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- Are We There Yet? 4
Editorial by Edward Little.
- Shaking the Paluwala Tree: Fashioning Internal Gathering Houses and Re-Fashioning the Spaces of Popular Entertainment through Contemporary Investigations into Native Performance Culture (NpC) * 8
Jill Carter's conversations with Spiderwoman Theatre's founding Elders inspire her to explore the theatrical marginalization of ageism that cuts across all cultures—and to create theatre to challenge it.
- Welcome to Ramallah:*
Two Authors in Search of a Play 14
Sonja Linden balances the personal with the political in her journey as co-author of *Welcome to Ramallah*—a play about displacement of the Palestinian people.
- Peering through the Prism:
Visible Minority Performers outside
Canada's Urban Centres 20
Clarrisa Hurley reviews Onelight Theatre's Prismatic conference in Halifax, and considers the accomplishments of visible minority artists based in small centres—as well as the challenges they continue to face.
- More Than a Metaphor 26
Jakub Stachurski highlights some of the personal stories that emerged in the panel discussions held as part of Teesri Duniya's production of *My Name Is Rachel Corrie*.
- The Geopolitics of Invisibility in Ahmed Ghazali's
The Sheep and the Whale 29
Barry Freeman reflects on the (unbridgeable?) gap between himself as spectator and the refugees being re-presented in the TPM production of Ahmed Ghazali's *The Sheep and the Whale*.
- Dispatches 35
Abby Lippman on the Montreal production of Caryl Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children: A Play for Gaza*.
- 36
Louis Patrick Leroux on Wajdi Mouawad's *Seuls*.
- Book Review 37
Jisha Menon reviews Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo's *Performance and Cosmopolitics: Cross-Cultural Transactions in Australasia*.

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Jerry Wasserman looks at local attitudes to colour-blind casting through recent letters to the editor posted on his [vancouverplays](http://vancouverplays.com) website.

BOOK REVIEW

Juliana Saxton reviews *The Applied Theatre Reader* (Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston, eds.)

DISPATCH

Yvette Nolan reflects on directing *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* at the National Arts Centre.

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T H E A T R E

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Adrienne Wong as Rachel Corrie in the Quebec Premiere of *My Name Is Rachel Corrie*, co-produced by Teesri Duniya Theatre (Montreal) and neworldtheatre (Vancouver).

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alt.theatre:cultural diversity and the stage is Canada's only professional journal examining intersections between politics, cultural plurality, social activism, and the stage. Our readership includes theatre practitioners, academics, plus others interested in issues pertaining to arts and cultural diversity.

alt.theatre welcomes suggestions or proposals for interviews, news, pieces of self-reflection, analytical articles, and reviews of books, plays, and performances.

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ARE *we* THERE

Selected key events of 1998 (not necessarily in order of importance):
Conrad Black launches *The National Post*; Teesri Duniya Theatre launches
alt.theatre: cultural diversity and the stage.

YET?

by Edward Little



The Post, wearing the blue trunks of the Alliance/Reform Party and weighing in at 500,000 inaugural copies, championed a neoliberal discourse aimed at uniting the Right against what Black saw as “a liberal bias” in Canadian newspapers. Also in the ring was Canada’s National broadsheet titleholder, the Thomson Empire Liberal red-clad *Globe and Mail*. The prize was heavyweight corporate control of Canadian Media.

alt.theatre, tipping the scales at a scant 500 copies and championing an alternative discourse of cultural plurality, social justice, and a critical role for the arts was determined to get in a few good punches from the sidelines.

Black padded the gloves with his holdings in Southam News. When Black sold to Izzy Asper in 2000-2001, Asper stuffed in his CanWest Global Television and print network as well. The *Globe and Mail*, backing the Liberals, followed that Party’s lead and adopted an aggressively neoliberal stance. The fight was rigged. All backers were making book on the same ideological agenda—to ensure that neoliberal market principles would hold sway over both government policy and the economic sector.

In 2003, media commentator Lawrence Martin confirmed the decision: “[T]he media forces of the right [have] gained the predominant place.” Martin cited an “unnamed European diplomat” who tactfully characterized the relationship between the Canadian people and its national media as “a bit of a problem”—noting that while Canadians tend to the moderate middle, most of Canada’s political commentary was now right of centre. National media were not representing Canadian people and values. Martin, noting that there was “almost as much of a drumbeat for an Iraq war in the Canadian media as in the United States,” put it more bluntly: “*The National Post* is so American it should come in a holster.”

In the 2006 and 2008 federal elections, *The Globe and Mail* backed Harper’s Conservatives. The fight became about whose corporate interest would get to host *the only* Party. For former NDP leader Ed Broadbent it was all part of a barbarous “political assault on social rights” (1). The “purse”—the money distributed to both fighters—was substantial. By 2004, taxes on Canada’s super wealthy (those earning an average income of 5.9 million) dropped from 42% to 31%. By comparison, taxes for 95% of Canadians fell by only 1% (Broadbent 8). Meanwhile, by 2009, James Adams was reporting that the income of most Canadian artists was “hovering at poverty levels” and “the situation is likely to worsen as the worldwide recession deepens.” Broadbent’s assessment of the social cost of government’s shift in values:

“Canadians have returned to levels of inequity not seen since the 1920s” (8).

Apparently, size does matter. While a bloated national media were largely preoccupied with battles over whose neoliberal dogma could piss farther, *alt.theatre* was struggling at a grassroots level to champion an alternative discourse focusing on the project of multiculturalism. Mainstream media, backed by vast financial resources, was seeking economic influence. *alt.theatre*, modestly supported by our beleaguered arts councils, was seeking equality of access in support of not-for-profit theatre that would question prevailing ideologies; resist pressures to link the arts to the commercial values of the market place; counterbalance the individualistic profit motives of corporate forces; and nurture a healthy, pluralistic democracy operating in the interests of a culturally inclusive “common good.” Oh—and bring people together in time and space to be entertained and to share profound collective experiences of the human condition.

alt’s editorial stance was and is rooted in a discourse of cultural politics concerned with the social violence wrought by rhetorical strategies that position art, ideology, and politics as mutually exclusive. For over ten years, *alt’s* writers have provided first-hand accounts of theatre variously constituted as “an unofficial ... opposition party” (Smedley 14); a medium of education, social commentary, imagination, and community celebration (Mackey); a place of ritual and healing; a means of breaking the silence; a way “to encourage free thinking” and “to mobilize people to work towards social justice and change” (Leblanc-Crawford 12); and where artists accept that they do not merely *express* cultural values, but that they *constitute* them as well (Wallace 5).

As might be expected of a journal dedicated to intersections between politics, cultural diversity, and the stage, the voices in *alt.theatre* tend to speak from various places within Canada’s social, cultural, and political margins. From these perspectives, the persistence of a bicultural reality that fundamentally excludes First Nations is not merely “academic.” Blatantly racist immigration policies are not simply wrongs from a distant past. State-sanctioned multiculturalism functioning to manage ethnic diversity or facilitate the “importation of cheap labour” (Knowles viii) is not exclusively a minority concern. The consequences of these injustices haunt us all. They appear in embodied experience from the margins. They generate not only artistic creation, but also complex ways of seeing, responding to, and being in the world. These in turn profoundly complicate our collective daily interactions. The myriad way in which these ghosts of injustice are ignored or

occluded in mainstream theatre criticism—and in the hearts and minds of some audience members—is an ongoing theme in *alt.theatre*.¹

While we cannot change what has been done in *history*, many of the voices in *alt.theatre* are directly involved in using art to change what history is doing to the *present*. From early on, our writers advocate rejecting “the globalized model of commodified culture/entertainment” and building in their place “unique theatrical and artistic mirrors that reflect particular cultural identities” (Nichols 5). Some look at theatrical projects that map the human impact of intersections between ideology, politics, and culture within an explicit context of embodied memory, decolonization, and healing. Others are striving to develop alternative ways of working and new aesthetics that create bridges between the contemporary experience of art and life and the social functions of traditional or ancestral cultural forms. Some are adapting dominant forms such as Shakespeare to speak to particular socio-cultural contexts. Others are involved in “recuperating” or “rehabilitating” for the Common Good populist forms such as the *Pastorelas* in Mexico or the *Cordel* in Brazil—genres that were originally imported from Europe to serve a Colonialist agenda. Still others are “speaking truth to power” using traditions of political theatre or satire.

The hope that lessons from the margins might contribute to greater self-reflection and a stronger collective mission on the part of not-for-profit theatre has also been central to *alt*'s discourse. These issues have been taken up in discussions of both of the actions and inactions of government, of arts organizations, of funding bodies, and of training and academic institutions. Over the years, *alt.theatre* has examined the promise and the actuality of initiatives such as the Canada Council's Artists and Communities Collaboration Program and the Equity Office's “Stand Firm.” We have challenged the exclusion of culturally diverse artists in proposals to promote “Cultural Mediation” by Quebec's *Culture pour tous*. Our writers have also spoken out against the erosion of cultural sovereignty through international trade agreements (Thomson); challenged the rhetoric that would characterize systemic barriers as “competitive hurdles” for women, minority artists, and different social classes; examined the complicity of state and local community in censorship and self-censorship; called on the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres to take a stand against the “War on Terror”; and urged artists to speak in solidarity against the “manufacture of disinformation,” government and public apathy towards the arts, social injustice, and the growing inequality and loss of democratic participation borne of “smaller government.”

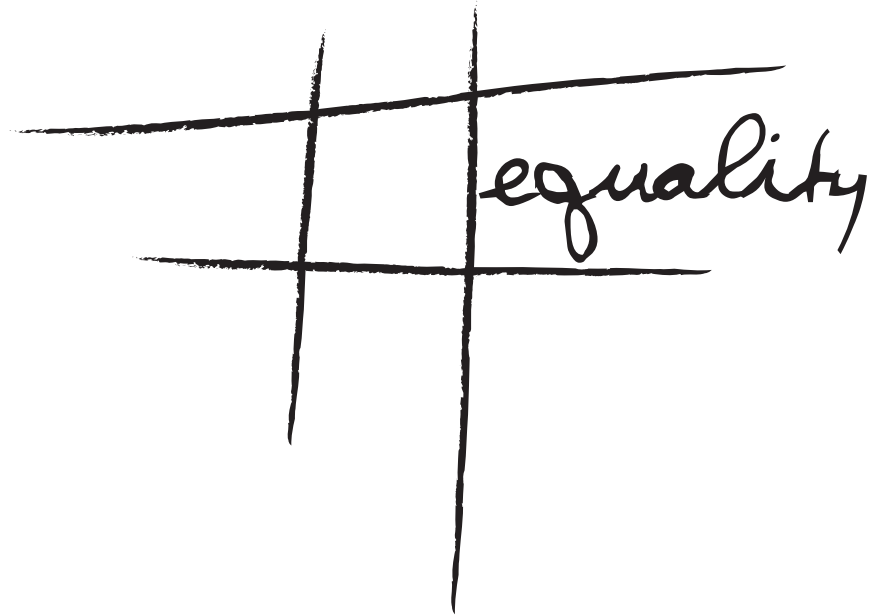
An increasingly prevalent approach to socially engaged activist theatre is represented by “applied” or “community-engaged theatre”—work that involves professional artists working with citizens across disciplines and via intersectoral alliances to produce art focused on identifiable social outcomes. As *alt*'s writer indicate, this work often proceeds from the minority experiences of economic vulnerability, linguistic “ghettoization,” or a need within communities isolated by culturally entrenched social networks to interrogate what is often naturalized as “unquestionable” cultural authority.

How far have we come? In ten years we have seen a considerable growth in the number of culturally diverse artists and companies working in various contexts in Canada. Very often this work is innovative, fresh, and artistically accomplished. As a result, there is a wider-spread awareness and appreciation of the work of minority artists. Increasingly, studies and critical reviews of culturally diverse arts and artists are the stuff of conference panels, academic papers, and publications in books and journals. Mainstream theatres are now more likely to include “diversity slots”—albeit most often as “Showcase” events rather than as part of regular programming.

With this growth in recognition come heightened concerns for minority artists with recurring questions such as: Who are our audiences? What is the nature of our relationship to our socio-cultural communities? Under what conditions does *inclusion* risk tokenism, exoticism, appropriation, or assimilation? The pages of *alt.theatre* track the ongoing struggle of many minority artists to negotiate these questions and to serve the “Two Masters” represented by minority ethnic communities that tend *not* to support theatre in large numbers, and artistic careers that often require complicit participation in the intentions and values of the Regional Theatre Network. These can also be productive tensions—increasingly within the pages of *alt.theatre*, the social values, politics, local-engagement, and aesthetic terms of the margins are being brought to the centre to critique, and perhaps even to re-vitalize, a moribund mainstream theatre.

More than ten years ago, *alt.theatre* set out on a journey to connect artists within and across cultures in an exploration of the promise and potential of culturally diverse theatre. Along the way we've seen the impact of Canadian demographics as immigration from Asia has overtaken that from Europe. We've visited exciting new artists and picked up new readers. Occasionally, we've stopped to buy a newspaper—checking to see if our journey is making news, or if there is any indication that we are closer to our

destination in the hearts and minds of the Canadian public. Now, as our national media tell us to expect a few economic bumps on the road, we keep passing the burning wrecks of neoliberalism. Someone asks, "Are we there yet?" Apparently not.



