Hourig Attarian
Don Bouzek
Catherine C. Cole
Lina de Guevara
Maria Dunn
Yael Farber
Laura Freitag
Steve High
Michael Kilburn
Gary Kirkham
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Jan Selman
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ORAL HISTORY & PERFORMANCE (PART II)

alt. theatre
cultural diversity and the stage

Vol 9 No.2
December 2011 $8

A new work by Rahul Varma, *Unusual Battleground* is a play about hidden identities. Inspired by interviews acquired through the Life Stories of Montrealers Displaced by War, Genocide and other Human Rights Violations, this presentation is part of the culminating events series, We are Here: Life Stories Montreal

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BOOK REVIEW
MICHELLE MACARTHUR on Shelley Scott's *Nightwood Theatre: A Woman's Work Is Always Done*.

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COVER PHOTO
© Maxime Côté
Katy Grabstas & Curtis Henschel in *kAdmΩs*, an adaptation of Sophocles' Theban plays, written and directed by Yael Farber. *kAdmΩs* was originally created for and produced by the National Theatre School of Canada.

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EDITORIAL

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ARTICLES

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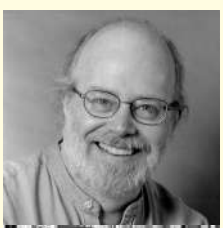
RACHAEL VAN FOSSEN

is an artist, teacher, and researcher with a focus on community collaborations and socially engaged performance. She was founding artistic director of Common Weal Community Arts (1992-1999), artistic director of Black Theatre Workshop from 2001-2005, and co-founder and associate artistic director of the Collectif MOYO from 2007-2010. She teaches in the Theatre and Development specialization at Concordia University and is a faculty member in the MFA-Interdisciplinary Arts Program at Goddard College. Her current projects include co-editing a book for Common Weal and publisher CPRC entitled *Connect: Towards a Socially Engaged Aesthetic*.



DON BOUZEK

is the Artistic Director of Ground Zero Productions, a twenty-five-year-old company that creates theatre on a variety of social issues. Since 2000 he has worked with Banner Theatre (Birmingham, UK) to produce a series of Video Ballads about globalization. As a video creator he has produced a nine-segment dramatized series for the Alberta Workers Health Centre and two documentaries for Athabasca University and Access TV. He has won two awards from the Canadian Association of Labour Media for his work with unions, and is the recipient of an Alberta Centennial Medal for his work in the arts.

CATHERINE C. COLE

is the editor of *Inventive Spirit: Alberta Patents from 1905–1975* (Red Deer and District Museum, 1999) and co-author with Judy Larmour of *Many and Remarkable: The Story of the Alberta Women's Institutes* (Alberta Women's Institutes, 1997). Her Master's thesis (University of Alberta, 1988) was titled *Garment Manufacturing in Edmonton, 1911–1939*, and she has also published an article on the subject of GWG in *Edmonton: The Life of a City* (Edmonton and District Historical Society, 1995).

MARIA DUNN

is a Juno-nominated storyteller through song. She writes historical and social commentary with melodies inspired by Celtic and North American folk traditions. Along with the multimedia collaborations *GWG: Piece by Piece* and *Troublemakers: Working Albertans*, Maria has produced four independent CDs, including *The Peddler* (2009 Canadian Folk Music Award Nominee), and has performed in Canada, Europe (2008 Celtic Connections), and the US (2006 Smithsonian Folk Life Festival).

STEVEN HIGH

is Canada Research Chair in Oral History and lead researcher in the Montreal Life Stories project. He is the author of four books, including *Corporate Wasteland: The Landscape and Memory of Deindustrialization*, and has collaborated on a travelling exhibition of the same name.

INTERVIEW

LAURA FREITAG

is a writer, director, poet, and theatre practitioner. She recently finished her BA at McGill University in Honours English and Jewish Studies, where she staged an all-female version of Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker* and directed Martin Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life*. She is a regular reviewer for Montreal's Rover Arts Blog, a former editor of *The Veg Literary Magazine*, and a poet who has been published in *Steps Magazine* and *Scrivener Creative Review*.

YAEL FARBER

is a multiple award-winning director and playwright of international acclaim whose works have toured across the US, the UK, Canada, Australia, Japan, Europe, and Africa. She was named artist of the year in her native South Africa in 2003, where she has received three national best director awards. Internationally, she has recieved such honours as the Scotsman Fringe First and the Angel Herald awards (Edinburgh) and a Sony Gold Award (London). She is currently head of the Directing Program at the National Theatre School of Canada (Montreal) and playwright-in-residence for Nightwood Theatre (Toronto).

POEM

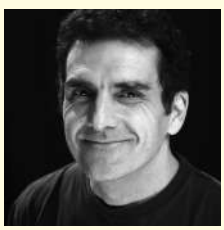
DAVID FENNARIO

is a playwright/performer, social activist, and former weekly columnist for the *Montreal Gazette*. His award-winning plays, published by Talonbooks, include *On the Job* and *Balconville* (Chalmers, 1976, 1980), *Joe Beef* (Prix Pauline-Julien, 1986), and *The Death of René Lévesque* (*Montreal Gazette*, 2003 Play of the Year). Twice profiled by the NFB, his plays have been televised on CBC and Bravo. His 1974 memoir *Without a Parachute*, republished as *Sans parachute* (2010), won poet Gilles Hénault a Governor General's Award for translation. Fennario was the 2007 candidate for Quebec solidaire in Vielle Verdun, where he was born and still resides.

DISPATCHES

LINA DE GUEVARA

—a specialist in Theatre of the Oppressed, Commedia dell'Arte, and Transformational Theatre—is a director, actor, and teacher. Originally from Chile, she is PUENTE Theatre's founder and had been its artistic director for twenty-three years when she retired in June 2011. PUENTE is based in Victoria, BC, and produces theatre committed to promoting diversity in the arts and exploring the immigrant experience.



GARY KIRKHAM

Gary Kirkham is an award winning playwright. He worked in collaboration with the MT Space on *The Last 15 Seconds, Body 13,* and *Seasons of Immigration*. He is the author of *Falling: A Wake, Pearl Gidley,* and *Queen Milli of Galt*. His plays have been produced by over twenty theatres including Lost&Found Theatre, Theatre Aquarius, Rivendell Theatre, Chemainus, and Theatre Passe Muraille. He was the playwright in residence at the Blyth Festival. He runs a high school theatre program for immigrant youth.

JENNY MONTGOMERY

is a stage director who focuses on plays that explore themes of social justice and transcultural connection. Before moving to Quebec, Jenny worked as a freelance director in Chicago. Jenny is an associate member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, an alumna of the Lincoln Center Theater Directors Lab, and serves on the planning committee for DirectorsLabChicago. She has written three plays and is currently working on a new one based on interviews with refugees and Québécois.

BOOK REVIEW

JAN SELMAN

is a theatre professor at the University of Alberta, teaching popular theatre, directing, and acting. She is a specialist in participatory theatre, and her recent work includes co-facilitating *Transforming Dangerous Spaces* on coalition in women's activist communities, curriculum development in Kenya, and leading the *Are We There Yet?* research program—a program that links theatre and social science researchers, health agencies and theatre companies to create, adapt, and assess theatre for change.

Performance, Oral History, and the Crisis of Legitimacy

BY EDWARD LITTLE

Derek Paget coined the term "Verbatim Theatre" in 1987 to describe a form of documentary theatre constructed "verbatim" from oral history interviews. In 2010, Paget observed that documentary theatre "tends to come to the fore in troubled times" (173). Our present troubles include a rapidly increasing militarized culture, partisan spin and paternalizing rhetoric from governments engaged in environmental and economic brinksmanship, and an accelerating "crisis of legitimacy"[1] fueled by social inequity, mounting evidence of governmental collusion in corporate corruption, and a vertically organized mainstream media serving corporate agendas.

The contributors in our two-part expanded issue were selected based on their various and diverse approaches to incorporating historical "actuality," testimony, verbatim text, and/or documentary elements into their work. They are each, in their own way, responding to our troubled times. What unites them is a shared concern with social justice, fostering education and awareness, and forging and strengthening social partnerships aimed at greater participation in collective dialogue about the conflicting values and ideologies that are at the very heart of our troubled times.

We begin this issue of *alt.theatre* with Laura Freitag's interview with Yael Farber, "When We Memorialize: Yael Faber on Adaptation, Witnessing, and Testimony." Faber's work regularly incorporates testimony and verbatim accounts into new scripts as a means of bearing witness—so "that empathy becomes possible in a room." As Freitag explains, "Farber memorializes contemporary political tragedies and implores her audience to become witnesses with her." For her *Theatre as Witness* trilogy, Farber created original scripts based on testimony from people living under South Africa's regime of apartheid: *A Woman in Waiting* speaks with the voices of mothers forced to leave their own children to care for the children of others; *Amajuba* engages with urban violence and forced relocation to present "a kaleidoscopic experience of what apartheid did to children"; *He Left Quietly* presents the words of death row survivor Duma Khumalo, who came within fifteen hours of being executed before his sentence was commuted. Farber characterizes Khumalo's story as "an astonishingly unjust case—but not astonishing in a South African context at all."

Freitag also takes up Farber's use of testimony and community participation in the writing, creation, and performance of original works based on adaptations of classical Greek plays. *KAdmΩs*, adapted from Sophocles' *Theban Plays*, "examines leadership, accountability and the nature of democracy in a contemporary Super Power" (Farber). To this end, Farber integrates excerpts from American journalist Mark Danner's articles, "The Truth of El Mozote" (1993) and "The Red Cross Torture Report: What It Means" (2009)—articles concerned with the complicity of the US government in interrogation, torture, and genocide. In *Molora*, adapted from Aeschylus' *Oresteia* trilogy, Farber integrates a chorus of six women and one man from the Xhosa tribe into both the interpretative process and the performance, setting the play within the context of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The piece was inspired by Farber's "desire to expose the cycle of violence and the dilemma faced by the survivors who have to choose between revenge and forgiveness."[2]

Farber's work has garnered attention in South Africa, in Canada, and around the world. In 2011, she directed students at Montreal's National Theatre School in a production *KAdmΩs*. She notes, "In a way, I'm drawn to do theatre in societies that are deeply unaware of how entrenched they are in a political ideology. I think that's the most deadly politics of all—the one that slips under the radar." Farber approaches her work from a universal perspective. By integrating specific instances of oral history and verbatim testimony, particularly in adaptations of classical drama, her strategy as an activist is to merge testimony, oral history and verbatim accounts with aesthetic and architectural elements as a means of implicating her audiences. She seeks to produce an experience in which "you are not just watching. You are a part of this. You are implicit in this experience and complicit to whatever happened. Because we are all that quantity of apathy that enables great injustices to go forward."

Our next piece is a poem by Point St. Charles artist-storyteller David Fennario. "Motherhouse" celebrates a face in a photograph—a face from the historical record wearing a look that speaks truth to power across generations. Within an image of women working in a World War I British munitions factory in Verdun, Quebec—row upon row of uniformed and uniformly occupied workers—Fennario identifies a single face of resistance. The poem resonates with historical and contemporary economic injustices, social inequities, and our nation's deepening complicity in a military industrial complex that Canada increasingly supports even as it consumes itself and its host planet in a race to extinction.

In "*Soldiers' Tales Untold*: Trauma, Narrative and Remembering through Performance," historian Michael Kilburn also takes up the theme of war and its human costs. He examines the creative process of Shaw Pong Liu, a classical musician and composer who transformed Stravinsky's classic Faustian fable about a soldier's return from the front lines of World War I into a reflection on the impact of war on US soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Focusing on the experience of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Kilburn looks at how Liu uses elements of agitprop theatre—specifically the audience "plant"—to embody the verbatim testimony of contemporary veterans spoken by actors placed in the audience. Only slowly does the audience realize that these discordant interventions are part of the show. For Kilburn, Liu manages to create an experience that first mirrors and evokes the disjointed flashbacks and fractured narratives common to PTSD, in order that these fragmented pieces may then be re-integrated into a coherent narrative. Kilburn draws parallels between the experience of Liu's work and Jonathan Shay's prescription for a "communalization" of trauma: of "being able safely to tell the story to someone who is listening and who can be trusted to retell it truthfully to others in the community" (cited in Kilburn).

Following Kilburn, we shift to a series of articles that directly engage with issues of ethics and process in performance creation. "Stories Scorched from the Desert Sun: Performing Testimony, Narrating Process" is a deeply reflexive dialogue between artist-educator-dramaturge Rachael Van Fossen and Montreal Life Stories Artist-in-Residence Hourig Attarian. Van Fossen and Attarian describe their project as an exploration of "testimony as process" within a performance research-creation project drawing on autobiographical sources and an earlier series of oral history interviews conducted by Attarian.[3] The project uses three voices to tell the stories of several girls who lived through the horrors of war and genocide in different places and times. The script adheres to the convention that all words spoken by the characters are taken verbatim from original sources—with the important exception that recollections of the past could be altered, when deemed dramaturgically advantageous, to allow a character to speak as if in the present. In the project, Attarian and Van Fossen focus on the ethical problems and dramaturgical solutions involved in translating into performance oral history that involves stories of graphic violence and trauma. To counteract the risk that the power and immediacy of theatre might create a counterproductive experience of sensationalized or eroticized violence, Attarian and Van Fossen adopt a Brechtian "reporting" style that supports a "more muted," less emotional approach to graphic elements. This also facilitated the dramatic choice to foreground tensions between their own subject positions, as Attarian wrestled with the personal impact of making her story public. As she explains, "What started as an exchange between the two of us, seeking to understand the perspectives we each brought to the performance, became a story in its own right as we delved deeper into our collaboration. What follows is the charting of that story: the "storying" of the performance." On the night of the performance, Attarian witnessed her own story for the first time in public.

Next up in this issue is Lina de Guevara's Dispatch on Puente Theatre's mode of creating theatre with immigrant communities in Victoria, BC. Puente emphasizes a resident-artist approach that foregrounds community consultation and participation. For Puente, the interview is just the beginning of a community-engaged relationship, which starts with artist-participants, often themselves immigrants, conducting interviews with members of their community. This then extends into an artistic process of sharing impressions and interpretations, exploration, and workshopping that merges verbatim material and embodied experience through the use of forms such as Image and Playback Theatre. The result is a representation of local immigrant experience that resonates with Henry Greenspan's ideas about the essential need to break ritualized distinctions between tellers and listeners so that we may become *partners* in conversation.[4]

Jenny Montgomery's Dispatch, "Living the in-between," offers another, in this case unanticipated perspective, on the process of creating theatre from interviews and embodied memory in which "authenticity" became common ground. Montgomery came to Canada from the US on a Fulbright grant to work with the Montreal Life Stories project. She set out to create a verbatim play based on interviews with refugees and Québécois about their comparative impressions of the meanings of "home, identity, and cultural belonging." Montgomery soon discovered a ubiquitous, yet officially unacknowledged, liminal space where those born in Quebec of refugee or immigrant parents—even if one parent is Québécois—continue to exist in a prolonged state of in-between. Here, being a "visible minority" excludes full status as Québécois. In creating her play, Montgomery found herself mired in her own liminal state when she married her long-time Canadian boyfriend and struggled to negotiate her application for permanent residency.

Up next, theatre artist and artistic director Don Bouzek, historian Catherine Cole, and musician Maria Dunn explain their collaborative approach to interdisciplinary "cultural road building" in Edmonton's labour movement. In their contribution, "Three Perspectives on Performing First-Person Experience: Ground Zero Production's *GWG: Piece by Piece*," Bouzek explains,

> There's an old saying: You can't know where you're going until you know where you've been. Many people who haven't been acknowledged in the Official Story need to start their journey to social change by hearing and valuing their own stories. Whether the workers were the men who mined coal in the Crowsnest Pass or the women at GWG [Great Western Garment Company], their stories are not part of the dominant narrative of the 'independent pioneer' in Alberta.

Changing that narrative is the first step in Raymond Williams' long revolution of changing consciousness.

Bouzek's theatre training was largely text-based. His recognition that the Labour Movement is an oral culture led him to embrace "a more direct documentary approach." The *GWG: Piece by Piece* project—while essentially interventionist documentary theatre based on story-gathering and oral history "actuality"—also incorporates exhibitions and displays, publications, and presentations at academic conferences. As was the case with the International Workers' Theatre Movement and the Canadian Progressive Arts Clubs of the 1930s, the participation of workers and inclusion of perspectives informed by gender, class, and cultural diversity are the very foundation of Ground Zero's work. While the Progressive Arts Clubs brought together an ensemble of lawyers, historians, writers, and artists from visual, plastic, and performing arts backgrounds, Ground Zero's inclusivity extends to embrace the digital age in their creation of "Video Ballads"—a form co-created by Bouzek and Dave Rogers of the UK's Banner Theatre. Performed live, the Video Ballad is a "modern interdisciplinary performance style mix[ing] video actuality, song-writing, World Music, and dramatic techniques." Alan Filewod, in his essay "The Documentary Body," characterizes Banner and Ground Zero's use of digital communication as no less than a "reconstitution of activist theatre" (cited in Bouzek).

In contrast to Puente Theatre's mode of beginning with the interview, Gary Kirkham of MT Space Theatre writes of a collaborative approach to performance creation that originates in "the pause"—the empty and "MT" space evoked by the company's name (an acronym for multicultural theatre, while at the same time referring to Peter Brook's book and conceptualization of *The Empty Space*). Kirkham's Dispatch describes a process of collaborative creation that starts with physical exploration. This is informed by each performer's individual research, to which the playwright adds verbatim text to both unify the play and to enhance "the complexity of the voices in the story." This ensemble approach resonates with the physically based work popularized by England's Joan Littlewood in the 1950s and 60s, and subsequently practised in Canada by George Luscombe at Toronto Workshop Productions from 1959 to 1986.[5]

Thus far, our contributors—mostly artists and researchers working in the performing arts—have tended to focus on the impact and efficacy of integrating oral history, testimony, documentary elements, and verbatim text into the theatrical event. Steven High's "Embodying the Story: Oral History and Performance in the Classroom" takes us into considerations of many of the pedagogical implications of interdisciplinary practice, as he contributes an oral historian's perspective on the journey from interview transcript to performance. High, writing about and within the context of a co-taught, interdisciplinary course in oral history and performance, considers the lessons that embodied approaches to performing verbatim text offer to oral historians. In doing so, High provides a fresh perspective on a range of issues of mutual concern to theatre artists and oral historians—such as relationships between individual and collective memories, productive tensions between disparate disciplinary treatments of "fact" and "fiction" and ethical perspectives on the use of "authenticating detail"; questions about each discipline's responsibility to "source communities"; and reflections on how approaches to embodied learning, deep listening, and shared authority in our respective methodologies might be placed in productive relationship. Such a relationship would contribute to deeper reciprocal relationships with individuals and communities concerned with fostering reflection, dialogue, and sociopolitical action.

This issue concludes, as usual, with a book review—in this instance, Jan Selman on *Applied Theatre: International Case Studies and Challenges for Practice*, edited by Monica Prendergast and Juliana Saxton. As Selman points out, the emergent field of "participatory, community-based, developmental, educational, and social theatre needs an umbrella term." Yet while "'applied theatre' is increasingly winning out in this effort to find a name that includes and draws these areas into meaningful relationships," the label is contentious. Selman makes an eloquent case about the name's failure to convey the complex and multifaceted ways in which this emergent field embraces the passion, curiosity, risk, and chaos of shared lived experience. Prendergast and Saxton include a section on Reminiscence Theatre—a verbatim approach focusing on older people as a source community. Yet the examples of practice contained in Prendergast and Saxton's book extend beyond oral history and performance. This is a book about communal involvement with theatre making and theatre performance in a broad range of international contexts, and Selman offers particular praise for sections dealing with the interdependence of "areas of contestation and dilemma" pertaining to "participation, aesthetics, ethics, and evaluation." In Selman's estimation, the book "belongs on the shelves of everyone engaged with practising, learning, or teaching about theatre committed to its communities' expression, cultures, enfranchisement, education, and health."

This two-part expanded issue of *alt.theatre* had its genesis in the performance working group of Montreal Life Stories, and this year marks the fifth and final year of SSHRC funding for that project. The legacy of Montreal Life Stories will include community-based documentation centres and an online database housing hundreds of Montreal Life Stories interviews together with contextual information, maps, timelines, and digital stories. The site will also host Stories Matter—a free, downloadable, open source software developed specifically by and for Montreal Life Stories. While primarily designed as an alternative to transcription for oral historians, the software allows users (including artists and educators) to upload and "tag" audio and video interviews and materials, to thematically search the database, and to arrange selected excerpts or "clips" into exportable "playlists." Finally, during March 2012, *Montreal Life Stories Rencontres* is hosting a series of events at various locations throughout the city of Montreal. These include performances, workshops, artistic displays, exhibitions, multimedia installations, round table discussions, and an international academic conference. It seems fitting, then, to close the covers on this two-part expanded issue of *alt.theatre* with

THE TEN TOP

LESSONS ON DIVERSITY AND INTEGRATION OF THE MONTREAL LIFE STORIES PROJECT

1. **Sharing** Life Stories builds bridges across cultures while empowering individuals and their communities.

2. Whenever possible, communities should be partners in **research** and not simply objects of study.

3. Government support for community efforts to **remember** strengthens society and is money well spent.

4. The personal is crucial to **understanding** the whole; learning with is better than simply learning about.

5. Government support for **founding** community archives is crucial to transferring the wisdom of refugees from one generation to the next.

6. Cultural harmony comes from understanding the differences and **building** on the commonalities.

7. Theories often become most **meaningful** when informed by the real experiences of real people.

8. Creative arts-based **inquiry** opens new doors to understanding.

9. Education about genocide and prevention affirming the life stories of students from persecuted communities deepens their commitment to school and **helps** all students to understand the toxic consequences of racism and extreme nationalism.

10. Building a world with more immigrants and fewer refugees requires that the Government of Canada **enlarge** its capacity to prevent mass atrocities and protect civilians.

In Solidarity,

Ted

ERRATUM

In Vol 9.1 (September 2011), Alan Filewod's *Collective Encounters: Documentary Theatre in English Canada*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987, was inadvertently omitted from the Works Cited list of the editorial. *alt.theatre* apologies for this oversight.

NOTES

1 Jürgen Habermas brought this concept to the fore in his 1975 work, *Legitimation Crisis*.

2 Molora translates as "ashes," and the genesis of the project was in the 9/11 images of ashes falling on people in Manhattan. For more information visit the Farber Foundry website.

3 The interviews are published in Attarian, H. and Yogurtian, H. "Survivor Stories, Surviving Narratives: Autobiography, Memory and Trauma across Generations." In *Girlhood: Redefining the Limits*, edited by Y. Jiwani, C. Steenbergen, and C. Mitchell (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2006): 13-34.

4 Greenspan has been a regular visitor to the Montreal Life Stories project. His work with Holocaust survivors spans two decades and involves sustained dialogue through a process of interviews and re-interviews.

5 Luscombe studied under Littlewood in the 1950s.

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———. "Acts of Commitment: Activist Arts, the Rehearsed Reading, and Documentary Theatre," *New Theatre Quarterly* 26.2 (2010): 173-193.

