no puedo entender que Xixón pierda para siempre algo tan 'sagrado' tan 'generador de vida' como un teatro y no pase nada; permitirlo es una atrocidad, es ir contra el crecimiento, individual y colectivo; ir contra nuestra historia, contra el progreso y la vida. Lo contrario jamás podría defender ningún partido que se diga de izquierdas. 'Pesetizar' la cultura es una sandez. Claro que cuesta dinero, normal, pero es necesario invertir en esto, como se invierte en otras cosas; si no hay dinero, se busca, o al menos se intenta. Creo absolutamente necesario el teatro Arango para Xixón y Asturias, para público y creadores; nadie pide al Ayuntamiento que nos lo compre, simplemente se pide interés, respeto y compromiso con nuestra dignidad, realidad y futuro (Caamaño, "Que no es necesario")."

Pinzales, and also takes part in theater events organized by FMC (Gijón Municipal Cultural Foundation), festivals in Spain, and abroad. The group usually tours Asturias with its productions, many of which belong to the street theater genre.<sup>2</sup> In his article “La izquierda y la política cultural,” Antonio Caamaño explains that an actor has very few options and opportunities to work in Asturias. It seems that being a manager-actor is the best option, and this is what Caamaño and Rodríguez are. They usually invite different directors and practitioners to work with the group.<sup>3</sup> The need of Nun Tris to hire different actors for their productions is an aspect of the dynamics of the group with which Caamaño is not very happy, and he reflects: “Quizás la crisis del teatro sea la crisis de la idea de colectivo” (Caamaño, “RV: Albentestate”).

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<sup>2</sup> Caamaño states that the three public administrations (city halls, autonomous communities, and the state) do not support the theater as they should: “La relación del teatro asturiano actualmente no es buena con la administración; las ayudas a la producción son ridículas en comparación con las que hay en el resto de comunidades del estado, con lo cual el producto es difícil que pueda competir en acabado y calidad con otras compañías más apoyadas. El mercado que genera el Circuito de teatro profesional al año es muy escaso, si contamos con que hay unos veinte espacios donde se puede representar, normalmente no vas ni a la mitad, y en un año una compañía como la nuestra debe hacer al menos ochenta anuales para sobrevivir. [...] Nosotros para ello, también nos dedicamos a gestionar eventos, tales como mercados medievales, festivales de teatro de calle, carnavales, cabalgatas de navidad, animaciones” (Caamaño, “RV: Albentestate”).

<sup>3</sup> “[...A]l artista, en el neoliberalismo asturiano, se le ha obligado a convertir su trabajo en una opción, no proletaria, sino empresarial, el único remedio para subsistir; la iniciativa privada en cuanto al arte y espectáculo supera con mucho las opciones públicas de empleo que no las hay; vamos, en Asturias no hay manera de ganarse la vida de actor si no se es actor-empresa, no doblaje, no TV, no cine, no centros dramáticos, 16 empresas de teatro en Asturias, más que en todo Castilla-León y menos trabajo, claro. Contradicciones del actor-empresa: contratar actores-proletarios y no poder pagarles como es debido; dos: crear un producto cultural competitivo en el marco estatal, con muchos más problemas que las empresas del resto del Estado, por falta de recursos y ayudas; tres: que la Administración asturiana, desgraciadamente principal cliente del artista, o del actor-empresa asturiano, no asume que las empresas de espectáculos son yacimientos de empleo, generan trabajo y altas en la Seguridad Social igual que cualquier otro, y que puede beneficiarse ella y toda la sociedad asturiana de una política cultural con objetivos claros, y de su correcta proyección y difusión, cosa de la que está muy lejos” (Caamaño, “La izquierda”).