NOTE

¹ For a comprehensive, thematically arranged index of specific articles published in in *alt.theatre* and relating to the categories discussed in this editorial, visit www.teesriduniyatheatre.com/alltheatre.html

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SHAKING THE PALUWALA TREE:



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Fashioning Internal Gathering Houses
and Re-Fashioning the Spaces of Popular
Entertainment through Contemporary
Investigations into “Native Performance
Culture (NpC)”¹

by Jill Carter



Gloria Miguel and Monique Mojica. *Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way*. © Ric Knowles

*I had Oberlin, then I had Spiderwoman, and now
I have old age. That's scary. That's me.
That's all.*

(Gloria Miguel, qtd. in Haugo 60)

In August 2007, I visited with three Grandmothers of Native theatre to speak about life, art, process, and legacy. This series of interviews was a key part of my doctoral research, which is focused on the documentation and dissemination of the Spiderwoman process of Storyweaving, a distinct dramaturgical and performative methodology authored by Muriel Miguel and developed by Spiderwoman Theater. At thirty-four years of age, Spiderwoman Theater is North America's longest running Native theatre company and the world's longest running feminist theatre collective. Its core members and co-founders are octogenarians Elizabeth Miguel (aka Lisa Mayo) and Gloria Miguel with their youngest sister Muriel Miguel, who, at the age of seventy, still bristles when Elizabeth and Gloria refer to her as their "baby sister" (see Haugo 61).

I returned home from this trip with very mixed emotions. On the one hand, I was elated; our discussions had been rich and densely layered. Each of these artists had let me into her creative process, and each discussion had deepened my understanding of the collective works that constitute Spiderwoman's canon. At the same time, I was sad, angry and frustrated; I kept replaying the final minutes of my interviews with Lisa Mayo and Gloria Miguel. I kept remembering a conversation I had had with Muriel Miguel months earlier, and my mind kept returning to her words: "I wish we had talked more about aging. I wish we had done a show about aging."

Six months earlier, Spiderwoman had performed *Persistence of Memory* at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, in what may well be the final performance of the sisters together as a company. On that historic February night, we witnessed three irrepressible Indigenous women who have created a theatre company, have authored and developed a workable poetics of decolonization that draws upon traditional Kuna aesthetic principles and cosmological understandings, and have made a way for the generations of Native performers and theatre practitioners who follow them. As we watched them dancing on that knife's edge between forgetting and remembering, I know that we all felt a deep sense of privilege. The legacy re-membered on stage that night was our legacy. They had carved out a path in the wilderness and inspired us to follow.

But six months later when I returned from my visit to these Grandmothers, I felt that they had been betrayed and that I was somehow complicit in the betrayal. At eighty-one and eighty-three years of age respectively, Gloria Miguel and Lisa Mayo were less elated by their accomplishments than I. After years of battling racism, after years of being pushed to the margins because of their brown skin, they are now battling ageism; they are

now being pushed to the margins and denied the chance to work because of their aging bodies. As Gloria Miguel has articulated it, it is as if she "took a breath but never got to say [her] last word" (Interview).

Days after my return to Toronto, Monique Mojica (who is Gloria's daughter) and I began to discuss this situation. How is it that these women who have (in the words of one major Native playwright), "broke[en] open the doors" for the rest of us (Haugo 70-71) now cannot even get an audition with the Native theatre companies for whom they created a way? Could it be true even within our communities, which pride themselves on their reverence for Elders, that (as Gloria has recently posited) "people talk about respecting elders but don't really want to look at old people" (Douglas 2)? If we agree with the Lakota/Sioux Elder Beatrice Medicine that "Elders are [the] repositories of [indispensable] cultural and philosophical knowledge and are the transmitters of such information" (qtd. in Archibald 37), then is it not incumbent upon Native theatre practitioners—particularly in urban centers, where the theatrical event is a key site of knowledge transmission—to make a place for elderly bodies upon our stages and to read that knowledge from those well-worn "books?"

During the November 2007 developmental workshop for Monique Mojica's *Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way*, the company's cultural advisor and scenic designer, Oswaldo (Achu) DeLéon Kantule, told us the story of the Paluwala Tree in Kuna Yala. The Paluwala is the site of life and plenty on this earth. But within the place where life abounds, greed sometimes springs to life. As Achu has told this story, the uppermost branches of this tree held all salt water, sweet water, fish, soil, vegetation, etc. But a "fat man" lived at the top of the Paluwala tree, hoarding all these good things for himself while the people below starved. Eventually, the Kuna people decided to chop down the tree and to release all its goodness over all the earth.

As Achu tells it, that fat man in the Paluwala Tree is a metaphor for those who hoard and work against the community. And as Poundmaker Cree Floyd Favel (director of *Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way*) opined after hearing this story, "theatre in North America is situated in Paluwala." Or perhaps, if we were to put it another way, theatre in North America is like the Paluwala tree; it contains all the goodness, sweetness and life-enhancing properties we could want. But at the heart of theatre today sits a collective, self-serving "fat man" who controls its infrastructures, its accepted rules, its accepted forms, and who polices the gateway, prohibiting all those who do not conform a platform from



which to speak (or even to witness).

Elderly, weak, or “cumbersome” bodies are by-and-large unwelcome on the professional stages of the Western world. Indeed, the architecture of these stages seems almost designed to prohibit access to such bodies. Theatres, which may be accessible to differently abled patrons, do not so easily accommodate differently abled artists onstage or backstage. And when we apply for grants from provincial and national arts councils, there is little leeway to extend rehearsal periods (to double or triple the conventional duration), to cut work days by half, to include more (fully paid) rest days in the work week, or to hire full-time helpers who would devote themselves to frail or elderly members of the company during the work day and after hours. Some bodies require an investment of more time and greater resources than (it might seem to some) the fruits of their labours warrant. Furthermore, Western theatre audiences, it appears, do not even notice the absence of elderly or differently abled storytellers on the stage. Monique Mojica, after all, has been playing *Elders* since she was thirty-five years old! And as she has noted, “there’s something wrong with that” (“Storying”).

ELDERS: A “Bad” Investment?

In the fall of 2007, Mojica and I came to two resolutions. Monique began to “build windows” in her latest project, *Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way*, that would let in her mother as a co-performer. And a few months later, with the support of the University of Toronto’s Aboriginal Studies Program, the Graduate Centre for Study of Drama, and the Centre for Aboriginal Initiatives, I applied for a substantial grant, which would facilitate Gloria Miguel’s visit in an event called “Story-ing the Human Being.”

I was a little worried: on paper, it seemed, the amount of monies for which we were applying could be substantially reduced if we compressed the proposed activities into a few days. But the visitor, at eighty-two years of age, would have to pace her activities. She would require plenty of free time to rest, so only one activity could be planned per day; and a completely free day would

© Ric Knowles

“*Elderly, weak, or “cumbersome” bodies are by-and-large unwelcome on the professional stages of the Western world.*

”

be scheduled into the middle of her visit. She would require a full-time salaried helper. She would require door-to-door transportation. When she taught her Storyweaving workshops, she would require a salaried co-teacher to take students through the warm-ups and to physically demonstrate any points she was trying to make as her arthritis has significantly restricted her movement. So you can imagine how thrilled I was when the Jackman Humanities Institute graciously agreed to fund this project exactly as it had been proposed.

On 10 October 2008, Gloria Miguel concluded her visit to Toronto with a staged reading at University of Toronto's Robert Gill Theatre of her most recent work in development: *Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed, Something Blue* is a one woman show that finds its genesis in the refusal of its eighty-two-year-old creatrix to succumb to the physical deterioration and the dismissive and degrading societal attitudes that constrain, contain, and silence her and so many others in her peer group. Constructed upon the dramaturgical foundations of Spiderwoman Theater's Storyweaving process, "this is an intensely personal piece, which explores personal and cultural identity and the responsibility of elders in our society" (Publicity Materials). As she wove their stories, she alternately embodied a Kuna Daughter from the Stars whose mission (according to Kuna tradition) it is to teach the people on earth to live; her childhood self witnessing and experiencing abuse from her own grandmother; elderly female friends who have experienced abuse and neglect; her sister Lisa Mayo, who at 85 has been diagnosed, treated, and forever scarred by a particularly aggressive cancer; Gloria-the-actress singing in a French Cabaret; Gloria-the-disappointed-octogenarian fighting to maintain her will to live; and Gloria-the-Elder reflecting on what it means to be an Elder and what is required to earn that title.

Miguel required her cane to move about. She kept her script close in case her memory failed. At times, her breathing was laboured. But despite it all, this aged, cumbersome container, which houses stories within stories within stories, was able to transcend its own mortal decay. The script she carried was soon abandoned, as she straddled multiple layers of existence and identity in worlds that she could both see and make us see. Her cane at times became a Chaplinesque prop, which she flourished with cheeky aplomb as she danced. At other times, the cane lay forgotten on the floor as she embodied a fulsome seductress holding us in thrall singing in husky tones "La Vie En Rose." We gasped. And when she threw her rose into the audience, the young girls in the front row fought each other to catch it as if she were a rock star.

Something Old: The storyteller. The creation stories that explain her existence and give her meaning. And the personal stories of the family in which she came to awareness of that meaning. *Something New:* The stories of the new generation that she has birthed, that she directs and for whom she builds her legacy. The relationships forged between aged storyteller and her youthful auditors, which will inform the relationships they forge with the generations that follow them and the legacies they will leave. *Something Borrowed:* Stories told to her by others. Stories she articulates for those women who either have no platform from which to testify or who no longer have

“*The script she carried was soon abandoned, as she straddled multiple layers of existence and identity in worlds that she could both see and make us see.*”

breath to carry their words. *Something Blue:* A momentary indulgence in loneliness and regret. The pain of being abandoned, forgotten, discarded. The fear of what comes next. And the purity with which this new relationship between Elder and younger (in the moment of performance) must be invested despite that pain, despite those fears.

ELDERS: The Payoff

In attendance that evening were sixty students from my Native Theatre course at Brock University. Every one of these students was under the age of thirty. And apart from one young woman of Jamaican and Rappahannock descent, all of these students were Euro-Canadians. I identify these students here because although I (as an Anishinaabekwe) have been speaking of the importance of Elders in my community and of their importance in Native theatre, I contend that their absence on stage is not just a problem for Native theatres, affecting how these serve their communities. The silencing of the aged, the weak, and the differently abled is a problem that diminishes and (dis)affects all communities.

I had my Brock students submit written responses around their reception of Gloria Miguel's performance. Many of these young people had already lost their grandparents, and suddenly they were seeing what else they had lost with these ancestors. They mourned the stories they would never hear and the knowledge they could no longer access. These things, some confessed, they had not properly valued. These things

had belonged to the past, and they had been looking ahead into the future. Now they wondered what that future would lack without the legacy that they had allowed to slip through their fingers.

Others were more hopeful. Their grandparents still lived. They had Elders in their neighbourhoods, in their churches, even in their homes. And after seeing Miguel's performance, something had changed for all of these students: every one of them had outlined a plan to address the troubling lacuna that has sprung up between their generation and the generations that precede them. Such plans included scheduling weekly or monthly visits to particular Elders; some included

“*What is lost to a culture when its Elders are prohibited access to its nation's stages?*”

planned trips to their grandparents' birthplaces; some included learning their grandparents' languages; some, documenting their grandparents' stories. And some included putting those Elders onstage. Furthermore, the responses of these students reflected a collective shift in attitude towards the craft for which they are training. For instance, in one of the more passionate responses I received, a young man wrote, “As an actor, one of the first things I was taught was never to tell the audience something, but to show them. After watching this performance, I totally disagree with what I was taught” (Student). In every one of these students, a new internal structure—quite unlike the internal frameworks that had governed their actions and attitudes before this encounter—was beginning to take shape.

What is lost to a culture when its Elders are prohibited access to its nation's stages? “Organic continuity”² is interrupted. The future is forever altered and perhaps irreparably compromised because the past has been lost. And the past has been lost because relationships have been fractured. Of course, this does not mean that our communities' stories have value only if an Elder is telling them. Elders do not always need to be on the stage. But active and ongoing relationships with our Elders—their pro-active involvement in the transmission of Story—are required.

Swampy Cree playwright/performer Candace Brunette is a student and practitioner of Storyweaving. And from within this process, she has been developing her *Omushkego Water Stories* for the last two years. This project has

taken her back to her community where she and visual artist/costume designer Erika Iserhoff (Swampy Cree), under the direction of Floyd Favel and Monique Mojica, have partnered with Swampy Cree Elders. These repositories of communal memory gave their stories to Brunette and Iserhoff who wove them together and gave them back in a workshop performance, which was intended to solicit commentary and criticism from the Elders as they received their telling. But the aftermath of this very early stage in the work was an exciting surprise to all: reading their own stories from the archives that are the bodies of Brunette and Iserhoff, the Elders began to remember long-forgotten remedies (this for tape-worm, that for lungs, this for burns, that for...) as they began to riff off of the duo's performance and to weave these lately recovered texts into the experience of the theatrical event (Brunette). Precious IK (Indigenous Knowledge) that may have been forever lost was re-membered and woven into legacy, which will inform the lives of future generations. Within a short space of time, the first key stage in the process of decolonization³ was well under way in this community. And that journey—like the *Omushkego Water* project—has only just begun!

