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alt theatre

cultural diversity and the stage

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contents

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Editorial

Theatre and Public Response

By Edward Little

As I write this, the horrendous suffering in the wake of natural disaster holds a faint glimmer of hope that at least some of the enduring political violence in South Asia might — if only for a brief moment — be put aside in the interests of facilitating relief efforts. For the time being, our common humanity stands to outweigh our competing fundamentalisms.

Looking over the articles for this issue of *alt.theatre*, I am reminded that the heartbeat of theatre is a common humanity — that theatre's essential concern with individual responsibility, social justice, and quality of life is predicated on multiple ways of seeing and being in the world. It is precisely this diversity — often falsely characterized as a malicious attack on values — that challenges and threatens the single-mindedness of competing fundamentalisms.

In this issue, the political and ideological fallout from the violent "religious" protests and subsequent closure of a Sikh play in Britain raises complex questions about the moral obligations of both state and cultural institutions vis-à-vis religious tolerance, protest, and freedom of expression within a pluralistic society. Theatre has a long history of bringing to light the inherent hegemony and potential for oppression within unexamined socially or culturally prescribed notions of what is to be considered "public" and what "private. The closure of *Behzti*, marks a victory for the fundamentalist mindset.

On the other side, a children's puppet theatre touring Israel and occupied Palestine reminds us that a theatre of solidarity can provide a strategic balance to a theatre of protest — that, especially in times of war, we need a range of options beyond merely reiterating representations of violence and trauma. A participatory theatre for social change in remote Mexican villages similarly speaks to the power of theatre to bridge difference, and to the role of artistic expression as a means of channeling anxiety away from violent *reaction* and towards considered *actions* that encompass education, communication, collaboration, *and* examinations of complicity.

In advocating plurality, one writer endorses the Canada Council's *Stand Firm* initiative towards increasing cultural diversity in Canadian arts on the grounds that it has been designed so that the artists themselves will work together to direct planning and actualization. Another writer criticizes a European analysis of the impact of cultural diversity on theatre in Canada on the basis that reductive categorizations pertaining to "mainstream, aboriginal, and multicultural" perpetrate a colonialist and ultimately divisive cultural politics. And a poem speaks of art as a perpetual search into the human condition.

As these articles suggest, theatre is charged with bringing to our collective attention the complex ways in which indoctrinated ideas, media, world events, and even the languages we speak in turn influence and "speak" us. For many artists today, identifying the socially and culturally specific nature of these hegemonic forces is essential if we are to guarantee public support for individual rights within pluralistic societies. The articles in this issue suggest the potential — and even the necessity — of adopting a range of approaches to avoid the trap of engaging in a discourse of single-mindedness on its own terms: the comparative and divisive good versus evil of religious fundamentalists that is increasingly the domain of politicians and mass media.

The power of theatre lies in comparatively small acts of face-to-solidarity that enable us to experience multiple perspectives simultaneously, to imagine multiple solutions, and to find common ground from which we might debate and challenge single-minded opposition to diversity. In celebrating our common humanity, theatre often confronts injustice and bears witness to horrible trauma and violence. It might use humour, satire, allegory, and metaphor — or graphic and shocking directness. Theatre can engender solidarity, pleasure, lightness of being, anger, and outrage — as well as commitment and meaningful participation. It can challenge us to examine our complicity in hegemony. The writers in this issue draw to our attention the importance of a theatre that keeps its focus on our common humanity and resists the temptation to become diverted into quibbles about relative values within competing fundamentalisms. To paraphrase Oscar Wilde, we may have to lie in the gutter, but we must keep our eyes on the stars.

InBox

I was looking through back issues of alt.theatre in search of readings for courses I'm teaching at Concordia University, when I came across Ted Little's editorial discussing ali and ali (vol 3.1). It's the best articulation I've heard of the other/self dynamic-argument, which for me is at the heart of the play's politic. And it's a facet of the play that no review - rave or pan - got, with the exception of a couple of small alternative papers. In fact, it's a clearer delineation of the idea that "the other is us" than we the creators have so far managed. Because it's a theme that continues to dominate my thinking, it's really gratifying to have it so well explained, and in the future I'm going to include the editorial in my coursepack for workshops on political theatre.

Marcus Youssef is a freelance theatre-maker, journalist and community educator in the thick of his first year of university teaching at Concordia.

The Closure of Behzti: TIMELINE

1998: Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti begins writer's attachment scheme with the Birmingham Repertory Theatre

2001, October: Bhatti's first play, *Behsharam (Shameless)*, opens at the Birmingham Rep.

2004

December 9: *Behzti (Dishonour)*, Bhatti's second play, opens at the Birmingham Rep. The run is scheduled to close December 30.

December 18: After ten days of peaceful protests, demonstrators storm the theatre, resulting in the intervention of riot police and the evacuation of the theatre in mid-performance.

December 19: Birmingham Rep. affirms that "short of 'blatant censorship' and canceling the production, it could not have done more to appease the Sikh community." The theatre maintains *Behzti* is a work of fiction and not a comment about Sikhism. Community leader Mohan Singh counters, "When they're doing a story about a Sikh priest raping somebody inside a gurdwara, would any religion take it?" (news.bbc.co.uk, 19 December 2004)

December 20: While Sikh community members meet with police, the Birmingham Rep. maintains the production of *Behzti* will continue. Religious leaders, including the Roman Catholic Diocese, urge people to boycott the show.

Later that day, citing concern for the health and safety of its employees and audience, Birmingham Rep. cancels its production of *Behzti*. Sikh community leaders applaud the decision; free speech advocators express shock and concern.

December 21: Birmingham's Old Stage Company and London's Royal Court Theatre both express interest in staging *Behzti* if Birmingham Rep. does not repeal its decision.

The Birmingham Rep Theatre Photo courtesy of www.bbc.co.uk

Behzti: Dishonour in Birmingham

A short commentary by Jaswant Guzder.

When Gurpreet Bhatti's play *Behzti* (Dishonour) was closed in December 2004 before its premiere in Birmingham, it had already become a significant cultural icon for the diaspora. The silencing of women's voices is certainly not a new theme among the subcontinent cultural communities. Indian women writers can draw upon their long legacy of censorship or look to contemporary pioneers like Ismat Chugtai, charged in 1947 for including a lesbian theme in her short story "The Quilt," and, more recently, Deepa Mehta, who endured controversy and riots for creating the films *Fire* and *Water*. The darkest issue emerging from Gurpreet Bhatti's predicament of riots and death threats implicates us all: the undermining of the right to individual freedom of voice in a democratic society.

The successful closure of this play by a subgroup of conservative elements among the divided Birmingham Sikhs—who used violence and threats to assert their affronted religious sensibilities—was an action that implicitly appropriated the voice of an entire community without a democratic process. Akin to the outrage and fatwa directed earlier by extremists towards Taslema Nasreen, the threads of politics, social order, freedom of speech, post-colonial realities, diasporic tensions, and secular values are all woven into the scenario. But the right to freedom of speech is still the fundamental issue: the dissenting group justified its actions by suggesting that its vision of cultural and social peace takes precedence over open dialogue.