WHEN WE MEMORIALIZE:

YAEL FARBER ON ADAPTATION, WITNESSING, AND TESTIMONY

INTERVIEW BY LAURA FREITAG

© Maxime Côté
ANTIGONE: "You will rise up—the forgotten. Those murdered in our name." (Back, hanging) Jackie Rowland [Antigone]; (left middle ground) Ishan Davé [Polynices]; (right middle ground) Brett Donahue [Oedipus]; (foreground from left) Alexandra Ordolis, Samantha Wan, Sophie Holdstock [The Furies, Mothers of the missing]; (foreground far right) Adrian Morningstar [Militia]

South African theatre practitioner Yael Farber stages adaptations of canonical works, such as those of Shakespeare and Sophocles. Molora, her hugely successful adaptation of Aeschylus' Oresteia, is a restaging of the play within post-apartheid South Africa at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In kAdmΩs, *her adaptation of Sophocles' Theban plays, she re-enlivens text through the inclusion of testimony from and writings by Mark Danner on the El Mozote Massacre and contemporary American politics. Through her use of canonical texts, Farber memorializes contemporary political tragedies and implores her audience to become witnesses with her.*

Laura: You seem drawn to texts that explore the genre of tragedy and themes of conflict and reconciliation within the family. What is it about the genre of tragedy that appeals to you?

Yael: What I love about the Greek texts is that they are wide open and able to contain the immensity of both the epic and the intimate. There is something very intimate about the family and tribal dynamics, but also something vast that is able to hold the epic nature of what's happening inside a nation.

I work in a very visceral, emotional way. I tell stories that move me. I love how the genre of tragedy can hold emotions. Anne Carson wrote a magnificent introduction to her translation of Euripides' *Hippolytos* called "Tragedy: A Curious Art Form". She talks about its exorbitance — people's stories bumping up against one another and inter-lives that momentarily can be held within the largeness of the story (8).

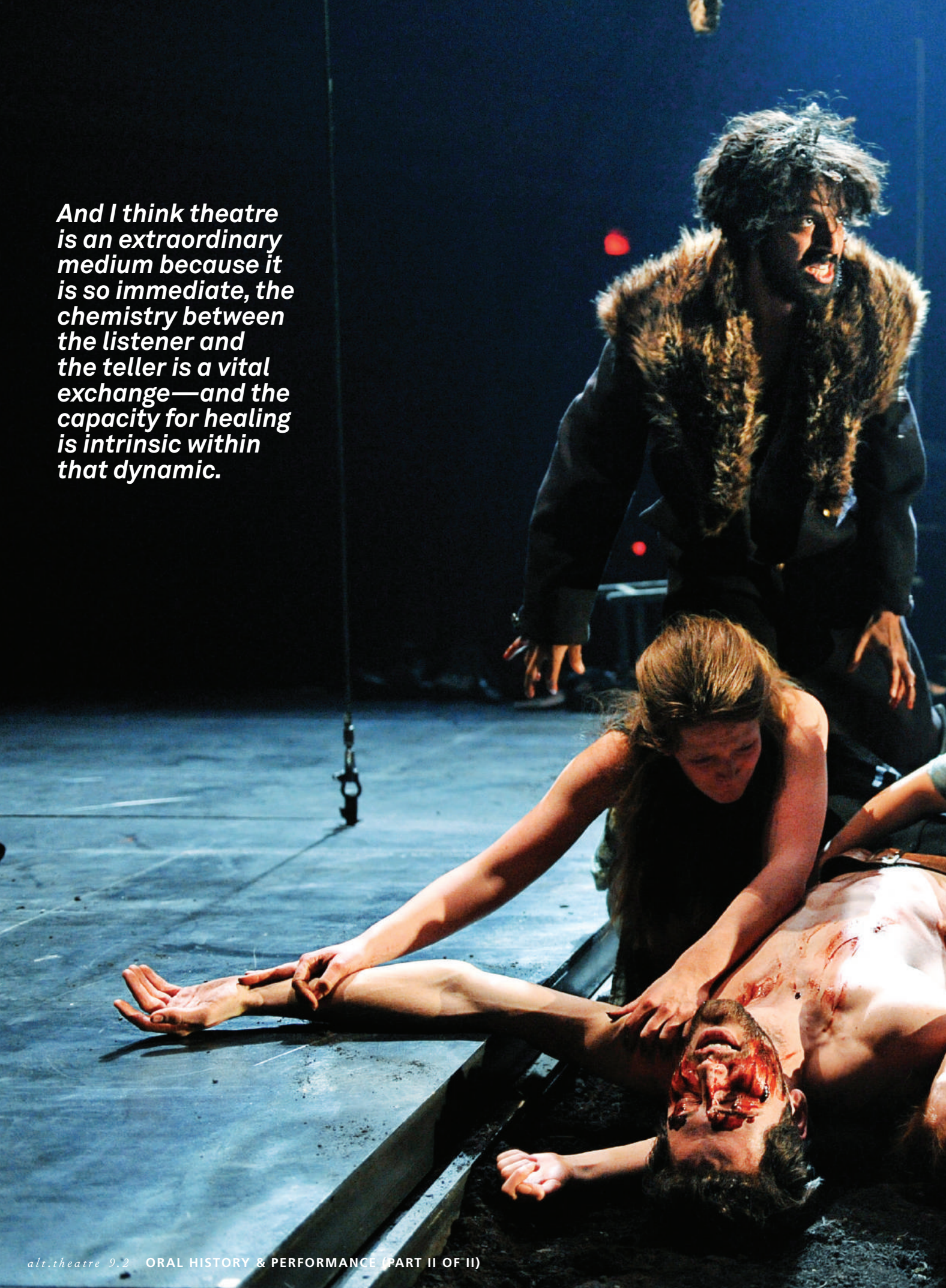
Is it political? Is it familial? It's both.

Growing up in South Africa — it was a highly politicized society. The state of apathy was a deeply political position that most people around me took. A very common phrase you'd hear was "I'm not political." You cannot live inside a fascist government, in which you are the beneficiary, and say you are apolitical, because that's a deeply political position — to be disengaged from the political status of your country. It all works within the larger frame of what happens inside a family.

I find that nations behave in pretty much the same way as families — and that's what is so extraordinary about the Greek tragedies. That Klytemnestra [in *Molora*] is Klytemnestra, but she is also a massive symbol. She is a very powerful metaphor of a particular political movement. Hers is a particular response to someone killing your child. If Klytemnestra's response is to kill the husband who murdered one of their daughters, she has taken a very, very politicized position — especially if you consider how countries responded to the World Trade Center being decimated, or to a particular blow to the tribe. We work in these concentric circles: from nuclear family, to tribe, to country, to nation, to world — but we operate on exactly the same dynamics inside all of that.

Laura: In your trilogy, *Theatre as Witness*, you created pieces based on the testimony of various people living under the apartheid regime in South Africa. What was the process like? Why choose those specific stories?

Yael: The guiding principle I come back to all the time is not which stories do I need to tell, but which stories need me to tell them. The first piece in the testimonial body, *A Woman in Waiting*, was a result of my being very engaged in the question of mothers who must leave their own children in order to take care of someone else's child. In South Africa the common status in almost every white home was that there was a black woman raising the children there who had left her own children somewhere to be raised by extended family. She would possibly only see her kids at Christmas-time, because these women would often come from rural areas or



And I think theatre is an extraordinary medium because it is so immediate, the chemistry between the listener and the teller is a vital exchange—and the capacity for healing is intrinsic within that dynamic.

other cities. I was exploring the extraordinary absence of that figure versus most white children having two mothers. What I was aware of was the metaphor of waiting. I saw in matriarchs who came to listen in the galleries of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission this same extraordinary capacity for waiting. It became a theme I was building — to speak about apartheid through that lens. Thembi Mtshali is a marvelous actress in South Africa, and I decided to tell Thembi's story as a way to talk about that kind of waiting. The story followed her life from growing up in rural Kwazulu, Natal waiting for her mother to come home once a year . . . to inevitably her leaving her own child, in order to take employment as a domestic worker herself.

The next piece was *Amajuba: Like Doves We Rise*. I was to work with resident actors in Mmabatho, which is a tiny little town in South Africa's former homeland of Bophuthatswana. I had no idea what the five company members' stories were going to be, but being black and South Africans, they were going to have extraordinary stories to tell, because apartheid was pervasive on every level. When I asked, "Would you be willing to work with your own stories?" and they said, "But you don't even know if we have stories worth telling," I said, "I don't need to, to know that we have stories in this room." *Amajuba* contains testimonies of urban violence and forced relocation — the politicization of one of the company members at the age of fourteen or fifteen into the kind of extreme violence that was gripping the country at the time. One of the company members was of mixed race, and the kind of exceptional teasing and cruelty he suffered at the hands of a school headmistress is told. I was just trying to get a kaleidoscopic experience of how apartheid affected childhood — the tenderness of those years — and its impact beyond the statistics.

The last piece I did in that body of work, *He Left Quietly*, was with Duma Khumalo who was a death row survivor — he was one of the Sharpeville Six. He came within fifteen hours of being hanged, along with his five co-accused. It was an astonishingly unjust case — but not astonishing in a South African context at all. But it did grab world attention, and it's only for that reason that they were given reprieve. They then all went on to serve life sentences — but only several years of those life sentences. They were released as part of political negotiations but their names were never cleared. I met Duma after I saw him perform a brief monologue and said, "I'd love to be able to help you tell your story in a deeper way."

Laura: What was the experience like for them to be able to tell their own stories?

Yael: The actors all went on massive emotional trajectories in their travels with their own stories. I have to emphasize that nothing that I do is intentionally therapeutic — I'm a storyteller. But there is something enormous that happens when someone bears witness to their own story and constructs random events with a playwright into a narrative that becomes cohesive. Through that cohesion they are able to reach out to the audience and bring them into the landscape of their lives; it is through this process that empathy becomes possible in a room. Empathy was almost surgically removed in South Africa across the colour lines. It was systematically eradicated wherever possible. When you are alienated so profoundly from people because of their skin colour, the capacity for empathy freezes up. And I think theatre is the antidote. Theatre is an extraordinary medium because it is so immediate, the chemistry between the listener and the teller is a vital exchange — and the capacity for healing is intrinsic within that dynamic.

Laura: Why did you decide to integrate Mark Danner's essays "The Truth of El Mozote" and "The Red Cross Torture Report: What It Means" in *kAdmΩs*?

Yael: I knew I was going to adapt *Antigone.* Just before I was going into creation, I was invited to a symposium in New York in October 2010 called *Bodies on the Line* directed by Anna Deveare Smith. There were eight of us invited from all over the world. I was the only theatre artist but we were all artists working in different mediums toward social change. Amongst that group was a woman named Claudia Bernardi who does incredible work with the communities of Perquin and El Mozote, which are where the massacres that I use testimonies from in *kAdmΩs* took place. Claudia facilitates the communities' painting of murals of their experiences. It's another way to story-tell and bear witness. Claudia was at the forensic sites when they were exhuming the graves at El Mozote to prove that they had indeed happened. I had a dream one night of her standing at the edge of this grave and uncovering — rather than Antigone's impulse to cover. But whether it is to cover or uncover, it is done to say: This happened. This person died. These deaths deserve the sacredness of burial or the disclosure of exhumation. Claudia started to percolate in my mind as an Antigone figure and Mark Danner was invited to talk about Claudia's work because he had written a book called *The Massacre at El Mozote*. This is how I encountered his writing.

Laura: In *kAdmΩs* the necessity of storytelling and testimony is brought to light through Rufina and the Soldiers' testimony from the El Mozote massacre. You especially highlight the necessity of an audience in order to bear witness to Rufina's testimony. When you write your plays, how do wish to position the audience with regard to what's happening onstage?

Yael: To implicate them, completely. I don't believe in proscenium arches. I don't believe in people sitting in an auditorium behind an invisible fourth wall and getting to be voyeurs. If we're in a place with a proscenium arch, I ask that the audience be brought onto the stage, as they were for *kAdmΩs.* Or to perform in a venue where the artists and audience feel as though they are in one experience so that the audiences are not above, beyond, or outside the story, but become a part of the communal experience of what's happening onstage. I use different elements — like having the audience cross the stage to get to their seats — in order to say, "You are not just watching. You are a part of this. You are implicit in this experience and complicit to whatever happened. Because we are all that quantity of apathy that enables great injustices to go forward." So it's always about providing catharsis, which is the extraordinary experience that we long for in theatre, but also the enormous discomfort of being deeply implicated with the players.

Laura: In the production of *Molora*, you cast six women and one man from the Xhosa tribe as the chorus. How did their unique perspectives affect your adaptation?

Yael: I was grappling with how to end the *Oresteia* … how it all ends in bloodshed — because what was significant about South Africa was that we did transition into a democracy with relative peace. When I asked the Ngqoko Cultural Group to be a part of the storytelling, it was such a personal ownership they took over the story. I had to go to their village to meet with them. As I was telling the story of the *Oresteia*, they kept stopping me … First for translation purposes, and second because every point of the narrative had to be discussed from a moral perspective. Here was a community, fiercely debating the actions of Orestes and Elektra from a profoundly personal perspective as I was unfolding it to them.

This continued within the process. Inside the rehearsal room, they asked me each day, "What will finally happen to the Mother? Will they still kill her?" Keep in mind that in *Molora* we witness Klytemnestra burning Elektra with cigarettes, waterboarding her in a pot full of water, putting a plastic bag over her head, and suffocating her until she is almost unconscious. These women were extremely sensitive, and I would have thought that with such a visceral response to the story there would be a kind of bloodlust that rises in all of us — that this woman has to be stopped, has to be taught a lesson. But despite their horrified responses to what was happening to Elektra onstage, they still would come up to me at the end of rehearsal each day and ask, "What's going to happen to Klytemnestra?" And I'd say, "Well, they kill her in the end." And they just kept saying to me, "That's not possible. They can't do that. We can't let that happen."

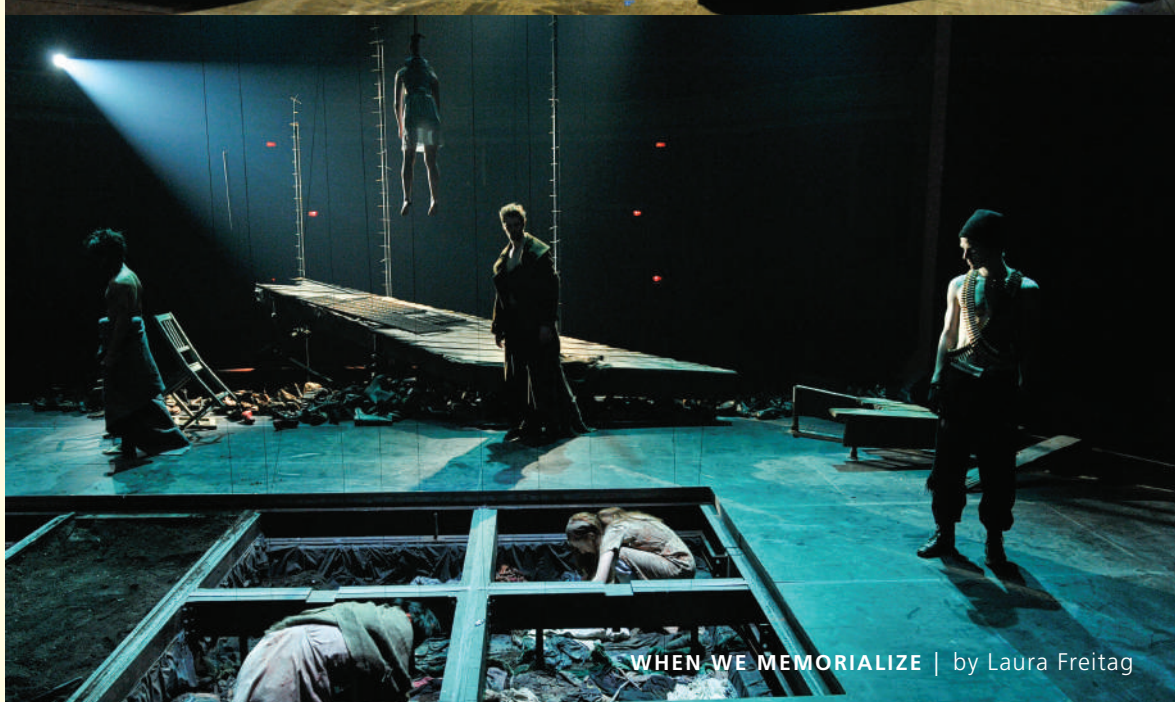
It was beautiful how it was working inside and outside of the metaphor. And it's an ancient text that cannot be changed. Which is kind of a beautiful way of describing the spirals we work ourselves into as a human race. What we consider our destiny. Finally, one of the women came up to me and told me, "We are going to have to stop the children if they try to kill their mother." And I saw the only possible ending of the play. The Chorus were leading me to the creative conclusion that would reflect South Africa: as Elektra runs forward to strike Klytemnestra, using the same pick axe that Klytemnestra had used to kill Elektra's father, the Chorus must grab her and pull the weapon from her hands. It was always a very moving moment to witness. I know the audience really experienced that enormous outlet of emotion. Ultimately, a person with a weapon in their hand needs to be stopped and then needs enormous compassion in order for any kind of real transformation to happen. And this is going back to what Cynthia Ngwenyu, the mother of a murdered child, said in response to the question posed to her at South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation hearings, when asked if her child's murderer should be given amnesty. She answered: "If I forgive him, he gets his humanity back. Then we all get our humanity back. And how can I not support that?

Laura: With *Molora* and the *Theatre as Witness* trilogy you were working with highly politicized actors with deeply complex cultural memories. What was it like putting on *kAdmΩs* with a group of young Canadian actors?

Yael: It was definitely different. They were a passionate group of people, but not a politicized group of people. Canadians are politicized very differently from South Africans. There was a very intensive conversation in which I would have to provoke them to remember that we are not doing this as entertainment — although it has to be a brilliantly told story that is compelling and powerful — but rather to create theatre that wakes people up, not anesthetizes them. They were able to join the dots and start to understand why and how the story of *Antigone* correlated to their own lives.

I think the fact that people are not politicized does not mean that they shouldn't be. The opening sequence of *kAdmΩs* focuses on the use of torture in Guantánamo and the role of "enhanced interrogation techniques" or torture — and Canada is involved in the war that is being waged in Afghanistan and Iraq. It's an illusion that anybody is living in a completely depoliticized society; it's just that there is a greater level of distance inside the society from the battlefield. In South Africa, during the years of Apartheid, you either lived inside the war or you lived ten kilometres away in your bubble, but with a sense of danger always there. The system kept this sense of danger alive. It served them. As it did the Bush Administration. Here, because the battlefield tends to be far away, except on that awful day when it was brought into the middle of Manhattan, there is very little sense of what it means to live inside a war. One can be deeply implicated in a war and not necessarily be aware of one's involvement. In a way, I'm drawn to do theatre in societies that are deeply unaware of how entrenched they are in a political ideology. I think that's the most deadly politics of all — the one that slips under the radar.

Laura: kAdmΩs ends with Antigone calling for the reclamation of truth and a revelation of a mass grave; why end *kAdmΩs* at the exposure of the trauma? Especially when, with *Molora*, you ended the piece within a



PREVIOUS PAGE
© Maxime Côté
OEDIPUS: “No more, no more shall I look away from the horrors of our own doing!” (Back, standing) Ishan Davé; (left, kneeling) Jackie Rowland; (right, kneeling) Samantha Wan [Ismene]; (left, lying) Brett Donahue; (right, lying) Sophie Holdstock [Iocaste]

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© Maxime Côté
TIRESIA: “The time is not far off when you shall pay back. Corpse for corpse, flesh of your own flesh.” (From left) Brett Donahue, Katy Grabstas [Tiresia]; (Seated) Curtis Henschel [Kreon]

© Maxime Côté
IOCASTE: “If clear sight were not so painful many more would elect to have it.” (Background, seated) Brett Donahue; (left, kneeling) Sophie Holdstock; (foreground, lying) Jackie Rowland

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ANTIGONE: “The rumour spreads throughout the world. The street is no longer afraid.”(Back, hanging) Jackie Rowland; (left middle ground) Ishan Davé; (right middle ground) Brett Donahue; (foreground, standing far right) Adrian Morningstar; (foreground from left) Samantha Wan, Sophie Holdstock [The Furies, Mothers of the missing]

space of forgiveness and reconciliation? Why did you make the choice?

Yael: Because nothing here has been resolved. As recently as Osama bin Laden's death, it was bragged that the critical information had been gleaned during enhanced interrogation technique sessions. Not only was this untrue, but they were still justifying their use of torture. El Mozote has never been explicitly acknowledged as part of the massive travesty of the financial backing from the United States during the Reagan administration that enabled the most horrific regimes of mass murder. Whereas in South Africa, during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the past was at least acknowledged. Klytemnestra, Orestes, and Elektra don't fall into a family group hug in the end, but they do turn from a vengeful killing that would continue the cycle. They want a different destiny—which seemed to be the collective consensus in South Africa.

In *kAdmΩs*, the last line is a quote from the *New York Times*' coverage of the recent Egyptian revolution. Antigone, moments before being hanged, cries out, "The street is no longer afraid." Indeed, *kAdmΩs* does not necessarily end in a place of reconciliation. But while having those mothers stand in a mass grave and watch the clothing of their murdered children slowly rise up is neither a resolution or conclusion, it *is* a way of saying, "This happened." If I could define what I do in two words, it would be to say: This happened. There are no answers. Just a bearing witness. I believe in the power of that.