When contemporary Native dramaturgical models are constructed upon specific tribal traditions, the possibilities for remembering and re-membering are great indeed. As our nations' storytellers work within these traditionally based models, other “bodies” are remembered. Further, as the structure of what Floyd Favel has called tradition's “younger brother” (30) is being internally reconfigured (that is, the internal decolonization of its artists), so too will its outer structure (that is, the architecture and administration of the theatre itself) begin to change its shape to accommodate those bodies (Carter 175).

Here in the house of Paluwala it seems that this can be no easy feat. But as Monique Mojica and Ric Knowles remind us, “Doing Aboriginal theatre, and doing research for Aboriginal performance creation, means something different [for our peoples] than it does for other communities” (5). The processual model that Mojica is building has evolved from the work of her mother and aunts before her; it contributes to the ongoing project of decolonization, affecting healing and transformation in artist and audience alike. Like Spiderwoman, from whose processual web she has been “spun” (Turtle Gals 325), Mojica's methods are informed by the aesthetic and cosmological principles that govern Kuna Gathering House Chants, Medicine Chants, architecture, and the art of mola-making. Her work is designed to shake the Paluwala tree in the site of public spectacle that we might begin to erect internal gathering houses—traditional spaces of story that connect

the generations, spaces of relationship that breed organic continuity, spaces in which we come face to face with our pre-colonized selves.

With *Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way*, Mojica has already begun to look for ways to dismantle the existing structures that threaten to bar her mother from the stage. As she prepares for its third developmental phase (commencing

Fall 2009), she has come to the conclusion that perhaps shaking the Paluwala tree is not enough; like her ancestors before her, she will have to fell that tree entirely and build her own house from the ground up ("Storying").



NOTES

- 1 Native Performance Culture (NpC) is a term that I borrow from Floyd Favel. For more than a decade, Floyd Favel—in partnership with Muriel Miguel, Monique Mojica, and other Indigenous artists around the world—has worked to develop performative and dramaturgical processes, which are informed by specific tribal traditions and ceremonial praxis without utilizing these in a misappropriative manner.
- 2 I borrow this phrase from Muriel Miguel, who uses it to express how her own work as artist and teacher and the works of Spiderwoman Theatre have been influenced by the generations that precede the Miguel sisters and reverberate throughout the generations that will follow them (Interview).
- 3 Hawaiian scholar Poka Laenui outlines five crucial steps in the project of decolonization: i) recovery/rediscovery; ii) mourning; iii) dreaming; iv) commitment; and v) action (152-58).

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BIO

Jill Carter (ANISHINAABE/ASHKENAZI) IS AN AVID THEATRE PRACTITIONER WHO HAS WORKED AS A PERFORMER, DIRECTOR, DRAMATURGE, AND INSTRUCTOR. CURRENTLY, SHE IS A DOCTORAL CANDIDATE AT UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO'S GRADUATE CENTRE FOR STUDY OF DRAMA, WHERE SHE IS COMPLETING HER DISSERTATION, *REPAIRING THE WEB: SPIDERWOMAN'S GRANDCHILDREN STAGING THE NEW HUMAN BEING*. SHE IS THE FIRST NATIONS MENTOR-IN-RESIDENCE AT U OF T'S TRANSITIONAL YEAR PROGRAM AND A SESSIONAL INSTRUCTOR IN U OF T'S ABORIGINAL STUDIES DEPARTMENT.



Welcome to Ramallah:

Two Authors in Search of a Play

by Sonja Linden

Let me set the scene: you're a playwright, it's the opening night of your new play and despite the fact that your work has become a shared experience during the pre-production period, you suddenly feel very alone. And worried. You've seen a couple of run-throughs and have reeled home with a sinking heart: the actors aren't nearly ready, the lighting cues were all wrong, the sound didn't work, and as for the play, well, it's rubbish, isn't it? But suddenly it's too late, you're skulking in the back row, and, notwithstanding the preternatural calm that has overtaken you, there is undeniable tension in your thighs. The house lights go down, the opening music fades up, it's out of your hands so you try to let go. But you can't—you wrote the damn thing, the buck stops with you. Only this time, it doesn't—there's a person sitting next to you going through exactly the same angst. You whisper good luck to each other and brace yourself for the off.

That was my experience one dank autumn evening in 2008. The “person” was my co-writer, Adah Kay; the theatre was the Arcola, a shining beacon of British theatre life in the heart of multi-cultural East London; and the play, *Welcome to Ramallah*, written to mark both the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the state of Israel and the concomitant Palestinian Nakba (catastrophe)—the traumatic uprooting of half their population. It’s an intense ninety-minute piece that disarms with its comedy in the opening scenes and ratchets up the dramatic stakes with increasingly dark momentum as the story unfolds.

Three minutes into the play and we hear laughter in the audience. Adah and I look at each other and exchange smiles of relief. They got it. We’ve hooked them. We’ve hooked each other. I have never “shared” a play before. But I am relieved to be sharing this one. It is contentious subject matter and we are expecting strong reactions. Adah’s lived experience of the occupation of the Palestinian territories over a period of five years has given the play its authenticity and this is why I had invited her to collaborate with me.

Flash back three years to 2005 and a late summer party given by mutual friends. This is where the story of our play begins. The friends had already told me about this remarkable woman and her husband who, as Jews, had chosen to live and work in Ramallah since 2002. I was intrigued. Within minutes of our introduction, Adah was telling me how keen she was to find a writing medium outside her normal academic one to communicate her powerful experience of life in the occupied territories. She had already written volumes—diary, e-mail, letters, articles, talks—and she had archived all of this writing in what I was to discover was her characteristic meticulousness. But how to channel this into something that would reach out to people beyond the narrow confines of academia and political activism?

Not long after, I suggested to my co-artistic director, Sara Masters, that we commission Adah to collaborate with me on a play, targeting the sixtieth anniversary year for the production. Three years earlier I had founded iceandfire theatre company to focus on issues of displacement and human rights. My first two plays for the company had been about people displaced to Britain—from Rwanda in *I Have Before Me a Remarkable Document Given to Me by a Young Lady from Rwanda*, and from Darfur, Iran, Iraq, Congo, and Colombia in *Crocodile Seeing Refuge*. Here was an opportunity to address a different kind of displacement, one outside Britain but with strong historical connections to it as the former colonial power in Palestine—a displacement moreover with huge global implications to this day. Adah

accepted the commission enthusiastically. The visceral nature of a play, she hoped, would break barriers that yet another NGO report or newspaper article could not.

The personal as the political would be our mantra, with the personal being in some small part the shadow of my own family’s displacement as refugees from Nazi Germany and its symbolic connection with the displacement of the Palestinian people with the creation of the Jewish State. To a much greater extent, however, the personal was to be found in Adah’s own story, whose central contradiction fascinated me—namely, that her Russian-born father had been a prominent Zionist activist in Palestine before the creation of the Jewish State, and yet sixty years later his daughter was an activist for the Palestinian cause. This is what captured my imagination as a starting point for a project that was to come to fruition three years after our first serendipitous meeting.

It was a play that was to present us with a series of strong challenges. Not least of these challenges was the pragmatic one—how do two people write a play together? With some exceptions, plays are for the most part the work of a single writer, unlike screenwriting, which has a tradition of multiple authorship. Having collaborated successfully on a screenplay based on my Rwanda play the previous year (the success, however, muted by the fact that the film never got made), I was making the assumption that I could do it again with a stage play. But unlike last time I would be co-writing with someone who had no scriptwriting experience. How would I/we meet that challenge? And what about the challenge of “sharing” a political line with someone I perceived as much more radical than me, quite apart from being vastly more knowledgeable. I had a lot to catch up on.

But one of my motivations in initiating this project was to get up to speed with this seemingly intractable conflict, in which I, as a Diaspora Jew, felt implicated. I knew vaguely where I stood: I was against the Israeli occupation, and regarded with horror the metamorphosis of a victim nation into an aggressor one. But like so many Jews, I still had this Holocaust-fuelled belief that a Jewish state was necessary—if only it could preclude the oppression of another people. Adah by contrast was by now a confirmed non-Zionist. What if we found we were politically incompatible? Let alone psychologically. Quite apart from the foolhardiness of trying to write a play set against what might be regarded as the world’s most contentious geo-political conflict.

Initially these fears were dormant as we looked for inspiration from Adah’s own life story.



Christopher Simon (Daoud) John Moraitis (Salim)
© John Haynes

To this end I “interviewed” her and pored over her very extensive body of writing, including the book she co-wrote in 2004 in association with the Defence for Children International/Palestine Section. Entitled *Stolen Youth*, it is a grim account of the detention of Palestinian children in Israeli jails. But first I read her diaries. Her 2002 Ramallah diary started with a siege of Ramallah in the spring of that year, when all the Palestinians cities were being reinvaded by the Israel Defence Forces. She and her husband, Tom, gave refuge to friends fleeing the IDF “with horror stories of mass roundups of all the men into camps, forced to be outside for ten to twelve hours in the cold, blindfolded,” the IDF “stamping on men’s arms.” She bewails the fact that the world stands by. “As a Jew it is heart-rending and shameless—no coverage in the British press.” She screams at IDF soldiers for sound bombing and tear-gassing “because little boys were throwing stones.” At other times she talks to them “as a bemused Jewish granny who can’t understand why they vandalize people’s houses, using their rooms as toilets.” Both she and Tom pledge “to continue to have these conversations with them, trying to talk to them as humans and getting them

to think of the Palestinians as people and not as some subhuman species.”

Her diary reveals the courage and integrity of this couple, not only in “coming out” as Jews, but in their constant refusal to be bystanders, even to the extent of being shot by a rubber bullet, as Tom was when photographing a demonstration—an injury that was to earn him a concerned phone call from Arafat’s office, and flowers! As living witnesses, they felt it incumbent upon them to communicate what they saw and heard to the outside world. “We are living such a strange life here in Ramallah, under total curfew except when they let us out to shop and wander as hungry animals released from their cages.”

How to transmute these experiences into a play? What would be our story? The obvious one was of a retired British Jewish couple living in Palestine and the impact of this experience on their lives. But this we shied away from for two reasons. First, Adah and Tom did not want to be featured in any obvious biographical sense—they’d been approached by a number of documentary filmmakers and had always refused. And second, Adah was keen to try her hand at fiction, albeit rooted in fact. Adah’s very particular experience and knowledge of the occupation were key resources for us, but we were intent on inventing our characters and our plot. All we knew for sure was that we wanted to communicate the experience of the occupation through our characters and the situations we placed them in.

At an early meeting, I asked Adah to write down what kind of play she would like to see and what she felt she wanted to communicate. Experience has taught me that the initial vision of a play has a clarity and a truth that are easily lost in the reams of note taking that can accrue in the writing of a play. By our next meeting she had produced an ambitious document, listing her dreams for our play. She wanted a play “that is provocative, that leaves people wanting to talk and discuss afterwards, that could change perceptions, is accessible to a wide audience, a play that contains humour and is entertaining. I want to do it all!”

November 2005 saw us sitting at her kitchen table for our first brainstorming session. Part of me yearned to make a break with naturalism, to opt instead for physical theatre with Palestinian women as a Greek chorus commenting on the action, or two opposing choruses reciting the conflicting narratives as to who are the rightful heirs of the land. Going down this route we could present a series of vignettes encompassing the experience of occupation in a broad theatrical sweep. We would need a big cast for this, even bigger than my last play, *Crocodile Seeking*

Refuge. But I knew that Sara, who acts as iceandfire's producer, was still reeling from this production with its cast of seven doubling as twenty-two and its sixteen different locations. This had been a challenge to say the least for a small touring company with a skeleton staff and a very tight budget. "Can you manage on four actors this time, please?!" kept ringing in my ears.

Budgetary constraints aside, Adah and I began to feel more and more that a tight human drama with a strong emotional content would serve our purposes better than a more episodic play. Our starting point had after all been Adah's unique experience, and we should not lose sight of this. We sketched out some rough storylines at the beginning of 2006, but then she and Tom were off for their annual six-month stint in Ramallah so it was not until the autumn of 2006 that we started

her sister's refusal to meet her at the kibbutz with their father's ashes, Nat is forced to come to Mara's apartment in Ramallah to retrieve their father's ashes. Nervous at being in "enemy" territory, Nat, warm-hearted but crass, constantly puts her foot in it when she meets her sister's new Palestinian friends. She has a very different take on Ramallah and the occupation from her "zealot" sister, which enables her to go on a journey of change as the play progresses.