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For this project of *Antigone*, Nun Tris invited Harold Zúñiga and Ingrid López, two directors who work together and are well known for their accent on the actors' work with their bodies. Thus, rehearsals started from improvisation with body work, and later focused on the text. Zúñiga and López, responsible for the adaptation of *Antigone*, are the artists which César Oliva describes as the last generation of Spanish playwrights in the twentieth century: they are practitioners and the objective of their text is its production without a commercial goal (321). Zúñiga and López have primarily utilized Anouilh's play, and they have shown their talent as the authors of this adaptation in their selection of the dialogue, which has been reduced to the necessary minimum, and which acquires great strength, fundamentally, in the use of stichomythia in the exchanges between Creon and Alben, and Alben and Is.<sup>4</sup> In *Albentestate*, whose performance lasts one hour, there is no Nurse or Eurydice; the Narrator covers the function of the Chorus and the Prologue (a function which becomes much wider); the Guards are reduced to one; and Creon becomes Creon, Antigone is Alben, Ismene is Is, and Haemon becomes Creon's daughter, Em (still engaged to Alben).<sup>5</sup> From Sophocles' text, Tiresias is present as Esia; who also covers the function of the Messenger at the end of the play. The relationship between Is and Alben, as well as the one between Em and Creon, is more that of Sophocles' characters than that of Anouilh's.

Zúñiga and López rehearsed *Albentestate* in Gijón with actors hired specifically for this production, Caamaño in the cast and Rodríguez as producer and assistant director. Nun Tris opened this production in Sama, Asturias, in February 2005. Later they presented it in Gijón and other Asturian towns, as well as Madrid, Buenos Aires, Montevideo and other Argentinean and Uruguayan cities. The tour in Argentina and Uruguay was supported by the Spanish state.

<sup>4</sup> Gilbert Highet explains that this was a device created by Greek drama: "It was a series of repartees in single lines, or occasionally half-lines, in which two opponents strove to out-argue one another, often echoing each other's words and often putting their arguments in the form of competing philosophical maxims" (208).

<sup>5</sup> The directors' choice of presenting Alben and Em as a female couple is surprising, for the spectator—used to certain conventions—may expect a further development of this subject, a statement on homosexuality. However, the effect of including this couple as an aspect of the story which needs no further reflection is a statement which succeeds in allowing the audience to consider it as a natural part of the story.

In the autonomous communities, political tradition and language, which instill them with identity, are pillars in theater. Since its foundation in 1997, Nun Tris has created a repertory in which the Asturian culture has had an important position, mainly due to the inclusion of the oral tradition of the province which has a language of its own, one of the Romanic languages that coexist in Spain.<sup>6</sup> A linguistic reference to Asturias —the only one— is not absent in this adaptation of *Antigone*, in which the title makes a Spanish speaking spectator wonder about the meaning as much as any spectator whose mother language is not of Latin origin. The doubts are dispelled as soon as the dramatic action begins, with the tyrant's order regarding one of his nephews: "Dejadlo al bentestate y que sea devorado por las aves y los perros." *Al bentestate*, which in the Asturian language means "in the open" and "without protection," shows the desolation of human beings when involved in a relationship of oppression, either as victims or victimizers. The directors saw in this title, which was Caamaño's suggestion, the possibility of a double reading: the corpses of the two brothers lying in the open air, and Antigone's feelings exposed to her environment.

In *Al bentestate*, all the characters lack protection and are presented as painful repeaters of the most important age-old error of mankind: not being open and willing to sympathize with others, which is the origin of violence. An undoubtedly Brechtian production, *Al bentestate* tells the story of Alben (Antigone) through the *Gestus* determined by the stance that the characters take in the face of violence and their attitude towards the possibility of the embrace. The hug also extends to other languages of the stage: light, music, and verbal language, and "gives us the key to the relationship between the play and the public" and a "condensed version of the story."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Nun Tris has also shown interest in productions that resort to other cultures, such as *K* (2003), a version of *The Process* by Kafka, with which they toured Argentina and Uruguay and for which they got an award as best foreign production, granted by the Cultural Center Ricardo Rojas of the University of Buenos Aires, and *Runa* (2004), on a selection of stories from the five continents.