Like any work of artistic imagination, theatre bears witness to all aspects of human nature in a dialogue that deeply resonates both with our fantasies and with external reality. But more immediately, theatre at its very heart is a living conversation with community. The outrage—centered on the religious implications of setting a play in a gurdwara—seems questionable given the lack of any basis in Sikh scripture or theology for equating a temple space with the sacred status of the *Gurbani*. The events of this play are not in the same category as the storming of the Amritsar Golden Temple and the burning of the scriptural legacy of the Sikhs in the assault of Operation Blue Star, nor of the horrific 1984 raping, murder, and pillage of the Delhi Sikh community in the wake of Indira Gandhi's assassination. But somehow this play was able to stir a high level of passion. In a community that is often seen as a model among visible minority immigrant groups, Sikhs have culturally accommodated without assimilating. Yet they have also had to endure many negative projections raised by such issues as the Air India crash off the Irish coast, racism, and the turbulent times of the Khalistani movement. While an earlier British film—the fictional Sikh vignette *Bend It Like Beckham*—had been careful to censor the implicit lesbian relationship to avoid inflaming passionate outrage, *Behzti* was forthright and confronting. Perhaps the temple is an unconscious mirror of the predicament of *izzat* (honour), which embodies a part of masculine or community honour in the temple of a woman's body. All cultures have after all constructed resonances of sacred spaces, and perhaps the theatre itself has such a status in the Western imagination, resonating with the Greek mythic world where the principles of democratic process evolved.

In fact, there are abundant Sikh shabads and stories, starting with those of Guru Nanak, who challenged religious zealots of Hinduism and Islam in the fifteenth century to reconsider rituals and caste prejudices that lacked essential humanity, equal treatment of all persons, and spiritual intent. Contrary to the views of the mobs that stormed the Birmingham

theatre, Sikhism is grounded in respectful coexistence and egalitarian values between genders. One of Guru Nanak's seminal lessons is in the story of his visit to Mecca, where he lay down with his feet facing towards the sacred Q'abba. When the surrounding faithful chastised him, he persuaded them to reframe this provocative moment with his answer: place my feet then in a direction where God is not residing.

Yet in a British urban setting in 2004, vocal and enraged members of the Sikh community took offence to a passage in *Behzti* that used the setting of a community place of worship to bear witness to abuses against women that have been hidden from open discourse. The news reports of authorities intimidated by a breach of social peace and a playwright who fled into hiding simply amplified the misguided and distorted interpretation of such violence. If these rioting crowds were better informed about Sikhism, they would have celebrated the right of the author to speak without fear or enmity—among the *sat sang* or in a theatre space—as well as her right to bear witness to the tragedies she has chosen to bring to a wider public audience.

Silencing is a powerful tool, used to both impose oppressive control and maintain a social order that has for centuries used the concept of *izzat* to suppress, mutilate, or murder women with the impunity of patriarchal outrage. Shauna Singh Baldwin's novel *What the Body Remembers*, set in the Partition's traumatic times, recalls the story of her grandmother in a fictionalized account that raises similar dilemma's of loyalty and honour. The themes of *Behzti* are hardly limited to Sikh women, but rather they are a prevalent concern of women throughout many parts of the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, and they continue to re-emerge among various diaspora communities throughout the world.

> **"We don't have to celebrate or agree with the works and ideas of artists or individual voices, but we must defend their right to write or speak openly"**

These abuses certainly cannot be generalized with regard to all families or groups of these societies, but it is understandable that they are sufficiently alive to have inspired the playwright to create *Behzti*. I recall in my own childhood the stories of young women similarly beaten and molested in our Canadian gurdwara, and the implicit collusion to diminish the implications of these transgressions. These were collusions to preserve *izzat* while the molestation and abuse of women silently continued to occur. Just as the periodic disclosures of sexual abuses by priests in the Catholic Church have distressed the congregations who have hoped for the absolute sanctity of vows, the East has its own history of periodic deviations from benevolent familial values. No cultural community is immune to human transgressions. The powerful denial of injustice or related shadow issues by communities or individuals is a universal trait, but the healthy counterpoint of blindness in the social space is the freedom of a democratic and imaginative discourse and the imagination of artistic spaces. We don't have to celebrate or agree with the works and ideas of artists or individual voices, but we must defend their right to write or speak openly, as when Gurpreet Bhatti opened discourse with a contemporary imagining of a current social predicament.

For centuries, the unpleasant wounds of injustice have been the inspiration of playwrights throughout the world, whether in ancient Greece or modern India. Britain has indeed been a special beacon of active theatrical traditions since Shakespearean times. When Thomas Beckett was murdered in the cathedral, or when the Guantanamo Bay prisoners were known to be held in inhumane conditions and without rights to trial, the British theatre did not shrink from bringing them alive on the stage to speak among us.

The misguided violence and outrage in Birmingham has been successful in silencing a contemporary British Indian playwright, and we need to state clearly that we cannot collude with this intimidation. This was an ominous and negative blow for all of us who believe in preserving our voices in democratic and humane societies.

Dr. Jaswant Guzder a board member of Teesri Duniya. She is an artist and mother, and is active in the divisions of Transcultural and Child Psychiatry as an associate professor of Psychiatry at McGill University and head of Child Psychiatry at the Institute of Community and Family Psychiatry in Montreal.

December 22: At the request of Bhatti, who feared "increased threats to her safety," the Birmingham Old Stage Co. abandons plans to remount *Behzti.*

December 24: The Sikh community denounces threats made to the safety of the playwright and the Rep's general manager. Sikh leaders urge the culprit(s) to withdraw their threats.

Sources:

Profile: Playwright Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti. news.bbc.co.uk. 20 December 20 2004

Theatre stormed in Sikh protest. news.bbc.co.uk. 19 December 2004.

Theatre attacks Sikh play protest. news.bbc.co.uk. 19 December 2004.

Theatre ends play in Sikh protest. news.bbc.co.uk. 20 December 2004.

Police meeting over play protest. news.bbc.co.uk. 20 December 2004

Protest play could find new venue. news.bbc.co.uk. 21 December 2004.

Sikh leaders criticize threats. news.bbc.co.uk . 24 December 2004.

Behzti. Watercolour by Jaswant Guzder

Theatre's Role Cannot be Bullied by Religious or Ideological Fundamentalists

by Rahul Varma

In the forward of her play *Behzti* — which was pulled from Birmingham Repertory Theatre because a violent minority of fundamentalist Sikhs smashed windows; pelted the theatre with eggs; threatened the playwright, audiences, and theatre staff; and fought with police on the streets — playwright Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti wrote, "I believe the drama should be provocative and relevant. I wrote *Behzti* because I passionately oppose injustice and hypocrisy." *Behzti*, or "dishonour," represents an honourable theatre tradition. "In a community where public honour is paramount, is there any room for the truth?" the program notes ask.

Bhatti's play depicts a scene of murder and violence: a young woman is beaten by other women, including her own mother, after being raped by a man who claimed to have had a homosexual relationship with her father. But the violent protest arose not because of the rape, beating, or murder, but because the scene was set in a Sikh temple known as gurdwara. The playwright, herself a Sikh, has gone into hiding.