We worked our way through a series of additional characters, and finally whittled them down to two—Daoud, a Palestinian neighbour with whom Mara is on the cusp of a relationship, and his uncle, Salim, a man in his seventies who lives in a village near Ramallah but who was born in the village on whose ruins the "tainted" kibbutz was built. The degree to which the two family histories

BALANCE OF A DIFFERENT KIND CONCERNED US, TOO, AND REMAINED OUR MOST CONSISTENT CHALLENGE—THE BALANCE BETWEEN THE PERSONAL AND THE POLITICAL WITHIN THE PLAY ITSELF.

our collaboration in earnest. Our fictional drama retained two key elements from Adah's personal story. One was that our protagonist, Mara, was, like Adah, British and Jewish and had come to live in Ramallah to work for the Palestinian cause, albeit for a number of months rather than years. The other was the matter of the ashes of Adah's late father, Izhak. He had asked for his ashes to be buried on the kibbutz he had been closely connected to all his life. Years later, while living in Ramallah, Adah became aware that this kibbutz, like so many others, had been built on the ruins of an Arab village whose occupants had been expelled. Appalled, Adah wanted to remove the ashes. In the event, she desisted, but the experience left an indelible mark on her.

It was this story that was to become the heart of our play. Our protagonist, Mara, takes with her to Ramallah the ashes of her adored father, with the intention of burying them on an Israeli kibbutz on the anniversary of his death. Her discovery that the kibbutz has a "tainted" history creates a conflict between respecting her father's wishes and being true to her political beliefs.

The character of our protagonist was inspired by—but was sufficiently different from—Adah. What we needed, though, was an antagonist. This eventually arrived in the shape of Nat, Mara's elder sister, a conventional Jewish wife and mother who had spent the last ten years living in the US with her Cleveland-based husband. Horrified at

are intertwined emerges in the climax of the play, when the uncle recalls his family's forced departure from the village.

My early fears regarding political differences between Adah and me were ultimately not realized. The more I researched, the more radicalized I became in my stance towards Israel's occupation of the Palestinian Territories. This culminated during my visit to the West Bank in an organized ten-day study tour with the Israeli Committee against House Demolitions. The devastation—physical and psychological—that I encountered underscored everything I had read and shared with Adah. We were on the same page now—not just creatively, but politically—concerning the oppressive and cruel nature of the occupation. Political balance, though, was an issue we constantly discussed. Adah had shocked me at our first meeting by saying she was "not balanced." One year down the line I understood what she meant: this was an unequal conflict, and we were concerned to show who we considered to be the real victims. Nevertheless, it was important to us to present a range of representative voices, two very different Jewish ones and two generationally different Palestinian ones. Our main political balance lay in the character of Nat, who represents the mainstream Jewish Diaspora voice.

Balance of a different kind concerned us, too, and remained our most consistent challenge—the balance between the personal and the political

within the play itself. High on the list of aspirations in our early visionary document was our wish to write “a drama with a good story line and credible characters, a play that raises larger human, social, political issues and dilemmas but is not preachy and dogmatic.” With our creation of four forceful characters we felt we had arrived at a strong “human” context through which to present the conflict, contained as it was within a domestic setting. We consciously kept shifting the tone: from a comedy of manners in the first half as Nat and the elder Palestinian mask their mutual suspicions with polite conversation, to high drama in the second half when Salim recalls his childhood trauma, to a final note bordering on black comedy as an upbeat release of tension in the closing minutes of the play. Through Nat’s alternately naïve and hostile interaction with her sister’s Palestinian guests, we begin to learn about the day to day life of the occupation. Adah’s experience of undergoing curfew with her neighbours, seeing how relative strangers would begin to share intimacies under such circumstances, inspired us to introduce a curfew a third of the way through the play. Our four characters were now trapped in an uneasy alliance to be shattered by the revelation in the climax.

At one of the post-show discussions in the second week of the play, a young Jordanian theatre professional, by chance in London on a British Council visit, told fellow audience members how stunned she was to hear this recounting of the Palestinian narrative in a Western context: “I was really surprised, to be honest, as we always expect to hear something from a foreign point of view, not the Arab point of view, and I’m really glad because now it brings hope that there are people on the other side, let’s say on the human-being side, that can actually listen to the truth from us.” Another Palestinian audience member told us that she had never seen her father cry before, but that night he had cried at Salim’s story, which was so close to his own. Yet another Palestinian emphasized to a post-show audience how much Salim’s story was every Palestinian’s story

The culpability of Nat and Mara’s father in Salim’s expulsion is of course emblematic, representing Israel’s culpability in the violent expulsion of three quarters of a million Palestinians. The play raises the question of whether the two sisters are responsible for the sins of their father and whether they can or should apologize to Salim and his family on their father’s behalf.

ULTIMATELY, I HAD THE SENSE THAT WHATEVER PEOPLE’S PREJUDICES (INCLUDING REVIEWERS’) AND IRRESPECTIVE OF WHETHER THEY LIKED THE PLAY OR NOT, IT WILL HAVE LEFT A RESONANCE—THEY WILL HAVE HEARD THE STORY OF THE OTHER.

The revelation harks back to 1948 with Salim’s unexpected recounting of his family’s violent expulsion from his village by Israeli soldiers when he was a boy of ten. He describes one particular soldier, and how shocked his family were at his brutality towards them as he had been a friend until then from a nearby Jewish settlement. As Salim describes this man, it becomes apparent to the sisters that he may have been their father. The two sisters react differently to this: Mara is horrified but intent on revealing their father’s identity to Salim and Daoud; Nat, while still in shock at Salim’s story, is outraged at this suggestion. Like so many Jews, she had been ignorant of the Palestinian narrative, having been reared on a very different account of Israel’s founding. The Jewish/Israeli narrative tells a very different story, one of the heroic fighters of a beleaguered nascent state succeeding against all odds against belligerent Arab forces.

Our main aim in creating a play that focused so closely on two families was to avoid the pitfalls of writing a polemic. We were shocked and disappointed therefore when the *Times* (10.2.08) described it as “a meaty piece of polemic,” adding that “the authors have striven to make the personal political with limited success.” The *Jewish Chronicle* (10.3.08), less surprisingly, talked about the “dramatic price to be paid when a playwright’s politics is so conspicuously present on stage,” and the *Stage* (9.30.08), with somewhat greater fairness we felt, commented, “This is a play that some may see as a fair reflection of the situation, others as a skewed polemic but either way, it raises debate as it intended.” This was in stark contrast to the hugely positive responses we received by e-mail, by word of mouth, and through our feedback forms for the entire six-week run. Night after night, audiences were filling the theatre to capacity, consistently telling us they were moved, gripped, and enlightened, as well as entertained,



and found “the personal is the political” to be very much the case. In our feedback forms, the key adjectives that were ticked apart from “excellent” were “compelling,” “engaging,” “insightful,” and “illuminating,” with zero ticks for “biased” and the smallest number of ticks for “didactic.”

We were particularly interested in feedback from Jewish audience members. Some Jewish friends whose disapproval I was nervously anticipating felt, on the contrary, that the play was “humane,” “sensitive,” and “nonpreachy.” Others were less happy with what they saw on stage: they

saw it as unbalanced and felt that the Jewish characters were less sympathetic than the Palestinian ones. But at least they came. Ultimately, I had the sense that whatever people’s prejudices (including reviewers’) and irrespective of whether they liked the play or not, it will have left a resonance—they will have heard the story of the Other. We had set out to write an engaging play that communicated the horrors of the occupation. We had ended up focusing additionally on the theme of conflicting narratives. The key issue raised in the play is how important it is for two sides of a conflict to recognize the narrative of the Other as a prerequisite for a meaningful resolution. We felt that this gave the play its universality, and of this we feel proud.

Welcome to Ramallah is of course an ironic title. It’s what Daoud says to Nat, half way through the play, when the apartment suddenly blacks out as IDF surround the building and helicopters circle overhead. But it is also a title we hoped would beckon the audience in—an invitation to share a world that is harsh and frightening because it is under occupation but whose population shares the same daily yearnings for normality as we do. This is a world where people make jokes, go to salsa classes, pop out for a pizza, fall in love, and have family squabbles. I write this against the backcloth of horrific events in Gaza, where normal life has been entirely suspended. What is characteristically missing from so much of the media coverage is any reference to the root cause—the Palestinian displacement in 1948 and the occupation. If our play can stimulate audiences to look behind the headlines of this conflict, we shall at least have cast a tiny pebble into these very dark waters. The aim of political theatre is to make ripples for audiences to turn into waves. We would like to think that we caused a ripple, however miniscule.

♦♦♦♦♦

BIO

Sonja Linden’S PLAYS HAVE BEEN PRODUCED ON RADIO AND ON STAGE THROUGHOUT THE UK AND THE US. SHE FOUNDED ICEANDFIRE (WWW.ICEANDFIRE.CO.UK) IN 2003, INSPIRED BY HER WRITING RESIDENCY AT THE MEDICAL FOUNDATION FOR THE CARE OF VICTIMS OF TORTURE. IN ADDITION TO HER FICTIONAL DRAMAS, SONJA HAS SCRIPTED THREE ONE-HOUR DOCUMENTARY PLAYS FOR ICEANDFIRE’S NATIONAL OUTREACH PROGRAM, ACTORS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, INCLUDING *PALESTINE MONOLOGUES*, BASED ON TESTIMONIES OF ISRAELIS AND PALESTINIANS.

PEERING THROUGH THE PRISM:

*Visible Minority Performers
outside Canada's Urban Centres*

*Prismatic, 22-23 November 2008,
Neptune Studio Theatre,
Halifax*

by Clarissa Hurley

*Canada may be defined as the place where one is
free to make up Canada.*

– Margaret Atwood

*Theatre is a crucible of civilizations. It is a place
for human communication.*

– Victor Hugo



Canada currently implements the world's most aggressive immigration policy, with the largest annual per capita intake of would-be citizens, most of whom gravitate to the largest urban centres. The foreign-born population of Toronto is approaching half at 43%, Vancouver's is 37%, while Calgary, Montreal, Ottawa, and some other large cities in Ontario and BC report levels of around 20% foreign born (Stoffman; Statistics Canada). Visible diversity in these large centres is ubiquitous, and immigrants are increasingly establishing themselves in all sectors of employment—including the arts and performing arts. Recent research shows visible minority performers participating at higher levels than the general arts labour force, and that their numbers grew by 74% between 1991 and 2001. Census 2001 data shows that the vast majority of visible minority performing artists are concentrated in Census Metropolitan Areas, and the majority of these in the three largest: Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal (Hill 17).

What then of the remainder who settle and seek to work in the regions and smaller centres? A recent conference in Halifax focused on these artists and their work. Prismatic—a three-day event comprising a colloquium, open-mike session, workshop, and showcase performance—took place at Neptune's Studio Theatre last November. Convened by Onelight Theatre with the support of the Canada Council and the provincial government of Nova Scotia, the meeting brought together practitioners and government representatives from across Canada with the dual purpose of celebrating the work of performers from visible minority groups based in small centres and discussing the challenges and issues that affect their work.

Onelight Theatre, a small, fully professional company, was conceived a decade ago by a core trio of colleagues at Dalhousie University: Shahin Sayadi as artistic producer, Maggie Stewart as managing director, and Jake Damberg as technical director. The story of its creation is a compelling one—a company created initially *ex nihilo*, with no support from sponsors, fueled by the commitment, talent, and artistic convictions of its founding members. Sayadi, a Persian-born Canadian, honed his creative vision at Dalhousie in the late 1990s and joined forces with Stewart (they would later marry) and Damberg. Beginning in a room behind a shop front and originally called The Crib in honour of Sayadi and Stewart's first-born, Onelight built its audience gradually.

To date, the company has produced six original theatre events, primarily new collaborative adaptations and reworkings of classic and canonical works ranging from Euripides to Ionesco. Most recently, in the fall of 2007 the company produced *The Veil*. The play was adapted to

the stage by Sayadi from Masoud Behnoud's epic novel *Khanoom*, the story of a Persian princess's journey from the palace harem through World War II France and Germany and eventually back to Iran. Told in retrospect by an elderly Persian woman to her jaded Westernized granddaughter, the play weaves a tale of women's lives through time and across cultures, behind veils both literal and figurative. *The Veil* was remounted briefly at Neptune in January 2009 before its tour to the Fadir International Theatre Festival in Tehran. The company's upcoming season will feature *The Civilian Project*, two new scripts that explore the effects of war on civilians and society in general.

Onelight's work challenges and extends conventional parameters and definitions of regional theatre. Whether inspired by classic canonical texts or new scripts, the productions are developed in Halifax by ethnically diverse teams of artists. Subject matter notwithstanding, this work injects the regional canon with crucial new blood that reflects its growing diversity. Sayadi makes clear he considers himself a "Nova Scotian artist" producing "Nova Scotian" plays regardless of their provenance or his own, a conviction that destabilizes and resituates the concept of artistic ownership or nationality. The company's mandate of collaborative dramaturgy facilitates this interrogation of the locus of cultural authority.