<sup>7</sup> This is Patrice Pavis' description of the function of the *Gestus* in *Languages of the Stage* (42). In *Al bentestate*, the hug as an alternative to violence goes beyond its limits as a kinesic sign: it is a *Gestus* in Bertolt Brecht's sense, to which Pavis has referred as "a discourse of the *mise en scène* or of the 'performance structure.'" According to Pavis, *Gestus* and Story collaborate to create the *mise-en-scène*: "Theatre, in fact, always tells a story [...] by means of *gesture* (in the

The story of Alben is the core of the plot, and it has five introductions, which accentuate the cyclic conception of the plot. First, it is preceded by the effect of a play of music and lights before the actors' entrance; then by the Narrator's interaction with the audience, presenting what will be his statement throughout the play: a message of love; followed by a short scene in which the actors represent the idyllic interaction of children among whom discord arises; then by the combat of the two brothers and Alben's discovery of her brother's corpse, and finally by the Narrator's introduction of the characters of the story of Alben.

Once the spectators are sitting down, a warm pink light is cast on the auditorium, and it moves at a playful rhythm on the spectators while a soft song is heard. The effect is that of a caress. The Narrator, in white rags, with a telescope and the look of a wanderer, enters while "Little Girl Blue" by Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart plays. The Narrator moves about at a *legato* pace while he addresses the spectators, making eye contact with them, smiling at them and touching their arm or hand. The audience perceives his exit as an ending. The beginning of the play is the end of something that the spectators have not seen: this offbeat is crucial in setting the cyclical nature of the story. Then, the children's scene, which synthesizes the plot: a harmonious relationship is broken by the violence that originates for the possession of toys. Next, the combat of the two young men, who later will be identified as Teo and Poli, is presented like a dance. Alben sees her dead brother and rocks him in her arms. During these introductions, music and movement are central and the word is absent. Finally, all the actors of Alben's story enter and the Narrator introduces them as puppets which he moves and arranges in the space. The cyclical nature of the plot is reinforced at the end of the play, when Creo says the lines of Anouilh's text: "Las cinco, ¿qué tenemos hoy a las cinco?" (*Albentestate*), and the words reverberate as the omen of a repetition.

After Creo's and Alben's scene, the Narrator refers to Man as the wonder of this world as Sophocles' Chorus says "Wonders are many, and none more wonderful than man" (49). However, instead of the enumeration of Man's deeds on earth as its master, followed by the option of good or evil in the Greek text, Zúñiga and López address the violence against fellow men as the element that turns Man into a prodigy: "Narrador: Cuando pisotea implacablemente a los demás, el Hombre no tiene en cuenta lo que es realmente humano, y así se

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widest meaning of the term): the actors' bodies, stage configurations, 'illustrations' of the social body" (40).



convierte para sí mismo en un prodigioso monstruo” (*Albentestate*). Violence—attractive as a marvelous spectacle—is stated by the utilization of two low side spotlights which cast an intense red during Teo’s and Poli’s combat; the red streamers that the Narrator and other characters throw when Em kills herself by Alben’s dead body; the huge red silk fabric that covers the tableau with Alben’s and Em’s death which Creo discovers when, too late, he intends to give in; the red scarves with which all the characters seem to quarter Creo after he has seen his daughter’s death. All of these elements underline the power of attraction that violence exerts.

The basic *Gestus* of the play, the hug, is presented during three of the five introductions with diverse functions: as a relationship between the artists and the spectators and as a relationship between the characters, as a gesture and as a sign of all the languages of the stage, and as an expression of love opposed to violence. The hug also gives definition to Alben and the Narrator.

The first introduction presents the embrace as the initial contact of the production with the audience: a warm gesture achieved through music and light. Then, the *Gestus* is materialized in the physical contact of the Narrator and the audience.<sup>8</sup> He does not embrace just with his gesture, but also with his look, his voice and the meaning of his linguistic signs. Thus, the hug cannot be classified as a kinesic, linguistic, non-verbal acoustic or spatial sign: it is all of this and even more; it is the basic *Gestus* in the play. It is the major sign in the production.<sup>9</sup>

During the fourth introduction, the audience is confronted with the horror unleashed by an embrace of the opposite nature. Two of the children dressed in sweet sailor suits during the introduction to *Paradise Lost* turn their backs to each other as they take off their jackets, and brandishing two sticks left on each side of the stage by two actresses, turn around to run these swords through each other’s naked torsos, falling into a mortal embrace. This is the utmost degeneration of the human relationships: what was supposed to be fraternal love has turned into murder, and Teo’s and Poli’s despisal for the value of the familial

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<sup>8</sup> This is the social *Gestus*, which Pavis explains as “the characteristic of an actor or a particular stage business” (42).