The violent reaction around *Behzti* is not new to artists who throughout history have found themselves threatened by intolerant extremists who are unable to withstand critical exchange of ideas. Because theatre is a live art form, playwrights are vulnerable to the wrath of those who cannot deal with controversial content other than through the use of violence. Over seven hundred artists, writers, directors, and others — ranging from Prunella Scales to Tariq Ali to poet laureate Andrew Motion — have signed an open letter condemning violence by Sikh extremists and supporting Bhatti's right to freedom of expression.

But *Behzti*'s closure represents not only a suppression of speech, but the failure of all those implicitly involved in this suppression. The Birmingham Reparatory Theatre failed to defy religious censorship imposed by fundamentalists. The police failed to protect the theatre, audiences, and the playwright (who was threatened with murder and advised to go into hiding by the police) (The Guardian, 21 December 2004) The British state failed through its hypocrisy: declaring war on terrorism and yet siding with the extremists by expressing approval of the ban in the name of religious sensitivity (as if the deranged behaviour of a few fundamentalists equals the religious norms of the larger Sikh community). And finally, the Sikh extremists who forced the closure of the play failed to appreciate that they have put at risk their right to be heard over what may be a legitimate grievance raised by the playwright through her work.

> "Distinctive cultural groups are not homogenous clans with one voice representing all. Different voices, interests, and rights compete within each minority group"

The *Behzti* affair draws attention to an important problem within the diversity debate. This is the simplistic notion that mere tolerance and respect is enough to sustain harmony across cultures, races, and religions. The *Behzti* affair forces us to go beyond tolerance and respect and reach for a deeper understanding of minorities. Distinctive cultural groups are not homogenous clans with one voice representing all. Different voices, interests, and rights compete within each minority group. Taking all things into account, the *Behzti* affair is not about freedom versus sensitivity: it is about women artists being silenced by a small group of fundamentalists who must stir religious fervor employing violent means in order to survive.

Some members of the Sikh community say that if the play had been set in a community centre instead of a gurdwara, it would have caused no problem. Hamander Singh, a spokesperson for the advocacy group for Sikhs in England said, "Rape and other things happen everywhere, we know that is a reality." (Alan Cowell, New York Times, 25 December 2004). What this translates into is that the enraged extremists who closed the play don't care that rape, beating, and murder occur — as long as they don't happen in their temples.

The playwright had a very different purpose. She raised these issues because they are important for young Sikh women. The setting of the play is a creative choice. Theatre is known for taking risks and making controversial choices. In the words of Dominic Dromogoole, artistic director of the Oxford Stage Company, nonconformity is as natural to theatre as conformity to religion.

Rahul Varma is a Montreal-based playwright and founding artistic director of Teesri Duniya Theatre.

ART THE CONSTANT

Art is not an industry,
Art does not produce material goods,
Art has no monetary value.
Art is an investment in a country's cultural identity.

Art does not follow trends,
Art does not submit to policies and socio-political directives,
Art cannot be pre-programmed.
Art is an expression examining what cannot be measured through science.

Art is not a popularity contest,
Art cannot be measured by monetary success,
Artistic quality has nothing to do with personal taste.
Artistic impact can only be calculated in retrospect.

Art is risky because it always relates to the spectator.
Art is dangerous because it makes the spectator think,
Art is hazardous because it is Imagination flowing freely.

Art reflects on the artist, his epoch, and on his contemporaries,
Art connects one to one's people and to the human race.
Art can unify a people in the long term, political programs cannot.

Being an artist is not a choice, it is a calling, an existence,
Being an artist is not a hobby, it is a lifetime commitment.
Artists do not work hours, they work every minute of their wakeful life.
An artist's need to create is always stronger than the need to survive.

Artists do not create to please the critics,
Artists do not create to please their peers,
Artists do not create to please the social and political order of the day.

Artistic creations do not please the audience, they benefit the audience.
Artists connect to the spectators through their art, not their talk,
Artists build communities with their work, not with "tricks and treats."

Artists have no job security,
Artists receive no benefits,
Artists have no vacation,
Artists go on because they ARE their profession.

A country that does not respect its artists will lose self-respect.
A country that does not support its artists will waste away its identity.
A country that ignores its artists, suffers from national communal dystrophy.
A country that rejects its artists, kills social conscience and progress.
A country that repels its artists, commits collective cultural suicide.

Every society needs artists, for they can always be looked upon with pride,
For they hold up the torch so others can lead, for the artists are constant.
Every society needs art, for it is the perpetual search into the human condition,
For it opens the eyes to the world, for it is intrinsic, for art is constant.

In light of the fact that art is so essential to our lives and
yet artists are the most undervalued members of contemporary society,
the above is dedicated to every reader.
Bobo Vian (Ms.), Performer, Theatre Artist, Q Art Theatre.

Photography by Lainie Basman

Bobo Vian has performed a wide range of roles on both stage and screen. A multilingual performer, Ms. Vian will be remembered for her versatility in Du Pic au Coeur, Nuremberg, Jackie, Wicked Minds, and, most recently, Baby for Sale. She is the associate artistic director for Q Art Theatre and teaches acting. She adapted Just Fine, her solo performance, from the book Zsuzsa Not Zsazsa by Susan Romvary, and her film novella, One More Step, received a public reading in 2003. She continuously fights against prejudice and discrimination, and for equal opportunity for all in the performing arts.

Art on the Line:

Le Petit Théâtre de l'Absolu on tour in the West Bank

by Gabriel Levine Photography by Lainie Basman

In October of 2003, we — the four puppeteers of Le Petit Théâtre de l'Absolu — spent three weeks in the Palestinian territories, followed by a week in Israel. We were invited to East Jerusalem by Abdelsalaam Abdo, director of the children's program for the Palestinian National Theatre, whom we had met at a festival in France. Up to this point we had functioned as a theatre company without state support, just surviving by the skin of our teeth. Here the hurdles were daunting: plane tickets, touring costs, the unknown difficulties of working in a dangerous place. We had also never done theatre for children. So *The Rooster and the King* became our first hand-puppet show, our first state-funded show, and our first show for children.

Our previous theatre had been explicitly political: shows about hidden history, resistance, or struggles for social change. Here we chose an Armenian folk tale with broader political implications:

A rooster discovers a pile of manure in the market and crows that he has found a beautiful treasure. When the King hears of it, he orders the treasure be brought to his palace. The rooster mocks him and the King orders the rooster be served for his dinner. But the rooster still makes fun of him and gives the King a terrible stomach ache. The King has a change of heart, gives up his kingdom, and sails away, singing with the rooster.

The spirit of the play was anarchic, if not anarchistic: lots of Punch-and-Judy style fisticuffs, bad jokes (translated on the spot into Arabic or Hebrew), some spectacular scenic moments (a wild chase through a bamboo jungle, the rooster dismembered and devoured by the King only to reappear intact in the King's belly). The kids of Palestine, in East Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Azariah, Dheisheh camp, Aze camp, Balata camp, Nablus and Qalqilyah were wildly enthusiastic. They would rush the stage if unsupervised, wanting to touch everything, to sneak behind, to see how it worked. Only once — in the old city of Nablus, under a cool awning of ancient stone, in a plaza where a secular militant had been assassinated the week before — did the kids overwhelm us, crowding the stage, testing the limits of our theatre, shaking our desire to bring pleasure into a world of privation, death, and desperation.