The Prismatic conference highlighted both the growing presence of high quality work by ethnic minority artists based in smaller centres and their frustrations with what they perceive to be the shortcomings of Canada as a "truly diverse" cultural environment in spite of its increasingly multi-ethnic composition. Surprisingly, given the extent of research and activism on cultural diversity over the past three decades, the conference underscored that the perception of cultural appropriation remains a prickly presence in the professional arts outside of urban centres and in the critical discourses surrounding minority groups in the arts. The label "voice appropriation" has shifted to the more positive and innocuous "access," but the discussion remains a familiar one, *déjà vu* to anyone who came of age intellectually in the wake of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and learned tenets now axiomatic about awareness of cultural diversity and the necessity of questioning one's own place in the experience and analysis of cultural artifacts, be they literature, visual art, theatre, or music. Students of the 1980s will remember endless often angst-ridden discussion of "self-reflexivity" and the recognition that the experiences of white educated European society had for centuries been the privileged mode of discourse or lens through which we learned about literature and the arts; that minority groups—women, people of colour, sexual minorities and the disabled—had been ill-served

by the homogenous patriarchal order dominant in the professional sector and rearticulated in educational institutions.

While few would question that minority and culturally diverse groups should play a directional role in the production and reception of their art, the concept of cultural appropriation does remain a fraught one since on the obverse of this clear face is stamped a more problematic credo of cultural authority—a conviction that there is an “authentic” voice for the representation of the experience of a minority group. The issue casts a wide interdisciplinary net, ranging from relatively tangible legal questions—such as the ownership



Dinuk Wijeratne

of the Elgin/Parthenon Marbles—to nebulous ones of performance and who can be represented in what context under what terms—that is, who can tell whose story? (on the issue of the mainstream consumption of minority cultures, see Root; Young). Some objections to cultural appropriation are aesthetic in nature: that it harms the culture being appropriated or the integrity of the object or cultural entity itself. A more practical objection based on principles of equity or fairness is that cultural appropriation allows some to benefit materially to the detriment of others (Ziff and Rao).

In disciplines like performance studies, spearheaded by Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, the idea of cultural appropriation, at least in academic circles, lost some of its force with the paradigm shifts towards an ethos of fragmentation, plurality, or performativity of identity; if our subjectivity is unstable at a level so personal as our gender, the claim of authenticity at the level of “culture” becomes increasingly problematic and possibly imperils the agency of the group it purports to empower. Nowhere are these issues more apparent than in live theatre, an art inescapably dependent on the material presence of the performing human body—a body instrumental in conveying a play's meaning but not one that is unproblematically self-referential. Placed in the murky cultural bouillabaisse of contemporary Canadian society, the issue of cultural appropriation is particularly untidy. Where there is little consensus on what constitutes a minority, and much diversity within minorities, the criteria for cultural authority are further diluted.

Placed in the murky cultural bouillabaisse of contemporary Canadian society, the issue of cultural appropriation is particularly untidy.

The first full day of Prismatic was devoted to two panel discussions with audience feedback focusing on problems and solutions. The first, moderated by Christopher Shore, executive director for Theatre Nova Scotia, featured Chilean born Lina de Guevera, artistic director of Puente Theatre based in Victoria, Sheila James, coordinator of the Equity Office of the Canada Council, and Rhoma Spencer of Theatre Archipelago in Toronto, a group whose mandate is to produce theatre from or related to the Caribbean diaspora. The discussion was too wide-ranging to capture in this brief article, but some common threads emerged. All agreed that it is a natural part of the artistic process to collaborate with like-minded and supportive peers, particularly in the early stages of an artist's career. Funding is a crucial factor in pursuing this and there was agreement among the practitioners that the Equity Office has been instrumental in increasing the presence of visible diversity in the arts labour force. Yet all decisively maintained that ample room for improvement remains and that Canada is still limited as a “truly diverse” culture. De Guevera identified the difficulty of finding and retaining trained performers for small companies in centres when there is not enough work to support them or mentors to train them. Performers who attain a level of training and are serious about pursuing their careers typically migrate to urban terrain. She pointed out that the two training insti-

tutions for professional performers in Victoria do not communicate with small professional groups like Puente in spite of their years of professional work. Her comments illustrate the still tenacious structure of the three partial solitudes of professional training grounds, academic theatre programs, and professional theatre companies. These three related sectors do in practice frequently overlap, but they do so in a clumsy ballet of approach and retreat; outreach and defense.

Sheila James gave an engaging account of her family background and early life as an East Indian immigrant in the town of Truro, NS, and her first-hand experience of the cultural isolation that leads to internalized racism. Following de Guevara's discussion of retention of minority performers, she used the phrase "horizontal organizing" as a means to work against the hierarchical structure of theatres in Canada. Performers tend to look to the largest regional group as the prize to aspire to and typically become tokens therein if they manage to achieve access at all, hence reinforcing the status quo. It is difficult for minority performers to break into the larger of the regional companies, which are frequently artistically anaesthetized by the interests—or perceived interests—of their audiences, boards, and donors. The alternative is to form alliances and cross-sector partnerships to strengthen and support one another as coalitions.

Rhoma Spencer as well shared her experience of moving into the cultural margins from an all-Black society and made clear how visible minority performers even in diverse centres are judged by a different lens, their work typically exoticized and relegated to showcase-type occasional events rather than integrated into the regular season or touring line-ups. Although based in Toronto and the director of her own company, Spencer also made clear that the climate for visible minorities in the largest centre is still not equitable.

The afternoon session, dedicated to a discussion of solutions, was moderated by Alex McLean of Zuppa Circus Theatre, and featured Sherry Yoon of Vancouver-based Boca del Lupo Theatre, Cathy Martin, an award-winning Mi'kmaq filmmaker from the Millbrook First Nation, and Maggie Stewart, managing director of Onelight Theatre.

Martin spoke at length about the tragic history of Aboriginals in North America and the still unresolved tensions between their communities and mainstream White society. Allowing that the arts have a central role in creating a positive cultural identity, she discussed the plight of a people still struggling with their own issues, in need of forging and fostering a space of their own

and completing an ongoing process of healing before opening doors to collaboration with other groups. Leaving some room for optimism, she pointed out that the Aboriginal population is growing and contributing to a demographic shift that will change the racial profile of Canada in the coming years.

A good deal of genuine anger was expressed by panel and audience members. A clear debate that emerged was whether to partner and integrate with other groups or to cultivate and nurture one's own interests until a critical mass is reached in terms of numbers, exposure, and opportunity. Some felt that space was still needed, others that there are natural allegiances to be forged among different minority groups.

Together with the anger was the anticipation of considerable and inevitable change in the locus of authority in Canadian theatre. Larger institutions like Stratford and Shaw have declining and aging audiences and the demographics of our populations continue to shift with immigration. James reminded listeners about the ongoing evolving nature of equity discussions and the paradigm shifts that have occurred in recent memory. As recently as the 1970s, for instance, there were no women on the peer assessment committees of Canada Council funding bodies.

The discussion of solutions touched on a number of topics such as improving access to work through greater inclusion of minority groups into the performing arts, allowing these minorities a voice in the development of programs and policies, fostering youth access and education, and revisiting the intent and purpose of policies and programs to determine their relevance and currency. There is a general need for outreach by cultural and funding organizations as artists in smaller centres may not be in a position to know about sources of support. James and other spokespersons for the Canada Council encouraged the participation and lobbying of stakeholders to pressure for change within the government organization. The final session of Prismatic was dedicated to an information session and workshop on public funding for the arts (on this issue, see Dawes and NourbeSe Philip).

A strikingly clear theme in the day's discussion was the nearly unanimous concern that minority groups remain vigilant toward their "authentic self-representation." This remains an issue in smaller centres where visible minorities retain a sense of a representative or ambassadorial role in relation to their heritage. Two comments from audience members revealed problematic implications of the idea of cultural authenticity in theatre. The first was offered by a Nova Scotia

actor and self-described “middle-aged White guy,” who averred that for someone like him to be cast in an ethnic minority role would be based entirely on “research” at this time, although potentially acceptable at some point in the future. In contrast, a young Asian actress pointed out that such a concern with appropriate casting and purity of racial voice limits minorities to autobiographical, potentially artistically limiting storytelling.

The “problem” raised by the first speaker is in fact only problematic in a culture that privileges realism and a transparent actor-character lamination approach to theatre. Presumably few minority artists in Canada have come from cultures that privilege this mode; moreover, the idea that theatrical realism is the normative form of Western dramaturgy is a tenuous one indeed considering the formative work of playwrights like Brecht, O’Neill, Ibsen, Strindberg, and Chekov, to name a few of the most obvious. Even in pre-multicultural post-war Canadian theatre, in spite of some degree of kitchen sinkery, realism can hardly be said to be the dominant style outside of larger commercial theatres. The aesthetics of writers like George Ryga, George F. Walker, Michel Tremblay, Michel Marc Bouchard, Tomson Highway, and Judith Thompson are evidence to the contrary. *Canadian Theatre Review’s* 2008 summer issue profiles a selection of small theatre groups throughout all regions of the country devoted to the practice of “devised theatre.” “Devised” dramaturgical approaches vary widely but share a focus on physically based generation of performance events, often in collective or semi-collective structures, frequently with extensive ethnic diversity and little adherence to or reverence for realism at the level of either casting or narrative. Devised theatre is sufficiently recognized as a viable theatrical practice that its methods are entrenched in the curriculum of Humber College’s Theatre Performance program. This growing presence endorses Sheila James’s recommendation of “horizontal organizing” of smaller groups and interested stakeholders rather than focusing unilaterally on hammering at the stolid indifferent walls of the largest commercial theatres and possibly helping to reinforce their artistic strangle hold (on this issue, see Wallace, 33-34; 144-76).

Ironically, Prismatic’s evening showcase was precisely what had been critiqued earlier in the day: a sort of pu-pu platter of visible minority performers. Percussion featured prominently with Mi’kmaq drumming led by Chief William Nevin of Big Cove, NB, followed by Korean drummers Arirang and tombak musician Ziya Tabassian. This segued into the spoken word lyrics of angry-young-woman El Jones, who delivered a powerful meditation on the letter B,

exploring its connotations and evocations for a Black woman. CBC presenter and writer-performer Shauntay Grant struck a contrasting tone of gentle nostalgia with her memoirs of growing up in rural Nova Scotia. Flamenco diva Maria Osende performed traditional and updated routines and nouveau-gospel band the Deep River Boys delivered appropriately rousing fare. All performances were committed and most were equally accomplished; however, the piecemeal cacophony of the variety show ambiance left an aftertaste of frustration. That the onus remains on performers to prove their presence through occasional events like Prismatic speaks to the

All performances were committed and most were equally accomplished; however, the piecemeal cacophony of the variety show ambiance left an aftertaste of frustration.

still complacent homogeneity of much regional theatre in this country. A final image of Canadian ambivalence was embodied in the presence of the Honourable Mayann Francis, Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia. If a role so colonial as the LG can be defamiliarized by a visible minority, surely we can expect more diversity in our performing arts.





Prismatic conference and performance event poster image
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BIO

Clarissa Hurley HAS A MA IN ENGLISH FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW BRUNSWICK AND IS COMPLETING A PHD IN THEATRE AT UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO'S GRADUATE CENTRE FOR STUDY OF DRAMA. SHE TRAINED PROFESSIONALLY AS AN ACTOR AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF DRAMATIC ART AND THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF DRAMATIC ARTS AND HAS APPEARED IN PRODUCTIONS IN LONDON, NEW YORK, TORONTO, AND FREDERICTON. CURRENTLY, SHE IS WORKING AS AN ACTOR AND DRAMATURGE WITH THE NOTABLE ACTS THEATRE FESTIVAL IN FREDERICTON.

more THAN a METAPHOR

by Jakub Stachurski

On 16 March 2003, Rachel Corrie was killed by an Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) bulldozer while protesting the destruction of Palestinian homes. Subsequently, with the permission of the Corrie family, her diary and correspondence were edited by actor Alan Rickman and *Guardian* journalist Katharine Viner into a seventy-minute monodrama. The resulting play, *My Name Is Rachel Corrie*, was staged in December 2007 at the Monument-Nationale by Teesri Duniya and newworldtheatre.

Several of the performances were followed by discussion panels in which community members and artists involved in the production delved into the issues surrounding the play. The fact that both the panelists and the audience members had seen the play only minutes before taking part in the discussions significantly affected the tone of the dialogue. Rachel Corrie's words became a catalyst for numerous, disparate narratives concerning the Israel-Palestine conflict. The resonance of her words created a space within which members of the Montreal community, many of them strangers to one another, shared highly personal, vulnerable experiences.

The following transcript attempts to highlight some of these stories, as well as issues surrounding the Israel-Palestine conflict and the staging of *My Name Is Rachel Corrie*. The transcription has no overarching theme or ordering principle, other than the chronology of the panels themselves. Even though they are taken from different dates, these quotations read as a nearly seamless dialogue, one initiated by the words of Rachel Corrie and extending beyond her death beyond the conclusion of the play.

