



Ghent University Research Center Studies in Performing Arts and Media

in collaboration with The Research Center for Visual Poetics Antwerp

# Occupy Antigone

## Tradition, Transition and Transformation in Performance

International conference on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of March 2014

in Ghent, Belgium, Europe

Occupy Antigone? Occupation (with regard to the occupy-movement) can be understood as an act of seizing a certain object, usurping it, collectively using it in a different way and hence giving new meaning to it. Something the Performing Arts do, especially since the evolvement of postdramatic theatre. Ancient tragedies and texts did not disappear from the postdramatic stage but often speak a language of deconstruction. The idea behind the Occupy-movement, which started 2011 at the Wallstreet, broadly speaking was to globally join forces to address and change obvious imbalances.

Although research on re-stagings of ancient tragedies has continually increased within Theatre Studies, analyses of the performances of *Antigone* are still significantly underrepresented. This research gap stands in sharp contrast to the boom in studies on *Antigone* (see literature below) since Judith Butler's crucial study *Antigone's Claim. Kinship Between Life & Death* was published in 2000. Scholars of a variety of fields other than Theatre Studies have been very occupied with *Antigone* (taking her theoretically hostage) trying to set free her essential "truth".

Within the German-speaking humanities, and particularly under the influence of Georg Wilhelm Hegel's famous interpretation, *Antigone* marks the conflicting transition from an ethics of the family and divine law to an ethics of the state and humanism (Hegel 1807). Since Hegel's account, the story of *Antigone* has been read in a great number of contradictory ways. In 1984, George Steiner published an influential analysis of the *Antigone* myth in various artistic, cultural and intellectual fields. Therein, the author shows *Antigone* as "object of obsession from the end of the eighteenth century until the present" (Meltzer 2011, 169).

The interpretations of the *Antigone* myth and of Sophocles' tragedy are remarkably contradictory when it comes to *Antigone's* kinship relations. While the Hegelian tradition places the emphasis on *Antigone's* relation to her dead brother, more contemporary analyses of the text take a closer look at her forgotten sister *Ismene* (Honig 2011, Goldhill 2006). *Antigone* desires her father/brother (*Oedipus*) and her fiancé; she acts on behalf of her mother, on behalf of or against her sister, or on behalf of her dead brother. Further inconsistencies can be found in how the antique heroine is situated in terms of her religious stance, politics and gender role. In addition, she embodies the transition from life to death.

*Antigone* performances are an exceptionally rich field of research for performance analysis. First, and most significantly, there is an immense amount of material from the boom of re-stagings of ancient tragedies since the 1980s, and contemporary stagings of *Antigone* are found in Europe, the Americas, Asia, Africa and India. For example, *Antigone* adaptations have told the story of the founding of the nation of Ghana (Kamu Brathwait's *Odale's Choice*, Ghana 1962), and critiqued the neo-colonialism at the turn of the century (Femi Osofisan's *Tegonni*, Nigeria 1999). The forbidden burial of one's kin provides a number of points of connection for Latin American versions of *Antigone*, i.e. due to the abduction of civilians by the military regime in Argentina in the 1970s and early 1980s, (José Watanabe's *Antigoná* 2000 and Griselda Gambo's *Antígona Furiosa* 1986). In Postcolonial contexts the occupation of the cultural assets of the occupier often plays a significant role in negotiating colonial legacies. Despite the heightened presence of ancient tragedies in the arts, both Theatre Studies and Performance Studies research on *contemporary* performances of *Antigone* are still at the very beginning.

In English-language research, there is only *one* anthology (published in June 2011), which examines the socio-historical and political aspects in the texts and performances of *Antigone* from around the world. We would hence like to invite you to occupy *Antigone* and demonstrate (on) the crossroads of philosophy and performance.

***In the following we introduce four themes as open sets of guiding questions. We are furthermore especially interested in lectures on Antigones (performances, theories, considerations ...) from different parts of the world, contexts and cultural/ religious traditions.***

### **1) Antigone's (transformed) Heritage**

What have been the links between philosophy, art and performance and the figure of Antigone in the past? Which are the relations today? Within which philosophical frameworks do we encounter Antigone today and what is the tragic element in these frameworks? Are there connections between shifts in conceptualizing the tragic and shifts in interpreting Antigone? In this panel, we would like to generally address the question WHAT Antigone? The question what we are referring to, when we talk about Antigone in different frameworks (the text, the performance, the figure, the myth etc.) can only be answered by specifying the approaches used to tackle her.

## 2) (Re-visiting) Antigone's Kins

The notion of kinship, which is fundamental in Butler's work seems to be neglected in *Antigone on the Contemporary World stage*. This is remarkable since, especially in contemporary performance practice, we find a shift of focus on Antigone's kin, such as on Ismene (Lot Vekemans, Nicole Beutler, Stacey Gregg), Kreon (Jorgen Cassier) or even Teiresias (Jaques Nichet). Isn't there a kinship between Antigone in performance practice and Antigone in academic writing? How can Antigone's story and its different interpretations (found in the performing arts, for instance) be beneficial for gaining insights into (the development of) concepts such as identity, kinship and the other? Are Butler's claims questionable in the consideration of different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds? Could it be possible that we must go beyond Poststructuralist Theory to address these questions?

## 3) Antigone glocally political

Under the term of the *glocal* we want to bring together the smaller and broader terms and concepts of Antigone's political appearances, in light of the fact that definitions, categories and worldviews are flexible and variable, not fixed and universal. While Atholl Fugard's *The Island* has been an Antigone-milestone in Postcolonial Theory and performance, critical thinkers of Decolonialism today accuse Postcolonialism of still imposing Western thought on the rest of the world. At the same time, Antigone's story is also being rewritten and retold in a variety of contemporary socio-political contexts, some of which even deal with specific political crimes (Motus, Stacey Gregg). Antigones are not only continually emerging in Africa (Osofisan, Brathwait), they can also be found in the Middle East, for instance in Israel or Jordan. Further academic writing shows how Antigone can be - and often is - related to specific agents of political events (Honig, Festic). Is Antigone (and has she always been) essentially political? What can we learn from her glocal presence? How do notions, such as the tragic, heritage, philosophy, kinship, mourning, hero, resistance differ in different cultural and religious contexts? How do they *not* differ? Hence, what (socio-political) topics are returning "globally"?

## 4) Translating, Relating and Mediating Antigone:

Which cultural metaphors, which traditional myths, and which ritual roots in relation to Antigone are at stake in art and scholarship? Critics emphasize that the ongoing transformation of the Antigone myth could mean a loss of the crucial "original" meaning. Others may call it a necessary means of translation. What tools do we need for a successful translation and have these tools themselves changed over time? What and how do we decode (in different fields)? How are the means of (artistic and academic) translation intertwined with different media (body, text, language, visual art, technologies)?

**Please send abstracts (500 words max) by 31th of August 2013 to [Charlotte.Gruher@UGent.be](mailto:Charlotte.Gruher@UGent.be)  
Please include the speakers affiliation(s) and brief bio (100 words max.).**

*Please note that we will apply for funding to reimburse travel and/or accommodation costs for those who are not able to find these funds at their home institutions, but at this moment we cannot guarantee that we will be able to cover them for everyone who requests it.*

For more information and updates, visit:

<http://www.theaterwetenschappen.ugent.be/occupyantigone>



**The conference is sponsored by BOF (Bijzonder Onderzoeksfond UGent)**

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