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Poem

BY DAVID FENNARIO

Motherhouse

I see the photo in book after book on the First World War
and have learnt to look for it
yeah there it is again
The photo with the caption

'Women factory workers inside the British Munitions Supply Company lunchroom in Verdun, Quebec'

table after table of them in their hundreds all dressed the same in dollymop dusters and work smocks with the same blank
look at the camera in book after book
same photo
same blank look

I think I can recognize some of the faces because
I grew up on the same streets
mothers wives lovers daughters sisters
comrades and union mates
they were somebody
they had names

but this is the way we are supposed
to remember ourselves
ready to do whatever we're told

Inventory

but there is one face
that stares with eyes that
challenge the image
someone stunned into bitter understanding
by some bitter loss
like the 'labour militant' quoted
in the *Montreal Star*
July 14,1917

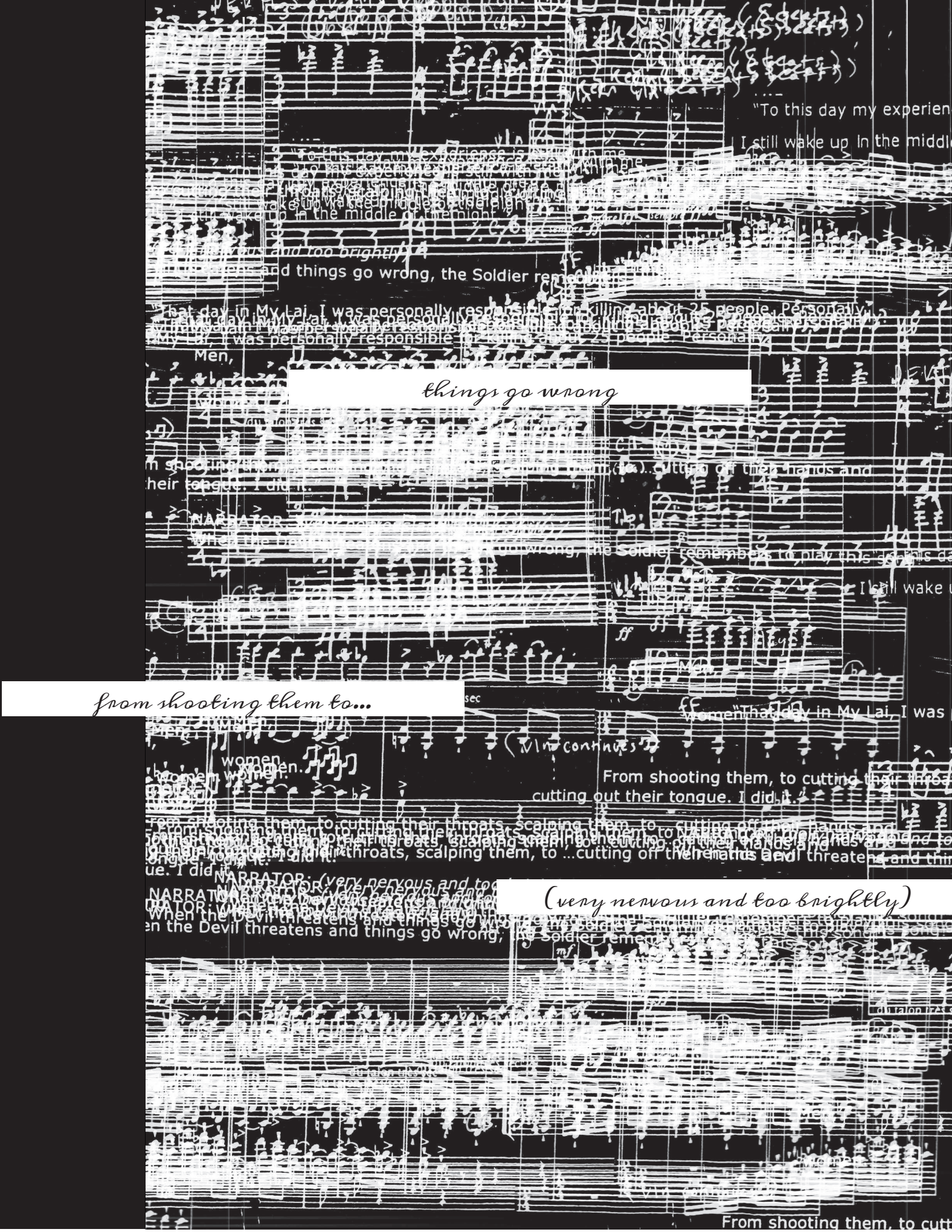
'Our men die overseas and our children starve because of the war profiteers. I've lost every relative except one'

who was she?

SOLDIERS' TALES UNTOLD: *TRAUMA, NARRATIVE, AND REMEMBERING THROUGH PERFORMANCE*

BY MICHAEL KILBURN

Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale* (*L'histoire du soldat*, 1918) is a classic Faustian fable of temptation, loss, and irredeemable knowledge. A contemporary deconstruction of the piece by Boston-based composer Shaw Pong Liu (*Soldiers' Tales Untold*, 2008) uses the narrative and musical architecture of the original as staging to present the unincorporated testimony of combat veterans. Her strategy confronts both the rarefied abstraction of the classical art world and the blithe complacency of a civilian public insulated from the reality of war. It also suggests new formal possibilities for acknowledging, documenting, and processing the psychological and social trauma wrought by war through a collaboration of oral history, the arts, and community outreach.


things go wrong
from shooting them to...
(very nervous and too brightly)

Based on a Russian folk tale, Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale* tells of a soldier returning home from the front who is waylaid by the devil and tricked into surrendering his fiddle in exchange for a book of knowledge. After three days apprenticeship in the ways of the book, the soldier returns to his home village only to find that his friends and family no longer recognize him. He realizes that instead of three days, three years have passed and the villagers now take him for a ghost. He eventually recovers his fiddle from the devil but has lost the ability to play. He wanders alone, following the classic morphology of the Russian folktale, until he finally outwits the devil and saves the princess. But the tale does not end happily, as the soldier's desire to see his mother once more leads him to cross a forbidden boundary and costs him all he has gained. As the devil's triumphal march drowns out the soldier's plaintive violin, the narrator intones the moral of the fable:

> You must not seek to add
> To what you have, what you once had;
> You have no right to share
> What you are with what you were.
>
> No one can have it all,
> That is forbidden.
> You must learn to choose between.

When Shaw Pong Liu saw *The Soldiers' Tale* in New York in 2007, she found the performance aesthetically compelling but disturbingly disconnected from the socio-political reality of the time. With two wars raging, revelations of torture and atrocity, multiple and involuntary "stop-loss" deployments of troops, and an administration and public in patriotic denial of the human costs of its military engagements, the obvious analogies, resonances, and lessons of the piece seemed lost in abstraction. She wrote,

> The isolation of the concert hall magnified the societal ignorance of the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Nobody on stage or in the audience seemed to think it necessary to acknowledge that there were real soldiers with real stories fighting for our country at that moment, some fighting and dying, some fighting and coming home to an uncertain after-life. In that moment, the idea of juxtaposing excerpts of Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale* with actual veterans' stories came to me as a way to challenge this casual disconnect between the art music world and the world outside. To bring social, political and individual realities into the sanctified concert space and transform both in the process. *Soldiers' Tales Untold* is the genesis of a struggle to be a conscious artist, to make socially relevant work, and to meld the constructive forces of art, education, community and dialogue. (*About*)

Months of research on the impact of combat stress on veterans and a careful restructuring of the composition culminated in a dramatic revisioning of Stravinsky's classic tale. Shaw Pong Liu's *Soldiers' Tales Untold* remixes the original score with atonality and passages of improvised music. C. F. Ramuz's libretto is punctuated with verbatim excerpts of testimony culled from published oral histories of American and Russian veterans of World War II, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Building on the extant themes of the fable—the loss of innocence, betrayal, the difficulty of homecoming—Liu makes the analogy to contemporary veterans achingly clear. What began as an aesthetic attempt to deconstruct the abstraction of high art quickly acquired broader sociological implications. Her growing understanding of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and empathy toward veterans—whom she had initially regarded as complicit—was reinforced by her chance involvement and dedication to the project of several veterans who had auditioned for roles in the performance.

> At that time I still felt like soldiers had some responsibility, like they weren't very innocent in my mind. But it was through then doing the research that my perspective shifted a lot, to feel like a lot of people get funnelled into the military—either they're misled or they just don't have other options—and that made them less culpable to me. It made them also victims of something that they weren't prepared for. (Personal interview)

It may seem disingenuous in the context of the general suffering wrought by war to focus on the victimization of soldiers, who may themselves be responsible for the suffering of others. But the original narrative context of *The Soldier's Tale* also effectively frames the broader critical consideration of war that Liu seeks, especially given that the average North American is much more likely to encounter a veteran suffering from PTSD than an Iraqi, Afghani, or other civilian victim.

The piece premiered in spring 2008 and has since played in a variety of public venues—schools, colleges, churches, and community centres in Boston and Montreal. The use of public space and the disconcerting structure of the work, including the use of embedded actors in the audience, underscores Shaw Pong Liu's intent to provoke engagement and dialogue about war and bring consideration and awareness to the stories that usually remain unspoken and unheard.

Each performance starts conventionally enough: the lights dim and the narrator announces over Stravinsky's jaunty opening theme: "Down a hot and dusty road, tramps a soldier with his load."[1] The soldier sits and tunes his cheap fiddle by a stream. The violin and clarinet trade modernist riffs as the bass line walks and the trombone punctuates. The devil appears, disguised as an old man, and demands the instrument from the soldier, offering a mysterious book in trade. As the two negotiate, following script, the devil promises accommodations of luxury and abundance. Suddenly someone in the audience mutters, "I never saw so much food." A few eyes glance curiously—Is someone distracted? Thinking aloud? Talking to themselves?—but quickly return to the stage. The performance continues uninterrupted and the audience maintains composure and focus as onstage the soldier goes with the devil to tutor him in fiddle and learn the ways of the book. Then the voice from the audience mutters again, an afterthought: "Many times before I'd gone to bed hungry." People begin to look around, some shush disapprovingly. As the story unfolds on the stage, more mutters and whispers are heard throughout the audience: "… hungry … adrenalin's going crazy … take every fear, every emotion you've ever felt and pack it into five minutes …"

Building on the extant themes of the fable—the loss of innocence, betrayal, the difficulty of homecoming—Liu makes the analogy to contemporary veterans achingly clear.

Returned to the road by the devil's carriage, the soldier resumes his journey home and the music reasserts itself with the upbeat opening refrain, perhaps just a touch shriller. The soldier arrives at last in his village, but cannot reintegrate. His friends and neighbours turn away in silence, hurriedly closing doors and windows. His mother screams and runs away at the sight of him. "When I came home, I just couldn't fit in," murmurs a new voice in the crowd. Then the soldier sees his fiancée married with two children and realizes the depth of his betrayal. "The dirty cheat!" he cries, "I know what's happened! I know you! It wasn't three days: three years have passed!" The bass line staggers in syncopation. "They all take me for a ghost … I'm dead among the living." The trombone moans and clarinet chatters, growls and overtones from the bass, as another voice speaks bitterly from the audience, "The true hell of war doesn't start until you come home."

As the story continues, more and more disruptions are heard from actors in the audience, reciting fragments of testimony. The narrator and musicians on stage gradually begin to lose their composure and the musical score breaks down, devolving into incoherence and improvisation, a bitter soundtrack to the testimony coming from the audience. Then, one by one, the embedded veterans stand and begin to address their comments directly to those on stage and the other audience members. The musicians strike up the theme, trying shrilly to reassert their control of the performance. But the voices will not be silenced, speaking now in sentences instead of fragments and beginning to approach the podium. Onstage, the performers gamely try to move the narrative forward as the soldier tries to start life anew, seeking to rescue a princess in another land. But the voices will not be silenced or distracted. Even as the soldier regains his fiddle and revives the princess, they permit no release: "To this day my experiences are with me; I still wake up in the middle of the night." Finally, the embedded veterans take the stage, commandeer the microphones, and speak directly to the audience.

The music plays on and the narrator tries to get the story back on track, but her fairy tale cannot compete with the horror stories of napalm, shrapnel, and a parade of the living dead. "Oh happy day!" she says, "A happy new life begins!" A witness retorts, "That day in My Lai, I was personally responsible for killing about twenty-five people … shooting them, cutting their throats … cutting out their tongues. I did it." The music shudders and collapses under the contradictions of the competing narratives. The narrator slumps in defeat and one by one the musicians put down their instruments and join in the oral testimony of the veterans. Gradually a cacophony of horrific recall swells from the stage before subsiding into verbal and musical fragmentation. The narrator manages to conduct a few bars of harmony to pronounce the moral: "No one can have it all, that is forbidden," before the structure collapses again. Finally the narrator, musicians, and veterans all drift into the audience, speaking directly to audience members, moving from one to the next like panhandlers of grief: "My parents had no way of sending me to college … I'm unable to work; unable to sleep … patriotism, you know, patriotism … I hear the screams of the people who died … I didn't sign up to have feelings like that …" One by one, they fall silent and sit quietly back amongst the audience until someone decides the piece is finished. The performance is always followed by a discussion, in which audience members can reflect on their experience, ask questions, and sometimes share their own untold tales of personal or family experience of war.

As the story unfolds on the stage, more mutters and whispers are heard throughout the audience.

Soldiers' Tales Untold is a challenging piece, not only in its contravention of performative expectations and aesthetic framing, but also in its direct invocation of traumatic stories and inconvenient truths that are usually silenced in public discourse. Improvisational departures from the familiar musical score and interruptions from the audience disorient the audience's expectations and leave them vulnerable to the disturbing content of the soldiers' tales. The violation of the fourth wall in both directions and the use of embedded actors in the audience challenge the audience's privilege, anonymity, and passivity. The structure implies a rejection of the framing of war as spectacle or pageant perpetuated by our media and politicians and a reminder of the veterans and casualties among us. It is an attempt, as Liu says, to "break the civilian bubble" (Personal interview).

While Liu's primary aim is to occasion and provoke community dialogue about the traumatic consequences of war, putting the audience in the uncomfortable position of experiencing narrative breakdown and forcing them to finally hear the soldiers' tales in direct address suggests an even more socially demanding and responsible aesthetic. Liu's formal strategy mimics the disruptive logic of traumatic memory itself, ultimately deconstructing the musical narrative to provide a space for the direct and unprocessed testimony of veterans. This has a jarring Brechtian *verfremdungseffekt* on the audience. It forces them to recognize the existential plight of veterans in their midst who may have experienced trauma and to perhaps begin to question the social injustice that underwrote their traumatization. And at the same time it forces—or enables—them to experience aesthetically, in a small way, the discordant, dissociative symptoms of PTSD themselves. Musical and textual fragments repeat compulsively and without resolution, the social and performative conventions are violated, the narrative dissociates, the devil wins. It demands a new type of listening, such as Cathy Caruth suggests is essential for understanding the significance of trauma:

> The traumatic reexperiencing of the event thus *carries with it* what Dori Laub calls the "collapse of witnessing," the impossibility of knowing what first constituted it. And by carrying that impossibility of knowing out of the empirical event itself, trauma opens us up and challenges us to a new kind of listening, the witnessing, precisely, *of impossibility*. (10)

Contradicting and interrupting the narrative framework of *The Soldiers' Tale* demonstrates the limits of language to witness or contain traumatic history. In her classic study *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry describes how torture "unmakes the world" by rendering semantics meaningless. Pain defies rendition in language; violations of human rights and dignity are literally unspeakable. Learning how to speak them is the first step toward recovery and reintegration into the social world. The closest social analogy to torture, says Scarry, is war, which obliterates not only human and physical objects, but deconstructs the very premise of civilization. The social and psychological trauma of war not only affects individuals and communities, but disrupts the social contract and the allegedly self-evident truths that bind the body politic. Like torture on a social scale, it literally "unmakes the world." Despite the ideological meta-narratives and symbologies of nationalism, freedom, justice, homeland, etc., the function of war is inescapably to inflict pain and wreak destruction on the enemy, and inevitably, if collaterally, on one's own soldiers and civilians. In certain circumstances—such as the moral ambiguity of the mission, betrayal of command trust, lack of logistical and social support, or broader bankruptcy of ideology—combat can also corrupt the mind, character, and capacity for social reintegration of the combatants, leaving survivors carrying unexploded ordnance within their psyche. This obviously carries a huge social cost as well, from the ongoing cost of physical and behavioral health care for veterans to the collateral damage inflicted by depression, suicide, domestic and workplace violence, and other issues of reintegration.

Where *The Soldiers' Tale* suggests, *Soldiers' Tales Untold* makes explicit the narrative breakdown that accompanies the trauma of war. The audience is forced to relinquish their privileged position as passive spectators of a coherent story and confront the impossibility of the protagonist's dilemma; the ineffability of trauma. They are left with only fragments of soldiers' tales; both of the original Stravinsky and of their interventionist neighbours. The salience of this dramatic device is suggested by authors of *Parallels*, an oral history study of PTSD and an important resource in the rewriting of Stravinsky's piece: "The fragment is by far the most basic characteristic of contemporary warfare … if the reader is to get an authentic understanding of combat, the act of reading should parallel the experience. As the soldiers had to make sense of the fragments, so must the reader" (Hansen et al. 10).

Despite Chris Hedges' claim that "war is a force that gives us meaning," war is also—and more so—a force that tears meaning asunder. War traumatizes: the inherent violence, depravity, and dehumanization of combat afflicts soldiers and civilians, individuals, and societies. For those who suffer combat PTSD, the jagged edges of their unassimilated experience gnaw and scrape at coherence and integrity, undermining the potential for reintegration and challenging society to acknowledge their grief. In its narrative deconstruction, *Soldiers' Tales Untold* lays bare the Faustian bargain of war: the bitter cost of knowledge and irredeemable loss of innocence.

The social and psychological trauma of war not only affects individuals and communities, but disrupts the social contract and the allegedly self-evident truths that bind the body politic.

Though PTSD would not be officially categorized as a mental disorder until 1980, the symptoms of combat related stress were already apparent in Stravinsky's time. Veterans manifesting hyperarousal, nightmares and flashbacks, detachment, aphasia, and difficulty reintegrating into civilian society were said to be suffering from "soldier's heart," "shell-shock," or "battle fatigue." It was apparent, however, that such "war neurosis" was distinct from other pathologies in that it was not the result of any distortion, repression, or unconscious projection but rather the unmitigated and overwhelming *structure of its experience*: "The event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (Caruth 5).

The relationship of trauma to narrative, and particularly its resistance to narrativization, has serious implications both for the consideration and treatment of those suffering symptoms of PTSD and for their host societies. Narrative structures our experience of the world and the memories and meaning we create from it. Narrative is essential not only to individual psychological health, but in fomenting human society. Both socially and psychologically, the stories we tell are, as cognitive linguist George Lakoff says, the "metaphors we live by."

But trauma can interrupt the narrative process by which we make sense of the world and establish our place in it, severing the normal function of mind to integrate memory, knowledge, and emotion in a meaningful synthetic whole. Traumatic memories are not true memories, assimilated into a linear narrative, but are encoded rather as fixed vivid images and sensations. These traumatic events and visions remain unprocessed and unintegrated into our life story. This dissociation is made manifest in fragmentary, contradictory, and sometimes violent expressions, with symptoms of hyperarousal, intrusion, and a kind of numb anomie. By replicating these symptoms in the structure of her piece, Liu forces the audience to at least concede a space for the hypertextual fragments of traumatic memory and experience, a margin of error in the master narrative.

The response to *Soldiers' Tales Untold* varies according to audience and context. While younger audiences sometimes giggle uncomfortably, not knowing the protocols of high art or the socio-political context, most adult audiences are moved by the experience to reflect on family members or friends who served in the military and wonder at their untold tales. A response following a performance at a small lounge in Cambridge, Massachusetts, is


I didn't know I had it in me
my whole mind just went
horror climax

typical: "I was thinking about my family and I don't even know if they killed a person, and I don't feel like I can ask them to talk about these things"(Lui, *About*). A World War II veteran at a college presentation noted the emotional power of the performance: "It brings one's emotions up to the point that you almost want to scream in response … He's a human being, just like me. He has a family. He loves … he can find peace" (Lui, *About*).

While the piece has proven effective at opening a space for discussion about issues of war and veterans affairs in civilian communities, veterans themselves are typically more reticent about sharing their own experiences. Even those self-selected by their interest in the arts or involvement in activist groups seem to be wary of commenting publicly on the issues raised. While *Soldiers' Tales Untold* has never been performed exclusively for veterans, the response to a special performance for members of a Boston veterans' shelter illustrates the complexity of raising such questions. During the discussion period, one audience member spoke at great length of a fellow veteran who was homeless and suffered symptoms of PTSD. As Liu later reflected, "Suddenly the room got very uncomfortable because he wasn't giving a comment that we could say 'hmm' and move on from. … There was no answer, there was no solution: it's like somebody's suffering was laid out for us. Usually civilian comments have a sense of roundness about them because you're reflecting on something, but it's not an ongoing personal trauma" (Personal interview).

The strategy of incorporating the live testimony of combat veterans succeeds in terms of Liu's initial goals of confronting the abstraction of high art and pricking the civic conscience of the audience, but it clearly also raises dense theoretical, practical, and ethical issues, issues that have left the development of the piece in limbo. Who speaks in this new artistic forum, and for whom? What are the responsibilities of the artist, the audience, and society, particularly when invoking traumatic memories and buried histories? Can the arts help reconstruct the shattered narratives of the victims of trauma and reintegrate them into community?

While demonstrating the incapacity of the mythic narrative to contain the unprocessed traumatic experience of combat and opening a window for civic dialogue, Liu's is still a tightly structured and self-contained composition. In the end the soldiers' tales remain untold. The uncomfortable silence that ends the play functions as an invitation to dialogue but also highlights the irreconcilable tension between the need and the impossibility of speaking. In her feminist analysis of trauma and recovery, Judith Herman recognized the malignancy of traumatic stress precisely in this dilemma between the will to deny and the will to proclaim, which is manifest within both individuals and societies. Such cognitive dissonance has been described in various contexts throughout history as "double-consciousness" (W. E. B. DuBois), "doublethink" (Orwell), "hysteria" (Freud), or, in clinical parlance, "dissociation."

Reconstructing these shattered narratives, processing and integrating the traumatic experience into a coherent life story, is central to the therapeutic treatment of dissociation. Whether called e*xposure*, *narrative*, or *testimony* therapy, telling and retelling the story of one's trauma is well established in clinical practice, indicating a positive correlation between narrativity and the alleviation of PTSD symptoms. Under the guidance of a trained interlocutor, the repeated verbalization of the traumatic event, especially considering—as in the case of oral history and testimony therapy—the broader context of a life story, gradually reiterates a coherent narrative that can be psychically integrated. The object of the treatment, often in conjunction with psychotropic drugs to dull the horror, is to allow the subject to master the narrative, to make sense of the event and thereby gain some ownership and control over it. Even the diagnostic recognition of PTSD in the 1980 Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) III appeared to help to contextualize and legitimate the heretofore inchoate suffering of its victims.

But employing narrative to alleviate individual suffering is only half the story. The *public* forums of storytelling and listening provide crucial elements of acknowledgement, communal mourning, forgiveness, and healing. As Jonathan Shay argues in

his classic account of combat PTSD, *Achilles in Vietnam*, "Healing from trauma depends on *communalization* of the trauma—being able safely to tell the story to someone who is listening and who can be trusted to retell it truthfully to others in the community"(4). Retelling stories of trauma is crucial not only to the recovery and social reintegration of the individual victims, but also to social responsibility and restorative justice. Acknowledging the trauma present in the community in its members and its practices can promote healing and solidarity and prevent revictimization.

While Dr. Shay's work advocates community responsibility for the care and rehabilitation of veterans, its main insight is the correlation of literary tropes of classic Greek narrative to contextualize the phenomena of combat, repatriation, and the related stresses to a general audience. In both *Achilles in Vietnam* and *Odysseus in America*, he locates the disparate, chaotic, and shattered voices of his patients in Homerian literary archetypes. Grounding the dissociative symptoms both historically and aesthetically enables a civilian audience to begin to comprehend the traumatic experience of veterans, and a veteran audience to move beyond the alienation and repression of their return. Shay suggests that considering the psychology of contemporary combat veterans through the lens of Homer's classic texts might yield a greater understanding of PTSD among mental health care workers and also educate the general public about its prevalence and effects. He also suggests that a greater understanding of the combat experience of contemporary veterans might even benefit literary studies of the text itself.