... I used to be a soldier in the Israeli Defense Forces. I began my service right before the outbreak of the first Intifada. Some of you have heard this before, but when I was in the army, I spent a

lot of time in the West Bank. So I was a soldier in the IDF, serving in the occupied territories during an uprising protesting the occupation—and I did not know that there was an occupation. I'd heard the word "kibush," which is Hebrew for occupation. I knew that there was something going on. These "crazy guys" were throwing rocks and we had to arrest them for such subversive actions as showing the colours of the Palestinian flag. But I had no idea what was going on, I had no idea what we were doing there, nor did I have a clue as to the impact of our presence on the Palestinians. To all this I suppose I could say: well, I was young, I didn't know, we weren't raised to question. I could excuse it. But what I can't excuse is not only that I didn't know, but [that] I didn't care. When we took over a school to use as a temporary army base, a Palestinian school, the only thing I could think about was that having no toilet was a big inconvenience to me. It didn't dawn on me to think where were the kids who should be in the school and where did they go to the washroom. I was recently looking through some of my old photo albums—a friend wanted to see a picture of me with the crew cut I had in the army. I found some pictures of our head base camp near Bethlehem—actually it's a place that Rachel's writings refer to. I noticed something in the background in some of the photos that I had never noticed before: Palestinian apartment buildings and houses. They were so close that for them it was like having an occupying army in their backyard. And I'd never noticed them. How could I have never noticed them? The answer is because I simply didn't care. The Palestinians weren't on our radar screen, so I just didn't notice, didn't give a damn about them. If I'd been given the opportunity to know one one-hundredth of what I know now, what would I have done? ... -- Ronit Yarosky

...we share the loss that comes out of this very tragic area and this very tragic situation, and we share that with many, many, many people. And



Adrienne Wong as Rachel Corrie © Itai Erdal

Rachel is remembered now by many, many people, and there are thousands who have suffered similar losses and they're not remembered in the same way. So I hope that part of what we can do is to try to keep that in mind. It's part of what Rachel's message was, of somehow making it more than just a metaphor [...]. We're very connected to "Parents Circle," a group of Israelis and Palestinians who have lost family members, and they've all come together because they believe it's the occupation that has killed their family members... -- Cindy Corrie

... my big moment, my realization, was when I was coming back from the Shivah, from the memorial service for my brother in Israel. I was on the plane, and—again perhaps because I had fully been emotionally torn apart by that and realized how many hundreds of people it affected when I was there—I actually saw, in my mind's eye, above all that, the suicide bomber's mother. And I wondered, how is she feeling, how is she doing this? Because I knew how I felt, and I knew how my mom felt, and that's really when I started to say, I have a choice in how I look at things and what I want to do. It was an opening for me, to be able to say, "Start looking at the situation and asking why." Because it took something so huge to really make me look at it and say, why did this happen, and what would make somebody do that? And that's where I started. Part of my journey was to use art as a tool for myself, it wasn't really about changing anybody else, but just trying to bring some type of understanding for myself. It was through that work, and a lot of people—you don't do it in isolation, that's for sure—that I was able to create a very small skit. I didn't have all the words that Rachel's parents have from Rachel. I didn't know really how my brother felt or what he would have done. My skit was: I wanted to take him back [to] the day of the bombing and have him approach [the suicide bomber]. And so my brother Ari would

say to him, "What could have happened? What could our potential have been if we weren't fighting?"... -- Tali Goodfriend

...I'm reminded of an e-mail we got about six months ago, a person who said he took three years to write to me. He said, I was living and working in Egypt, in Cairo, when the planes flew into the Twin Towers. He said, I was one of those that cheered when I saw that on TV, I cheered when I saw the planes flying into the Twin Towers. He said, then I heard about Rachel, your daughter, being killed. I didn't think much about it, but then I heard some more and then I read about it. He said, and then I went to work and I used my money to buy clothes to impress my co-workers. He said, and then I decided that I had to do something. So he went back to get an advanced degree in conflict resolution, and now he's been teaching conflict resolution in various Arab countries in the Middle East. He said: And I didn't want to write, until I'd got it all done... -- Craig Corrie

... I was in Palestine in early 2005, then I came back in March of 2005, and I was at the Native Friendship Center, which is just up this street, on St. Laurent. I was talking with a group of Native youth from the community of Grassy Narrows in Northern Ontario who, since 2002, have set up road blocks in their community to stop logging. There've been massive clear cuts and it's destroying all their land there. So they're taking this incredible direct action to just say enough is enough, we're stopping the logging by any means necessary. And the way these youths were talking about their land that was disappearing from right under them was so moving for me, because just weeks ago I was hearing people in Palestine talk about their land using the exact same language, talking about how the land is not just something that we take for granted, but the land is our backbone. I heard Palestinian farmers talking, in broken English,

about how when the IDF goes in to bulldoze trees, how that's the equivalent of breaking people's bones. And to have that kind of language, that kind of articulation, resonating here, was really powerful. I think it sends a really clear message: What people are facing in Palestine is not entirely different from the realities of life on this land ... -- Aaron Lakoff

... [W]hy was the play banned—well, not banned but cancelled—at one stage in New York? The whole discussion about the Palestinian issue is labeled anti-Semitic the minute you question the moral claim of Israel to kill. Some pro-Israeli people do criticize Israel, for tactical reasons, for tactical mistakes—"they shouldn't have done this at that point"—but the minute you question the moral claim of Israel to kill Palestinians, you run the risk of being called anti-Semitic. And I think this is the crucial issue, and this is the fight that people who want peace should fight. We have the right to criticize the moral claim of Israel to occupy ... -- Rachad Antonius

... one of the most remarkable organizations I've had the pleasure of coming to know in the last two years is "Women in Black." It's an organization of Jews and Palestinians who are eternally committed to the peace movement and issues of social justice and to attempting to empower people in the Middle East who have obviously been completely demoralized. Their level of activism, I thought, was truly remarkable. When you think of the people who receive the Nobel Peace Prize, and then you have people like this who spend, essentially, their every waking hour attempting to effect peace and they're completely ignored in the media—to me, this is the most troubling part. We might wake up tomorrow and suddenly the media will decide that they like peace activists, in which case I guess there'll be a run on peace activists and we'll start doing very well—so I would like to keep the hope alive as well. But I find it very distressing that I myself, as a person who's been involved in the peace movement for so long, was not even aware of "Women in Black" until I was fortunate enough to meet members through "Shalom Salaam" ... -- Stephen Block

... theatre, for me, is always an act of dissent. If my favourite world leader, Nelson Mandela, were running a government and I had to do theatre, I would still be questioning and examining. But there are artistic directors who decided to produce this play and then changed their minds due to a fear of being labeled anti-Semitic by those who had not even seen the play. Why was the

charge being made? Because of an historical experience of a woman who died for the cause of humanity, I would say. Rachel Corrie: Was she inspired or misguided by pro-Palestinian activism? Did the fact that the play was censored in several major cities popularize the play even further? Who in the world makes a work of art and takes no position? For me, taking no position is also a position: it's a position of inactivation. By producing this play, are we celebrating the peace

I HEARD PALESTINIAN FARMERS TALKING, IN BROKEN ENGLISH, ABOUT HOW WHEN THE IDF GOES IN TO BULLDOZE TREES, HOW THAT'S THE EQUIVALENT OF BREAKING PEOPLE'S BONES.

that Rachel Corrie was promoting? If we didn't do the play, we'd simply be missing the call for action, for that's what she made. If we uphold her play very highly, knowing it had become a victim of censorship, then Teesri Duniya Theatre and newworldtheatre would be very happy that we achieved a victory. It's not only a victory against censorship, but a challenge to explore the truth that has still not emerged ... -- Rahul Varma

...what Rachel Corrie did was—she says it in the text—she did her job, she cared. She had the courage to write down what she saw, and it's what she saw. And whether she was naïve when she saw it, or whether she was absolutely well informed at the moment that she saw it, she wrote it down. And if things don't get said, they don't get said, and therefore nothing happens, nothing changes—we don't all meet here today, we don't have a discussion about it, we don't hear things that are difficult to hear, we don't put ourselves in our own kind of harm's way, which is to disagree with one another in the hopes, perhaps, of finding a different kind of consensus, or an understanding, for my part, of two countries where I have never travelled ... -- Sarah Stanley

Conversations transcribed and edited by Jakub Stachurski.

BIO

BORN IN BIAŁYSTOK, POLAND, **Jakub Stachurski** CURRENTLY RESIDES IN MONTREAL. HIS POETRY, FOR WHICH HE HAS RECEIVED AN IRVING LAYTON AWARD, HAS APPEARED IN *SOLILOQUIES*, *HEADLIGHT*, AND *EYE*.

THE GEOPOLITICS OF INVISIBILITY IN AHMED GHAZALI'S

The Sheep and the Whale

by Barry Freeman



John Ng and Paul Lee in *The Sheep and the Whale*.
Cahoots Theatre Projects and Modern Times Stage Company in association with Theatre Passe Muraille.
© Guy Bertrand Photography

Something about watching the 2007 English-language premiere of Ahmed Ghazali's *The Sheep and the Whale* at Toronto's Theatre Passe Muraille made me uncomfortable. The play tells the story of some of our world's disappeared people: stowaways and refugees from poor and war-torn areas of Africa risking their lives in deadly passage to a Europe that promises a better life, only to disappoint those few who make it. Despite the many fine qualities of the Cahoots Theatre Projects and Modern Times Stage Company co-production at TPM, what lingered for me was my sense of distance from its stories and issues. Something about the play, the production, or the performance as an event made me especially self-aware as a spectator and I found myself unable to enter the play's dark world. Was it the result of some failure on the part of the artists to move me?

Was it that I could not reconcile the story of despair and death in political extremis with the relatively affluent and safe setting of the performance? Or was it that my own family's immigration story—to Newfoundland from the south of England sometime in the 1750s—was too obscure to make *Sheep* as resonant for me as it may have been for someone else? These may have all been the case, but on further reflection I began to think it was something else too: a problem to do with my *ethical* relationship as a spectator to the figure of the refugee on stage.

How does the refugee's story engage the spectator? On the one hand, refugees are invisible figures, denied an identity and caught in the obliterating space between a political community that has failed them and another that sees them as a burden. On the other hand, re-presented refugees are restored to visibility with a story and presence, are effectively welcomed into a shared space (for more on this issue, see Gluhovic; Nield; and Wake). Onstage, the refugee is a paradox, present yet ever-receding, passing before us as a ghost. The ethical danger, in my view, is in refugees becoming their re-presentation, thereby eluding us and doubling their invisibility. If stage refugees—like those that destroy their passports before they flee across the Strait of Gibraltar—struggle to overcome their own spectral appearances, grasping after some fact or semblance of humanity within the frame of a theatrical vision that must disappear, what are we left with? Can representation succeed in restoring refugees' identity and humanity? And if a performance does give us a refugee, through whom we might under-

stand a specific story, does this engage us in geopolitical issues?

In allowing the refugee to recede from view, I couldn't help feeling that I was also absolving myself of political or ethical responsibility. The refugee's ongoing experience of invisibility effectively took the burden of consciousness (or conscience) away from me as a spectator. The basic ephemerality of performance combined in this case with a theatrical form that did not invite the audience to respond or intervene left me open to be "cast" in the role of a numb and impotent onlooker.

Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert write that in their experience, audiences sometimes go the theatre not so much to bear witness to stories as "to publicly enact their shame" (qtd. in Wake 191). Did *Sheep* invite or allow its audience to enact its shame? Does the collective experience of shame

THE ETHICAL DANGER, IN MY VIEW, IS IN REFUGEES BECOMING THEIR RE-PRESENTATION, THEREBY ELUDING US AND DOUBLING THEIR INVISIBILITY.

even depend on allowing its victims to recede from view? If theatre conjures the ghostly voice, story, and political body of the refugee, what happens when the curtain falls? In a figurative sense, visibility also means "the degree to which something impinges upon public awareness" (OED). To

be visible in this sense is to come to light in the realm of public discourse, to become a matter worthy of attention and care. But if, as Sophie Nield writes, theatre "is a place where you have to appear" (138), it is equally a place where you have to disappear: Prospero's fading "insubstantial pageant" or vision of "baseless fabric." Must it always "Leave not a rack behind"? (3095: 151-156).

Both the play and the production highlighted the many ways that the refugee resists visibility. The play is set onboard a cargo ship on the Strait of Gibraltar, and in a stormy, *Tempest*-like opening, it begins with the ship's crew piling on deck the bodies of anonymous Moroccan refugees whose boat has capsized nearby. Shrewd and unsympathetic, the ship's captain wants only to get rid of the bodies, but port authorities in Tangiers, Algeciras, and Gibraltar won't receive them. Meanwhile, the crew hunts down an African refugee—the 'Stowaway'—who hides in the ship's shadowy shipping containers.¹ The Stowaway finds allies in the ship's compassionate doctor and in a young couple who happen to be aboard: the Arab-Moroccan Hassan and his French wife Hélène. While Hélène grapples with her complacency and political paralysis (voicing some of the dis-

comfort I felt as a spectator), Hassan brings to light the secret he has held from her: twelve years prior, he also entered Europe illegally by crossing the strait. As the diplomatic and personal crises unfold, a solitary Arab survivor sits on the deck throughout—traumatized though silent, invisible though present.

