Signs of Absence in Pavlovsky's "teatro de la memoria"

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Great catastrophes are always instructive.
Ernesto Sábato, *Nunca más*

During the 1980's, Argentina's military rulers were ousted, democracy was restored, and those who had daringly committed themselves to a "teatro de denuncia" suddenly found themselves without a cause. This does not mean, however, that the horrors of the 1970's and early 80's were simply put behind or that Argentine playwrights ceased to express ideological concerns, but rather that a new dramatic form had to be sought for a different political scenario. In the case of Eduardo Pavlovsky, the most prominent of Argentina's politically committed playwrights, the overt violence and cruelty of his earlier theatre gave way during the 1980's to monologue and retrospection as he struggled to prevent anyone from forgetting the abduction, torture, and disappearance of thousands of Argentineans during the so-called "Dirty War" that lasted from 1976 to 1983.[1]

In 1983, the generals fell and Pavlovsky staged a final denunciation of the regime in *El señor Laforgue*, at which point he brought to a close a cycle that he himself labelled "político-denuncia" and initiated a new cycle that might be termed "teatro de la memoria."[2] In three post-regime works of the 80's—*Potestad, Pablo*, and *Voces*—the referent is the same period of repression and terror to which he could only refer through metaphor in *El señor Laforgue*, *Cámara lenta*, and *Telarañas*. What has changed in his theatre is not the historical referent, but the retrospective filter through which he now presents it. In his most recent works, Pavlovsky focuses on those who lived to tell the story, in particular the former accomplices of the regime, who, in their present state of limbo, struggle futilely either to bury or to resurrect the past. On a barren set that conveys their current existential void, the past invades and dominates the characters' present as retrospective narration surpasses action and the invisible takes control of the visible. Indeed, absence dominates Pavlovsky's "teatro de la memoria," from the obvious case of the off-stage protagonist to the repeated theme of "el olvido" and the ultimate indeterminacy of the text.

In the prologues that Pavlovsky characteristically provides for his "propuestas," he repeatedly warns the reader that although the pages do indeed constitute a text, it is nonetheless "un texto de vacíos," whose gaps lie among the disjointed images of past and present as well as between text and historical context. Paradoxically, these "vacíos" suggest absence and at the same time offer the audience, director, and actors a multiplicity of potential meanings. Although the reader can readily concretize Pavlovsky's parade of images in her/his mind's eye, it is ultimately up to the directors and actors to "desentrañar" the text, give it life, and make these multiple meanings coalesce.[3] Pavlovsky offers what fellow dramatist Eduardo Rovner terms "un teatro de imágenes," comprised of "textos que priorizan la imagen, no sólo como punto de partida de la obra, sino también en el desarrollo de la misma, dejando que lo semántico, la idea, el mensaje, surjan del propio desarrollo de la historia que cuentan esas imágenes" (28). Only by correlating and historicizing the images, that is "reading" them within their historical context, can either the reader or the spectator formulate the missing link between personal memory and historical reality, and thereby uncover the ideology that is, according to Patrice Pavis, "'textualized,' absorbed into the work in the form of a discursive referent" (130).

In *Ideology*, Terry Eagleton establishes the multivalence of the term "ideology" by offering a random list of sixteen definitions, which range from the compatible to the contradictory. Four of these definitions relate particularly well to Pavlovsky's conception of the dramatic text as a form of ideological discourse: "a body of ideas characteristic of a particular social group or class; forms of thought motivated by social interests; the conjuncture of discourse and power; and the medium in which conscious social actors make sense of their world" (2). In this case, the "body of ideas" pertain to a group of artists and writers who daringly opposed the military regime and who now refuse to let those years fade into common oblivion. In contrast to the prevailing "politics of amnesia," Pavlovsky resurrects the past and forces his audience to remember and to grapple with a painful history that it might well prefer to forget. Indeed, the ambiguity, vagueness, and fragmentation of the on-stage images compel the audience to make sense not only of the plays but also of its own memories, which are likewise increasingly hazy and equivocal. Ultimately, the dramatic text and the strategies that it requires of the reader or spectator allow both Pavlovsky and his audience, as "conscious social actors," to "make sense" of their world, both past and present.