Shaw Pong Liu's *Soldiers' Tales Untold* also invokes a classic text to frame the experience of combat veterans and raise consciousness of their dilemma. But she goes further than Shay's descriptive analogy, empowering the voices of veterans to speak back to the text itself, challenging, infiltrating, and ultimately decentring it. The incorporation of traumatic testimony directly into aesthetic form has the potential to validate the historical experience of veterans and other survivors of war—a recognition often officially denied—while sublimating its post-traumatic effects.

Telling these *Tales Untold* in an aesthetically mediated, public form has great potential for collective narrative reconstruction and reconciliation. If, as Shay, Freud, Zizek, Shaw Pong, and others suggest, trauma is embedded in art and culture, then archetypal narratives like the *Iliad*, Stravinsky's *Soldiers' Tales*, Hitchcock films, etc. might provide a ready-made cultural rubric or framework the afflicted can grasp onto, a focal point around which they may begin to organize and make sense of their own traumatic experience. Recognizing that others have also suffered similar wounds may provide reassurance, solidarity, and cultural legitimacy to those suffering in silence and isolation. In addition, the public nature of performance art provides a forum for the social acknowledgement, respectful attention, and cathartic empathy essential to both private and public memory and healing.

If we do not accept the responsibility of memory and history, if we choose to forget, then they are condemned to live in the ever-present horror of the event.

While beyond the scope of her current production, Liu's use of storytelling, archetype, and narrative to frame, contextualize, and ground the trauma and alienation suffered by combat veterans suggests the potential for a more interactive or dialogic art therapy. After all, it is only when the soldier regains the ability to play his fiddle—when he finds his voice—that he is able to overcome the devil, surmount his alienation, and rejoin human society. As traumatic experience can interrupt the normal process of semantic encoding and assimilation of both memory and history, the mindful structured listening of oral history and the reassuring archetypical structures of the arts can rebuild trust and solidarity and induce social recognition and reintegration. Liu herself recognizes the incompleteness of the project and envisions having veterans collaborate more directly in the creative process in its next phase, perhaps shifting it toward a therapeutic rather than a critical diagnostic function. She says, "The piece is incomplete until I have more veterans as collaborators. I'm someone on the outside trying to share what I see from a civilian perspective and an artist's perspective as well. I would like to have more sanction from people who actually know what I'm talking about" (Personal interview).

The collaboration and investment of veterans is key to the ongoing development of the production and the realization of its therapeutic potential, but, as Judith Herman has noted, recovery also depends on a social context in which such stories can be told and heard. Denial, secrecy, shame, and repression are both psychological and social functions of the aftermath of trauma, both a subconscious reflex and the eighth stage of genocide. This buried conflict can only be overcome by acknowledging, integrating, and communicating the trauma, and this is only possible in the context of a political movement that demands it, be it civil rights, women's liberation, anti-war, or victimology. As she says, "Survivors challenge us to reconstruct history, to make meaning of their present symptoms in the light of past events" (3). This social narrative function is the rationale of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions and other traditional social justice mechanisms, such as the Rwandan *gacaca*, which create an institutional space for traumatized and dislocated communities to tell their stories until an event can be consensually historicized. These may or may not also determine punishment, amnesty, restitution, and apology: the main function is dialogic. The central problem confronted in both the structure and function of Liu's production is how such dialogue can take place in the absence, indeed the willful neglect, of political will. Without the support of public institutions, what should be the role of the arts and the responsibility of communities to acknowledge and address the needs of their most vulnerable members?

Finally, the therapeutic potential of performative art and other social media in the public recognition

and memorialization of trauma also contains a critical and cruel irony. Victims of war, genocide, and other human rights violations—including soldiers—deserve empathy, support, and treatment, but we must not forget the moral of their story. Trauma happens for a reason, usually a political one, and addressing the symptoms of PTSD should not obscure or forgive the root cause of the affliction. As witnesses to what Caruth calls "an impossible history," the victims of trauma also bear a responsibility to carry and convey it.

> It is indeed this truth of the traumatic experience that forms the center of its pathology or symptoms; it is not a pathology, that is, a falsehood or displacement of meaning, but of history itself. If PTSD must be understood as a pathological symptom, then it is not so much a symptom of the unconscious, as it is a symptom of history. The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess. (5)

This may seem a cruel burden to place on the traumatized, but it is the cost of their true rehabilitation. They are witnesses to impossible histories that must be told. The wars in Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere were and are perpetuated by the efforts of political elites and the complicity of the public in burying their true costs. Human rights violations continue with impunity because of the lack of political will to confront them and the structural contradictions of allegedly global institutions based on state sovereignty and self-interest. Witnesses, victims, and veterans of the atrocities of our "catastrophic age" are ignored, silenced, prescribed into an antidepressant fueled half-life, forgotten in refugee camps, or otherwise consigned to irrelevance so that we may be spared an awkward cross-examination (Caruth 11).

A society that refuses to acknowledge trauma—particularly the trauma it perpetuates through its own policies of privilege, repression, and ignorance—engenders the perpetual re-victimization of survivors by forcing them to carry alone this burden of "impossible history." As Judith Herman said at the 1990 Harvard Trauma Conference, "Every instance of severe traumatic psychological injury is a standing challenge to the rightness of the social order" (cited in Shay 1). Accepting the social responsibility of remembering, and of creating consensual meaning, may finally allow the witnesses to be dis-possessed of the event; to finally forget. This gets at a central irony of the relation between trauma and memory. We must remember so they may forget. If we do not accept the responsibility of memory and history, if we choose to forget, then they are condemned to live in the ever-present horror of the event.

Shaw Pong Liu's *Soldiers' Tales Untold* demonstrates an ethical artistic response to this dilemma. In using a classical narrative archetype first to frame then to submit to these untold tales, she creates a forum that both respects the humanity of life stories and seeks a critical dialogic engagement with the social and cultural metanarrative. This should be a model for oral history and the arts: to promote social and political engagement, bearing witness to the traumatic history of our informants and bearing their burden forward. Confronting the traumatic reality of war, shorn of its jingoism and euphemism, might give us pause in starting another. Narrative may provide some comfort and understanding, and the arts a cultural forum and legacy, but the only truly effective treatment for PTSD is prevention.

NOTE

1 Quotes from *The Soldier's Tale* are taken from an audio recording of the performance at Endicott College on April 28, 2009.

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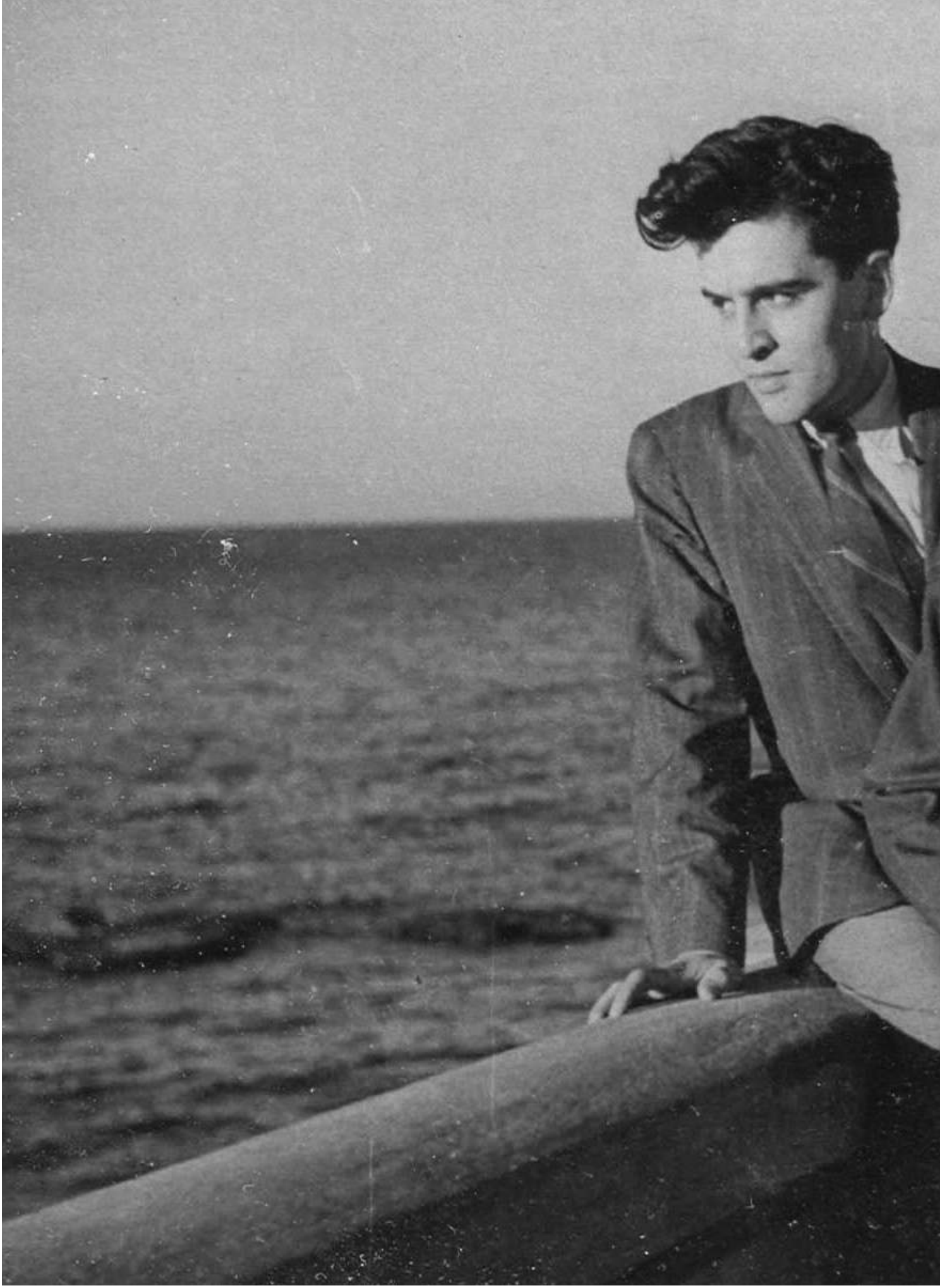

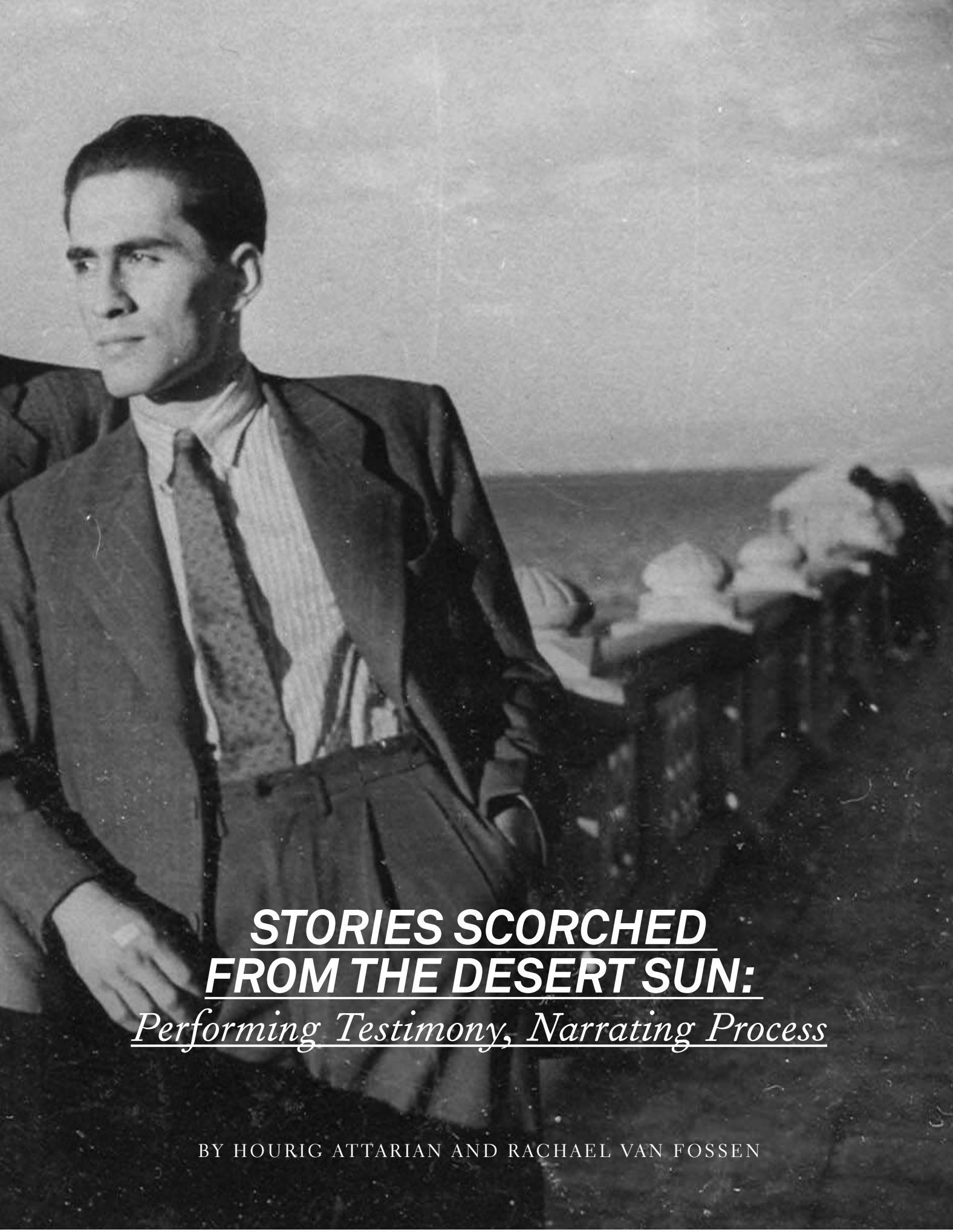

STORIES SCORCHED FROM THE DESERT SUN:

Performing Testimony, Narrating Process

BY HOURIG ATTARIAN AND RACHAEL VAN FOSSEN

BEGINNINGS

As part of the Untold Histories project of the Oral History and Performance Group,[1] we collaborated in March 2009 (Rachael as dramaturge and staging director, Hourig as author of the text) to create a theatrical staged reading based on oral histories of the Armenian genocide and on narratives of lived experiences of war. The original text, written in the form of a "storytelling essay," was retitled *Stories Scorched from the Desert Sun* for its incarnation as a performance.

We faced a number of issues in our deeply reflective collaboration, including concerns raised by the tight time frame for both text adaptation and staging rehearsals. In looking at how testimonial storytelling lends itself to performance, we needed to be attentive to points of convergence and divergence among the multilayered perspectives of author, dramaturge, director, and cast. Exploring testimony as a process that hinges on the transformative aspects of telling and sharing these stories through performance, we became aware of an act of "multiple voicing." We found that both performing the stories and storying the performance create a cathartic, introspective, and proactive process as witness for all involved (including cast, writer, dramaturge, and audience). Most importantly, this approach creates a space of collective ownership for the events and experiences retold.

Arising from this collaboration, a dialogue ensued between dramaturge and author on the notion of "testimony as process," even when focusing on "product" such as a performative public presentation. We have since found that our initial engagement in the performance as a learning experience has opened up new possibilities for our evolving collaborative dialogue. What started as an exchange between the two of us, seeking to understand the perspectives we each brought to the performance, became a story in its own right as we delved deeper into our collaboration. What follows is the charting of that story: the "storying" of the performance. Intended as performative dialogue, the text—as presented at the Remembering War, Genocide and Other Human Rights Violations conference—intertwines with excerpts of the original script in italics.[2]

STORYING THE PERFORMANCE

CHORUS 1: My memory will retain what is worthwhile.

CHORUS 2: My memory knows more about me than I do;

CHORUS 3: it doesn't lose what deserves to be saved.

CHORUS 1: Eduardo Galeano.

HOURIG: These are the stories of several girlhoods told in three voices. I am Hourig.

YOUNG PERGROUHI: My name is Pergrouhi, My mother's name was Hadji Mariam. My father's name was Boghos. I don't know my family name.

HERMIG: And I am Hermig. Our voices come together to tell the stories of many young women.

HOURIG: Young women who lived through the horrors of war and genocide in different places and at different times.

Rachael: In January 2009, my good friend and colleague Ted Little approached me to ask if I would be interested in acting as dramaturge for a performance creation piece being undertaken by Hourig Attarian, in her capacity as artist-in-residence for the Montreal Life Stories project. Hourig was, as Ted described, a PhD candidate who had conducted oral history interviews with survivors of the Armenian genocide. I cannot remember how I responded to Ted at that first invitation. I do remember that my initial inner response was decidedly mixed. I am always most interested in working on performance creation that is directly relevant to the lives of real, usually living, people, and I am increasingly interested in pursuing the staging of verbatim texts.

On the other hand, I felt nervousness about working on a piece on which I had not been involved at the beginning of the development process; all the more so if dealing with genocide stories, and with a writer who feels very close to the material. Would what I had to offer interfere with the "authenticity" or integrity of the stories? Interfere with the original intent of the writer in putting these stories forward? And indeed this invitation came at a time when my own creative preoccupations involve questioning the very notion of authenticity, a time when I am especially intrigued by building on performance as artifice, an artifice that can reveal what a rigid notion of "authenticity of voice" may not be able to reveal. I worried that my own creative

ALL IMAGES © Hourig Attarian from her family collection.

What started as an exchange between the two of us, seeking to understand the perspectives we each brought to the performance, became a story in its own right as we delved deeper into our collaboration.

preoccupations would be inappropriate to the material. I worried also that I am not an expert in testimony specific to trauma. I stewed about how to present such stories to a public without sensationalizing horror.

Hourig: The evolution of the writing itself and its story over the years is interesting to say the least. Originally, the first interview that took place with Pergrouhi the survivor was in 2002. This then led me and my friend Hermig, who co-authored the original text with me, to write pieces around it over the next year for a few different conferences. We were next invited to contribute a chapter to an edited book based on that text. At the time I was right in the thick of my doctoral fieldwork, which in fact was very much an offshoot of my initial work with the survivor Pergrouhi. And so, my work with Rachael, the cast, and the musician in March 2009 became the latest episodes in the evolution of the original writing. When I look back at it, this is a set of multilayered stories that has been with me for the past eight years. With each new stage, a new layer is added to the stories and a new incarnation results.

Rachael: One phone conversation with Hourig and I discovered I needn't have worried. She seemed open to my tentative suggestions about how we might proceed on a tight timeline towards a scheduled March 2009 public reading of a work-in-progress. I felt much reassured that we would work well and creatively together. For one thing, we found things to laugh about. For another, we agreed that we would enter this collaboration understanding that every aspect of it, including the staged reading, we would consider as a process of exploration, of experimentation in how we could stage these difficult stories as performance.

Hourig: When my friend and collaborator Hermig and I were preparing the text for publication a few years ago, we were very concerned about the textual representation of the stories. What we envisioned was a cascade of three voices each telling a different yet ultimately a similar story. Each of the stories had layers and substories in it as well, and we certainly saw it all very much intertwined. But how do you represent all that textually? All we could do was to contextualize it in the introduction and explain our vision. Looking at the published text now, it does of course have a cyclical aspect to it, yet it is also very much bound by the linearity of a written text. Rachael not only immediately understood this, but she also proposed a true intertwining of the text onstage. Thus, what the audience heard and saw during the March performance was actually stories flowing into one another seamlessly, complementing each other. By letting the different voices of the characters talk to each other, the audience was led in and out of different episodes of the stories. For example as the teenage characters of Hourig and Hermig tell their stories of the war memories, there are cuts with a few lines from one and a few lines from the other, but the stories fuse organically reaffirming the recounted experiences.

HOURIG: Hermig and I grew up together on the same street in Beirut, amid the chaos of civil war, our blossoming friendship our lifeline to sanity, our defiance to the turmoil engulfing us.

HERMIG: We had hardly taken in the full impact, the immensity of our grandparents' stories when our war started.

HOURIG: The year was 1975. The day April 14. Three days before I turned twelve.

HERMIG: It was April 1975, when the first incident occurred.

HOURIG: It was a bright spring day. The early morning ritual when our whole household was up always started with the aroma of coffee my father brewed for himself and my mother.

HERMIG: Not yet twelve and in the sweet twilight zone of childhood, that borderline space where realities and fantasies flow in and out of each other seamlessly, still trying to make sense of the deportation stories. Barely twelve, our first rush of hormones and our first infatuations landed upon us with full force. Grade six, awaiting that most important of all events in a young person's life, graduating from primary school, the celebration, the heady expectation of going on to high school and making our grand exit from the realm of childhood and being accepted into the world of grown up people, so we would be able to go to the parties that previously only our elder sisters were allowed to attend, and perhaps be allowed to wear bell-bottom pants …

Barely twelve, when our war started.

HOURIG: My father opens the green shutters of the verandah, to let the sunshine and the waking street noises in. This morning there is an eerie silence on the street and my father behaves in a strange way. Instead of finding him in the kitchen boiling the coffee, I see him peering out through the cracks of the green shutters. My mother is standing next to him. They are talking in low whispers.

MOTHER: "No school today, go back to bed,"

HOURIG: Is their response to my and my brother's bewildered looks.

FATHER: "It is not safe. There has been an incident."

HERMIG: It was a shooting on a bus carrying civilians. (TO HOURIG) Maybe the schools will be closed!

HOURIG: I couldn't understand why the shutters had to stay closed. I couldn't understand why the sunshine could not be let in. It was only three days before I turned twelve.

HERMIG: Little did we know then that this would be our long march in the desert that our grandparents had gone through in their time, our own baptism in blood and fire.

HOURIG: The summer I turned twelve, I had my first period. I walked through the threshold of womanhood as I bled out the pain I felt in my heart.

The summer I turn twelve is a very hot one. My bedroom window that overlooks the garage of a neighbouring building stays open at night, in the hopes of carrying a waft of a breeze inside. Instead, what invades my bedroom are the moans and cries of the blindfolded young boys I see hurled into the dark abyss of the garage during the day.

The year we turn twelve, Hermig and I meet daily to talk about the books we have read, the boys we have crushes on, the school we would go to if the roads were safe again, and the childhood that was robbed of us.

HERMIG: The bus incident was a story we only heard on the news, but soon the real fighting spreads all around Beirut. It usually starts with rounds of machine gun fire. Then we hear the militia yelling at people to empty out the streets, stay indoors, and stock some food … This sends my parents into a flurry—making sure that everyone has returned home from wherever they were, and then closing all the shutters and ordering us not to go near the balconies. There isn't anything an eleven year old wants to do as much as disobey her parents and of course this for me was a directive to go and watch what was happening on the streets through the slots of the shutters.

And I did.

YOUNG HERMIG: A man is being tied from his feet to the back of a pickup truck and being dragged around in the streets. The gravel is tearing him apart, and he is all bloodied. It is only a very short glimpse, but enough to catapult me full force into a new world, where suddenly my grandparents' stories of death and hunger stop being "stories" and acquire the full force of reality. All the penance that an eleven year old is capable of—why was I jubilant at skipping school for a week? Oh dear god, I'll go to school Saturdays and Sundays too, study until the late hours of the evening, please let this not happen.