The most disturbing invisibility is that of the ever-present dead Moroccans onstage, whose identities and stories go untold. The TPM production doubled this invisibility by having actual refugees play the parts: five youth who had all recently arrived in Canada and had participated in Cahoots Theatre Projects' "Crossing Gibraltar" program: a "theatre training and outreach program for youth from refugee and newcomer backgrounds" ("What we're doing"). In partnership with CultureLink, a "settlement agency for new Canadians" (*CultureLink*), Cahoots set up a program that offered theatre training, individual mentorship, and sessions with well-known guest artists to a group of thirteen youth. In the end, five of these youth were "invited" to be a part of the cast for *Sheep* (Program). Certainly, it was wonderful for the youth to have been involved in the professional production, and I imagine (since I can only imagine) that it was a rich experience. But that the youth were cast as the drowned refugees in the play—onstage, still and silent for nearly the entire performance—underscored the invisibility of the refugee (the more so given their conspicuous absence from the talkback session that followed the performance).

It is in the character of Hassan, however, that the paradoxes of visibility and invisibility find their fullest realization in the play. When we first meet Hassan and his wife H el ene, we understand that, bored with a vacation to the Canary Islands, the two had decided to take passage on a cargo ship out of a sense of adventure. All the while, however, Hassan is strangely preoccupied with their proximity to his home country of Morocco. He is drawn into childhood memories, and because it is the day of A id Elkebar, the Muslim festival of sacrifice, he becomes obsessed with his memory of having not been able to carry out the festival's ritual slaughter of a sheep as a child. Hassan's embarrassment mixes with anger when he learns that the Moroccan authorities are unwilling to retrieve the bodies of their citizens because they are celebrating the festival. Though he resents the Moroccans' pious devotion, he is mesmerized by the raw emotive and symbolic power of the sacrifice that explodes

to life mid-way through the play in a surreal orgy of song and dance. Hassan wakes from the sacrifice as if from a dream and finds himself lying among the dead bodies. "Every time I look at these faces," he says to a disturbed H el ene, "shivers go down my spine because I'm afraid of seeing someone I know—a brother, a cousin, or a friend" (39). Like H el ene, Hassan has to this point been terrified of specific stories, but, as if channeling the urgent, raw power of the sacrificial ritual, he begins to desperately expose every story he can: he talks to and tries to help the survivor; he tells H el ene how many of their friends in Paris were illegal immigrants (unbeknownst to her); he communes with the stowaways on the ship; most importantly, he confesses that he himself fled across the straight to Gibraltar twelve years previously.

But Hassan's crusade for others' visibility is matched by his own desire for invisibility. He withdraws from the community of the ship and his adopted community of France toward an unknowable future in an Arabic, African world rendered obscure and mysterious in the play. This reading would seem to be rooted in a Western (and agnostic) view, given one might as well regard Hassan's

retreat into a mythic-religious state as a spiritual "coming to light." If, as Patrice Pavis notes in his *Dictionary of the Theatre*, ritual is in part about "the desire to make the invisible visible" (317), then the ritualistic dream sequence may be a way to render Hassan's state visible for the audience. Watching the performance, I had the sense that the play was cueing me to take up the former reading by regarding Hassan's movement in the play as a withdrawal from the community of the ship, and, by extension, the political community of the West. For example, Hassan wants to absorb himself into the company of the shadowy stowaways on the ship and tells H el ene that he was lying with the dead bodies because he "wanted to see what it [was] like" (39). The stories he tells H el ene of his own and their friends' refugee pasts are not meant for her to cope with, but are rather related regretfully, as though from a retreating position. When H el ene asks why no one ever revealed their past to her, Hassan responds, "We want to forget. We wanted to believe that we were important, that we were asked to come" (43). As he retreats into invisibility, he can suddenly see more and more stowaways on the ship, and calls out to them to speak to H el ene from the shadows of the shipping containers. "You don't see them but they see you," Hassan says, and has the ghostly

IF THEATRE CONJURES THE GHOSTLY VOICE, STORY, AND POLITICAL BODY OF THE REFUGEE, WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE CURTAIN FALLS?

figures recite the names of H el ene's birthplace, her favourite colours and perfume (44). As Hassan whips himself into a frenzied confrontation with H el ene, he conjures more stowaways from the ocean and the shipping containers. Those who are invisible to H el ene (and the audience) are said to be watching back, visible in their absence. "From back there in the dark, through the holes and cracks," says Hassan, "They've been spying on you" (44).

Hassan's retreat into invisibility also threatens to obscure his Arabness. As an Arab, Hassan is remarkably present first and foremost because so few plays (in Toronto at least) feature Arab characters. Odd, when one considers what a significant demographic they are: Ahmed Ghazali's one-time home city of Montreal, where *Sheep* had its French-language premiere, was home to nearly 100,000 Arabs in 2006 according to Statistic Canada, accounting for 37.2% of all Canadian Arabs (there are only half as many in Toronto, though it is twice the size of Montreal) (*Canada's* 27). Yet, as Thea Abu El-Haj notes, the hypervisibility of the Arab in North America is not due to the community's surging demographics, but rather to negative narratives and images that invoke the "enemy other" and add to misconceptions, such as that of seeing the Arab world as a religious rather than a linguistic or political community (176). If Arab visibility is instead to be constituted by "in-depth, nuanced knowledge about Arab history and culture [that makes] Arabs visible in rich, complex and humanizing ways," (El-Haj 177) Hassan emerges as a hypervisible figure merely on account of his wider cultural absence, but moreover by way of his sensitivity to the plight of the Moroccan refugees, his elucidation of Aid Elkebar for the captain (the festival's sacrificial slaughter echoing the play's broader appeal for political charity in that one-third of the meat goes to the poor and hungry), and his own human struggle with his past.

Yet there is an additional paradox in Hassan's visibility: that the Arabness made visible by his explanations and his corporal and optical presence onstage is at the same time somewhat illegible. He begins to sing and speak in Arabic, to relate obscure parables about his childhood; and later, as a conjurer, he is able to animate the dead bodies to encircle and terrify his wife. Arabness becomes unknowable and shadowy, mapping on to Ghazali's other "dark" places, such as the passageways between the containers on the ship, the "Shantytowns of Bombay and Harlem," and even Africa itself (6). Of course the figurative association of "the West" with light, knowledge, and order and "the Rest" with darkness, mystery and chaos reiterates a deeply engrained Western intellectual and anthropological modernist tradition stretching back to the Enlightenment and beyond, and

Ghazali's set-up will be particularly familiar to anyone who has read *Heart of Darkness* or *The Emperor Jones*. In *Sheep*, I believe this well-worn construction runs the risk of overshadowing (as it were) the play's important implicit argument for a geopolitically interconnected world, in which a Western audience could (and should) be concerned about a "distant" story. It is as though the play, in spite of its foregrounding of Hassan's story, ultimately anticipates a Western viewer who does not, or perhaps cannot, "read" Arabness.

Aside from Hassan and the traumatized survivor, the only refugee in the play who speaks is the Stowaway. He, too, is a conjuration; he emerges from the memory of the ship's doctor, who recalls a conversation with him to Hassan. The Stowaway—perhaps a contemporary refugee, or perhaps the spirit of an African slave from a different time—enters with "the sound of a prisoner's shackled feet, walking," as the doctor pries for information:

DOCTOR: What am I going to call you?

STOWAWAY: The others call me the slave, darkie, nigger, Negro, the stowaway, the black man, the African, aboriginal, asshole. They're all good.

DOCTOR: Tell me where you're from.

STOWAWAY: From Africa.

DOCTOR: Which country?

STOWAWAY: A poor country.

DOCTOR: Which one?

STOWAWAY: A burning country.

DOCTOR: Which one?

STOWAWAY: I don't have a country, or maybe I forgot. (22)

In the exchange, the Stowaway has become his representation. He is unable or unwilling to tell a story. The Stowaway is not like those shadowy figures conjured by Hassan; he is a reluctant, petrified ghost, a shell of himself, a representation that has destroyed, and then forgotten that it has destroyed, its original. If the Stowaway is a ghost, however, the TPM production allowed him a chilling momentary materialization; the actor playing the Stowaway—Karim Morgan—entered in striking, powerful movements, staring coldly and fixedly forward, a dispossessed figure who nonetheless palpably possessed the stage and braced the audience. Morgan enacted the refugee paradox by bracing his audience with his presence just as his character eluded them in its absence.

Ironically, it is the Stowaway (the figure whose absented story disallows him either agency or representation) and not Hassan (who exhibits agency in his journey into his self) that has left the greatest impression on me. In her book *Purity and*

Exile, Liisa H. Malkki observes that the figure of the refugee is widely represented as a universal human sufferer, “stripped of the specificity of culture, place and history” (12), able only to exist in “the depoliticizing, dehistoricizing register of a more abstract and universal suffering” (13). Perhaps it is true that the Stowaway entered Malkki’s “register of a more abstract and universal suffering,” allowing me, as a spectator, to project onto the figure a vague shame for my complicity in all the systems that permit such suffering. Perhaps it is true also that the play, by presenting the ghostly Stowaway and the unknowable, mystical Arab, submits to a belief that its anticipated Western spectator cannot ever “know.”

If so, the play effectively resigns itself to its own inefficacy; but what happens in performance is another matter. Something about Karim Morgan’s unforgettable entrance, his mechanical delivery, and his exit—walking backward but still staring forward—exemplifies for me the sense of the specificity and visibility of the refugee figure falling away from us even as we watch. The force of Morgan’s performance stubbornly refused the retreat into invisibility, not through the telling of a story, but through the sheer, powerful theatrical force of embodied presence. Perhaps it isn’t the victims’ stories that render them visible (in the

figurative sense), but a particular kind of hyper-real, corporal presence in a shared space that—despite its ephemerality—resists disappearance.

Yet for me, the Stowaway’s moment of representational disruption was the exception in the play. For the most part, I had the feeling that the production mapped out a straightforward moral universe that, to be fair, is perhaps too tidily mapped out in the script itself. *Sheep’s* opening stage directions divide the stage into thirds: to the left, the ship’s clean cabins, rising in several levels of decks to a smokestack; in the middle, a long, empty deck with a railing in front of the open sea; to the right, a huge pile of rusty, battered shipping containers, dark and poorly arranged (6). Ghazali spells out the symbolic significance: “This space between containers and cabins is the gulf between North and South, between Europe and Africa, between Blacks and Whites, rich and poor, modern and primitive, etc” (6). The play’s dramatic personae also neatly divide into two groups: clear villains to deplore (the ship’s racist first mate and his underlings, the sleazy corporate operators of the ship, the indifferent port authorities) and victims or crusaders to admire (Hassan coming to terms with his past and Arabness, the ghostly Stowaway, the empathetic doctor).

David Collins, Karim Morgan, Oporajito Bhattacharjee, Timothy Hill, Andy Velasquez (bare chest) and Veronica Agudelo.
© Guy Bertrand Photography



Watching the production at TPM, I found that the neatly delineated moral universe of the play, the partial visibility of the refugees, and the unreachable, untold stories of those actual young refugees onstage all left me with the impression of not having anything substantial to hold on to. It seemed too easy to distinguish myself from corporate hucksters and cold-blooded deckhands, too easy to lament and let go of anonymous victims. I have argued, however, that by withdrawing from visibility, staged refugees may politically disengage their audience. If Ghazali intends the play to restore to visibility those who have been erased by globalization and geopolitics, the figures he stages retain their invisibility. It is true that the TPM production gave the refugee—particularly Morgan as the Stowaway—an urgent presence that has remained with me.

But it was at the same time a retreating presence that I felt that I was *expected* to let disappear. This was the source of my discomfort. I'm not certain whether this could have been any different; that is, whether in this case the script's

thematic and narrative outing of Western complacency could have been matched in production by a theatrical concern with outing the Western spectator's consumption of the refugee story. Could the production have employed specific theatrical or paratheatrical strategies that foreground the act of viewing, pushed harder for ethical and political engagement, questioned how geopolitical problems large and distant are rendered "visible," and directly engaged the audience with the real, lived stories being represented? Maybe. I wonder, however, whether such strategies would have given the audience an inflated perception of having "dealt" with these great geopolitical issues; whether, in other words, the illusion of having been engaged may lead to even greater disengagement. This, perhaps, is *Sheep's* final paradox: that it may have been more successful in engaging its audience by specifically disengaging them—that is, forcing them into a discomforting confrontation with their own distant and helpless spectatorial position.

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NOTES

¹ The theme of geopolitical invisibility in *Sheep* is also a theme in the history of ocean transportation. For a long time, goods were shipped around a world in such a way that they were visible, but containerization—which revolutionized the shipping industry (and global trade) in the 1950s and 1960s—made cargo visible only to those who sent and received it. Containerization has provided desperate refugees opportunities for a very dangerous kind of passage, as well as an excuse (among others) for countries to tighten border security. See Cudahy, Levinson.

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BIO

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What Should We Tell Them?

DISPATCH

Even before seeing it — in fact, even before reading it — many affixed the word "controversial" to Caryl Churchill's eight-minute play, *Seven Jewish Children: A Play for Gaza*. While others acknowledged the range of reactions performing the play would likely arouse, they stressed its complexities and nuances, and recognized the importance of the discussion to which such a performance would lead.