> "Mostly it worked because we were there, doing children's theatre in Occupied Palestine"

Because otherwise, in twenty-three shows for thousands of children, we found that — amazingly — our theatre worked, worked not just in terms of an admiring appreciation, nor even in a belly-laughing subversive satire, nor even in a healing fear-and-pity-purging ritual. It worked only in part because of our humble tools, our puppeteers' ingenuity, our play-making skills, our music, our fairground energy. Mostly it worked because we were *there*, doing children's theatre in Occupied Palestine: lugging our boxes across military checkpoints, baking in the desert sun, setting up our stage in crowded classrooms and community centres, sharing meals and conversations with refugees, social workers, journalists, and artists. As such we found the limits of our theatre, as well as the limits of our ideas and actions. But we also found that doing a children's show can be an act of solidarity as strong as any other.

It's 9:00 a.m. at Hiwara checkpoint, and a hundred Palestinians on their way to work wait in a long line that starts under a tin-roofed awning, passes through a kind of shelter made of netting, and finishes under the merciless sun. We are free to go, but no Palestinians can pass. We don't want to abandon our friend Saed, so we all stand in the shade next to the line of workers, who have been waiting for three hours already. It is Ramadan, so no one is drinking, and we forgot to bring any water. We wait with them as the sun climbs higher. A soldier orders a young man to stand in the sun while they check his ID; apparently he was leaning suspiciously on a water tank. The man shades his head with a magazine wrapped in a plastic bag. Scott does a quick pencil sketch in his notebook: the man standing, the concrete barriers, the desolate landscape. The soldier comes over and looks at it. "Very beautiful," he says, without any irony. Later we see that same soldier pushing back the line, grabbing men and shoving them, yelling in Hebrew for them to move back. A young man refuses to move, shouts at him in Arabic, "Just kill me now, we have no reason to live!" He is pulled away by some of his calmer neighbours. They are going to let ten people through, women and men over sixty only. We keep waiting as our little patch of shade shrinks further. We need a new strategy. A few teenagers start talking to us. One of them tells us he plays the piano. Well, we happen to have one on us! Hermine unpacks our little toy piano, and the guy starts to play, plunking out a popular melody. His friends crowd around. Sure enough, a few minutes later the soldier tells us we can go. They say they are concerned for our safety, but we think they are just afraid that a little music might break the monotony.

Our days were marked by the grinding routine of transit. Traveling with Palestinians through Israeli army checkpoints, we discovered the world of arbitrary power. It was hard to remember

"At some point, faced with the impossible, we feel the necessity to commit more than our voices, images, and words: we need to "be with" those who need us."

that these checkpoints were not on any border: the army controls all movement between any two places in the West Bank. Our Palestinian friends would show their ID, holding it firmly to avoid confiscation, trying to explain to these irritable gun-toting teenagers that we had the right to pass. Often we would avoid the checkpoints entirely, driving through back roads to an illegal crossing where razor wire was flattened down by cardboard and women hurried nervously in and out of taxis. We heard a middle-aged woman tell us how her Jerusalem schoolteacher's work permit had been suddenly and inexplicably revoked, and how she now traveled four hours each morning across fields and hills, scaling the separation wall, living in constant fear of arrest. Then we would reach our destination, drag our boxes into a dusty room or courtyard, and do a puppet show.

Almost without intending it, we found we had sidestepped a basic dilemma of solidarity work: the problem of the witness. In Israel and the Occupied Territories there are innumerable cameras, video recorders, dispatches, analyses, and media activists. So many are forced by the violence and hopelessness of the "situation" into a position of recording events as they actually exist, documenting the separation wall, the checkpoints, the settlements, the violence, cruelty and abuse, in the hope of making the world pay attention. But the world seems to endure a limitless amount of cruelty, an unbearable level of hypocrisy and abuse. The witness is so often frustrated and powerless, and while the telling must continue, it is so clearly not enough. At some point, faced with the impossible, we feel the necessity to commit more than our voices, images, and words: we need to "be with" those who need us.

The separation wall is the reason we are going to Qalqilya, maybe even the reason we are in the northern West Bank. The wall is sometimes a huge concrete structure, sometimes towering coils of razor wire, sometimes a ditch next to an electric fence. It snakes around the Palestinian lands, looping to encircle settlements and villages, lining access roads on both sides, cutting across fields and hillsides. Sometimes you can see two or three walls at once winding crazily over the landscape. We find ourselves in a narrow strip between two stretches of electric fence, standing in front of the gate of the village of Azoum. The gate is guarded by Israeli soldiers and opens only twice a day for half an hour to let schoolchildren and their teachers pass. "Where is the green line?" we ask Saed, referring to the pre-1967 border. He points west past the last green hilltop, past the last settlement. Borders here are fluid, and the landscape is a code we haven't learned to crack. At the last checkpoint, the entrance to Qalqilya, we say goodbye to Saed. He has to make it back to Nablus that night. We wish him good luck.

In the Occupied Territories, foreign nationals and Israelis have a certain degree of impunity, and activists are able to use their bodies as shields, a baseline assertion of the human against military and ideological domination. This can be as simple as picking olives with local farmers who are threatened by settlers, or as strong and dangerous as standing in front of a home-destroying bulldozer. We felt a kinship with these people who were putting their bodies on the line, even if we felt too fearful to do this. During the weeks of preparation before we left, we experienced this as a failure. But in the end, we found that we engaged as artists: we put our art on the line. Being there, performing, playing, meeting and eating and talking, clearly meant so much to the people we were with, people whom we came to call our friends. And we were invested in their children, their future, these children who had not yet inherited their exhaustion and sometime sense of futility. As hard as it was for us to accept, given the disastrous human situation in the West Bank, our actions had value.

It is nighttime in Qalqilya, a West Bank city entirely encircled by the wall—its inhabitants cut off from their fields, their wells. After our show, we stroll around town with our feminist hosts and their charming young daughters. The streets are lit up and filled with people. We eat Ramadan sweet: cheesy knafa and sticky baklava. The mood is somehow giddy and light. To the right, Nouha points out an official-looking illuminated gate. "Qalqilya zoo," she tells me. Right, I think, these people are trapped like animals here. But as we pass through the gate, I realize that we are in a real zoo. We wander along the tree-lined pathways past sorry-looking snakes and monkeys. A giraffe towers over us in the dark. Ziraffe, they tell us. A beautiful thirteen-year-old girl takes Scott's arm and teaches him the Arabic words for stars, sun, moon. The younger girls climb onto a swing set and fly through the night, singing in unison. They are singing a song of mourning for their brother, killed in the intifada. At this moment, my own brother calls on our cell phone. His voice crackles through static. "I'm in a zoo in Qalqilya, Palestine," I shout over the girls' song as they swing beneath the stars.

Now we are back in the position of witnessing, an unbearable position. Sometimes we feel like we are living in unreality, that communicating our experience to those around us is impossible. We are left with images, photos, fragments of memories. But we went by choice and left by choice, and there is more work to be done. Is the only solution to return?