HERMIG: My pleas are in vain. Ours is not going to be an adolescence of bell-bottom pants and parties …

Hourig: Through the performance it was now possible to see on stage what we had tried to envision textually a few years ago. The text takes very tangible form in its new representational mode through the performative act. This act of translation from one mode to another was joyful and rewarding. And seeing that incarnation of the text was absolutely fascinating for me.

Rachael: At our first in-person meeting, over coffee at a café-bookstore downtown, Hourig and I established important principles to guide how we would proceed. Given the emphasis we wished to place on an open-ended process, we quickly determined that both of us preferred not to have an all-professional cast. Where for a certain kind of process it can be valuable to have professional actors with experience in new play development, in our case I felt discussions of characters' journeys in more or less "standard" terms might actually prevent us from the kind of discoveries we hoped to make toward "new" ways to stage difficult testimony. It "felt" to both Hourig and to me that what was most important was to work with people who do, yes, have training in theatre performance, but who are perhaps first and foremost curious and relatively new to *the* process of script development, in order for *this* script development process to be, itself, a new one. Working with students would help us to continue to consider the whole experience as a learning process for ourselves. We ended with a wonderful, talented, but also very brave cast of three—two acting students, Amena Ahmad and Suyi Liu, and Maya Dhawan, a young but mature professional artist. All three engaged thoroughly with our creative research process.

Hourig: I loved the fact that the cast was multiracial, because it emphasized in a very specific way the universality of the stories. However, seeing the text on stage and going through the rehearsals, I must admit I went through very conflicting feelings. On one hand, going through the process of rehearsals felt like going through sculpting sessions, shifting and changing sometimes in minute details, until there was an end product on performance night. At the same time, the process of rehearsals gave me the opportunity to step out of my story, to become an observer, whereas before I was very much part of the story. This had both its good and bad points, since being the observer and the listener of my own stories took a toll on me emotionally. This feeling was very pronounced, especially on the night of the performance. On the other hand, it felt rewarding, because having the stories reach out to a larger audience was really a dream come true.

Sitting through the rehearsals and later on in the theatre hall, the roles of narrator and listener had definitely reversed for me. Listening to how the voices we had written about became embodied in a very real sense, I found myself in the position of witnessing my own story; while Rachael and the cast, who were the original witnesses if you will, became the narrators. It has always been difficult for me to deal with my own war memories. Talking about survivors' memories and survivor stories has always been a first vehicle in that sense. It is a way of bridging into my own stories, trying to understand my life story or my life experiences through the telling of other life stories which have been indelibly, inevitably more harrowing, more difficult, more traumatic than mine could ever have been. Doing that has also proven to be a healing journey.

Rachael: I find it fascinating to listen to Hourig speak about how she shifted from considering that the performers and I were witnesses to the stories, to being herself an observer, or witness, to testimony by others. Fascinating because part of my ongoing discomfort in working with testimonial material stems from a concern that often, instead of paying attention to the important act of witnessing, I am paying attention largely to technical details. In this case, how to bring to theatrical *life* stories that are largely about *death*? How to lift stories told about past events into the theatrical present moment? It can sometimes feel callous and unfeeling to be the person worrying about what is going to "work" theatrically. And, admittedly, I am sometimes thinking in terms of what will keep an audience engaged—some would say entertained.

Hourig: On the night of the performance I was engaged in an act of "multiple watching." I was watching the actors, I was watching parts of my life story, I was watching the audience, and a part of me internally was watching me watch the actors and my story … I realized that it was much more difficult hearing my story out loud, than hearing Pergrouhi's stories, my great aunt Anoush's story, or Hermig's grandmother's and great grandmother's, Azadouhi's and Nouritza's, stories. I felt I had literally come face-to-face with my twelve-year-old self, seeing what she has been through in a new light. I thought about how I have felt compelled to share these stories, but also how healing is certainly a life-long journey. My hope in the end is that we learn to see where the transformative and empowering aspect of telling these stories lies, and that despite being very difficult, journeys these stories also contain the seeds of healing.

We are in a room with other people and, in that sense, witnessing the stories in a form of public communal experience that can also heighten emotional response.

Rachael: The first time we met, Hourig and I shared some good chuckles. I have a memory of Hourig looking to me, and saying "Well, the stories are not really *so* graphic, so…" I wasn't sure how to respond, feeling that maybe Hourig was looking to me for reassurance. I remember hesitating, and then responding a little tentatively, "Well, some parts of it are pretty graphic…" At this, we fully belly laughed. Being able to

laugh together is important to me, offering not only a release from difficult material, but also an increased sense of intimacy and shared experience between relative strangers. We talked also about the challenges of presenting such difficult material to an audience, feeling unable in our particular context to interject comic material.

ALL: (In unison) Pergrouhi.

PERGROUHI: When we went to Yaremja, they let us sleep in the barn.

YOUNG PERGROUHI: The animals return to the shed after having grazed the whole day, and we are allowed to sleep here, in a pit, almost. But the heat, the fleas, and the lice are unbearable.

My mother reminds me: "Listen, my child, your name is Pergrouhi, my name is Hadji Mariam and your father's name was Boghos. Don't you ever forget that".

During the day I go play with the Turkmen kids in the field. One day I noticed that my mother is lying on the ground. I go closer and see that her eyes are open. I speak to her, but she won't answer me back. I go back to play. I am only a child, barely six years old. I play during the day and go and sleep next to her at night.

PERGROUHI: For three days I slept like that in my dead mother's bosom.

YOUNG PERGROUHI: After three days, the old lady says to my cousin, "go tell her, her mother's dead." So she comes and tells me.

Four Turkmen bring a hemp sack, open it, put my mother's body in the sack and take it out. I am crying and running after them. They take her out in the fields and bury her there.

PERGROUHI: They just covered her with some earth and came back.

YOUNG PERGROUHI: I go every day to where her body lies and cry endlessly, "mother, mother, please come back, please get up, mother, please." But my mother doesn't answer back. They come and take me back in and tell me not to cry. They give me a rag doll to console me.

On the third day, I go to where she was buried again. Her arm is sticking out of the ground. Like a piece of wood. I am very frightened. The next day I go back. The dogs have pulled her body out of the ground and are ripping her apart. Those village dogs are very ferocious.

PERGROUHI: Those dogs were very ferocious. (pause) I have so many more things to tell, but I cannot go on anymore.

Hourig: Personally, one of the interesting aspects of the process of writing was seeing how it transformed from audiotaped and videotaped interview material, with an interview that had a very specific purpose in terms of oral history, to a storied essay, and finally transitioning into a performative mode, making the personal public and political through an artful engagement. Going from the oral history interview into the performance is very much fusing life and art together in that moment and carrying the audience in its folds. It is a curious way of both suspension of disbelief because of the artistic engagement, yet at the same time total immersion in a life encounter, all within a specific temporal framework between the stage lights fading up and fading out.

In the transition to performance mode I felt particularly concerned about the graphic elements of violence and trauma that surfaced in the original stories. The transition from the written to the spoken word carries a lot of power, since within a certain time frame you can reach a number of people through an audience that is more or less captive in the theatre hall. The written word, despite all its graphic details, still has a certain mutedness that is very different from the experience of the spoken word. As a reader, when I reach a disturbing part in a text, I can choose to close the book, take a break, choose not to continue reading, decide when I'm going to come back to it, or not come back to it at all. With the spoken word, what is going through to the audience is so powerful, immediate, and strong. The bridging is very direct.

The important question and concern for me then is how and what to do as writer in order not to sensationalize the violence. Of course the importance of these stories is all about memory against forgetting, public truth-telling, knowing and understanding our past, doing justice to the stories and to the people involved, but at the same time, it is also crucially about healing and creating awareness. In that context what is essential for me is that the story does not get bogged down in the violence and the trauma, because *that* is not the message, that is not where I want the story to stagnate. I also do not want us, as an audience, as readers, listeners, to be caught in that voyeuristic and grotesque trapping.

Rachael: I have been highly influenced in my thinking on testimonial performance and voyeurism by Julie Salverson's writing about avoiding an "erotics of injury" and the eroticization of trauma in performance of difficult testimony (see "Change", "Witnessing Subjects", and "Clown"). Of course the power of live performance is largely that the words of the text are received by multiple senses among audience: seeing, hearing, even feeling the words as they sonically fill the room means it is a more immersive experience. And we are not alone as we may be when we read the same story. We are in a room with other people and, in that sense, witnessing the stories in a form of public communal experience that can also heighten emotional response. This potential power of live performance may need to be tempered by writing and performance techniques that allow distancing—certain forms of humour, for example can allow distancing. In our case, without that particular tool, how might we make the most of both those potentials—offering simultaneously a distanced and a heightened emotional response?

Hourig: This is where the transformative aspects of the act of "storying" and of the performance itself become very important. And again the question arises, how do you do that? This issue became a crucial node in my collaboration with Rachael, because we very much saw eye to eye in this respect. I also remember that this was an issue I addressed at length during rehearsals with the cast. Every single time we talked about intentions of the characters, where the characters were

leading, how they were going back into their stories trying to understand themselves, I would always ask the actors for "less emotion, more mutedness." This was primarily because the experience of horror and dehumanization the characters had been through is an unfathomable and unspeakable experience, and I certainly do not want an audience to be captive in that experience. I want an audience to be able to go through and beyond it; to see what it does to us, but to also be aware of how to reach beyond that, where to go as human beings. Not as people who belong to this or that ethnic group, but as human beings, embracing the universality of the stories and learning to go beyond the trappings of victimhood. In that sense another vital connection I see between oral history and performance is in what kind of a vehicle the performance wants to and can be to achieve this. And therein lie both its power and its accountability.

Rachael: Hourig's note to the actors about being "more muted" provided us with an interesting conundrum for rehearsals. It is challenging to the work of the actor to mute a performance that has not yet been fully explored and experimented with. While I thought I knew what Hourig meant, and what and why she was looking for this muted effect as a way to underplay the sensationalistic aspects of the stories, my usual inclination is to ask actors to "go big" in rehearsals, from which experience we may make discoveries, but we can also pull back the performances as needed. As soon as Hourig spoke, I knew that this approach would not be useful. Yet in actorly terms, "muted" is not an easily playable action. Asking for "muted," I worried, would increase rather than decrease a tendency to feel tentative about dealing with personal and difficult material. We nonetheless made some conscious decisions, or at least attempts, to de-sensationalize the more graphic descriptions of violence.

For three days I slept like that in my dead mother's bosom.

What we settled on, for instance in the excerpt performed by Suyi Liu as young Pergrouhi, was almost literally a more Brechtian reporting style of performance.[3] I asked Suyi to play Young Pergrouhi as a curious young girl simply reporting the facts of the discovery of her mother's body. Her playable action became "I am trying to figure this out as I am speaking," with a near absence of sentiment. While avoiding a melodramatic sensationalizing, I believe that this choice also emphasized all the more the horror of subjecting an actual young girl—the real Pergrouhi whose words the character spoke—to the experience not only of loss, but of desecration.

Hourig: Reflecting on the interplay of oral history and performance, there is an element of performance in oral history to begin with. As a narrator, telling your story is an act of interpretation. At the time of the interview, you are making instantaneous decisions in your mind, deciding what to highlight, what to touch upon, what to go deeper into, what to leave out. And you are aware you are doing this for a certain audience. You are also probably going through a subtle act of self-censorship—there is very much that element of judging what is appropriate or not appropriate to be told, since you're aware that the interview is recorded for a purpose and will be available as public record or in archives. So you are already very much an editor of your story. You also become (some people in a rudimentary way, others through an innate storytelling gift) the performer of your life story as you retell it. For example, the survivor Pergrouhi was a master storyteller who held a listener captive with her recounting.

Rachael: The texts that ended up in the performance were performed, for the most part, verbatim from the original source material. There is one sense in which this was not true. In storytelling form, we may often hear the teller narrate the characters' adventures or misadventures using the past tense; in theatre, where the characters are not being narrated but instead performed by actors, of course these characters are ordinarily speaking in the present tense. Throughout most of the performance text, we changed the original from narrations of past events to show characters who were previously narrated *about* as if they were instead in the moment, and we as audience were watching events unfold as they are happening. One effect of this choice, of course, is to increase identification processes, and thus provide a means to emphasize the present relevance of stories from the Armenian genocide. The stories seem less other to those of us without a direct relationship to the genocide.

Simultaneously we are disrupting identification by having young actors play several characters at many different ages, and having them move quickly back and forth between

these characters. The effect of the intertwining of the three narratives therefore served, I hope, not only to achieve the cascade of related stories that Hourig has characterized, but also to keep audience members actively engaged—since they need to keep up with and sort out the various shifts.

HOURIG: (speaking to Hermig) The anatomy of our survival has deep, very deep roots. Resurrection is not a grace from heaven, but an imposed survival mechanism. This is what countless teachers have taught generations of Armenians. "You will avenge yourself by living/ Living a thousand fold more stubbornly" wrote one poet. And so I have lived.

HERMIG: We met Pergrouhi when she was 95 years old,

As we were recording, translating, editing Pergrouhi's story, we started remembering and retelling the stories of our own grandmothers, great-grandmothers, and great-aunts. Trauma for us is not simply inherited memories of genocide stories. Soon it was our own memories of war and violence that we were writing about, something we had avoided doing for many years.

HOURIG: My last visit to Pergrouhi was on Sunday, April 24, 2005. There was a single red carnation in a vase, next to her bedside. Her voice was very tired. As I held her hand to say goodbye, she told me, "Thank you for coming, thank you for not forgetting me." It was to be my last visit to her, her last spoken words to me. Two mornings later she passed away.

What will always remain engraved in my memories of Pergrouhi is the image of her as a little girl.

On one of my visits, she is asleep when I enter her room. I sit next to her, holding her hand. She wakes, and tells me, "As soon as I closed my eyes I heard them coming, I heard them coming after me." I squeeze her hand softly and mumble a few comforting words to her. "The dogs are coming, they are barking loud, they are fierce. They're going to rip me apart just like they did my mother." She sounds so helpless. She is the little girl again who witnessed it all.

CHORUS 3: Ninety years had not been able to wipe away the fear.

CHORUS 1: Ninety years she had lived with this pain.

CHORUS 2: Ninety years and the wound is still raw.

Rachael: The term "staged reading" most often conjures images of actors with music stands and very little if any actual staging. However, a usual audience for a staged reading of a work-in-progress is, in my experience, made up largely of theatre professionals, and the event considered part of the process of development for the script. Our audience would be quite a different one. In addition, our goal in development was to explore and experiment not just with text, but with concrete

ways to stage trauma and death, as I said before, in such a fashion that brings these to life. In other words, as much as we decided from the onset to consider adapting for a staged reading as a process, it was still important that the product—what we would put before the public—was theatrically engaging. With deep appreciation to Maya, Amena, Suyi, and Chimwemwe Miller, composer and onstage musician, we rehearsed quite a lot compared to usual standards for a staged reading. Their talent and consummate professionalism carried the day, along with Hourig's admirable willingness to let me mess around with the stories, shifting from ideas of their integrity to notions of their being integral, integrated, and intertwined.

Hourig: I cannot say enough about how I felt both Rachael and the cast and musician honoured and nurtured the stories they told on stage. They also became part of this journey on a personal and collective level. The stories of course have a life of their own beyond the actual persons who are involved in them. They are now a part of the lives of the audience who watched them just as they are a part of the creative, artistic, and personal journeys of the cast who were involved in them, who in turn brought their own stories into the retelling process as well.

Rachael: As Hourig and I continue to work together grappling with these issues, the piece itself is taking quite a different form than what anyone had imagined initially, in at least two important ways. For one, we have discovered that the story of the script, ultimately, will no longer be constructed as several stories of the Armenian genocide with multiple protagonist-survivors. Those oral histories will still be prominent in the piece, but the central storyline will actually explore—through

the single protagonist of Hourig herself—her struggles and journeys around the "why's" and "how's" and "for whoms" behind the need to tell these stories in public forums.

Secondly, the act of "storying the performance" for presentation at conferences has significantly influenced how we envision the form that a resulting "script" will take. We now envision that elements of our own interwoven dialogue as collaborators—a dialogue exposing challenges and opportunities in our process, and raising questions about how to proceed both ethically and theatrically in dealing with this testimonial material—will also be integral to a never-quite-final-but-maybe-final-ish script. A script that will be, probably always, in process. As Hourig wrote towards the end of her dissertation, this will be a story with no ending.

***Hourig*:** After all it is the nature of memory work that the portraits we create will always remain essentially unfinished.

NOTES

1 The Oral History and Performance Group is one of seven research clusters making up Life Stories of Montrealers Displaced by War, Genocide, and other Human Rights Violations—a five-year project funded under a Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) grant from SSHRC.

2 *Stories Scorched from the Desert Sun* was performed as a theatrical staged reading produced by Teesri Duniya Theatre on March 28, 2009, in Montreal, as part of the Untold Histories series of the Oral History and Performance Group. The cast members were Amena Ahmad, Maya Dhawan, and Suyi Liu, with Chimwemwe Miller as musician. Maya, Amena, and Suyi subsequently took part in our performative dialogue presented at the Remembering War, Genocide and Other Human Rights Violations conference in November 2009, with excerpted versions of their original acting parts. In the original staged reading, the three actors played multiple characters at many different ages, in many instances shifting back and forth quickly between each character.

3 In his vision for a socially engaged and politically effective Epic Theatre, Bertolt Brecht advocated a distancing effect (also known in English as the "alienation effect") in order that spectators avoid losing themselves in the emotions of a character. In this way Brecht and others influenced by his thinking hope to encourage critical reflection in an audience. For more on the theory and theatre of Brecht, see Willett.

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PUENTE Theatre: In the Beginning, there was the interview!

For over twenty years, PUENTE Theatre of Victoria, B.C., has been creating plays about the experiences of immigrants in Canada. *I Wasn't Born Here* (1988), *Crossing Borders* (1990), *Familya* (1992), and *Canadian Tango 09* (2009) all deal with stories of how immigration affects the lives of Latin American women, men, couples, and families. The community plays *Sisters/Strangers* (1996) and *Storytelling our Lives* (2002, 2006) include stories of women from around the world. With *Canadian Tango 09*, we focused on couples living in mixed racial/cultural relationships.

PUENTE's productions are based on extensive interviews, following guidelines we have developed over the years. Our interviews are conducted by the participants in the shows, mostly the actors, but also those involved in other capacities. Most of these participants are immigrants themselves, and as such, they empathize with our topics. We train interviewers to listen with full attention, to respect the answers they receive, and to avoid making comments or giving advice. We discuss the purposes of the interviews and of the need for emphatic listening, and we practice by interviewing each other. Whenever possible, we hire expert facilitators to conduct the training.

The number of interviews varies from fifty to one hundred. For *I Wasn't Born Here* and *Crossing Borders* we did no more than fifty each. For *Familya* we interviewed eighty-one immigrant teenagers and parents from Mexico, Chile, Poland, Vietnam, Colombia, among others. For *Canadian Tango*, we interviewed ninety Canadian-born people married or partnering with Chileans, Cubans, Vietnamese, Taiwanese, Nigerians, Egyptians, Koreans, Colombians, and more. Some couples were gay.

As the director, I'm concerned that interviews focus on questions that lead to actions, stories, images, and situations that can be staged—not about general information or statistics on the immigrant situation. We are not conducting an academic study, we are staging a play. Our questions include: What words do you associate with the word "immigrant"? How did you imagine Canada before coming here? What was your best moment as an immigrant so far?—Your worst? We ask for metaphors of the immigrant experience—of their relationship with their parents—of their marriage. We get: "We are like the sun and the moon: they are hot and the source of life and I am small, cold and distant to them"—"Being stuck in a hurricane [that] keeps swirling and never ends, constant destruction"—"It's like a house: pretty outside but winding and complicated inside"—"A brick maze with no exit"—"We are like a zebra"—"A lost ship stuck in the ocean"—"Sheltered from the world under an umbrella." After all the interviews are done, we compile the responses. These make for fascinating reading and provide an inspiring foundation for our work.

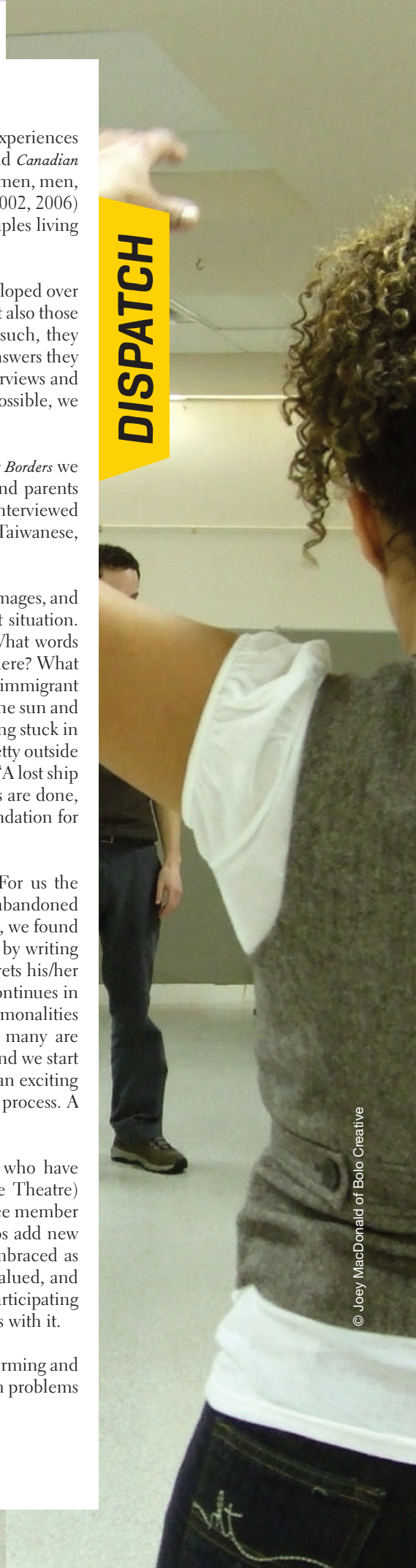
I don't consider PUENTE's work to be "verbatim theatre," even though it resembles it. For us the interview is only the beginning of a sequence of interpretations by several people. Early on, we abandoned recording devices, preferring instead to take notes. When we started doing interviews in 1988, we found that the interviewees seemed intimidated by the tape recorder. We began to appreciate that by writing the answers, we were sharing a process of interpretation: First the person interviewed interprets his/her experiences, then the interviewer does it with his/her notes and observations. This process continues in the rehearsal hall: interviews are acted out in front of the cast, different elements and commonalities are observed and used in improvisations and movement sequences. Scenes are created, many are discarded, and some we continue to work on until finally the shape of the play is discovered and we start making sense of the material. It is a long process, one that doesn't guarantee success, but it's an exciting exploration and it involves the entire cast. Everyone must keep an open mind and trust the process. A hundred possibilities are tried and only a few are kept.