<sup>9</sup> Each social *Gestus*, the attitude of each character before violence and the embrace, fulfills an expressive function generating meaning at the level of the subject, according to Erika Fischer-Lichte (46) and also regulates the interaction generating meaning at the inter-subjective level (51).

bonds is best represented in the choice of this oxymoron: violence and love signified together.

Alben's relationship with the embrace is a clear attempt to project it. Carmen Sandoval, who plays Alben, has determined the character in a gesture that is hinted and does not reach its goal. The first time that she enters, that is, during the fourth introduction, when she sees Poli's dead body, she slowly projects a scream that is not heard, but her body shows her intention of reaching for her brother. This is the only time that she achieves it. Taking one of the veils that hang from her waist, she covers him after rocking him like a child in her arms. This intention to cover him with her arms, with the veil, with the soil is what defines Alben's attitude towards life: an attempt to give love, which is impeded. Sandoval materializes this attitude in the gesture that characterizes Alben from then on: her trunk projects forward, her arms raise and bend at the elbows, the palms of her hands turn outward and her fingers spread out at the level of her face but ahead, while her eyes are cast down at a point far ahead of her feet. It is her fingers, not twitching, but in a soft gesture, that signify her intention of love. The horror of the violence that she lives leads her to never make eye contact with any other character. Her gaze is always beyond the physical reality that surrounds her, in search of the body that has been snatched from her arms, or rather, her gaze is directed towards the auditorium. It is her effort to overcome the circumstances under which she has to live.

But is Alben the recipient of an embrace? The distortion of an embrace is what she receives, an inversion of its meaning —similar to Teo's and Poli's— which takes place during her dialogue with Creo. After she has confronted him, and has dared to climb to the platform on which he stands, after she has even climbed the throne, Creo makes her descend and wraps the upper part of her trunk and arms with a long cream-colored fabric as a bandage that impedes her social gesture. Is's attempt to release her sister's arms is in vain: with her sacrificial will, Alben wraps the fabric around herself again, accepting to play the role that she has been assigned. In her scene with Is (Arantxa Fernández), both sisters seem to be trying to reach each other, but their failure to meet at an ideological level materializes in their failure to embrace each other physically, although both of them project their trunks and arms forward. Their dialogue takes place while their eyes never meet and they turn towards the audience. While Alben is standing, Is crawls or drags herself on the floor, more attached to material goods and contemptuous of moral principles which could impede her earthly happiness. Alben's violence towards herself results in another distorted

embrace: the one with the red scarf with which she hangs herself.

Creo, guided by his desire of power, refuses to acknowledge the importance or need of the embrace. Concerned only with the reassertion of his authority, his social gesture is the exact opposite of the embrace. Antonio Caamaño has found a posture that makes him more robust and attached to the soil on which he stands: his knees bend, his legs are open giving him a sounder base with both feet on the floor, his firm stance without altered balance shows his refusal to consider any others' views but his own. He bends his elbows, and his hands rest on his thighs. His gesture shows that he has no interest in reaching out to anyone and that his main purpose is to project a strong image of himself. Only when he sees Em dead does he try to embrace his daughter with an awkward gesture. He, too, is the victim of the distorted violent embrace when each character ties one of his members with a red piece of fabric and pulls on it while turning his back to Creo, who later wants to get rid of the big red fabric. It is the Narrator who restores peace by opening the cube-box that serves as a throne and shows Creo where to put the red fabric away.