The International Children's Puppet Festival takes place every October at the Hakawati theatre in East Jerusalem. Le Petit Théâtre de l'Absolu encourages show-making and cultural intervention.

Continued on page 15

Theatre for Education in Oaxaca, Mexico:

An Interview with Pedro Guillermo Castellanos Lemus (April 1, 2003). Translated from Spanish and edited by Tamar Tembeck, July 2004.

Photo by Omar Lemus

Pedro Guillermo Castellanos Lemus belongs to the Grupo de Teatro Crisol, a Mexican theatre group that has been active in the state of Oaxaca for the last ten years. Grupo de Teatro Crisol presents traditional theatre in the cities of Oaxaca and also brings workshops and performances to various remote Oaxacan communities. The ensemble has facilitated the creation of numerous community theatre groups throughout the state of Oaxaca and uses the theatre as a tool for popular education and development.

TT: How do you go about facilitating the creation of theatre groups in Oaxaca?

PL: It can involve either actually creating a theatre group or working on the acting, directing, and dramaturgy within groups that already exist. We also present our own theatre pieces, both in villages and in colonies at the edge of the city.

Recently, we've been involved in what we call the "social part" of our work with suburban communities and with marginal groups from the villages. Last year, we initiated a project entitled *Expresarte* [to express yourself / to express art] in the colonies, which we will pursue this year. (These colonies often have no sewage system, no water, and suffer severe economic difficulties.) The project didn't only involve theatre, but also included literature and object art. We began the project after having completed a physical theatre piece that was developed with a lot of clown and pantomime techniques and very little text. The play was directed towards youth. We addressed issues of addiction, family problems, school, social circles, and friendships, but without saying "this is good" or "this is bad." It was more of an exploration on youth and adolescence. The piece was very well received, and after the performance the audience told us that they would like to learn how to make something like it.

When we started to work with these communities, we realised that the artistic activity allowed them to channel a lot of their worries. These anxieties, in today's circumstances, could otherwise lead to a type of neurosis that might in turn lead to violence, addiction, or other delinquencies. We believe that by performing artistic work in areas that have these types of problems, we can help to slow down the growth of violence in the suburbs of Oaxaca: gangs, addiction, juvenile delinquency starting at the age of twelve or thirteen... So we find it particularly important to work there.

"One of the major problems these youths face is the fact that they have a great desire to express themselves, but they have neither the voice to do so nor an audience who will listen to them."

Generally, we would arrive in the colony with a fully developed piece entitled *En la Cuerda Floja [Walking the Tightrope]*. Loudspeaker announcements would have been made in the street during the week, and then we would return on Sunday night, gather people around, and present the show. Afterwards, we spoke with the audience, sometimes we did some exercises with the assistants, especially with the youth, and then we invited them to participate in workshops that lasted one month in each colony. We offered them three workshops: literature, object art, and theatre. We saw that the art workshop was important because it allowed them to make something with anything, so it promoted a culture of recycling. The teens were also very interested in creating something that they wouldn't have to be a part of. They didn't necessarily want to see themselves in [the final work]. So it was important to give them [the option to create an artwork].

On the other hand, the teens had to reveal themselves in the theatre workshop. Because they're teenagers, they resisted this exposure a lot. That's why the artworks were important to us, and so was the literature workshop. We find that one of the major problems these youths face is the fact that they have a great desire to express themselves, but they have neither the voice to do so nor an audience who will listen to them. Through the literature workshop, they could learn to relate what they wanted to say in a structured manner. Meanwhile, all the motor activity and intellectual activity would be channelled through the theatre workshop, which is linked to the practice of play, or playing at playing. We would play a lot to channel energies, and without realizing it, they were already making a scene, they were already doing theatre.

After a month of work, we put on an exhibition with each colony. Many of these youths find it difficult to integrate themselves into the communities or even into their own families. Some of them are homeless, others have trouble studying... They face many different types of problems. The creative process offered them a way to intro-

"En la Cuerda Floja" Creación Colectiva, IESO y COBAO de Pueblo Nuevo, 2002. Photo by Octavio Flores

duce themselves back into their communities. They learned to create an artistic product that could then be shown. So we presented the play, we exhibited the objects they created in the art workshop, and then we read some stories out loud. We also exhibited their texts on walls and in the public plaza.

One way in which to encourage the kids to keep on working was to find a way for their stories to be read not only in their own colony, but to also make it available to people in the city. We convinced a state newspaper to publish two or three of our stories every week, so everyone was able to read their writing in print.

At the same time, we were invited to make a radio show in which the kids could talk about their colony, say "This is how I live," or whatever they wanted to say. On top of that, as a theatre group, we dramatized some of the stories which were then broadcast over the radio. People could hear their own stories. That was very motivating for them.

We only managed to work in seven colonies. But the project had a strong social impact, and institutions working on the prevention of delinquency, the promotion of culture in Oaxaca, and youth programs all said that it was a great success. It is highly likely that we will pursue the program this year with greater backing from the government and that we'll be able to cover more colonies.

TT: How many people are there in the group?

PL: We were twelve people for this project.

TT: And you spent a month in each colony?

PL: We would start our first day in one colony, and then on day fifteen we'd already be starting in another colony. We started a new project every fifteen days. So we were always working with two colonies at once. That was a lot. It was quite draining. But it was also thrilling because so many interesting things happened. In the end, we interviewed the youths and broadcast the interview over the radio, and we also interviewed the adults living in the colonies. They told us whether or not the project had worked for them. The children's ability to express what had happened over the month was quite captivating. We'd ask them "What are you doing here?" "I'm in theatre." "And what is theatre?" And they would give some really interesting answers with regards to what theatre can be: "Theatre is what gives me the opportunity to be another person," " to create worlds," and other such definitions in one or two sentences. Hearing that, you tell yourself it's working for them. And many of these people continue to work alone, creating their stories and their plays.

We also have other projects in difficult communities. This is really where we began our social work. In 1998, there were a number of important forest fires in Oaxaca state. The smoke reached the city; the city was full of smoke. We asked ourselves, "What can we do? We can't go put out the fires, because we'll burn. We don't know how to do that. What we know is how to make theatre." We said to ourselves that the problem with forest fires is one of prevention, it's not a question of putting them out. What if we were able to prevent the fires, to bring this to the consciousness of the people who cause the fires, who provoke them...

We researched why these fires were happening, and we realized that there are three fundamental factors involved.

The first is the agricultural and breeding practices in the communities. They always need to cultivate more land because they don't recycle. So, we found that we had to educate them in matters of conservation: how to recycle their land and save their forests. They can extract resources from the forest while at the same time preserving it. The fact that they weren't doing this was their greatest problem.

"We asked ourselves, "What can we do? We can't go put out the fires, because we'll burn. We don't know how to do that. What we know is how to make theatre."

The second problem has to do with corruption on the part of companies that steal wood. They go in, cut and clear, then burn... It's illegal, but it still happens. Sometimes, the people in the community even allow it to happen because the cutters pay them two or three pesos. These people don't have any money, so they say, "Fine, that's okay." But they're stealing their wood! So this is another situation that calls for education.