We complete our research by inviting the public—particularly but not exclusively those who have been interviewed—to take part in workshops. Here they create "living sculptures" (Image Theatre) representing their experiences; we also offer Playback Theatre experiences, where an audience member tells a personal story and watches it improvised by the Playback ensemble. These workshops add new scenes, moments, and directions to our plays that make them truly community efforts—embraced as such by our audiences. Participants often tell us that their experiences and opinions seem valued, and they feel pride and ownership of the artistic achievement represented by the play—and that participating in the research process helps them reflect on their situation as immigrants and come to terms with it.

The stage is a place of power, and for any immigrant, to see our reality reflected on stage is affirming and exciting; it makes us feel included and valued, and this helps to strengthen us to solve our own problems and to contribute as equals with the rest of society.

Lina de Guevara

DISPATCH



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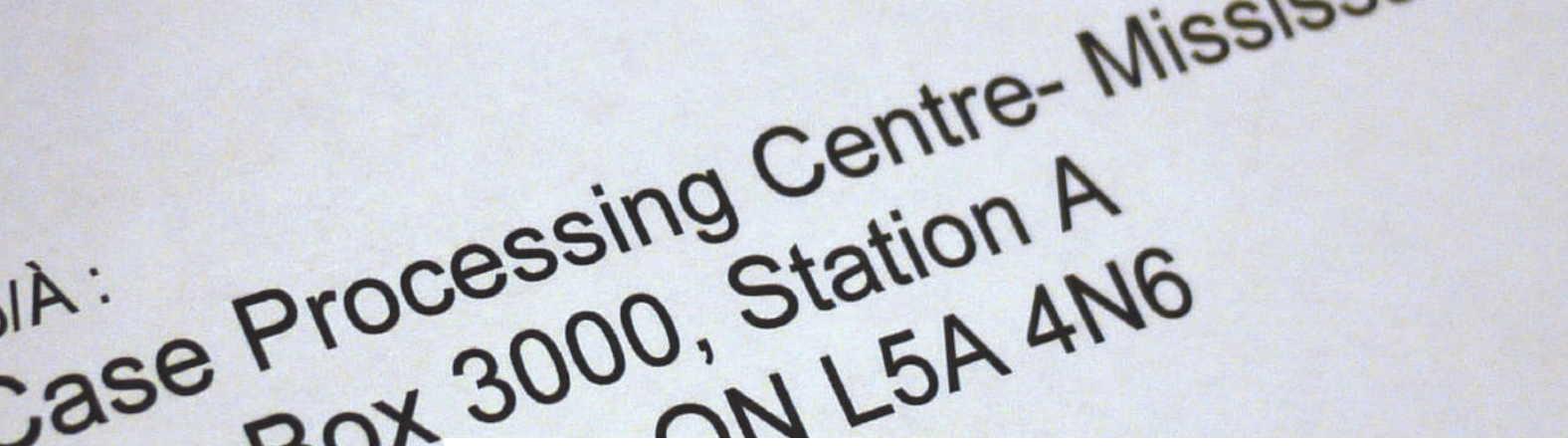

DISPATCH

Living in the In-Between

Autumn 2009. I had come to Montréal on a Fulbright grant to create a verbatim play, affiliated with Concordia University's Life Stories of Montrealers Displaced by War, Genocide and other Human Rights Violations. I felt my "outsider" perspective as someone from the United States would be useful in my interviews with Québécois and refugees about home, identity, and cultural belonging. As a listener and observer, my intention was to use theatre to bring others' stories on these themes to a larger audience; I hadn't realized that I had also embarked on my own journey of cultural adjustment.

Some of the people I interviewed described living in the space between "refugee" and "Québécois." One interviewee with a Québécoise mother and Tunisian father spoke of the moment she realized that even though she was born in Quebec and considered herself Québécoise, others perceived her as a visible minority. I found her story about learning to live in this state of "in-between," or liminality, particularly compelling because she is an example of how people can create their own path when pre-existing cultural labels don't fit their reality.

This state of in-between is a place familiar to most theatre artists. As we start a new theatre project, we enter an uncertain transitional state of creation until we finally end up with a realized show. It is in that in-between space where we wrestle with challenging questions and do the difficult work of creation so that we may emerge on the other side having experienced a meaningful transformation to share with our community.

The liminal journey can be difficult. I have learned that I am comfortable taking "safe" risks, but that I freeze in the face of true risk. Having completed the enthusiastic research and interview phase of my project, I felt mired in the long transcription phase necessary to have the material to create the final script. My personal life began to echo the themes of my research when I prepared my application for Canadian permanent residency, after having married my long-time Canadian boyfriend. I had entered a liminal state regarding my status of living in Canada and the stakes were real: someone I didn't know would decide if I was allowed to continue living in the same country as my husband. Suddenly aware of my vulnerability, it was as if I was supposed to start a trip but found myself stuck in an airport — neither here nor there — unsure if I even had a ticket for the journey.

Those long in-between months were uncomfortable, artistically and personally, but at some point I came to suspect that underneath the seeming stagnancy a quiet transformation was underway. Perhaps my identity was shifting from an American temporarily visiting Canada to what I have just become: a permanent resident of Canada. Though I am relieved to finally have the label of "landed" permanent resident, I also recognize that I will always live in a cultural in-between state. I have chosen to make my home here, but I will remain someone d'ailleurs, not from here. As a theatre director, I hope to embrace dwelling in the liminal, a place rich with creative possibility where I will make my own path.

Jenny Montgomery

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Three Perspectives on Performing First-Person Experience: Ground Zero Production's GWG: *Piece by Piece*

BY DON BOUZEK, CATHERINE C. COLE, AND MARIA DUNN

All the contemporary movements of change … are all responses to globalization. The more we share the stress and strain of a corporate monoculture based on greed and accumulation, the more we want a gentle authenticity of experience. … . The way to hear those stories is not to change channels … but to listen to our own stories, our own hearts, and the stories of our own, local communities.
— JOE LAMBERT,
Digital Storytelling

Don Bouzek—The Director's Perspective

Storytelling

This summer I attended a workshop through the Center for Digital Storytelling.[1] It was another step in a long road.

The Labour Movement is an oral culture. I'd been trained as a theatre worker in a text-based tradition; so when I started working with unions in the mid-1980s, I had to learn new ways of working. Around the same time, I was producing a radio series for the Development Education Centre in Toronto. This involved me in regularly interviewing and editing material from people from the global south.

These twin paths jolted me out of the framework of the theatre work I was doing then at The Theatre Centre. In terms of content, I realized what a narrow cross-section of stories I was seeing on the stages in Toronto. In terms of style, I wanted to see if there was a way of bringing a more direct documentary approach to the work of my theatre company, Ground Zero Productions. I began, through works like *The Fessenden Animation* (1985 to 1990), to explore Eduardo Galeano's style of creative non-fiction. In other works, I broke free of written text entirely: for example, using edited recordings of interviews with my father as a dramatic "voice" in the production of *Waves* in the early 1980s. My 1998 visit to Banner Theatre in the UK completed the process: one of that company's trademarks is the use of audio recordings—what they refer to as "actuality"—on stage in their productions. Ground Zero Productions and Banner began to collaborate, and the result is what we call the Video Ballad.

One of the things Dave Rogers, artistic director of Banner, and I talked about was the incredible wastage of material on the average show. Usually we recorded and transcribed masses of interviews—often over a hundred hours—in creating an hour-long piece. The choices we made were often driven by the very specific circumstances of the performance, and a lot of good stories had to be set aside. We wondered how we could preserve them.

The UK has a long tradition of oral history, with a strong class-consciousness. As the old adage goes, history is created by those in the position to write it. As a result, many voices go unheard. In the past this has included wage labourers, women, and people of colour. Oral history evolved to capture these alternative voices, but initially these stories—told by people who couldn't write—were written down by others. Recording technology removed the necessity of an intermediary to the storytelling.

In 1999 the federal government announced a funding program in honour of the new millennium. I got together with some Labour people in Edmonton and founded the Alberta Labour History Institute (ALHI) as a way to secure the funding to start collecting the stories of workers in the

Performers: Shannon Johnson, Maria Dunn and Sharmila Mathur

province. Activists were dying before there was any record of their stories, which were not widely circulated in Conservative Alberta, to say the least.

Not surprisingly, the project wasn't funded—but the concept of ALHI was strong enough to survive and grow. We now have almost four hundred interviews and are preparing a major series of dissemination activities for the centennial of the Alberta Federation of Labour in 2012, including a website, book, DVD, posters, conference, and theatre tour. It was because of ALHI that I initially connected with Catherine Cole. We subsequently evolved the GWG project.

Catherine C. Cole—The Historian's Perspective

GWG: Piece by Piece is a sixty-minute Video Ballad—a musical multimedia piece—created by singer/songwriter Maria Dunn and filmmaker Don Bouzek of Ground Zero Productions. It depicts the experiences of immigrant women who worked in Edmonton's GWG (Great Western Garment) clothing factory over its 93-year history.

Since 2004, the GWG project has been collecting oral histories, archival records, and artifacts related to the history of Edmonton's GWG factory. Aspects of the story have been disseminated through diverse media—temporary displays, academic and public presentations, publications, a virtual exhibition, and a book to be published by Goose Lane Editions in March 2012. The Video Ballad is the performance element of this large multidimensional project.

From its small but ambitious beginnings in 1911, GWG reputedly became the largest work wear company in the British Empire before World War II. The company was responsible for innovations ranging from being the first garment manufacturing company in North America to introduce the 8-hour day and 40-hour week to developing pre-washed denim jeans.

When Levi's closed the doors of its last North American plant in March 2004, laying off 488 workers and contracting all manufacturing offshore, it was the end of an era. After nearly one hundred years, the GWG brand is no longer produced in Edmonton. GWG jeans are now imported from countries in the developing world, such as Bangladesh.

The GWG story is a national and international story, yet today it is little known or appreciated in Edmonton, let alone throughout the country. The GWG project recognizes those who worked at the plant and informs the general public about its significance.

Collecting the Stories

In 2003, Lan Chan-Marples, daughter and niece of Chinese immigrant workers at the plant, and Linda Goyette, author of *Edmonton in Our Own Words*, met with me and Don Bouzek to discuss the possibility of initiating a multidisciplinary project on GWG. I had completed a master's thesis on *Garment Manufacturing in Alberta* in 1988, but had set the subject aside for fifteen years—until Ray Elliott, working on a collectors' guide to GWG, contacted me for assistance. Don was developing a project on the Chinese community in Edmonton, and Lan had advised him not to focus on the railway, laundry, or restaurants—but on GWG instead.

Oral history evolved to capture these alternative voices, but initially these stories—told by people who couldn't write—were written down by others. Recording technology removed the necessity of an intermediary to the storytelling.

At the time, the GWG project was conceived of as an anniversary project: the centennial of the City of Edmonton was in 2004 and that of the Province of Alberta in 2005. GWG was nearly one hundred years old, and the project would ensure that working class women, the labour movement, and members of immigrant communities were included in the celebrations. We secured seed funding from the Edmonton Community Foundation, the Alberta Museums Association, and the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation to conduct research and develop a small travelling display about the project.

Within months, however, Levi's announced the closure of the plant. Plans to celebrate the long, rich history of the company turned into efforts to ensure invaluable archival and artifact resources remained in Edmonton. As a former museum curator, I was concerned that this material not be lost to future researchers. Local 120 United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW, which absorbed UGWA in 1994) generously gave us its collection of photographs, minutes, and ledger books to be donated to the Provincial Archives of Alberta. Levi's allowed us to fully document the plant (now demolished) through audio/video and still photography, and allowed us to interview employees on site.

Tara Fenwick, then Associate Professor of Adult Education, and research assistant Joan Schiebelbein of the Work and Learning Unit at the University of Alberta became involved in the project, assisting with interviews and transcription. Fenwick created a Readers' Theatre dramatic presentation that she and her colleagues read at academic conferences and immigrant service agencies. She selected text from various transcripts to create fictionalized workers. The presentation was based upon a small number of interviews, and made no distinction between memories from the 1940s and those from the 1990s, or between the 1917-1954 factory and the 1954-2004 factory and its satellites. From a historian's perspective it lacked accuracy, but it was effective because of its immediacy.

In 2007, we acquired funding from the Voices Less Heard Community Arts Program of Edmonton's Cultural Capitals Program, which allowed Maria Dunn to begin participating in interviews with me and developing her songs. More than fifty interviews have been conducted with former employees: women and men who worked at the plant from the 1920s through 2004, from all departments, and from various ethnic backgrounds.

Exhibiting the Displays

We developed two small temporary displays. The first was featured at

events such as the May Week Labour Arts Festival and a labour history symposium to appeal to former workers to come forward to be interviewed. The second features quotes and photographs from early interviews as an acknowledgement of workers' contributions to the project; this can still be quickly set up on its own or when the Video Ballad is performed to provide context. We have displayed it in such diverse venues as museums, archives, heritage fairs, and Fair-trade fairs.

For years, I scoured antique shops and sales, flea markets, and eBay to develop a collection of GWG vintage clothing, signage, catalogues, advertising, and giveaways. These artifacts provided insight during the research process and enhance the visual appeal of the Video Ballad, exhibitions, and publications. The Royal Alberta Museum acquired the collection in 2008. At that time, Don and I partnered with the Royal Alberta Museum and Provincial Archives of Alberta to develop a virtual exhibition with funding from the Virtual Museum of Canada. The virtual exhibition was launched in 2010 and includes information for teachers, collectors, and researchers, and integrates a number video excerpts from the oral history interviews.[2]

As a historian, I was interested in reaching diverse audiences through non-traditional dissemination media—encouraging people to think differently about something as common as a pair of jeans. I've been touched by the emotional responses to the Video Ballad. Because it's a live performance, it's a shared experience. Sitting in the audience and feeling the laughter and tears around me and seeing the support for the workers is very compelling—much more immediate than a publication or exhibition. When I hear Maria sing the songs she wrote in first-person—as a worker at the plant—I hear the voices of the women we spoke with over the years, some of whom have now been silenced through death. GWG: *Piece by Piece* is a powerful way to keep their voices alive.

Don Bouzek: The Video Ballad

The work of Banner and Ground Zero takes the cultural road building of interventionist documentary theatre into the digital world. … Digital communication has been the means and the form of their collaboration and their reconstitution of activist theatre. It disrupts and relocates cultural genealogies, reterritorializes artistic traditions, produces new structures.
— ALAN FILEWOD, *"The Documentary Body"*

The Video Ballad is a performance language I've worked with Banner Theatre to create. Named in homage to the famous Radio Ballads created for the BBC by Ewan MacColl, Peggy Seeger, and Charles Parker fifty years ago, this modern interdisciplinary performance style mixes video actuality, song writing, World Music, and dramatic techniques.

We began developing the form over ten years ago at a workshop in The Drum, the Black performing arts centre in Birmingham. Since then, we've created more than a dozen shows on topics ranging from the 1984 miners strike to refugees and asylum seekers. They've toured throughout the UK, with additional performances in Canada, France, Italy, and Scandinavia.

We call the Video Ballad a performance language because the form permits very different works to be created. While the Banner Ballads share some traits and have a similar creative process to more folk music-based works (such as those created by Maria Dunn), they are much more hard edged. The current generation of Video Ballads is structured as a musical performance rather than a play, with songs and video footage interwoven. A typical performance is sixty to ninety minutes in length and its form varies depending on the context, in the same way that a live music set list changes from night to night in concert.

Video Ballad Process

The first step in our creative process is research. We work with concerned communities and partner organizations to develop the objectives for the work, including identifying key problems and potential actions to be taken. Then we look within that framework for specific stories that illustrate the points.

Next we record professional video interviews. Once recorded, the interviews are transcribed and then imported into computer software used for academic "coding." This allows the creative team to share the process of identifying and tracking key themes in the material.

Based on choices about which themes we want to develop, we prepare a rough video edit with large sections of this "actuality." This edit is given to the musical team, who begin to create songs based on the feelings and content in the actuality. At the same time, the videographer is looking at ways to edit the material into shorter segments, and searching out complementary visual imagery. The song writing and video editing are shared back and forth as they develop, so that each process influences the other.

When the team feels that a satisfactory outline has been created, we plan a "Show and Tell" presentation. Central to these presentations is a "check back" with the people whose stories we are telling, effectively getting their permission to share their stories more widely. Based on the feedback received, the show is then revised and fully mounted.

Maria Dunn—The Songwriter's Perspective

Shaping Stories into Song

In Spring 2004, just prior to the closing of the GWG clothing factory, Don invited me to visit GWG and sit in on brief interviews with women working at the factory. At this time, I also began reading transcribed interviews from Catherine and Don's work with Lan Chan-Marples and learning about the history of the GWG clothing factory, the garment industry (local and global), and immigrant movements to Canada in the twentieth century.

In 2007, with funding from the Edmonton Cultural Capital Program, I was able to participate in interviews with Catherine and Don, specifically with the view that we would focus on the women's stories of immigration in addition to their work life at GWG. Knowing that I would be writing

songs inspired by these interviews, we added a few questions to the interview about the sounds that the women experienced in their workplace and whether any songs came to mind when they thought about their work at GWG. At the completion of each interview, I took notes on particular stories that I would like to write about. Once this set of interviews was completed, Don and I analyzed the transcripts for common themes and noted the video clips that best represented those themes. From our list of emerging themes, we developed a preliminary outline of the Video Ballad.

When we began to look more closely at all the video clips that represented a particular theme, we generally found more interview clips than we could possibly use in the time frame of the Video Ballad. One of our biggest challenges was to decide which interview excerpts were most effective in expressing the song themes. We also sought a balance of clips from women representing different countries of origin.

Songwriting Process

Stories: A few of the women's stories were particularly moving and compelling: Lillian Wasylynchuk's story of her battle with lung disease; Kim Ngo's story of deeply missing the family she left in Vietnam; Assunta Dotto's story of her journey from extreme poverty in Italy to instigating a work stoppage during the WWII years. Experiencing these personal stories changed the focus of the Video Ballad slightly because I looked more specifically to them when writing some of the songs.

Themes: I wrote lyrics inspired by the full range of interview quotes pertaining to the themes we had chosen (whether or not we were using them in the Video Ballad) and by other information on the history of GWG, the Edmonton area, and the global garment industry.

Musical Styles: I sought to use particular musical styles to reflect the country of origin of some of the women. For example, the musical setting for Assunta Dotto's story was inspired by an accordion waltz theme (also used in instrumental vignettes around her story). "The Shareholders' Reel" reflects the Ukrainian heritage of Anne Ozipko with a Ukrainian dance-inspired form running underneath her video clips. Shannon Johnson composed a violin tune over my chord progression for these instrumental parts. And Kim Ngo's Vietnamese lullaby (sung in her interview) served as inspiration for the song "GWG Lullaby" in its melody, rhythm, and lyrics.

Rhythm: I took some inspiration for the songs from the rhythm of the machines in Don's video footage of the GWG plant. I transcribed these rhythms and used them in writing a few of the songs.

Flow: In writing the songs (particularly the two or three songs written later in the process), I needed to give thought to the chronology of the full Video Ballad. I made some decisions in terms of the key and feel of songs (upbeat vs. sombre) based on where they might end up being performed in the course of the piece. For example, I initially approached the GWG lullaby in a minor key to more closely reflect the Vietnamese lullaby sung by Kim Ngo, but then realized that several songs before and after this song were also in minor keys. I also positioned the more upbeat or light-hearted songs within the Video Ballad to give the audience a break from some of the more emotional themes.

Weaving Music with Video: I developed certain songs as stand-alone pieces, to be later melded with interview clips (for example, "Speed Up," the musical motif that runs throughout the video ballad). Other songs were built around specific interview clips, so that the story told in the interview became integral to the story that unfolds in the song. For example, in "The Shareholders Reel" and "I Cannot Tell You," the interview segments move the story along before the lyrics of the song continue. Also, I timed instrumentals, usually chord progressions in keeping with the form of the song, to fit underneath the video clips, so that song and video flowed seamlessly together.

Developing the Performance: While developing the Video Ballad, we performed three of the completed songs in a short public workshop. GWG workers had been specifically invited to attend the show and a few of them provided comments. The initial performance of all the completed songs with video took place at a history conference; again we asked the GWG workers to come and give us feedback. This performance gave us a sense of how the Video Ballad was fitting together and where we needed to make adjustments in the music and the video. Catherine also provided us with valuable feedback on the accuracy of visuals and historical facts displayed during and between the song and video segments. Following this initial full performance, I began working with Sharmila Mathur (sitar), and we made a few more adjustments to the music to finalize it for the opening performance of *GWG: Piece by Piece*.

Final Thoughts

The fact that I was able to participate in some of the interviews with Catherine and Don before writing any songs made the process of developing the Video Ballad a very rich songwriting experience indeed—and one that hopefully does justice to the voices of the women who so generously shared their stories with us.

Excerpt from *GWG: Piece by Piece*

(Lyrics copyright by Maria Dunn)

Anne Ozipko: My oldest brother was 15 years old, and they wanted to come so he wouldn't get to go in the army. So they came here. I think they were better off in the Ukraine. But because of us kids, they came and got a homestead for $10. Nothing but bush. No house, no nothing.

TITLE: Poland 1939
ACTUALITY: Footage of German tanks

Hana Razga: I come from Czechoslovakia. We came after the Russian came to Prague in the, in the August 1968, so my fiancé and myself we came to Canada shortly after that.

TITLE: Prague 1968
ACTUALITY: Footage of Russian tanks

Susan Bui: People want to leave there, they want to escape. Really hard to make money. If you rich you really rich, but if you poor you work really hard, and you cannot afford good meal for one day—two.

Performers: Shannon Johnson, Maria Dunn and Sharmila Mathur

TITLE: Vietnam 1974
ACTUALITY: Footage of Vietnamese tanks

Kim Ngo: I was a teacher back home in Vietnam. The communist was not very good to our family. So, I had to go. I found some friend and relative who were trying to escape the same time. We were together in the boat, 59 people.

ACTUALITY: Refugees boarding ship

SONG

I cannot tell you the whole story
But if you knew me, you'd understand
Though I was young, I'd lived a lifetime
Of war and hardship in my own land

When I escaped, I left my family
I took their blessing, their hopes and pride
Pray for my safety on the journey
And I'll send word from the other side

Oh daughter please, don't hold to me
Though it's so hard to let you go
You've more to give, you've more to be
Than this country will allow

I could cross the oceans, brave open water
Come to a place so wintry, bleak
But all my courage, my looking forward
Could not prepare me for my grief

Kim Ngo: I was so sad, lonely being new in the country. Everything was different. I was so sad, so sad. Just a couple months after I landed, I did not have enough money to buy for my grandmother, who was sick at the time in Viet Nam, enough medicine at one time. So I saved and bought some and had a whole box. I did not mail it to her yet and she passed away. So I cry my eyes like swollen so much. I think I scream into a blanket, "Grandma, why didn't you wait? Why didn't you wait?"