Yet despite Pavlovsky's status as an avowed Marxist and the clear-cut ideological slant of texts like *El señor Galíndez* and *El señor Laforgue*, his most recent works are increasingly ambiguous, a fact that has made their performance a source of increasing debate. In leaving his plays open to distinct ideological

interpretations, he also leaves open the possibility that the spectator will identify with the point of view of the oppressor and even condone the process of victimization that unfolds onstage (Feitlowitz and Taylor). As the dramatist states in a recent interview, "in my art, I am not interested in clarity, but ambiguity. I want the spectator to feel a certain confusion, for him to be unsure of what he's seeing" (Feitlowitz 70). Consequently, in Pavlovsky's theatre of the 80's, the ideology, or "action-oriented set of beliefs," is not immediately clear but rather the clarification toward which the spectator struggles to arrive amidst the sparseness, ambiguity, and absence that characterize the texts (Eagleton 2). Yet no matter how equivocal the final message may be, Pavlovsky's theatre is undeniably political. Ultimately, the "action" toward which he directs us is not the opposition to dominant ideology, for the generals have already fallen, but rather the simple act of remembering a history that may be over but not unrepeatable.

In discussing the relationship that exists among the production, reception, and social context of a dramatic text, Patrice Pavis concords with the three levels of reality proposed by Roman Ingarden: 1) objects discursively referred to but not shown on stage; 2) objects shown directly but not discursively referred to; and 3) objects referred to and shown on stage (122). With regard to the first category, which dominates Pavlovsky's most recent theatre, Pavis explains further that these objects are "not shown on stage, except 'negatively,' by their absence, and by the emotive impact they may have on what is made visible (actors, decor, etc.). Such 'objects,' then, are never made tangible; their function is to convey signifieds and their significance is the link between them and the visible action of the play" (122). In *Potestad*, *Pablo*, and *Voces*, these invisible objects invade and dominate the domain as well as the dialogue/monologue of the on-stage characters. While the object referred to might be an off-stage person, action, or even a relationship, all such references pertain to the past, an unshakable past that continually infiltrates the characters' present. Since these objects/beings are never physically present on stage, they must be concretized in the mind of the audience, who must also determine the link between them and that which is visibly present. The dynamic of these three texts owes to the primacy of the absent sign and to the consequent interplay between on-stage space and off-stage space and between the space of the past, which is entirely diegetic, and the space of the present, which is governed by the presence of the actors and their gestures. Due to the spare, sketchy nature of the "propuestas" as well as to their underlying ideology, the characters themselves ultimately emerge not as authentic beings, but rather as metaphors of the conflict between past and present and between the forces of memory and oblivion.

Written and premiered in 1985, *Potestad* is a moving testimony to Argentina's reign of terror and its aftermath, when the tables were turned and the victimizers suddenly found themselves at the mercy of their former victims. In this powerful monologue, words dominate actions and the absent past controls the present as a middle-aged man obsessively recalls and attempts to reconstruct the abduction of his young daughter.[4] The text is almost entirely diegetic, for the "action" is confined to one virtually barren set, a single character, and a single act, which is the verbalized and pantomimed recreation of Adriana's disappearance. Indeed, the virtual absence of mimetic action is itself a sign of the existential vacuum in which the father presently subsists.