The third cause is carelessness. People go into the woods and start a fire, then they don't put it out properly. The same goes for cigarettes, etc.

There are other causes, but these are the most important ones. So we decided to create a project around this. We went into the communities and created theatre pieces with them in order to motivate their interest in conserving their forests. If they don't help in the conservation effort, and if we don't help them, everything will come back and affect us: climate changes, floods, droughts...

We made a collective creation with a minimal amount of text. There are many languages [spoken by the aboriginals in the

state of Oaxaca] and we don't know them all. We teemed up with the Environmental Protection Secretariat. The first year, we reached different communities and the Secretariat realized that the prevention was working. The following year, they asked us to do it again. They paid us and provided us with transportation and everything. Then the World Wildlife Fund [WWF] got involved. To date, we've produced three different works with them. The characters stay the same, but they come into different situations.

The first play is about forest fire prevention. The second is about the preservation of [ecological] diversity, which is another problem. The third is about community organization. These communities exploit natural resources because they don't know how to rally themselves into community groups. This is due in part to the political parties that separate the communities. Religion is also a source of division between them. Although this division cannot be avoided, we hope that through the plays we can suggest some form of community organisation.

When the plays are over, we go and speak with the audience. We serve somewhat as the liaison agents between the communities and the various institutions that oversee agricultural and environmental issues. We're like ambassadors: we present the play and the people tell us what they like. Then we return and present their requests to the institutions. Fortunately, they listen to what the communities have to say.

Oaxaca is a very big state. We've visited many places, but not the entire state. I especially enjoyed visiting one community that lives deep inside the jungle. We had to drive fifteen hours by van and then walk for another five hours in order to get there. The people had never seen theatre before in their lives. We got there, did the work, and tried to explain what we were doing... We did this work with the people, and in the end it was very enjoyable and we understood many things.

TT: How did you know where to go?

PL: Through the WWF and the Environmental Protection Secretariat. They've studied which areas have the most [environmental] problems. Then there's a whole bunch of logistical work, talking with municipal authorities, etc. You have to go through all the official red tape in order to get there.

TT: How did communities that had never seen theatre react? Did they have any points of reference from their own culture?

PL: Yes. They have a number of [comparable] events. Religious celebrations, for instance, or ancestral rituals with masks, torches, and dances. They have some references.

The play is very entertaining, too, so people attend it for that reason, to have a good time. Even if the communities don't get together for religious or political reasons, they still come to watch the play. Everybody gets together. That's very important for the institutions, because after our performances, the WWF comes in and explains what they can do. Or the Environmental Protection Secretariat comes and says, "Now that we're all together, here's what we can all do."

If you were to try and gather these communities via a political party, a municipal authority, or a church, it is certain that not everyone would attend. But if you show up with a play, everybody gets together to see the show. That's what we're doing with these communities: bringing them together.

TT: Could you describe what led you to doing socially driven theatre work?

PL: It was this experience in 1998. I remember it clearly. I was in a bar with colleagues from the theatre group having a beer. We were talking about the fires that were devastating nearby forests. It was ironic: "Are we really preoccupied about this, sipping our beers over here?" And we answered, "No. We have to do something." And that was the moment we decided to do something.

It isn't everything. There is still much to be done. We can't change it all. But we can start to motivate a movement, because the civil population has to participate and so does the government. We need such opportunities in order to foster different outcomes [for the communities] in different contexts. The only thing that we can do is to motivate or generate a movement in that direction.

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Cultures in the City or a City of Cultures?

By Zab Maboungou, Translated by Ken McDonough

Stand Firm (*Cap sur l'excellence*) stems from an initiative by the Canada Council for the Arts, which, in concert with the country's artistic and cultural community, set out to consolidate the goals of equal access to the arts and equal participation in their development and dissemination. The Council committed itself financially and logistically to bringing key players from the Canadian cultural and arts scene together — especially artists, agents, and cultural organizations from communities of non-European origin — as part of a dynamic collaborative and consultative process.

This initiative is, in a sense, a milestone in relations between institutions and the people and communities they are meant to serve. In recent decades, the movement of people and cultures in the world — including in Canada and Quebec — has become an inexorable reality. The institutions that fund the arts and foster their development have not always been able to take the pulse of these changes in any significant way. This has contributed to a system of exclusion that seems almost natural: one in which works based on cultural models not endorsed by the existing cultural system are routinely eliminated in the name of art.

Stand Firm sought a general buy-in from "proven" artistic and cultural organizations — those that had already contributed significantly to the artistic and cultural life of the country — so that they could move beyond mere awareness of each other's existence. The initiative would provide them with opportunities to pool their strengths and abilities, network, potentially map out a course of action, and mobilize themselves. The first main gathering, held in Toronto in September of 2002, was essentially a massive brainstorming session. The members of *Stand Firm* got to know each other and took part in a series of workshops. After this initial meeting, they began to build a network. Once the network was in place, they held discussions and telephone conferences and set up regional committees.

One condition for participation in *Stand Firm* was that the participants had to take effective and autonomous control of the program. Much more than a representative structure, *Stand Firm* was to be a new opportunity for transformation: a springboard to opening up Canada's arts and culture community. Personal and collective commitment was required in order to achieve this objective, and the terms of this commitment were to be determined by the various regional committees and groups.

Driven by the need to anchor this initiative, *Stand Firm Montreal* immediately signed on. The Montreal contingent is currently made up of six members: Black Theatre Workshop, Montreal Asian Heritage Festival, Les Éditions du CIDHICA (a publishing house), Tumbuktu – Productions Twiga, Teesri Duniya Theatre, and the Nyata Nyata Circle of Artistic Expression (dance). *Stand Firm Montreal* immediately agreed that any proactive process that had the potential to transform the relationship among artists, the "cultural communities," and institutions was of vital importance. The objective of *Stand Firm* is clear: to fight against the isolation and apathy brought about by the ever-present barriers to active and visible involvement in Canada's cultural and artistic development. Those barriers, erected in happy and even benevolent indifference by the "host society," would no longer be able to hide the effervescence of the cultures in the city.

If this "sudden awakening" is to be meaningful, not only must funds be reallocated where they are needed more than ever before but qualified people must be appointed to appropriate positions in Quebec's arts and culture institutions. If we agree that cultural diversity is a reality that can no longer be sidestepped, then the current situation, where cultural goods are circulating without people, cannot continue. Allowing it to do so would be the same as settling for a cheap "pseudo-global culture" in which the increasingly diversified movement of cultural goods is used as a foil by those who still regard themselves as the sole champions of "official" culture.

Commenting on the publication of a general cultural dictionary in 2000, George Leroux observed, "All reflexes by which a society seeks, as many continue to do today, to manage diversity and contain it within foundations it intends to control are problematic." His statement underscores the growing challenges that many societies face today in integrating cultures — especially in the West. Leroux went on to say: "To be a culture today means to not only call upon Sophocles or Shakespeare to interpret history, but also to know that this culture is not the sole reading of the world and history." Granted, but then who will see to it that an alternative reading is proposed? And who will interpret it? This raises the whole question of points of reference, a notion that implies the existence of a symbolic system of places, representations, and people from which the search for meaning must proceed.

