

# I Want Justice: A Performance About Impunity in Argentina

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*This performance is about the effects of impunity on subjectivity. It was produced in commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the return of democracy in Argentina in 2003. This commemoration coincides with international concern created about the freedom of the repressors of the last military dictatorship in Argentina, the petition of extradition, and its rejection by the Argentinean Supreme Court. Written during a doctoral seminar on social interaction at the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign, the author uses multiple literary, theoretical, and artistic sources as intertextual references to construct an autobiographical, explorative piece that spins around collective memory as a practice of social justice. The author suggests the historical impact of the dictatorship on Argentinean culture and subjectivity should be linked to previous historical massacres and traumas, which are then re-signified or recoded in light of the disappearance of 30,000 people during the period 1976 to 1983 in Argentina.*

**Keywords:** *state terrorism; Argentina; justice; homosexuality; impunity*

Argentina, says the poet, it is not love that unites us, but fright.<sup>1</sup> This piece wants to give tribute to those who died, those who survived, and to those who speak within us, beyond us.

*Where do the disappeared go?  
Search in the water and in the thickets  
And why is it that they get disappeared?  
Why is it that we aren't all equal?  
And when does the disappeared return?  
Every time that is brought to mind*

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*How to speak to one who is disappeared?  
With a tightening feeling from within.*

From "Desapariciones" by Rubén Blades (1999)<sup>2</sup>

Early on in my life it was already too late<sup>3</sup>  
I have always had the impression I never come to places in the right time  
Punctual, yes  
In time, never  
Dislocated from myself, split in fragments  
I am constrained to reconstruct my self over and over,  
I do not rest

An awkward composition of scattered memories,  
I cannot think of my self in unison

Between me and myself there is an irrecoverable ominous silence

Moments that are truth, are also written in my own language

I translate them over and over in my mind  
Characters creating themselves,  
They wear masks

At the age of six  
My parents send me to psychotherapy  
There, I draw my family in a circle, at the request of my doctor  
I remain excluded from this circle  
I draw myself outside  
I draw myself without eyes  
Later, in the consulting room, I choose to invent other versions of me  
in malleable clay  
The doctor summons my parents to an appointment  
A meeting from which I never knew anything about  
But that it is they who need treatment, not me

I am eight years old now, and it is too late again  
My parents send me to a British school to study English  
Because they want me to be bilingual  
Off we go that morning  
The maid, her son and me  
That morning I do not talk, I just say a couple of words that  
I will regret forever  
I will complain about the bus, about the people in the bus  
About the colored people in the bus  
There is silence after what I say,  
An impossible shadow cast on me at noon  
To recover this solely memory, it took me years of struggle against myself

Off we go that day, holding hands, the maid, her son and me  
In a public bus to school  
He goes to the school across the street  
It is a public school  
In my school we will learn, that day, the names of the aborigines  
They are the people in the bus  
Chiriguanos;  
Chorotes;  
Chulupies;  
Diaguitas;  
Guaranies;  
Kollas;  
Mapuches;  
Mocovies;  
Pilagas;  
Tapietes;  
Tehuelches;  
Tobas;  
Wichi  
We would never learn that day what happened to them  
How they were tortured and converted and killed and forgotten  
And so it is only today that I learn that at the age of eight I fell for Nahuel  
The Mapuche

My class is in English  
A language I never learnt

I am ten years old now, and it is too early  
But I, nevertheless, desire  
I desire him  
An aboriginal "he"  
I cross the street that separates both schools  
This is my first international flight  
It is 1982, and there is the Malvinas War<sup>4</sup> going on  
Those who were not touched by death are coming back  
We, the defeated, receive these children in silence, in the middle  
of the night, in shame  
To recover this sole memory, it took us years of struggle against ourselves

Speechless  
These are the children denied, abjected,<sup>5</sup> excluded from the family, without eyes  
They cannot put in words the shadow of silence that falls upon them  
in the middle of the night

I am thirteen years old now  
I finish primary school  
And give my primary kiss,  
Or is it him, Nahuel, who kisses me?

Later that day  
I want to stop time  
Break the watches  
Cancel their tick-tocks  
I want to drain the rain  
Open the skies  
Look down  
And Cry and Shout  
My love has died<sup>6</sup>  
In the hands of his father  
Was it too early for me to love?  
Or is it you Argentina, with your labyrinth of classes and races  
and peoples and hearts  
Broken

I am not white in Buenos Aires,  
Nor are our brothers and sisters from  
Bolivia, or from Peru or from anywhere else  
I see they are selling red peppers in the street  
Buenos Aires, do you still believe that you are European?

The next five years I go disguised  
I wear my body in clothes that do not fit me

The school uniform my mother irons every day  
Is cashmere, the shirt is Dior

Unarticulated  
Sometime later that year  
My father loses everything  
During the 1989 economic crisis  
My mother's private yoga lessons are the first to be cancelled  
And I find a job selling perfumes

He, my father, lies on the couch for days  
He says he is going to throw himself under a train

The fridge, like a body full of organs, is sectioned,<sup>7</sup> operated on  
There are cabinets with food rationed for each day of the week  
But rice is all there is

Sometimes, when I get a good commission I make it home with French Baguette,  
My father's favorite

I am twenty years old now  
I write an essay for my class on human rights  
My parents had to sell their wedding rings to pay the debts  
I am a student at the public university  
In class we study the 1976-1983 dictatorship  
The repression tortured, killed and made disappear 30,000 people

They took their bodies and split them in parts, choosing to leave alive the victim,  
Their organs exposed  
They are the children without eyes  
Their speech suspended  
Those who participated in the repression will never be punished  
And those who survived reinvented themselves;  
They wear ten thousand plateaus of masks

I am thirty years old now,  
It is too late again  
I exclude my self again and travel to the US  
To take classes in an American University  
Although I am not sure of what that means  
Again, it feels like being dislocated, in time and space, split in fragments  
Like being under-medicated with three pills a day

I  
There is a distorted reflection of me on the surface of every mirror  
And I have three American coupons in my hand  
To buy the world

Now I know  
Speaking another language is difficult  
But articulating one's voice is even more so  
To say things that matter, and to keep quiet in the right time  
No to care for coherence  
To care for remembrance  
I am constrained to reconstruct my self over and over,  
Put together scattered pieces of my country  
My people  
Our memory  
My Obsession

To stop being me  
And become other voices  
The voices of the survivors  
I am aware this is an impossible mission  
And that is why I should try

Changing this piece one thousand times, writing it in madness,  
Leaving it with missing spaces  
As our history is

I want the identity of the missing ones to be recovered  
Otherwise I am missing too

I want to hear the voice of the survivors  
From hell  
Shouting

I want justice

Like the poet,<sup>8</sup> I want to reinvent the world after the disappearance of the world  
 And after one has disappeared in the world as well  
 Try to interlace memories  
 That which is all that is left  
 Put the Impossible to the test  
 And see if it resists

## NOTES

1. In reference to Jorge L. Borges's poem "Buenos Aires."
2. Original lyrics in Spanish; translation by author.
3. This beginning is in reference to the opening lines in Margarite Dura's "The Lover."
4. Also known as "the Falklands" war.
5. In reference to Julia Kristeva's (1980) famous notion of abjection.
6. These lines are in reference to the poem "Song IX" by W. H. Auden included in his *Twelve Songs*.
7. In reference to a painting by Frida Khalo.
8. In reference to "Poesía Vertical" by the Argentinean poet Juan Juarroz.

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