The Narrator is always ready to help the action move forward without interfering with the direction of the events, but only contributing to what the dramatic action is building. His introduction and comments frame the action, fulfilling an epic function that has a defamiliarization effect on the audience, whom he addresses directly while the other characters are frozen. After he has made direct contact with the spectators from the beginning, he also makes contact with the other characters. Although he always moves about among the characters of Alben's story, he is an external element to it and belongs to the diegetic space. After the Guard has informed Creo that the guards have caught Alben, the Narrator enters on skates, observes each character from a short distance and then delivers the speech on tragedy that, in Anouilh, the Chorus pronounces. His attitude is always playful and joyful because, as he states, "Ahora el resorte está tenso y no tiene más que soltarse solo" (*Albentestate*): the tragedy is inevitable and there is no hope. However, he shows an emotional connection to the characters: he attends to details of their costumes and props in a protective way although they always ignore him. Nacho Quevedo, who plays the Narrator, has found a dynamic but soft pace to move about that differentiates him from the other characters, even when he mixes with them. His social gesture is the hug, hinted in his reaching out to the audience, and achieved towards the end of the play. After Creo has made up his mind and has ordered Alben's death, the action is frozen and a harsh red light bathes the stage. Then, while

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“Underground Tango” by Goran Bregović plays, the Narrator extends his arms forward and takes the characters in his arms almost making them dance to music which they have refused to hear. He knows that they will take their own course afterwards, but his action is a trial of what would happen if the tragedy were avoidable. Simultaneously, the silhouettes of the two actresses whose shadows hug each other —although the two actresses do not touch each other— are projected on the backdrop.

Just as there are several trials of beginning, there is an ending and a coda. After Creo has witnessed Em’s death and has been quartered in the scene that Zúñiga and López call “la danza del horror con los fantasmas de los muertos,” Creo puts away the red fabric, and all the characters throw themselves on the platform. Then Creo clears the path for the possibility of a new action with his question about the planned activity for five o’clock. The red light that has characterized the last scene of Alben’s story disappears. A blue light illuminates the stage and seems to create a space for the Narrator’s reflection, which takes place by means of the visual image and not the verbal language. The Narrator tries to make Creo see the other characters, but Creo refuses, and the Narrator’s answer is a hug. While the same soft music which is played as the Narrator enters for the first time is heard again, on the background of the stage several images are projected. They are photos that display violence such as crowds under the fascism in Germany and Spain, photos of Hitler, and photos of both the soldiers responsible for the abuses and the prisoners at Abu Ghraib. They are intermittently contrasted with photos of a daisy, two angels, people enjoying the beach, and a sleeping baby. During the last part of the music, the Narrator hugs and rocks Antigone, and with this image, the play closes.

Nun Tris decided to stage *Antigone*, but the founders of the group let the guest directors determine the adaptation of the text. What makes Harold Zúñiga’s and Ingrid López’s adaptation a typical script of what César Oliva calls the last generation of Spanish dramatists is the process of their writing.<sup>10</sup> Both directors are also actors and dancers, and their experience as practitioners was crucial in the selection of the scenes from Sophocles’ and Jean Anouilh’s scripts.<sup>11</sup> The

<sup>10</sup> According to César Oliva, these playwrights have a deep knowledge of all the languages of the stage, and they work on the script very carefully, although staging the play is more important than publishing to them (*Teatro español* 321).

<sup>11</sup> As actors and directors, Harold Zúñiga’s and Ingrid López’s latest production is “La miel y la hiel,” which opened in Moscow in December 2006.

directors' aim was to find scenes which would provide an opportunity for the use of kinesic signs. They say: “[H]uimos un poco de los grandes trozos de bello lenguaje pero poca acción” (Zúñiga, “Albentestate 1”). First, Zúñiga and López outlined their adaptation by creating what they call “an esthetic poetry,” which they specifically define as the formal parts of the script that have a visual unity, and determined the “poems” that they would develop. This is their usual method, and they state that auditive and kinesic signs are essential in their writing:

[L]a música y el movimiento son parte básica e importante para que la ‘semilla’ vaya engordando, e incluso a veces, nos lanzamos desde la música o el movimiento o desde ambos, sin pedirnos nada, a ver adónde nos llevan, y encontramos en el camino la “semilla” (una idea básica estética-ética que vamos desarrollando y a veces nos lleva a otra “semilla”). (Zúñiga, “Respuesta”)

Having determined the “esthetic poetry” of the script, they worked on the characters analyzing how they would move around, what sort of persons they would be, “cómo sería su forma de percibir lo que [los] rodeaba” (Zúñiga, “Albentestate 1”). This last concept was the foundation for the rehearsals, when they began to work with the actors.