Culture understood as an unending movement that unfolds according to specific, identifiable points of reference should be embraced nonetheless, as Milton Tanaka illustrates using the example of an independent ethno-cultural initiative:

The Montreal Asian Heritage Festival, created and

Continued on page 15

Flat Categories:

A Review of Marc Maufort's Transgressive Itineraries:

Postcolonial Hybridizations of Dramatic Realism (P.I.E.–Peter Lang, 2003)

by Kate Bligh

It is in acknowledgement of Artaud's influence across artistic forms and media that Scheer notes how "all forms of art were ineluctably hybrid for Artaud" and that, by failing to recognise this fact, the attempts by individual disciplines — especially theatre studies — to appropriate his work in singular fashion proceed from a simple "misunderstanding of Artaud's ideas about form."

Review by Tony Gardner, Liveartmagazine.com. 2 March 2004

transgress	*v.t.* Violate, infringe, go beyond bounds set by, (commandment, law, limitation) *(Concise Oxford Dictionary)*
itinerary	*n.* Route; record of travel; guidebook. *(Concise Oxford Dictionary)*
hybrid	*sb. and adj.* Half-breed, mongrel; also fig. one born...of a freeman and a slave. *(Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology)*

In *Transgressive Itineraries*, Marc Maufort sets out to define and analyze directions in recent postcolonial anglophone drama, and to measure the evolving styles of these dramaturgies against the benchmark of dramatic realism. He does so by surveying noteworthy plays and performance texts written in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand between 1980 and 2000 and sorting them into three categories. Each of the three chapters of the book then deals with one of these categories, which are presented as "Mainstream," "Multicultural," and "Aboriginal." The Canadian writers included in the first category are Judith Thompson and George F. Walker; those in the second are Guillermo Verdeccia, George Seremba, Djanet Sears, Betty Quan, Marty Chan, and M.J. Kang; and those in the third are Tomson Highway, Daniel David Moses, and Drew Hayden Taylor.

In each chapter the Canadian playwrights are considered first and the Australians and New Zealanders second. Although I am not familiar with any of the southern hemisphere writers whose work is discussed in this book, the rationale behind their categorization seems clear: "Mainstream" texts are written by descendents of white English-speaking families present in the country of writing for several generations; "Multicultural" texts by first or second generation immigrants from non-English speaking, non-white, or visibly interracial families; and Aboriginal" texts for the most part by descendents of indigenous peoples back to the dawn of humanity.

In his introduction, Maufort summarizes various arguments about the impossibility of defining realism and concludes that the oeuvre of Eugene O'Neill — with its spiritual awakenings, epiphanies, and identity quests — probably best epitomizes Western modern realist drama. He then sets out on similarly well-trodden paths in search of the ever-elusive definition of magic realism. This is a term I have always had some resistance to, wondering why Marquez's, Allende's, Rushdie's and Highway's spirits are considered "magic," whereas Shakespeare's, and even the Holy Ghost itself, are not. It seems to me that the realism/magic realism polarization simply puts us right back into the old Christian/Pagan divide, or, taking the simplification even further, to the dichotomy of the Crusaders versus the Infidels.

Having concluded that there is no such thing as magic realism, Maufort proposes nevertheless to apply the term via a series of subcategories coined by Jeanne Delbaere, including "mythic realism," "psychic realism," "grotesque realism," and even "Aboriginal realism." The framework thus established, the survey begins: key examples of work by each writer are briefly described, analyzed, and then categorized according to the extent to which they qualify as realism de souche (A Québécois term: from the root/stock) or are, fulfilling the title and undertaking of this book, one of the subcategories of magic realism.

I would like to direct the reader's attention to this review's opening excerpt regarding Antonin Artaud's notion of artistic form. If one were to substitute the term "Canadian artists" for "Artaud" and change "their" for "his," I suggest that this well-made point would still stand. With reference to one of the definitions I quote at the outset here, the term "hybrid," as does the word "mulatto," infers not just a mixing but a combination of superior and inferior, a down-grading. From the outset, I feel it is too laden, perjorative, and poisonous a term to be appropriate in the context of these artists. I'd like to suggest my own reductive, more concise, but obviously much less politically correct titles for Maufort's categories: "English Except for the Accent," "Just off the Boat," and "Native." Or how about "Whites," "Coloureds," and "Blacks"?

Transgressive Itineraries is an academic study, and its author is thorough (at least, as far as I am able to judge, in his consideration of Canadian authors) and well read. He is a European academic based at the University of Brussels who has made a number of visits to Canada, Australia, and New Zealand in the course of his research. As a Canadian theatre practitioner, what I learn from this book is not so much about the directions and innovations of postcolonial anglophone playwrights as about the way in which a European academic has observed, analyzed, and defined works created here and in the southern hemisphere by a wide spectrum of artists who have only their language and their contemporaneity in common. The categories, system, terms, and order or hierarchy of progression chosen in this book convey much more about the values, assumptions, and interests of the author and the culture in which he is writing than they do about the value, content, and significance of the multi-faceted, shimmering, convulsing trawl of works he has netted here.

In the span of twenty years covered by this study, Judith Thompson began writing about poor white trash in southern Ontario (*The Crackwalker*, 1980) and then sent her Cree characters into the forests of the extreme north of that province (*Sled*, 1997) before returning to a white middle-class, seventh-generation homestead (*Perfect Pie*, 2000). Tomson Highway was born on his father's trap-line in northern Manitoba, one hundred miles north of Brochet Manitoba, the reserve to which he belongs. Since then, his personal itinerary has included residence in England and France and classical training as a concert pianist. My point here is not to expect a solely biographical investigation of

the work of any writer. In this instance, however, the categories in which the analyses of these writers are being promulgated are limiting ones taken from too narrow a perspective, thus providing a mono-dimensional, compromised understanding of their developments and achievements.

This book is a competent and serviceable work that will be elucidating for any European who knows little about the dramaturgies of Canada, Australia, or New Zealand. It could have done with more careful proof-reading: I noted an average of one typo every three pages or so. I finished it with no little frustration at seeing these artists explained and dissected in such a manner; with a strong intention to read the works of Australian writers such as Louis Nowra and Jane Harrison and Maori writers such as Hone Kouka and Briar Grace-Smith; and with a reinforced conviction that such analyses and surveys might be carried out much more constructively from within the culture generating the writing.

We laughingly dismiss the scientifically minded ponderings of nineteenth-century European anthropologists over the specific differences between maroons, quadroons, and octaroons as a result of "miscegenation." Perhaps it is now time to consign this type of academic discourse to the history books of the twentieth century. Perhaps it is time for a postcolonial poetics of our own?

Kate Bligh has recently become a Canadian citizen; she has lived in Montreal for the last eight years and is aboriginally English (as far as she can tell). She is artistic director of les productions temenos (www.temenos.ca) and works in both English and French. Her itinerary so far includes half of Europe, parts of Asia, and many destinations in North America. One of her more notable transgressions has been acting as artistic director of the Black Theatre Workshop from 1999-2001. She is a part-time faculty member of the departments of Theatre and English at Concordia University and has taught at the National Theatre School of Canada.