Although the grieving father is accompanied onstage by his faithful friend, Tita, she barely looks at him or responds as he struggles to reproduce every detail of the kidnapping:

> *El hombre detrás de dos sillas, mirando hacia el público.*
> Sábado, tres y media de la tarde.
> Yo estoy sentado acá (*Señala la silla derecha.*), Ana María, mi mujer, está sentada acá . . . (*Señala la silla izquierda.*)
> Más o menos a un metro treinta, un metro treinta y cinco del vértice de la pata izquierda del sillón, está sentada mi hija Adriana. (*Señala el lugar donde está sentada Adriana con el pie derecho.*)
> La posición física de cada uno de los miembros de la familia es importante en la medida en que la posición física describe, evoca, sugiere, la relación entre los miembros de la familia, el tipo de vínculo existente entre ellos. (25)

Through the scientifically exact reproduction of certain gestures and postures, the father tries to recapture the past and through it his daughter. Yet he has lost not only Adriana, but also his youthful vigor and his intimate relationship with his wife, who now literally tunes him out with a set of head phones. In his study on discourse as performance, Michael Issacharoff discusses the politics of stage space and the relationship between the on-stage and the off-stage. As he explains, space itself is a semiotic system, wherein the off-stage typically pertains to the past while the on-stage refers to the present (70). Although *Potestad* would seem to be almost entirely diegetic due to its persistent reference to the past, off-stage and on-stage sign systems, past and present, gradually merge as the father enacts a frenzied pantomime of his narrated memories. The only props are two chairs, which the man alternately joins and separates as signs of past and present, of previous family intimacy and his current loneliness and alienation.

The receiver grants unreserved pity and compassion to the father as he directs toward the audience his excruciatingly detailed description and pantomime of Adriana's disappearance. Yet in the final moments of the monologue, he undergoes an abrupt transformation into what the stage directions prescribe as "un burdo personaje fascista" (42). Before the curtain falls, he recalls Adriana's appearance in their life and, in so doing, discloses that he is not her real father or even her legitimate adoptive father, but rather a doctor formerly employed by the regime to certify the death of its victims. In this particular case, the so-called "fanáticos" left behind a baby, whom the doctor took home to his barren wife. In a dramatic shift of perspective, "la época de antes" now refers clearly to the military regime and the "disappearance" that the "father" laments is indeed the restoration of Adriana to her true family. The audience suddenly realizes that the stranger is not a kidnapper, but rather the rightful father previously left for dead. Meanwhile, the blood that literally covers the face of the usurper both signs and assigns guilt to its proper owner. As a result of this final metamorphosis, Pavlovsky's deeper ideological concerns—the *indulto*, or pardon of the torturers and their accomplices, and the re-writing of history—lie buried until the final curtain.

In the absence of Adriana and of all that gave meaning and purpose to his life, the father clings to the memory of certain postures and gestures, which he describes and reenacts throughout the text. His activity of contextualizing these minute movements and thus extracting their tragic significance parallels that of the receiver, who, after the father's grotesque transformation, re-contextualizes the work from a completely different perspective and finally understands the true tragedy of the situation, which is, of course, not the final disappearance of Adriana but rather the father's incapacity to recognize his own guilt and responsibility.

In the "prólogo," Pavlovsky explains the historical source of *Potestad* as being "una nueva raza de médicos torturadores [que] nació durante la dictadura. Todos están libres" (15). Yet while this particular man may be legally free, he will be imprisoned and tortured for life by the memory of Adriana. Pavlovsky also notes that while *Potestad*, like his earlier plays, portrays repression from the viewpoint of the repressor, the bereaved father is not like Beto or Pepe of *El señor Galíndez*, but rather "más sofisticado, más científico, más 'ambiguo.' Puede estar al lado nuestro, usar el mismo lenguaje, tener las mismas costumbres, se nos puede meter en todos nuestros intersticios" (13). This professional side of the repression was all the more frightening because of their "invisibility," their apparent normality. Proof of the extent of this ambiguity is the grieving father's success in portraying himself as the victim. As the title suggests, *Potestad* is indeed about power, not only the power of a pathological mind to twist our

perception of history, but also the insidious power of the past to infiltrate and dominate the present.