Once they had the outline, they selected the music for the scenes. Thus, for *Albentestate* they first considered the visual language and created the text, and later they chose the music, which was extremely important during the rehearsals. Carmen Sandoval appreciated how hard the directors had worked on the production before working with the actors, and her description of the rehearsals agrees with Zúñiga’s idea of the production as the result of the contribution of both directors and actors.<sup>12</sup>

Sandoval and the directors express that the rehearsals would have been more fruitful if economic reasons had not restricted the time devoted to them. Zúñiga and López understand the need of the actors to accept roles in other productions, or to have other jobs in other fields simultaneously. It is important to have in mind what Caamaño says about the few opportunities that actors have in

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<sup>12</sup> “Digamos que toda la parte de poesía estética nos surge antes (la prefijamos) y al hacérsela trabajar a los actores se modifica. (Es como mezclar dos compuestos químicos con los que nunca sabes en qué proporción reaccionarán. Esa maravilla hace que el trabajo nunca sea ni de A ni de B. Sería impensable sin A + B. A veces, A + B no te gusta y tienes que plantearte otras cosas)” (Zúñiga, “Respuesta”).

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Asturias. Obviously, in this sort of production, long periods of rehearsals are crucial. *Albentestate* was the product of the careful reflection of a team, and although Nun Tris prepared this production in a month and a half, during thirty rehearsals of six hours each, the result was brilliant.

The creative process of *Albentestate* involved improvisation with kinesic and paralinguistic signs before the use of linguistic signs was incorporated. The actors would first work on paralinguistic signs addressing auditive and substantive features. The former consist of pitch, intensity, duration, articulation, emphasis, quality, rhythm, speed. The latter are intensity, time, basic frequency and format sequence in voice; and laughter, weeping and sounds that substitute for speech. Only later did they focus on the semantic meaning of the text.<sup>13</sup>

During the rehearsals, Zúñiga and López inverted the order of their work with music and movement. First, the actors listened to the music of each “esthetic poem” in order to perceive the atmosphere that the directors wanted while the text was read aloud. Then, they began to work on improvisations guided by a premise that the directors gave them, disregarding the use of verbal signs, and focusing on finding the kinesic signs that would identify their characters. For instance, the directors asked Nacho Quevedo to work on the Narrator as “el rey de los caídos [...] un ‘homeless,’ pero como un duende. Se ríe de las miserias humanas, pero siente fascinación y ternura por los seres humanos” (Zúñiga, “Albentestate 2”). The actors tried diverse movements, gestures, blockings, and Zúñiga and López selected those that they found more effective. Sandoval points out that the improvisations were recorded on videotape in order to rescue what was useful (Sandoval, “Re: Desde Asturias”).

Describing the search for her character, Sandoval explains:

[E]l gesto inicial por el que comenzó el trabajo con el personaje de Alben fue la sensibilidad en los dedos de las manos. El director me pidió que sintiera con los dedos, con las manos, que captara todo mi entorno y expresara mis emociones con los dedos. [...] Alben no ve con los ojos, sino con sus manos, y siente a través de la piel. El personaje tiene que mostrar una gran sensibilidad; de ahí todo el tema corporal. (“Re: Desde Montevideo” Oct 28 2005)

The work with kinesic signs at the earliest stage of the rehearsals is what helped

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<sup>13</sup> See Erika Fischer-Lichte’s theory on paralinguistic signs in chapter “The Actor’s Activities as a Sign.”

the actors build their characters strongly. They found what was essential in their characters, and then they worked on different situations and scenes.

Sandoval refers to the process that this search implied:

A cada uno de nosotros se nos dio una premisa; a mí, por ejemplo, que tenía que ser como una ‘membrana captadora’ [...] No sabía por dónde empezar, pero sí me quedó claro que Alben tenía que ser un ser eminentemente sensitivo y perceptivo de todo lo que sucede a su alrededor, incluso de lo más sutil. Después de estar varios días probando multitud de movimientos, un día moví los dedos de las manos como si estuviera ciega y percibiera el espacio, el aire, el sonido con los dedos, con las manos, como pequeños radares y ahí empezó realmente a existir Alben. (Sandoval, “Re: Desde Asturias”)

These initial searches were focused on finding the essence of the characters, and did not consider the specific scenes of the text.