SONG

Granddaughter please, don't mourn for me
Though it's so hard to let you go
You've more to give, you've more to be
Than this country will allow

There's little time for feeling lonely
There's little time for looking back
You do your duty, you make ends meet
Roll up your sleeves, pick up the slack

ACTUALITY: Plant footage

Guitar plays one verse

Don Bouzek: Creating a Digital Collection

There's an old saying: You can't know where you're going until you know where you've been. Many people who haven't been acknowledged in the Official Story need to start their journey to social change by hearing and valuing their own stories. Whether the workers were the men who mined coal in the Crowsnest Pass or the women at GWG, their stories are not part of the dominant narrative of the "independent pioneer" in Alberta. Changing that narrative is the first step in Raymond Williams' long revolution of changing consciousness. That impulse was what always underpinned the oral history work of ALHI, but the GWG project took it in new directions.

The breadth and depth of the project has shown me one answer to the questions Dave Rogers and I asked about conserving the stories gathered in developing a performance. Collaborating with Catherine and the other researchers expanded the scope of what is collected. It taught me about the possibilities in seeing the work through the lens of broadly gathering community history, which includes not only collecting oral history but also photographs and artifacts. Catherine also opened up the multiple and diverse media through which the collected body of material can be disseminated. I have come to see the work as the creation of a large digital collection—in the case of GWG about three terabytes of hard drive space. This collection is indexed using standard archival techniques, forming a database—a database that can be accessed by many different people, from many different perspectives, through many different media.

Working from this wide-angle perspective has a number of advantages. A much broader base of support can be initially generated for a project. At first, many communities are more willing to embark on a process of simply preserving their history than they are to engage directly with an artistic process, such as developing a Video Ballad. Not coincidentally this perspective also broadens the base of potential financial support. Dr. Jennifer Kelly at the University was able to secure multi-year funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Council to research Black History in Alberta. One avenue of sharing this material was Pat Darbasie's play, *West Indian Diary*, which GZP produced this past season.

This more deeply rooted process allows the researchers and artists involved to "give something back" to the community in return for allowing access to their stories. So, as Maria Dunn and I begin work on a new project based in the communities downstream from the tar sands, we are able to offer support in collecting the stories in the area in exchange for allowing us to work with the video material being generated.

With GWG, the narrow focus of the workplace provided a framework for what we gathered. The diverse nature of the communities that worked in the plant and the simple fact that it had been closed gave us some space in how we created the Video Ballad. However, with less defined projects, we need to develop a community process to clarify the focus. Catherine Cole and I are currently in the initial stages of a new project based in Mill Woods, a "planned community" in Edmonton's southeast. We are starting to design a process to give input and control to the diverse communities that settled the neighbourhood in the 1970s, notably people from Chile, South Asia, and the Caribbean.

The process also provides a strategy for artists from different cultures to collaborate while addressing appropriation of voice in the work. The Video Ballad in particular allows people's contributions to a performance to remain in their original voices. Certainly there are issues raised in the editing process, but the structure of workshop performances for the people who told us their stories provides a check on that selection as well. I personally see this process of generating a community digital collection forming the foundation for GZP productions in the future.

NOTES

1 The Centre for Digital Storytelling is "an international nonprofit training, project development, and research organization that assists youth and adults around the world in using digital media tools to craft and record meaningful stories from their lives and share these stories in ways that enable learning, build community, and inspire justice." www.storycenter.org

2 www.royalalbertamuseum.ca/virtualExhibit/GWG/en/index.html.

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DISPATCH

The . . . (Pause)

As a playwright, I focus my attention on writing the "Pause." I spend months building the characters and crafting the scene to reach that wonderful moment where everything is understood and nothing is said. When I collaborate with the MT Space, we start with the pause.

At MT Space, it all begins (as our name suggests) with an empty space, five actors, a director, and a text developer. No script. Just an idea we want to explore. In the play *The Last 15 Seconds*, we were exploring the deaths of American/Syrian filmmaker Mustapha Akkad and Rawad, the terrorist who killed him in the hotel bombings in Amman Jordan. Our research on the subject returned a wealth of information about Akkad: hundreds of articles, hours of interviews, and, of course, the films he produced. There were only a few lines in the media about Rawad. We knew that Akkad's story would be based on historical research and Rawad's life would be mostly invented. This disparity would inform how the play would develop.

Rehearsals: We start with nothing but actors walking around, bodies moving in an empty space. We have all done our own research; everyone has their own take on the story. At this point the play is like a script. It begins as a blank page. Everyone is a playwright; we are all creating the play. The actors will continue to move in the space for hours, waiting for something to happen. We have no idea what we are looking for, but we'll know when we see it. What we are looking for is small. It's the tension between bodies that implies a relationship, with history, and a subtext — the Pause.

When we find this powerful moment (the pause), we explore the character and craft the scene around that pause. We use movement as much a possible before we add anything to it. We may add a prop or music or movement or text. I have hundreds of lines of verbatim text on scraps of paper to offer the actors. Other times, the actors improvise the feel of the text; I then write verbatim text that matches the subtext they're playing. By starting with the physical, the scenes have two or three layers already; adding text gives them even more depth. Verbatim text is a powerful way to connect the physical exploration to the story we are trying to tell. There is an authenticity to the character that you can only get from verbatim text. There is a beauty to verbatim text. It has the feel of a documentary, but in the voice of an actor, it can have the musicality of poetry.

The multiple voices and points of view are both the strength and the weakness of collaborative theatre. Collaborative theatre often lacks a cohesive story and ends up being a series of scenes about an idea. The challenge is to bring all the scenes together to tell one story. I find that adding verbatim text helps to unify the play while at the same time enhancing the complexity of the voices in the story.

We all had some apprehension about telling a story based on real people. The idea of cultural appropriation came up often in the rehearsal hall. We did not want to perpetrate the Western narrative about Islam. We wanted to honour their stories. Using verbatim text was a way to add their voice to the creative process. They become collaborators with us and allowed us to tell a story that none of us could tell on our own.

Gary Kirkham

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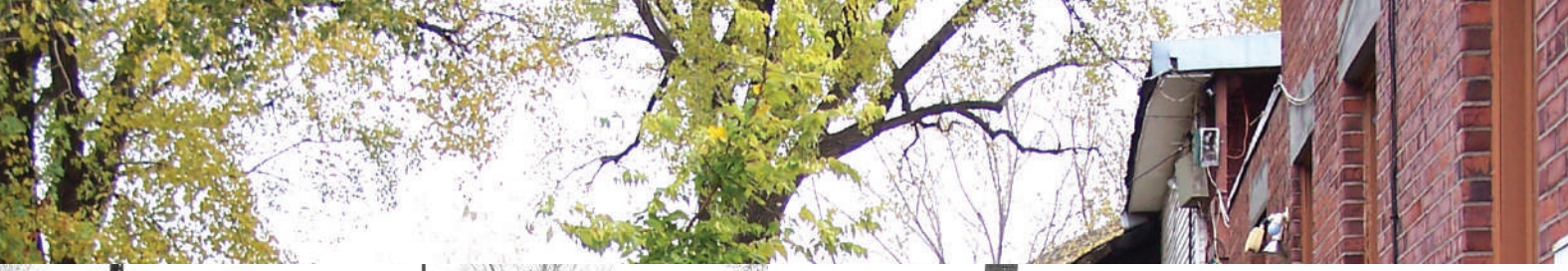

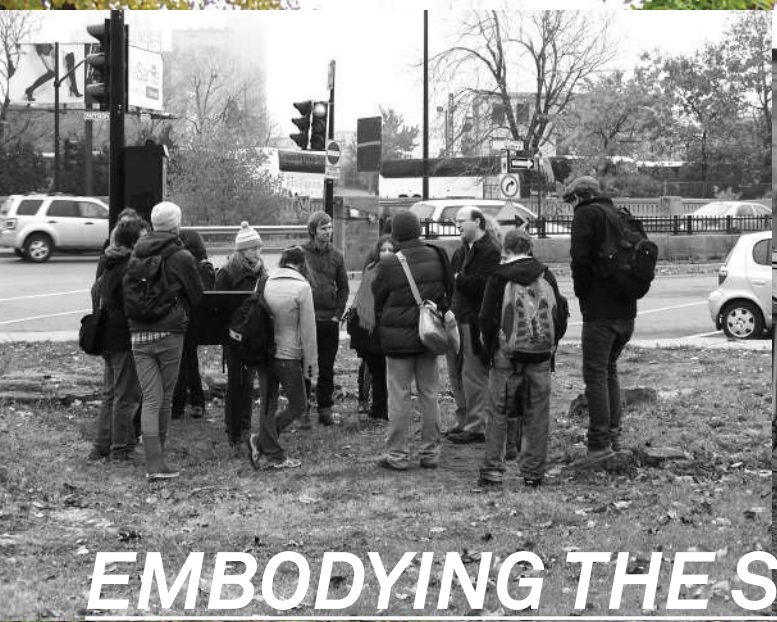

EMBODYING THE STORY: ORAL HISTORY AND PERFORMANCE IN THE CLASSROOM

BY STEVEN HIGH

"To consider the relationship between oral history and performance is, in some ways, to ask how it is that a story can touch."
— Shannon Jackson

"The performance of oral history is itself a transformational process. At the very least, it translates subjectively remembered events into embodied memory acts, moving memory into re-membering."
— Della Pollock

If asked to describe a history seminar at the senior undergraduate or graduate level, I don't think anybody in my discipline would imagine a dance studio with hardwood floors, mirrored walls, or floor-to-ceiling windows that cover an entire wall. Nor would they imagine a classroom where students and faculty communally set up and take down the tables and chairs each week or who sit on foam mats in a big circle.

I also doubt they would expect to see students engaged in song, dance, and improvisational exercises—such as the "Fantasy Machine," where one person enters our big circle and begins to do a repetitive movement. One by one, others join in until everyone is a cog in this gloriously strange and silly machine. Yet this is precisely what a group of twenty-six history and theatre students enrolled in Concordia University's inaugural Oral History and Performance course did over an eight-month period in 2010-11. If my colleagues in the department of history only knew!

Co-taught with Ted Little from the theatre department, the course is a by-product of the Montreal Life Stories project,[1] a major collaborative research project recording the stories of those displaced by war, genocide, and other human rights violations. From the outset, we sought to incorporate these recorded life stories into film, radio, exhibition, digital story, and performance. Ted and I proposed this course as part of our 2006 grant application. Seven working groups took shape, including one dedicated to oral history and performance. Much of the performance-based work in the project, however, is not verbatim theatre.[2] Ted Little was instrumental in putting the group together, bringing Teesri Duniya Theatre (a professional theatre company dedicated to promoting interculturalism) and Creative Alternatives (an art therapy centre) onto the team.

Why did I join this group and not one of the other six? To be honest, I wish that I blogged about these early days at the time, as I am no longer certain why. I have no background in theatre and the thought of being on stage terrifies me. And yet I remember being inspired the first time I read Della Pollock's book *Remembering: Oral History Performance*, which had only just come out. She writes that "insofar as oral history is a process of making history in dialogue, it is performative. It is co-creative, co-embodied, specially framed, contextually and intersubjectively contingent, sensuous, vital, artful in its achievement of narrative form, meaning and, ethics, and insistent on doing through saying"(Pollock, Introduction). It is noteworthy that it was a book (and a dense one at that) rather than a live performance that provided the spark that fired my imagination.

As an oral historian, I am interested in how we get from the interview to the public performance. What does it mean to stage oral histories? How does the performative process of remembering amplify the uncertainties and contingencies in history? How can the telling of a story move us? Oral historians have spent a great deal of time thinking about how to interpret the spoken word. We have spent far less time thinking about how to read visual cues or body language. Stories are told in words and actions. In experimenting with oral history based performance, I hoped to consider what happens after the interview. Canadian archives are filled with audio and video interview recordings that have never been listened to. New media and the arts therefore offer a tremendous opportunity to generate dialogue, reflection, and political action.[3] I believed then, as I do now, that performing oral histories can be a transformative process for everyone involved.

From Oral History to Verbatim Theatre

The transformation of recorded oral history interviews into performance is, of course, at the heart of the work we did in our studio-seminar course. In the fall term, we delved into the methodology and ethics of the interview and what is gained and lost in transcription. While the authority of the verbatim transcript is in its "authentic" rendering of what was said during the interview, we soon discovered its limits. Everybody seemed to agree that verbatim transcription largely fails to capture body language and the rhythm of the spoken word. Much is lost in translation to text. Yet, we also learned that a great deal is gained in our deep listening of the interview recordings through transcription of the spoken word and (occasionally) body language.

Our focus shifted to performance in the second term. Embodied learning in the classroom can be a little bewildering for a historian. The first two weeks of January consisted of back-to-back theatrical exercises and ensemble-building in which everyone participated. At times, I wondered where this was going. I yearned to reconnect to the interviews. Clearly, the first two weeks were designed to give our class of history and theatre students a common set of performance-based tools and a shared vocabulary. It was also important to shift the class into a new mode of learning. Gone were the tables and chairs. The introduction of Jim Forsythe (on sabbatical from Brandon University's theatre department) into the mix served to spice things up further. It also gave us the capacity to do a great deal of group work. This was all new to me and I grappled with how I might contribute to our process of collective creation.

It therefore felt "oh, so good" to reconnect with the oral history interviews in week three. The class formed into project teams in order to explore a specific theatrical form. I had been given the task of selecting an excerpt of a transcript for the group working on verbatim theatre. One student graciously agreed to my request to use his transcript of an interview he conducted for the queer community project. I chose at random three consecutive pages to copy, minutes before class started.

How we approached the transcript in class was just as improvised. First, we read the transcript, highlighting passages that spoke to each of us. We then arranged them in an order that seemed to make sense. The sequence was not the same as the interview. Lost, too, was the voice of the interviewer. But how would we perform these verbatim passages? Again, in our rush, we decided to say the first passage in unison before alternating with the next eight passages. The final passage would be again said (more or less) in unison as we rejoined the circle around us. This shifting voice, from the chorus to the individual and back to the chorus, was I think meant to signal that this person's story was not his alone. The relationship between individual memory and collective memory is often unclear, sparking a huge amount of academic writing. It seemed, at least to me, easier to represent this in performance than in text.

Of course, we had almost no time to rehearse, and the excerpts had not been edited to make it easier to read them, making my own reading awkward and clumsy. I kept tripping over the words of the final passage in our rehearsal, which forced me to slightly edit the words for our final "performance." The fact that these words were spoken by an interviewee about his own experience was important to me as a historian. Even though we re-arranged the sequence of the stories, they represent his interpretation of his own life. This strikes me as substantially different than projecting our

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own feeling and interpretations onto others. Yet it resulted in a more awkward and rigid performance than some of those of the other groups; the weight of these verbatim words does not always communicate. The experience motivated me to explore verbatim theatre further.

"Verbatim theatre" was coined by Derek Paget in 1987 to describe theatrical performances based on interview transcripts. As you might expect, a great deal of emphasis is placed on the authenticity of the stories being performed on stage. While some playwrights insist that every word spoken must originate in the interview, others use a combination of verbatim and self-authored material.

In verbatim theatre, actors often speak directly to the audience and sometimes acknowledge their reactions to what is occurring on stage. According to Alison Jeffers, verbatim playwrights "are looking for what writer Dennis Woolf has called an 'emotional arc' rather than the linear narrative of cause and effect which creates the classic dramatic arc"(4).[4] In creating a collage of multiple voices, verbatim performances usually allow for multiple points of view arranged side-by-side. For Jeffers,

> Watching a verbatim play can feel like being washed over by a great tide of voices, feelings and opinions [. . .] verbatim theatre is a lesson in suppression; more material is recorded that can ever be used. It is manipulated, crafted and edited to create an effect. The spectator's freedom to meander within this, to create their own patterns, logic, and narratives may, ultimately, prove a false one whereby the constructed nature of the playwright's vision is concealed from the audience by the very wash of the voices and the apparent lack of any narrative line. (6)

Rarely do verbatim plays include the interview context itself. It is as though verbatim playwrights cast the audience in the role of interviewer — to add this layer onstage would risk distancing them from the stories being told and listened to. "The writing that hooks an audience is full of moments of recognition; it relates to our own experiences," observes playwright Robin Soans (qtd. in Hammond & Stewart 18-19).

Verbatim theatre, like oral history, relies heavily on the "authenticating detail." Its authenticity is what gives it a certain power to reach audiences. Importantly, it is the absence of props and elaborate staging that increases the focus on the verbatim document itself. Derek Paget, in his essay "Acts of Commitment: Activist Arts, the Rehearsed Reading, and Documentary Theatre," observed that the actors explored the character behind the stories, making various choices about small gestures and expressions, accent, and articles of clothing as markers of identity. According to him, "far from a distancing effect, a kind of proximity is achieved by means of this closeness to the fact of the interview." At its best, verbatim theatre opens a space of ethical reflection and deepening engagement.

Responding to a recent surge in testimony-based theatre, Derek Paget has suggested that the *rehearsed readings* of verbatim scripts have emerged as a form of documentary theatre and activist art (173). Examples of this minimalist form include Christine Bacon's iceandfire theatre company in the UK, which focuses on the experiences of asylum seekers, refugees, and illegal immigrants. These rehearsed readings are often performed on a bare stage. Verbatim theatre companies sometimes integrate other documentary materials, such as video or audio recordings, as well. Post-show discussions are another common way to connect the stage to the "reality" outside.

I was struck by Paget's use of "source communities" to describe verbatim theatre's connection to the communities from which these verbatim stories originate, as it is a term that also emerged in the museum world to describe the curator's responsibility to the communities from which their artifacts come. The sharing of curatorial authority, however, only came about after Aboriginal peoples and immigrant communities challenged the museum curator's monopoly to interpret. New partnership guidelines in Canada insuring that Aboriginal people have a direct say in how their cultural artifacts are displayed are thus designed to foster trust and (I would argue) to protect museums from future criticism.

I wonder if theatre companies are under the same kinds of pressures. Does the labelling of something as "verbatim" give performers the authority to represent stories and groups that they might not otherwise be able to? I also wonder about the limits to community participation: Does their role end once the recording device is turned off? Of course, the attendance of interviewees and their "source communities" at public performances and their participation in post-show round table discussions influence the process. Generally, it appears that a strong sense of responsibility and trust pervades verbatim theatre, reinforced by the bonds created in the interview space itself.

Debates about the accuracy or authenticity of verbatim theatre dominate the scholarship. Personally, I think it inevitable that a person represented onstage is turned into a stage character, a theatrical construction. What then is the value of incorporating verbatim testimony? When is it done and why?

Verbatim seems to be a particularly common practice in work with refugees (Jeffers 15). Many projects exploring human rights and the immigrant experience theatricalize interview material, be it an anti-Iraq War play like *Guantanamo: Honor Bound to Defend Freedom*, Sonja Linden's *Crocodile Seeking Refuge*, or Robin Soans' *The Arab Israeli Cookbook* and *Talking to Terrorists*. Perhaps the most famous verbatim play of all time is Peter Weiss's *The Investigation* (1968), a dramatization of the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials. Verbatim theatre techniques were subsequently honed by the likes of Anna Deveare Smith in the US, whose *Fires in the Mirror* was written in response to the LA riots of 1991.[5] She conducted the interviews and then performed them all herself.

Examples of verbatim theatre abound in recent years. One of the main verbatim theatres in the UK is Dave Rogers' Banner Theatre (*Migrant Voices*, 2001; *Burning Issues*, 2004; and *Wild Geese*, 2005). In *Wild Geese*, Banner Theatre combines video interviews of migrants, informational slides on immigration, as well as music and song, into the live performances of migrant workers (Jeffers, 9, see also Filewod). Don Bouzek's Ground Zero Productions in Edmonton and Montreal's Porte Parole are two of the main Canadian verbatim theatre companies.

From Transcript to Script

I recently read Pam Schweitzer's *Reminiscence Theatre: Making Theatre from Memories* (2007), a reflection on her twenty-three years of experience as artistic director of Age Exchange Theatre in the UK. The book provides a useful "how-to," taking us through original concept, interviewing, scripting, rehearsal, and public performance. What I found most interesting about her approach is that she includes actors in the interviewing process and interviewees in the rehearsal process. As part of the scripting and rehearsal process, for example, actors take scenes back to the interviewees as a group. This reciprocal relationship strikes me as a promising way to extend the shared authority of the interview through the "oral history and performance" process.

As I understand it, reminiscence theatre differentiates itself from verbatim theatre insofar as its focus is on the elderly, who are both the source community of the stories being told and the public audience. The stories are recorded during "group reminiscence sessions," which resemble the "memory workshops" that oral historians sometimes conduct with small circles of interviewees. The groups here (20-25) are larger and usually occur in homes for the aged. Music and projected slides of old photographs are used to prompt remembering and to create a relaxed atmosphere. Common memories quickly emerge and there is great joy in remembering. Reminiscence theatre seems to have been influenced by drama therapy, as the therapeutic value of remembering is emphasized. Schweitzer notes that the recorded stories are often chock full of dialogue, as workshop participants perform their stories in a he said/she said kind of way (24). Because people often remember in direct speech, they make it considerably easier to transform it into a script.

In Schweitzer's theatrical process, the script takes shape from the transcribed "key stories" recorded during these reminiscence sessions. According to her, "We met up to talk about what they'd found, and on huge pieces of wallpaper lining paper, we all noted down the stories we thought would make the strongest scenes" (30). These scenarios are then integrated into a script with a strong central narrative, much like storyboarding a digital story. Among the strategies discussed by Schweitzer are looking for fragments of dialogue in the transcript when interviewees remember in direct speech, flashbacks, and direct storytelling. An added value of this participatory "transcript to script" approach is that it enables us to retain the life history context. Just as oral historians have counselled us against simply "mining for quotes" and to listen for the deeper significance in people's lives, it is important that performance-based inquiry works on many levels at once to explore our shared humanity.

From "Interviewee" to "Character"

As an oral historian, I know that the words spoken are meaningful. When someone uses "us" or "them" in an interview, for example, it provides us with a good indication of who the person identifies with and against. These words can then be read as signposts, or markers. Similarly, when interviewees speak in terms of a collective "we" rather than the personal "I," we understand that they are speaking on behalf of family or community. This often changes over the course of the interview. We can also listen to a person's life story as a whole, to listen for the silences as well as what is spoken. Where people linger and what they skip over tell us something. Oral history tells us "not just what people did, but what they intended to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did" (Portelli, Chapter 2). [6] Oral historians must therefore work on both factual and narrative planes, as well as on the past and on the present. In this way, we try to see the past through the eyes of someone else — coming to an understanding of "their truths."[7]

Of course, every discipline has its own language. These code words simultaneously unite those within a community of practice and exclude others who have no idea what you are talking about. When disciplines come into conversation, therefore, one of the many challenges is to find a common "working" language. A variety of accommodations usually result.

This was certainly the case in our oral history and performance studio-seminar. In the first term, and no doubt taking the lead from me, the theatre and history students spoke in terms of our "interviewees," thus privileging the interview space we were in. This is the language of oral history. Occasionally, I remember a theatre student or Ted Little say "character" instead. But this seemed out of place, and I remember that this was quickly followed by a self-correction: "Oh, I mean interviewee." Their references to the interviewee seemed forced, as though the person speaking had to consciously remember "to get it right."