Pavlovsky's second post-regime play, *Pablo*, is a complex and obscure text that signals absence from the title onward. Pablo himself never appears but rather exists solely through the memories shared among the onstage characters: two men named simply L. and V. and a woman, Irina. It is difficult to propose an identity for Pablo, for the characters' references to him are ambiguous and at times even contradictory. Pablo is at once an absent referent and a metonymy for the entire text, which is likewise spare, ambiguous, and ultimately indeterminate.

In the opening scene, V. arrives by train from a place only vaguely referred to as "allá," purportedly on behalf of Pablo. Yet despite V.'s detailed description of L.'s former friendship with Pablo, L. not only disclaims any knowledge of Pablo but refuses to discuss the past: "nadie habla de lo que pasó. La gente no molesta a nadie con sus recuerdos. Lo pasado pisado" (63). Nonetheless, in the closing scene, L. confesses that although he loved Pablo, he had to kill him as part of "el procedimiento," a term that vaguely suggests the institutionalized liquidation of the opposition. In similar fashion, V. has come to carry out the execution of L., but on the orders of L. himself. Before obeying this command and gassing L. to death, V. tortures him with memories of Pablo and of the days when his life had meaning and purpose. In a room stripped of all but a hanging bed and two trapezes, L. readily admits, "Me siento vacío [. . .] me aburro . . . [de] este tedio infernal, esta sobrevivencia estúpida sin acción" (65). To fill this existential void, L. observes through small holes in the window the movements of those who surround him. It is significant that in all three of these plays, the former victimizers combat inertia and the purposelessness of their current existence by contextualizing and thus creating meaning for the minute and trivial gestures performed by themselves and others.

The interrelationship among L., V., and Irina is a highly condensed metaphor of the struggle between memory and oblivion, wherein Pablo, the absent referent, represents all that Argentineans have struggled either to forget or to remember. While Irina and V. continuously refer to Pablo to remind L. of his own past, the latter sees no point in remembering anything:

> ¿Por qué volver siempre sobre el pasado? El pasado es una cosa muerta. He aprendido a enterrar todo lo que no sea inmediato. Sólo recuerdo lo que atañe a mi sobrevivencia. [. . .]
> No me interesa saber quién fui. [. . .]

> Pude haber sido aquel . . . pude haber estado allá. Pude haber sido amigo de . . . Pude haber pensado así . . . ¿qué importancia tiene? (83-84)

Despite L.'s refusal to engage in memories, he readily recognizes the *vacío*, the absence of meaning in his present existence, and for this same reason has ordered his own execution. In short, a life without a past is a life without a future.

Pablo is obscure, suggestive, at times surrealistic, and at best ambiguous. Ana Seoane aptly describes the performance text as a series of unresolved dichotomies: "Torturado y torturador, desaparecido y testigo, olvido y memoria, son los laterales que como dos constantes paralelas se acercan sin lograr tocarse" (10). The disjointed fragments of dialogue, monologue, and personal memories offer but a string of "vacíos." Under a shroud of ambiguity, neither the role nor the meaning of the absent Pablo is ever clear. He is at the same time dead and alive, a dear old friend and a total stranger. He is no one and everyone. As the final curtain closes, V. releases the deadly gas and states "Sos uno de tantos de una serie irreconocible," to which L. merely but significantly responds "Pablo" (94). Ultimately, Pablo is history itself, the connecting point for three disconnected individuals, and an invisible yet forceful reminder of an unforgettable past.

In *Voces*, of 1989, two voices search and at times intersect on an otherwise empty stage, as two characters resurrect the past in an effort to comprehend and to dominate their present relationship. While the two characters are presumably present onstage, they are, as Marguerite Feitlowitz states, "embodied in their words" (61). The visible is virtually displaced by the invisible and the absent as a man and a woman evoke actions, words, and spaces from the past.[5] More than the story of El and Ella, the text is a highly poeticized metaphor of the ideological struggle of the 70's and early 80's, here contextualized in the personal relationship between former victimizer and victim. El and Ella are at once lovers and enemies, he a former member of the military regime and she one of his former victims. Just as the political tide has turned, so has the relationship between victim and victimizer, as Ella takes control of her former torturer.