Zúñiga maintains that immediately after having identified the necessary kinesic signs for each character, they worked on specific situations which were extremely useful in later stages of the rehearsals, when they worked on the scenes. Some of the situations which the directors suggested the cast were:

Guardián: Haciendo una guardia. Disfrutando del sol, pajaritos. Reaccionando a sonidos de potenciales peligros...

Creo: Momentos de desfile ante el pueblo. De disfrute privado. Pasando revista a sus hombres...

Narrador: Vista de depredador observando sus presas potenciales, percepción de ambientes...

EM: Su padre dormido y ella llena de amor y respeto por él (de ahí salió esa forma de usar las palmas como para acariciar) [...] (Zúñiga, “Albentestate 2”)

As the cast worked on these situations, the directors asked them to find paralinguistic signs to use in their improvisations. Later, linguistic signs were added to paralinguistic signs. Sandoval relates that, almost in the last stage of the rehearsals, the actors focused on the script, and then they incorporated their lines to the blocking.

The directors’ description of how they prepared the scene of Is and Alben is very illuminating. It is evident that Zúñiga and López wanted the actresses to find

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the heart of the scene, to which the lines and the definitive blocking could be added later:

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La escena de las dos hermanas (la primera en la tragedia de Sófocles) simplemente la planteamos como una improvisación en la que Alben estaba “poseída” por una fuerza exterior que la obligaba a pedir algo raro que daba miedo (en idioma inventado), y por otro lado Is debía comunicarle (sin decir NO) que quizás no era conveniente traer lo que pedía. (Zúñiga, “Albentestate 2”)

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Creating a language was a technique to impede that the actress could rely on the semantic content of the linguistic signs—which she would use later—to express what she wanted. It made Sandoval work harder on kinesic signs, on which she had worked from the beginning, and made her incorporate paralinguistic signs. Thus, the use of the voice followed the same pattern as the use of the body: there was a search of the essence of the voices of the characters before even considering their lines. When the actors finally worked on the specific script of *Albentestate*, they already knew their characters deeply, and could resort to a set of previous experiences. This method allowed them to obtain results which differ dramatically from the usual process of staging a play.

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Clearly, in *Albentestate* the linguistic signs are not the predominant language of the stage: the strength of the production emanates from the secondary position of the verbal language, which also acquires an unusual strength due to its limited and meaningful use. This predominance of other systems of the stage over the verbal language make the audience aware of how the message is transmitted. For this reason, the poetic function is what organizes *Albentestate*.<sup>14</sup>

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In this adaptation of *Antigone*, Zúñiga and López chose to stress the theme of the lack of compassion. They pondered the use of a device which would provide the characters with wings, which would spread in those scenes in which the characters showed lack of compassion. This visual image would present the characters as animals which swell up when fighting (Zúñiga, “Albentestate 3”). However, the lack of time to improve the device led the directors to discard this possibility which excited them. In this respect, the economic factor determined the production, for they could not afford to take the necessary time. The lack of

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<sup>14</sup> On the functions of the language see “Closing Statement: Linguistic and Poetics” and “The Dominant” by Roman Jakobson.



compassion was meaningful in the production, but owing to the absence of this projected visual image, the hug acquired a greater significance. Thus, more than pointing out both the major error of humankind and the option of the hug, *Albentestate* presented the lack of compassion but stressed even more the Narrator's proposal of the hug, which became the image of the production.

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*O jogo das máscaras.* Na foto: No segundo momento da demonstração é apresentado o jogo da máscara. Observa-se a atriz com a máscara na ação de "pegar a xícara". Não há qualquer emissão vocal, todo o caminho da ação é realizado corporalmente. O trabalho com esta máscara está associado ao universo feminino, com movimentos sinuosos e mais lentos. Ao fundo notamos alguns dos materiais da demonstração: mala, acordeon. (Oficina de trabalho com os objetos, 28/07/04). Local: Sala de trabalho, Casa Yuyachkani, Lima - Peru