The second semester, as we moved fully into the performance side of the course, the terminology shifted decidedly from interviewee to character. This is not surprising. Character is the language of theatre and we were now focused on the integration of the "verbatim text" into performance. We were therefore putting our interviewees/characters into conversation with one another in a new story of our own creation.

Our ongoing work raised interesting questions about whose story it is once it is being staged in a workshop environment. If the interview is a "conversational narrative" between interviewer and interviewee (questions posed and answered), then the performance-based inquiry becomes a conversation between interviewers. On several occasions, I heard some of the history students begin to refer to their interviewees as "characters," only to correct themselves. It was the same "correction" as the previous term, except now it went the other way. It became an assertion rather than a concession. For me, at least, I still find the word "character" to be jarring. These are real people who shared their stories with us. To me, a character is someone who exists only in a story or on stage. As a result, it seems to cross the imaginary line between "non-fiction" and "fiction."

Now, I am quite sure that I feel this way because my discipline of history has invested a great deal in the realism of the work that historians do. The line between "fact" and "fiction" is jealously guarded. I remember some great debates in the 1990s about the "value" of historical fiction. The high point, for me, was Margaret Atwood's energetic defence of historical fiction in an article in the *American Historical Review*. She made the case that novelists are able to evoke the past and transport us back in a way that traditional historians could only dream of. I loved her piece. It is for these very same reasons,

perhaps, that I so much enjoyed the creative work undertaken by the students in our classroom. Not unlike a research paper, these were *their* interpretations.

What Does Oral History and Performance Offer Us?

One of the questions I have been asking myself in recent months is how I might integrate what we are learning into my practice as an oral historian? In my case, this is a difficult question. I am not an actor. Nor am I a playwright. How then might I usefully contribute to the staging of oral histories? And, conversely, how might performing these stories contribute to my interpretation of the interviews themselves?

Certainly, the notion of "embodied learning" is central to the work that we have been doing thus far. When we perform our stories as interviewers or perform the stories of others, we begin to know them in a different way. Small details suddenly become important: sounds, smells, emotions, movements. All of these otherwise peripheral memories rarely make it into our transcriptions. Instead, our relationship with the interviewee and the interview setting itself becomes the focal point of our work. This shifting perspective is important, suggesting to me that performing oral history has interpretative value in and of itself. Like transcription, it too is an exercise in deep listening. But it is a collaborative form of listening.

Yet oral historians are taught to listen, not watch. How do we begin to understand and interpret what the body has to tell us? At some level, I think every oral historian knows that body language is important—but how to begin? I have become convinced that performance-based methodologies have a great deal to teach us in this regard. Our work this past year has sharpened my sense of the body and what it can tell us. Hereafter, I don't think that I can watch my videotaped interviews in quite the same way. Indeed, I feel somehow better equipped today than I was before the course to find significance in what I am seeing.

In shifting to performance, I also marvel at how we find new points of connection between our interviews. Far from the abstract categories of identity and difference common in my discipline, these points of connection originate instead in our experience as interviewers and in those authenticating details. But the questions linger. At the end of the day, what is the role of the oral historian in the staging of these stories? When we speak of "oral history and performance" are we imagining two distinct methodologies (and skill sets) in conversation within collaborative projects, where perhaps the interviews are "handed over" from one group to the other? Or are we hoping for a single interdisciplinary practice to emerge that blurs the boundaries between the two? If so, is this a realistic goal?

I will be interested to see what new questions and insights will emerge the next time Ted and I teach the course. Oral history and performance enjoy a unique synergy. The telling of a story is a dialogical process that is charged, contingent, and reflexive.[8] Oral history is therefore a public act; a process of making history in conversation and in embodied movement.

NOTES

1 www.lifestoriesmontreal.ca

2 In the last issue of *alt.theatre*, we heard from Nisha Sajnani, Sandeep Bhagwati, and Caroline Kunzle about some of the fascinating playback, gestural, and sound theatre work currently underway in the project.

3 The emergence of research-based theatre in the health sector represents one way that theatre is being put into conversation with university-based researchers; see Gray et al.; Rossiter et al.

4 For another perspective, see Heddon.

5 Forsyth, in *Get Real: Documentary Theatre Past and Present*, examines documentary modes of performance including verbatim theatre. Among the chapters of particular interest to this discussion are Forsyth's and Hutchison's; and also see Lyons & Lyons. Some of the published scripts available are Anna Deavere Smith's *Twilight Los Angeles* and *Fires in the Mirror*; and Robin Soans' *Talking to Terrorists* and *The Arab Israeli Cookbook*.

6 For a great example of the writing of oral history, see Portelli's new book, *They Say in Harlan County*.

7 Collaboration in oral history, new media, and the arts is the focus of a special issue of the *Journal of Canadian Studies* (Winter 2009). Ethical considerations permeate the field. See, for example, Yow; and Sheftel & Zembrzycki.

8 For a discussion of the reflexive use of theatre, see Mienczakowski; and Pollock ("Telling").

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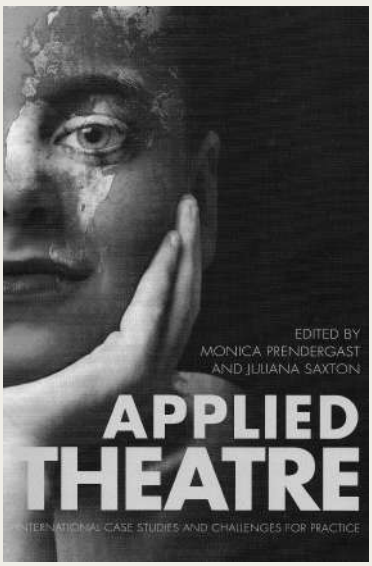

Book review

BY JAN SELMAN

Applied Theatre: International Case Studies and Challenges for Practice

EDITED BY MONICA PRENDERGAST AND JULIANA SAXTON. BRISTOL, UK: INTELLECT, 2009; CHICAGO, IL: INTELLECT, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS, 2009. Pp. vii & 221.

Without a doubt, as these authors/editors state, "the literature on applied theatre needs more documentation created by local facilitators and participants in their own voices" (vi). This still emergent field, one fraught with dilemmas and contradictions, is in some danger of being defined by observers, critics, and analysts who base research on a second-hand—or even third-hand—accounts rather than by those who journey through this work year after year. All too often the practitioners are by necessity running off to the next project or working so hard on the survival of their theatre work that they cannot provide these insights from the midst of their practice. While recognizing this problem, *Applied Theatre: International Case Studies and Challenges for Practice* makes an important contribution to keeping important material, written for the most part by practitioners or on-site critical observers, accessible. It also provides a useful framework for considering this vital and growing corner of theatrical practice.

WHETHER ITS READERS ARE STUDENTS OF THEATRE, DRAMA EDUCATORS, OR COMMUNITY WORKERS INTRIGUED BY THEATRE'S POWER AND POTENTIAL FOR COMMUNITY ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND INTERVENTION, THE BOOK HAS MUCH TO OFFER.

The book will be useful for those recently engaged in or curious to learn more about this potent practice of theatre. Whether its readers are students of theatre, drama educators, or community workers intrigued by theatre's power and potential for community acknowledgement and intervention, the book has much to offer. It is a one-stop shop as it were, introducing a good range of this kind of community-centred work. It provides substantial tastes of a wide variety of theatre that the editor/authors include within the rubric of "applied theatre." While, as a practitioner and sometime theorist of community-focused and popular theatre, I have some quibbles with aspects of the book, I fully recommend it. It belongs on the shelves of everyone engaged with practising, learning, or teaching about theatre committed to its communities' expression, cultures, enfranchisement, education, and health.

In keeping with their concern for introducing the field with clarity, the authors are careful to define their terms and to clarify what the book does and does not address. This reader appreciates their upfront delineation of labels, assumptions, and limits. However, each parameter raises dilemmas. For example, the book provides a useful and clear separation of drama processes, or "applied drama," from "applied theatre." However, in explaining that applied drama, which they sensibly chose to omit from this collection, is involved primarily in

process and that applied theatre moves through that stage to performance, the authors appear to rather quickly dispose of an important and defining element of much successful applied theatre: the meaningful involvement by those who are most affected in the process of shaping the form and content of the theatre event. While the book later returns to the question of participation in some depth, this initial separating definition works against the important concept of communal involvement with theatre making and theatre performance. In a book intended for beginners, this early implication is worrying.

I offer this observation with all due respect; overall, the writers provide accessible definitions and establish categories of theatrical work that contribute to the book's usefulness for students of theatre-made-for-its-communities. That said, readers may find Ross Kidd's categories of theatre that engages in social development and change a useful contrast, or perhaps a complementary perspective, to this book's approach. In several articles, Kidd—an educator, popular theatre practitioner, and organizer who promoted the use of theatre as an agent of change in Canada and particularly in Asia and Africa—came to define this kind of theatre in terms of its intentions, processes, and the degrees of community ownership of the socio-political goals as well as the performative outcomes.[1]

A particular strength of *Applied Theatre* is its many capsule descriptions of theatre projects. These are found early in the book as part of defining the territory, and later to introduce longer case studies. These thumbnails invite readers into multiple locations and multiple kinds of theatre practice. Those who may not have seen much of this work can quickly and somewhat viscerally collect a sense of the range of work held under the umbrella "applied theatre," and can glean some important insights into the processes of making the work as well as the nature of the performances. Prendergast and Saxton express the essences of these examples very well and efficiently; much is communicated in pithy, receivable prose. Happily, through the cumulative insights these exemplars provide, as well as via the book's quick history of the development of the "engaged, social, artistic phenomenon" (11) the writers label as applied theatre, the notion of participation by community members, so intrinsic to much of this work, gets focus.

However, the book's brief and sharply drawn critical introduction is something of a victim of its own commitment to simplicity, clarity, and brevity. While I have not read as straightforward and compelling a survey of "Where did this work come from?" as the one found in this volume, these admirable qualities are achieved at the expense of underrepresenting two aspects important to our understanding of the development of this work. The quick history, very compelling and memorable, unfortunately omits most of the streams of influence that arrived during the same time period but from the developing South.

With the exception of a nod to carnival and Augusto Boal, these remarkable streams of influence go unrecognized. The addition of some of the engaging and often risky work based in Argentina, collective creation in Colombia with Buenaventura, remarkable theatre within liberatory theology movements in the Philippines, street theatre and theatre in development efforts in India, and the people's theatre movement in Kenya would go a long way to adjusting the imbalance. The book's historical but largely Eurocentric view seems particularly off balance given the excellent and representative array of theatre projects from around the world offered later in the book.

Granted, this international history is also poorly represented in other major sources. Perhaps soon someone will compile and make meaning of the multiple strands of community-based, popular, and educational theatre-based work that challenged artists from the global North and South to expand their understandings of what theatre can do and how it can be part of justice movements. A related omission is the remarkable contributions of popular educators from the North and South who worked in many developing contexts, particularly from the 1960s on and often in alliances with theatre artists. Many applied Paulo Freire's principles of participant ownership and the liberatory power of coding and decoding processes as they developed, critiqued, and re-developed theatre projects for, with, and by communities.

Despite these gaps, which possibly emerged from a commitment to brevity and focus on the collections of papers written from the fields of practice, the introductory chapters in part one provide a useful set of ways for thinking about the examples that follow. They are a good addition to a growing but still scant set of lenses from which to examine this work.

Parts two and three are structured to link and compare like practices. They contain a series of examples of significant community-centred theatre work through a compilation of edited versions or excerpts of previously published articles. These collections are excellent, as is the way the readings are organized. Through useful introductions, the editors point out variations and overlaps in intention, methodology, content, and form. Quick thumbnails describe the topics and contexts, so readers can easily pursue the suggestion to select from among the material and decide when and whether to delve deeper.

These parts of the book, full of examples and reflections from the world of making and presenting theatre in communities of interest, offer one of the clearest approaches I know of to articulating, as they put it, "the landscape of applied theatre" (29). Similarities and differences are clarified, and definitions deepened through example. Readers are then helpfully invited to look at similar territory, but via constellations of theme and content as well as location (i.e., health, development, prison, specific communities, and museum/history). Borderlands and shared spaces between and among the categories are usefully acknowledged. Cumulatively, there are some themes, or territories of practice, that I miss, including theatrical work in the rich and urgent areas of intercultural understandings, re-settlement, and immigrant experience.[2]

Part four's concluding sections are excellent expressions of issues that face practitioners, partners, sponsors, and critics. Labelling these areas of contestation and dilemma as participation, aesthetics, ethics, and evaluation, the writers rightly note the interdependence of these elements

and offer clear summaries of current thinking on the challenges that practitioners and those who write about this kind of work grapple with.

I looked forward to reading this book. As a maker and facilitator of theatre, particularly of participatory theatre, I thought the book promised to address questions and experiences I live with and think about within my practice. I have also written about some of this work in recent years, and I looked forward to seeing how others grapple with describing the practice, dilemmas, and variances of this field. So I cracked the book with anticipation. I was surprised, after a few pages, to find that the book presumes the reader is a beginning student of theatre. Its voice suggests readers have next to no previous background and it is set up as a textbook, complete with "questions for discussion and reflection" and "suggested activities" at the end of chapters. Once making the adjustment to the editors' purposes, I found it a very good example of this kind of book. It strikes me as a strong text for an introductory course on the subject of community-based, educational, and/or activist theatre, and it usefully offers a body of representative publication and thinking. Indeed, those more experienced in the field will find its summations of relevant literature and the categories it proposes, while sometimes provocative, always useful.

I struggle with the title—the label "applied theatre." The field of participatory, community-based, developmental, educational, and social theatre needs an umbrella term. While these kinds of theatre have substantive differences, they also have significant commonalities, so they are linked together usefully at times. "Applied theatre" is increasingly winning out in this effort to find a name that includes and draws these areas into meaningful relationships.[3] Too bad. It seems rather thin. We apply a bandage to a cut. Apply ourselves to a task. Apply for a job. The term is cool, technical. Yet theatre is embraced and, yes, used because of its capacity to express the thick, multifaceted, chaotic aspects of lived experience, the overt and covert parts of ourselves, our community, our experiences and issues. Theatre at its best embraces humanity and our stories with depth. Curiosity and passion are not stuck on, not applied. Theatre is risked; it is committed to. The emotional wallop of the nuances of human nature, as it interplays with conditions and forces that may need challenging, is hardly contained in this phrase.

I too have struggled to find a label that captures this field. I am still looking. "Transformative theatre" gets close, but presumes that all of this work has that level of impact and that the more closed, well-made play never does. "Community-based theatre" gets at the practice of moving out of our institutions and into the mix of our cultures, subcultures, and streets. It somewhat captures the democratic openness to participation in the creative act that this work aims for. Yet that term is largely used to imply that the theatre making is done by "non-professionals," as if actors and other theatre artists are not part of their world but separate from it. So, while I am not keen, it is understandable that Monica Prendergast and Juliana Saxton chose to go with "applied theatre."

What's in a name? My worry is actually that in our practice of "applied theatre" artist/practitioners will embrace that thinness, rather than seek the richest, most aesthetically satisfying, most deeply grounded expression of theatre possible each and every time we try to express and affect the communities we care about. The field suffers from this anyway, with too much "application" and not enough investment in the arts of theatre. This thinness is ironic, as we choose theatre because of its capacity to embrace the messy complexity of people and our socio-political selves. And then we all too often thin it out, offering schematics of complex issues and complex moments in people's lives.

With this off my chest, I do want to underline the quality of this book. Students will find that they are taken into the subject in clear steps, with some useful links made to more traditional but also activist-inclined theatre. The book provides very helpful definitions and distinctions between and among the kinds of theatre collected within the applied theatre umbrella; the editors collected strong representative examples from around the world; and most of the heated issues of the field are acknowledged and introduced to readers, with encouragement to face these head on as we consider, practice, and reflect on theatre for and with communities.

NOTES

1 See for example, "Popular Theatre, Social Action and Adult Education," *Learning* 2.4 (1979): 15-17.

2 Examples for consideration include pieces that document Banner Theatre's extensive anti-racism work with and about asylum seekers and refugees in Britain; Marie Mendenhall's comments on theatre that negotiates between Aboriginal and European communities in "Stirring Up Tempests in Saskatchewan Communities," *Theatrum* 40 (1994): 11-13; one of several published pieces on Puente Theatre's work, which has a remarkable record of using theatre as a bridge between cultures; and Rahul Varma's, Jaswant Guzder's, and Edward Little's comments on Teesri Duniya's theatrical approaches to diversity, inclusivity and multiculturalism in Denis Salter, "Change the World, One Play at a Time," *Canadian Theatre Review* 125 (2006): 69-74.

3 See for example, Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston, eds., *The Applied Theatre Reader* (London; New York: Routledge, 2009).

EDITOR'S NOTE

The Applied Theatre Reader was reviewed by Juliana Saxton in *alt.theatre* 7.1 (2009): 34-36.

Based at Concordia University, the **LIFE STORIES OF MONTREALERS DISPLACED BY WAR, GENOCIDE, AND OTHER HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS** (Montréal Life Stories), is a community-university research alliance which has involved a team of more than 150 people and 18 partner organizations.

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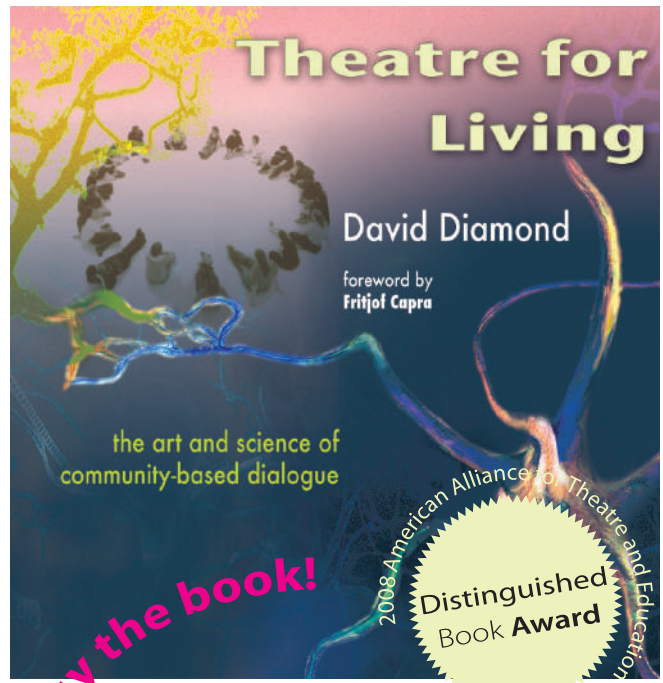

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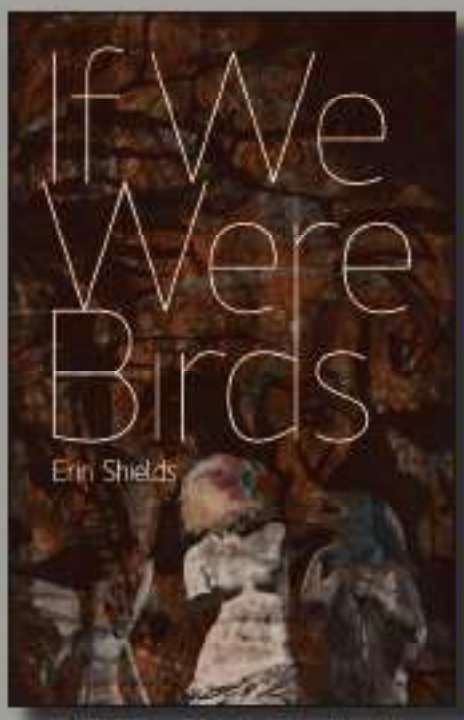

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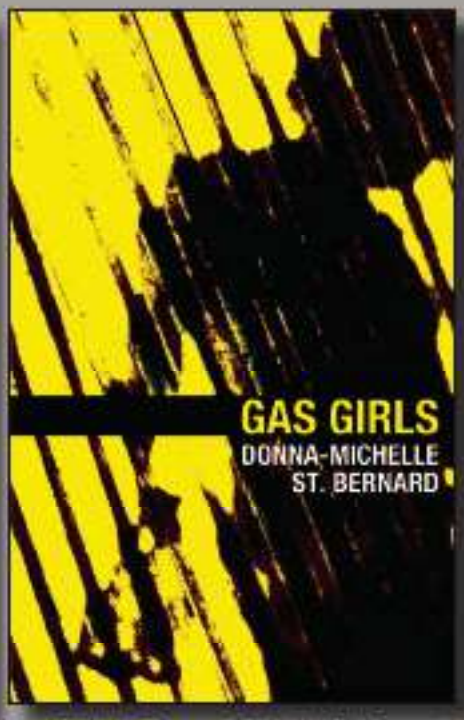

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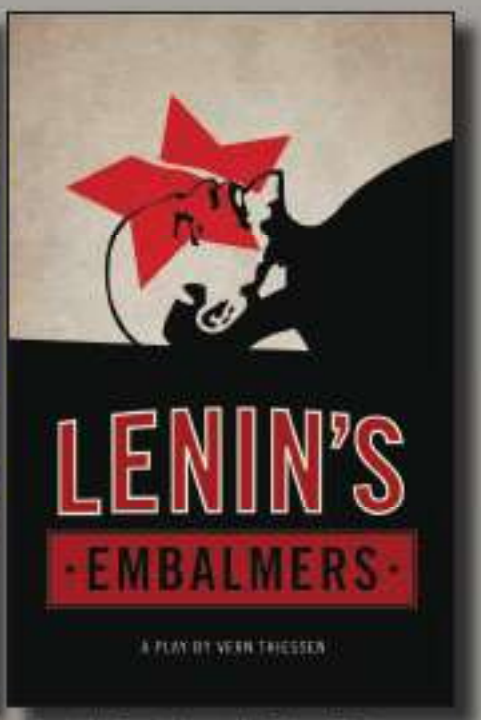

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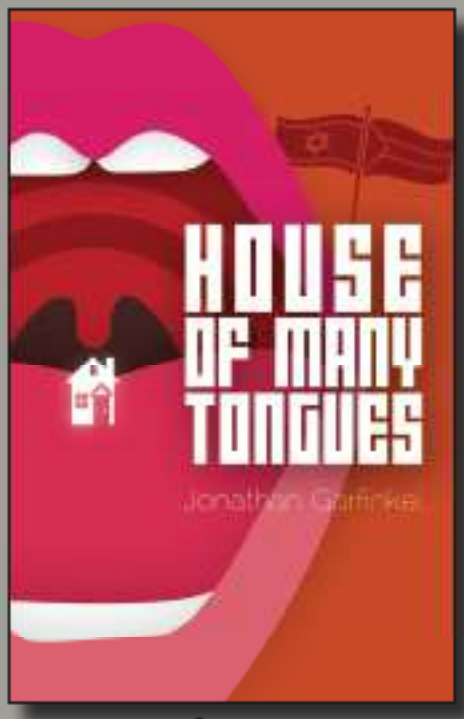

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