Like *Potestad*, *Voces* opens with a monologue and a long string of apparently meaningless gestures:

> (*Mientras habla debe realizar todos los movimientos sugeridos en el texto*). Mirando al frente. Tal vez de perfil. Ahora me miro la mano. Giro la cabeza hacia la derecha, ahora hacia la izquierda, puedo mirar otra vez al frente. Pausa. No. Tengo que hacer algo [. . .] Trato de que cada gesto tenga sentido, quiero decir que adquiera una dimensión

> de espontaneidad. No quiero huecos. [. . .] Lustrada de zapatos en el pantalón. Necesito más actos. Todo como si fuera normal. El tiempo se detuvo. Un bostezo, otro bostezo, una peinadita, rascada de frente, golpecito de talón en el piso. [. . .] Me distraigo un rato. Vuelvo al vacío. (9-10)

In this case, however, El is not recalling past gestures but rather performing new ones to fill the vacuum of his present existence. Through these actions, however trivial, El attempts to regain a sense of control and to provide his life a semblance of meaning. While he laments his inability to explain his actions, either past or present, he makes it abundantly clear that he feels no remorse whatsoever: "Sólo puedo decir que soy absolutamente responsable de todo, de absolutamente nada me arrepiento, porque mis actos son lo único donde puedo encontrar algún sentido" (11).

More than a dialogue, the characters' discourse consists of an intense series of alternating monologues, through which the characters vie for control of their present relationship. In this ritualistic struggle, El and Ella attempt to recapture the intensity, both personal and political, of the past historical moment and therein the intensity that marked the beginning of their relationship. Yet, while his dependence on Ella is abundantly clear, her feelings toward him are ambiguous, hovering between complicity and resistance. Although she implies that she has found pleasure in their physical relationship, at the same time she focuses on the political circumstances that brought them together and tortures him with reminders of his former role as interrogator and torturer. In the only physical action prescribed in the written text, Ella grabs him tightly by the neck and demands that he continue with this "juego":

> (*Se levanta. Lo agarra del cuello fuertemente.*)
> ¿Querés un vaso de agua? ¿Tenés sed?
> ¿nos detenemos o continuamos? [. . .]
> tenemos que volver a las intensidades
> volver a recordar todo segundo a segundo con nuestros cuerpos
> que no se olvide nada
> nada de nada [. . .]
> es tan fácil olvidar (18-19)
> [. . .]
> ¿Te ahogo, te hago mal, pasa el aire?
> ¿la tráquea resiste todavía?
> ¿cuántos ahogados?
> Ahora sí estamos juntos, ¿cuántos con la cabeza en el barro?

¿sin poder respirar?
cuerpos desnudos, mutilados, ahora sí estamos juntos
ahora sí, ahora sí.
Podemos recordar juntos, ¿estás de acuerdo? (*lo suelta*) (20)

Despite her physical submission, Ella uses silence, just as she did under torture and interrogation, to deny him full possession of her. While her silence cannot be viewed as a victory for her sex in general nor for the many who were forcefully silenced during the Dirty War, it is nonetheless a powerful weapon in her invisible, personal struggle against her former victimizer.[6] Specifically, she condemns him to anonymity by refusing to use his name either to address him or to denounce him, as former accomplices of the regime are brought to justice. Consequently, she denies him both an identity and a place in both history and in her/story. The power of her silence becomes clear when he begs for recognition:

te pido que digas la verdad
que cuentes lo que te hice
lo necesito para mí
es mi triunfo (27)