Cultures Continued from page 13

directed by Janet Lumb, a Toronto-born Canadian of Chinese origin, is self-managed by visible minorities that maintain their own representational systems. This annual multidisciplinary event brings together several visible minority artists of Asian origin who have chosen to produce works that fall outside the stereotyped perception of the mass media. Because the artists do not feel obliged to confine themselves to traditional Asian means of expression, they confound media expectations of what "Asian consumer art" is supposed to be.

The expression "visible minority" is more problematic than ever. And in the current context, even comical. Does it refer to biological visibility inherent in a person's race or to visibility that has yet to be cultivated? *Stand Firm*'s raison d'être lies in this difference in "point of view" — one that others must begin to take responsibility for articulating. Equity demands it.

Montreal's "Programme de soutien à l'interculturalisme" (interculturalism program), which was created by the city's cultural department in 1993, has created and disseminated 175 projects by artists and organizations of every origin, showcasing Montreal's rich cultural scene and the know-how of practitioners within its cultural mosaic. In volume 24 of the Montreal publication *Revue Possibles*, then head of the interculturalism program Sylvana Villata commented on the benefits and changes in the program, but added that "despite these positive aspects, interculturalism raises some debatable points, including the obliteration of real differences in the treatment of the cultures in contact and, more particularly, the tendency to reinforce the idea or impression of distance between the majority, or 'founding,' culture and so-called other cultures. From this perspective, the program is a compensatory means to give oneself a clear conscience—a kind of necessary panacea."

Rather than let the dice fall where they may, *Stand Firm Montreal* is determined to get beyond compensatory mechanisms and ideological or political expropriation so that citizens of all origins and identities — in this city where cultures are living together as never before — can benefit. To achieve this goal, *Stand Firm Montreal* is working to have its voice heard, directly or indirectly, by the pertinent authorities so that concrete measures are taken by those responsible for decisions affecting the arts, culture, and media.

Along these lines, *Stand Firm Montreal* drafted a set of recommendations for Federal and Municipal arts and cultural agencies, laying out a context for the expansion of policy on cultural diversity and a means through which greater parity could be achieved through existing funding structures. The Federal set of recommendations were presented to the then Minister of Culture the Hon. Sheila Copps at the April 2003 Minister's Forum on Cultural Diversity. A similar set of recommendations was drafted for the municipal context in Montreal, which influenced the Conseil des Arts de Montréal to host an open conference with the arts community in Montreal on "La diversité artistique de Montréal: une richesse à partager" (Artistic Diversity in Montreal: a Richness to Share) in March of 2004.

Though no conclusive policy emerged from the conference, the public and institutional dialogue for the Conseil has been set in motion. Through continued advocacy and learning from the lead of organizations like the Canada Council for the Arts and its *Stand Firm* initiative, we hope to see the popular rhetoric on cultural diversity within federal, provincial and municipal arts and cultural agencies translated into policy.

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Zab Maboungou founded Le cercle d'expression artistique Nyata Nyata in 1986 to develop and promote her creative endeavors. Her work as a dancer/choreographer has been staged nationally across Canada and abroad, and she is the creator of "the rhythmic of breathing," a method described in her book *HEYA: a historic, poetic and didactic treatise of African dance.*

Ken McDonough is a Montreal-based translator, editor, writer and occasional actor. A past contributor to alt.theatre, he has been associated with Teesri Duniya Theatre for the past 15 years.

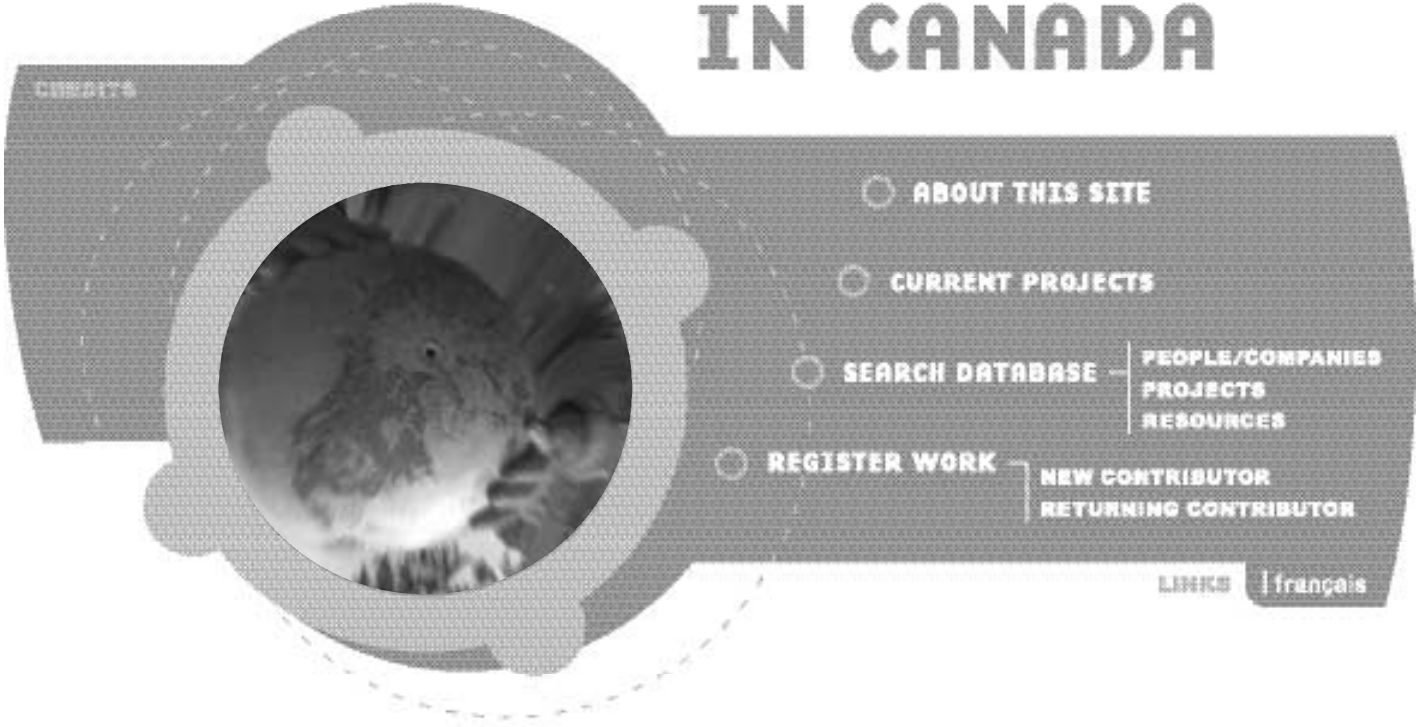
Art Continued from page 9

Write le_petit_theatre@yahoo.com for more information and ideas.

Gabriel Levine is one of the founding members, along with Hermine Ortega and Scott Gilmore, of Le Petit Théâtre de l'Absolu. He is currently pursuing an M.A. in Social and Political Thought at York University, Toronto.

This site provides a bilingual, searchable Database/Registry of Canadian projects, practitioners, researchers, teachers, and resources in the field of theatre and development.

THEATRE & DEVELOPMENT IN CANADA



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