Rather than grant him his request, Ella "imprisons" him in an empty cell of silence:

querés ser héroe como todos los demás orgullosos otra vez de lo que hicieron
orgullosos de andar sueltos desafiando y acechando siempre [. . .]
ese va a ser tu pequeño tormento te conozco bien es la única manera
de estar prisionero no voy a hablar
no te conozco sos irreconocible uno más de todos (28-29)

This last line in particular echoes V.'s parting shot at L. before releasing the deadly gas: "Sos uno de tantos de una serie irreconocible" (94). Like many of those who forever escaped persecution with the 1987 "ley del olvido," El, like the would-be father of *Potestad* and Pablo's executioner, and as one of the anonymous "tantos," will forever suffer the emptiness and meaninglessness of the present moment.

Like *Pablo*, *Voces* is dense, poetic, and filled with suggestive gaps. Although it portrays a specific, personal relationship, the very absence of communication between El and Ella is a sign of the gap that continues to exist not only between right and left but also between Argentina's past and present, as

the survivors of the 70's struggle throughout the 80's to blot out the past and forget their role in the making of a dark history. In response to those who have criticized Pavlovsky for his persistent and seemingly obsessive treatment of this particular moment in history, he and his wife and acting partner, Susana Evans, insist that "work like this keeps the theme present. There's the danger of people wanting to forget about what happened. There's a sector of the public saying, 'Again with torture. Enough already. Let's talk about something else'" (Feitlowitz 71). Like Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo and the unforgettable report on the *desaparecidos*, *Nunca más*, Pavlovsky foregrounds the very act of remembering and thus prevents the memories of Argentina's darkest decade from ever being silenced, forgotten, or repeated.

In his study of violence on the Latin American stage, Severino João Albuquerque discusses the portrayal of verbal and physical cruelty during times of severe repression and censorship. Although Argentina has shifted from dictatorship to democracy, Pavlovsky continues to eschew mimetic representation and to "represent the unrepresentable," as Albuquerque terms it, through metaphor, the innuendo of ambiguous verbal discourse, and diegesis. The primacy of word over action and of the absent over the present now owes, however, not to the threat of censorship and/or torture, but to Pavlovsky's drive as psychiatrist, actor, and author to delve into the memory and into the minds of those who contributed invisibly to Argentina's all-but-invisible Dirty War.[7] Consequently, we perceive the past through the blurry lens of a repressor who has either purposely forgotten his role in history or distorted it into that of victim. Lest we should all forget, Pavlovsky offers this "teatro de la memoria," in which he successfully combines present and past, the visible and the invisible, ideology and aesthetic vision.

The physical violence, scatology, and black humor of Pavlovsky's earlier theatre have been replaced by monologue, despair, and oblique references to a not-so-distant past. He now concerns himself not only with the changing relationship between victim and victimizer but also with the latter's relationship with her/his past. From the grief-filled monologue of *Potestad* to the disjointed and unpunctuated discourse of *Voces*, Pavlovsky experiments with the power and politics of memory and language to resurrect and/or rewrite the past and engrave it forever in the collective memory. Although his recent plays are relatively subjective, timeless, and indeterminate, these factors do not necessarily preclude political commitment, for the sign, however personal and/or oblique, is always, as Pavis reminds us, "subordinate to the social and historical situation of its use" (125). In formulating an aesthetic ideolology for Argentine playwrights of the 80's, Pelletieri highlights the ultimate transparency of the metaphor: "[los dramaturgos] concretan una metáfora de la realidad que termina siendo

transparente para un público que tiene su mismo referente" ("El sonido" 7). Accordingly, by historicizing the text, contextualizing the characters' discourse, and filling the gaps, the reader or spectator recognizes the characters' existential limbo as a metaphorical façade for the political limbo in which Argentina found itself following the fall of the regime and the tenuous restoration of democracy. In the absence of an authentic present existence, words substitute for genuine action as the former accomplices of the regime cling desperately to remanent images of their past.

In Pavlovsky's most recent theatre, the invisible no longer serves, as it did in *El señor Laforgue* and *El señor Galíndez*, to terrorize and control, but rather as an absent, evocative, and ultimately irretrievable referent. History, as it occurred, can never be regained, for in its writing it is re-written and thus forever transformed. Diana Taylor observes in *The Theatre of Crisis* that theatricality "is not simply what we see but a way of controlling vision, of making the invisible visible, the visible invisible" (4). Pavlovsky controls the vision of his own public by relying on an invisible referent, through which he instills in the audience the desire to "see" a fading past that many Argentineans would otherwise gladly leave buried. In a separate study, Taylor notes that some Argentinean critics have criticized Pavlovsky for being "monomaniacal on the subject, that he insists on belaboring a period that is dead and buried" ("Spectacular Bodies" 6). The period is, hopefully, dead, but it is obviously far from being buried. In *Potestad*, *Pablo*, and *Voces*, Pavlovsky combats what might be termed a "politics of amnesia," an invisible force most concretely represented in the *indulto* recently granted to the nine Junta generals. His own "politics of memory" is at once textually conveyed in the characters' memories of the recent past and at the same time contextualized in a present moment and in a political situation entirely unlike that of the previous decade. Yet it is highly significant that these three plays were written during a period that Pelletieri identifies as "la decadencia del Presidente Alfonsín," wherein the military staged an attempt, albeit unsuccessful, to regain control, and "la ley del olvido" virtually forgave and forgot the crimes of those who had not been brought to justice.[8] Indeed, Pavlovsky suggests the possibility of history repeating itself when the blood-covered "father" of *Potestad* closes his monologue not with remorse but rather with the frightening certainty that things will soon return to "normal:" "Si las cosas siguen así, dentro de muy poco, vamos a estar juntos otra vez los tres . . ." (45). Thus, by foregrounding the process of memory, Pavlovsky's theatre, like Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo's silent weekly march, continues

to be tacitly political in its painful evocation of the absent and of the not-so-distant and not unrepeatable past.

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Notes

1. As an avowed leftist and a prominent member of the daring Teatro Abierto group that lasted from 1981 to 1986, Pavlovsky was eventually forced to stage his own "disappearance." Shortly after *Telarañas* was banned from the stage in 1977, the actor/author/psychiatrist literally escaped with his life through a back window and went into exile in Spain, where he remained until July of 1980.

2. Due to the fragmented structure, ambiguity, and obliqueness of his plays, Pavlovsky's works are better understood as part of a given cycle, as he himself explains in a 1985 interview and with regard to *El señor Laforgue*: "La obra mía es la suma de mis obras, no la perfección de esta obra" (Giella 61). To date, these cycles include an experimental cycle heavily influenced by Beckett and Pinter (1962-1969), a highly politicized, yet still avant-garde cycle that ended with *El señor Laforgue* (1982), and the current cycle of "teatro de la memoria."

3. Pavlovsky stands out among Latin-American playwrights in the primacy that he grants the stage performance over the written text, which he frequently refers to as a "propuesta" rather than a completed work. In an interview with Marguerite Feitlowitz, he frankly admits, "acting, not writing, is my passion. What excites me about the theatre is the way a text can be transformed" (70). With regard to *Pablo*, he writes: "Estoy convencido de que hay varias posibles lecturas . . . que no dependen de la mayor o menor agudeza del lector . . . o del crítico . . . sino del 'desentrañamiento' que director y actores deseosos de trabajar el material, re-descubran. No será entonces la mirada del lector la que dará vida a la versión de *Pablo*. Sino la del grupo de director-actores que atraviesen la letra" (*Pablo* 54). Furthermore, Pavlovsky believes that the written text at once suggests and imprisons its many potential meanings. In a work as ambiguous, oblique, and stripped-down as *Pablo* or *Voces*, the text is clearly incomplete as well as indeterminate in the absence of the actual performance. Indeed, as I point out below in notes 5 and 6, the performance of *Voces* turned out to be a significant and polemical departure from the written text.

4. Although it is a well-known fact that children were among the *desaparecidos*, very few artists have dared to tackle such an emotionally charged subject. While *La historia oficial* first carried the subject to the screen, *Potestad* was the first theatrical treatment of "los niños desaparecidos." The play has received considerable critical acclaim, both for the unusual perspective it provides of the repression and for Pavlovsky's outstanding performance, and has been staged in many countries, including Brazil, Uruguay, Spain, Canada, England, Cuba, Colombia, and the U.S.. As usual, Pavlovsky plays the leading role and is accompanied on stage by his wife, actress/dancer Susana Evans.

5. As part of the transformation from text to stage, *Voces* was retitled *Paso de dos*. Since its premiere in 1990, *Paso de dos* has enjoyed a long run and packed houses in Buenos Aires and has been the source of much critical and political debate. As Marguerite Feitlowitz notes, the public's fascination with the play owes to a combination of its highly controversial topic (the love and complicity between torturer and victim), its graphic representation of sex and violence, and what she terms "Argentina's erotic fascination with repression" (71). The roles of El and Ella were played by Pavlovsky and Susana Evans, with the addition of a third actor, Stella Galazzi, who played Ella's voice. In a forthcoming essay, Diana Taylor details and questions the considerable gap that lies

between the text of *Voces* and the staged version, *Paso de dos*. As she effectively demonstrates, the violence that is verbalized through spoken memories in *Voces* is in *Paso de dos* physically and graphically enacted onstage, whereupon El rapes, beats, and ultimately kills Ella in a mud-filled tub. In this brutal and seemingly capricious on-stage violence, Taylor notes a "contradiction between Pavlovsky's politics and his practice," for in the performance he ironically seems to condone and even indulge in the very same phallocentric, authoritarian discourse that the written text would appear to condemn (20). Based on the observations made by Taylor and Feitlowitz, the performance text is clearly more ambiguous and puzzling than the published text and therefore produces a different reception and "reading" in its receiver. Although my own comments will be limited to the written text, one can never ignore, particularly in the case of Pavlovsky, the free rein of the directors, actors, and even the author himself to transform the text.

6. In her critique of the performance, Taylor discusses the effect produced by the splitting of Ella into voice and body. In her words, "the play tells two stories; one about erotic intensity; the other about criminal politics" (14). Although Pavlovsky insisted both to Taylor and to Feitlowitz that the woman "wins," both critics agree that what finally "wins" in terms of lasting impressions is not the marginalized, literally off-stage voice that denies El an identity, but rather the visual image of the naked, mud-covered, dead woman who before her demise enjoys the erotic intensity of her own victimization. Ultimately, as Taylor states, "by separating the voice from the body Pavlovsky reaffirms two deadly stereotypes—the voiceless woman and the bodiless victim" (14). In either case, the divided Ella of the performed *Paso de dos* seems far from victorious.

7. By extension, the Dirty War itself could be considered within the concept of invisibility, for most of those who disappeared became invisible, so to speak, under the invisible cover of the night. Pavlovsky has effectively portrayed the invisibility of the repression itself in *El señor Galíndez*, wherein the title character, he who controls the hidden operation, becomes all the more terrifying to victims and victimizers alike because he is unseen and at the same time omnipresent. For a more detailed analysis of the relationship between the visible and the invisible, the onstage and the offstage, and how it relates to the more general question of text vs. performance, see Bixler, "Toward a Reconciliation of Text and Performance: How to 'Read' *El señor Galíndez*."

8. Pelletieri provides a brief historical outline and socio-political context for his analysis of the Argentine theatre of the 1980's:

1980-83:	la dictadura en todos sus matices
1983- :	la recuperación de la democracia
1983-86:	Alfonsín presidente
1986-89:	la decadencia de Alfonsín. ("El sonido" 3)

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