It was with the latter in mind that Independent Jewish Voices Montreal (IJVM), a group of Jews in Quebec who share a commitment to social justice and universal human rights, decided to arrange for a staged reading of this play in Montreal. And because IJVM wanted French-speaking Montrealers to have access to this work, Jocelyne Doray was commissioned to provide the first-ever translation. On 3 May 2009, a bilingual cast of ten women directed by Rose Plotek presented the English and French versions at three standing-room-only performances, each followed by an exchange with the audience.

IJVM knew there might be those in the mainstream Jewish community who would attack the play and all those associated with its production, and we were right: cries of outrage and accusations of anti-Semitism were swift, loud, and numerous. But rather than engage with the substance of the play, these critics ignored IJVM's invitations to come to see the play and discuss it with us and others—they merely sent letters of protest to the media.

The theatre, obviously, is a powerful vehicle for raising issues in ways that op eds and scholarly essays can't. Plays engage the heart and soul as well as the head: they can make us uncomfortable and they can make us rethink our preconceived ideas and most cherished myths. Perhaps this explains some of the vitriol in the attacks against the play, its author, and those of us involved in having the work produced on stage. But while heated discussion and legitimate criticism are both welcomed, the kinds of attacks made against *Seven Jewish Children* deflect attention from the very issues it raises for discussion: How do we, as adults, talk to children about violations of human rights, the injustices done to racialized groups, the horrors of war?

During the sixty-one years since land on which Palestinians were living was taken from them and given to Jews to create the state of Israel, pressures to restrict and contain criticism of Israel by those living in the Diaspora have increased: go outside the limits and you're accused of being "self-hating" if a Jew, anti-Semitic if not. This has led to a myopic inability to see the Palestine/Israel conflict in ways that acknowledge the racism and colonialism of Israeli government policies—policies that lead to the separation ("Apartheid") wall, the illegal carving up of land illegally expropriated, and the continuing occupation and blockades that prevent Palestinians from access to education, healthcare, and many of the benefits automatically available to their Jewish co-citizens.

This was magnified during the six-week period from late December to mid-January, when Israel launched a ferocious attack on Gaza. All this led Caryl Churchill to write her play: a play about Gaza, but also a play about each of us who must talk to children and who need to figure out what we can, and we must not, "tell her" — "her" being the unseen child to whom the adults in the play refer.

To single Israel out as beyond criticism is just plain wrong; criticizing Israeli policies and practices is essential for democracy, for the survival of free speech, and for advancing the causes of justice and international human rights. To criticize this play is appropriate; but to use this criticism to silence others is unacceptable.

Go see the play; read it; watch it online. But then talk to others about the issues it raises, and remember to pass on the message to our children, to ourselves, that the Holocaust legacy of "never again" means never again for all peoples.

Abby Lippman

BIO

ABBY LIPPMAN IS A PROFESSOR IN THE FACULTY OF MEDICINE AT MCGILL UNIVERSITY AND A MEMBER OF IJVM. SHE IS A LONG-TIME THEATRE-GOER AND A SUPPORTER OF THE USE OF THEATRE FOR POPULAR EDUCATION AND POLITICAL CHANGE. BEING DIRECTLY INVOLVED WITH OTHERS COMMITTED TO FREE SPEECH AND ARTISTIC EXPRESSION IN THE PRODUCTION OF *7/C* WAS A SPECIAL PRIVILEGE.

35



How does one even say memory in Arabic?

In *Seuls*, Wajdi Mouawad stages himself as a doctoral student working on Québécois identity through Robert Lepage's solo plays. Harwan jets off to Russia to meet the artistically ubiquitous yet personally elusive Robert Lepage. He left Montreal thinking his father was in a coma, but as he believes he arrives in St. Petersburg he realizes that, in fact, he is the comatose patient. Panicked, Harwan reconnects with his initial impulse. The academic remembers how, before language, before French, before Arabic, he used to paint

What follows the initial ninety-minute monologue is a twenty-minute silent soliloquy. Harwan discovers a myriad of paint tubes in his luggage. He explores the tubes, spreading the paint with his hands, his entire body becoming an oversized brush. Transformed into a pulsating, paint-covered work of art, Harwan stands before a projection of Rembrandt's *Return of the Prodigal Son* superimposed upon his own recent efforts. The character and the actor blend into the master's work. They are framed by it. Harwan asks himself, also concluding his dissertation:

Who are we and who do we believe ourselves to be? (...) The Return of the Prodigal Son by Rembrandt, topic of (Lepage's) next show, forces me to examine a question I hadn't even considered in the course of this dissertation: what if I were to return to that which is waiting for me? Would I know how to find it, to remember what it might be? Who or what has been forever awaiting my return? Who might be moved by my sudden appearance along the road? What have I left behind without even understanding it? Have I lost all memory? How does one even say memory in Arabic?

The unexpected exotic last word of the play resonated at the Théâtre d' Aujourd'hui, a company devoted to Quebec drama since its foundation by Jean-Claude Germain. The mesmerized audience didn't seem alienated by the reminder of Harwan's cultural otherness. Yet, this otherness was inevitable. How does one say memory in Arabic? The question is not strictly rhetorical: it plunges us into our own relationship with memory. Can Harwan's failing memory of his origins be ours as well? By drawing us into his transnational odyssey of exile and identity, Mouawad has suddenly opened up a previously clannish issue to one which concerns all of humanity: How have we become so disconnected from ourselves? Paraphrasing Giorgio Agamben: How does one translate mere occurrences into actual experiences? Which of these experiences are essential to one's identity? Do memories truly translate into other languages? What is lost with the fading away of one's mother tongue?

The pairing of Quebec's two prodigious prodigal sons in a single solo work is uncanny; so is staging a Lebanese-born Québécois working on Québécois identity through the works of Mouawad's own illustrious predecessor, Robert Lepage. The author thus fuses the personal with the collective. Interestingly, Lepage stages plays in which a Québécois invariably leaves home on a quest to explore and artistically conquer the world, whereas Mouawad stages odysseys in which an exiled Sisyphus carries with him the burden of his past. The question "Comment dit-on mémoire en arabe?" mirrors and displaces Jean-Claude Germain's 1978 ironic accusation, *Un pays dont la devise est je m'oublie* (*A Country Whose Motto Is I Forget Myself*). Mouawad's question is self-reflective; its cruel irony accuses no one but the author himself. The question, turned inward, disarms onlookers. His question has become ours. With one resonating word, the entire world opens up as we think of who we have become.

Louis Patrick Leroux

BIO

LOUIS PATRICK LEROUX IS AN ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF PLAYWRITING AND LITERATURE IN BOTH THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND ÉTUDES FRANÇAISES AT CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY IN MONTREAL. A PLAYWRIGHT AND DIRECTOR, HE FOUNDED OTTAWA'S THÉÂTRE LA CATAPULTE AND WAS ITS ARTISTIC DIRECTOR DURING THE 1990S. HE RECENTLY DEFENDED HIS PHD THESIS ON QUÉBEC AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL AND SELF-REFLEXIVE DRAMA AT THE SORBONNE.

PERFORMANCE AND COSMOPOLITICS

Cross-Cultural Transactions in Australasia



Helen Gilbert & Jacqueline Lo

STUDIES IN INTERNATIONAL PERFORMANCE
Series Editors: Janelle Reinelt and Brian Singleton



BOOK REVIEW

by Jisha Menon

*Performance and Cosmopolitics:
Cross-Cultural Transactions in
Australasia.*

BY HELEN GILBERT AND JACQUELINE LO.

London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Pp. x. & 245

Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo's book, *Performance and Cosmopolitics: Cross-Cultural Transactions in Australasia*, is an important addition to a growing body of literature that critically examines debates on cosmopolitanism. Gilbert and Lo demonstrate what cosmopolitanism looks like, on the ground, within Australasia—the region comprising Australia and New Zealand. The book makes several important interventions: first, it locates debates on cosmopolitanism within the territorial bounds of the region of Australasia rather than rehearsing the arguments about the transnational and mobile flows of cosmopolitan practices across the globe. This focus on a region rather than a nation-state or “the globe” allows Gilbert and Lo to consider the co-implication of discourses on nation and transnationalism within debates on cosmopolitanism. While situating these debates within Australasia, Gilbert and Lo are careful to tease out the differences between cosmopolitanism and state-sponsored multiculturalism.

Next, it territorializes cosmopolitan projects within concrete, embodied cultural practices and thus redresses the charges that cosmopolitanism is becoming too rarefied and philosophical. By

insisting upon the material implications of cosmopolitan discourses, Gilbert and Lo are able to analyze how discourses of cosmopolitanism are also implicated within class, racial, and gendered economies of representation. Such an approach allows Gilbert and Lo to examine the ways in which cosmopolitan projects serve broader cultural and political agendas. In their own words, “As a social practice, theatre situates cosmopolitanism within specific cultural, political, geographical and historical contexts that anchor its universalizing impulses. As an economic practice, theatre shows how cosmopolitanism is imbricated in identifiable circuits of production, distribution and consumption that connect with the operations of (trans)national capital” (13).

In addition, Gilbert and Lo consistently situate cosmopolitical projects within asymmetrical power relations and the structural forces of commerce, militarism, and imperialism. Gilbert and Lo put it thus: “[T]he central contention of this book is that there is, inevitably, a politics to the practice of cosmopolitanism—a *cosmopolitics* that is caught up in hybrid spaces, entangles histories and complex human cor-

porographies” (11). By considering the fundamentally unequal relations of power between variously situated political subjects, the authors foreground the inequities of global asymmetries and thus redress articulations of cosmopolitanism as constituting a discourse about equal citizens around the world.

A major argument of this book is that a cosmopolitan consciousness within Australasia emerges through the dynamic cross-cultural interpenetration of indigenization and Asianization within the region. While discourses of Aboriginality are plumbed to assert claims to authenticity, Asianization is invoked to celebrate Australasia’s cosmopolitan imaginary. Gilbert and Lo trace the genealogy of Aboriginal and Asian theatrical practices in Australian theatre; black-face minstrelsy, for instance, offered an iconography of racial difference that could be retooled to suit Australia’s racial economy. Their analysis of plays such as Randolph Bedford’s *White Australia, or The Empty North* (1909) complicates the naturalization of whiteness as an unmarked category and explores how these normative ideas of whiteness are simultaneously articulations of an invisibly structured masculinity.

Gilbert and Lo take on questions of indigeneity and Asianization more centrally in chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 2 explores the insertion of Aboriginal performance within the largely Anglo-Celtic performance traditions of Australia’s culture industry. Through a discussion of legislation, dramatic productions, festivals, and the opening ceremony of the Sydney Olympic Games, Gilbert and Lo raise questions about authenticity and exoticism that are often invoked in discussions of Aboriginal art. They conclude that this “indigenization process [. . .] casts cosmopolitanism as neither the consequence of cultural diversity nor the prerogative of Western liberalism, but rather the practice of striving toward ethical interconnectedness” (80).

In chapter 3, Gilbert and Lo demonstrate that “the Asianizing process” also has multivalent and unpredictable effects: while on the one hand the presence of Asian theatre practices reinforces prevailing Orientalist images and iconography, it also offers avenues for cross-cultural dialogue. They situate these Asianizing impulses within ongoing discussions of Australian state-sanctioned multiculturalism that attempt to manage racial and ethnic diversity while reinforcing Australian masculinity as normative. Through an analysis of puppetry and circus/physical theatre, the authors demonstrate how Australians have embodied Asian theatrical techniques—and in the process have offered more engaged hybrid performance practices. They show that Asianization cannot be read purely through Orientalist frames;

such readings reduce the fundamentally heterogeneous and unpredictable effects of these encounters. Thus, they argue that the Asianization of Australian theatre offers opportunities for mutually productive artistic engagements that may exceed exploitative relations.

In chapter 4, Gilbert and Lo situate the indigenization and Asianization of performance practices within the Adelaide International Festivals of 1994, 2002, and 2004. Widely considered Australia’s major arts event, the Adelaide Festival enables an analysis of how Aboriginal and Asian performances are marketed and consumed. In the process, Gilbert and Lo dismantle the “curatorial imaginary” to unpack the curatorial assumptions that undergird the festival’s positioning of Aboriginal and Asian cultures. However, despite attempts to problematize “indigeneity” and disaggregate “Asia,” these two categories continue to circulate, uneasily, in a somewhat uncomplicated fashion throughout this analysis. For example, what diverse and incommensurable cultural practices are invoked under the title of “the indigenous”? Is it possible to resurrect “the indigenous” as an a priori and unified category after centuries of colonial intervention? A deeper analysis of how “indigeneity” and “Asia” are constructed within the Australasian imaginary would have nuanced this study.

In chapter 5, Gilbert and Lo use three case studies to offer a more grounded analysis of the processes of cross-cultural artistic engagement. The first considers the ways in which indigenous artists appropriate and reshape European canonical texts. The second examines shifting Australian-Japanese relations through various representations of a classic Australian play, John Romeril’s *The Floating World* (1974.) The third explores how Suzuki Tadashi training practices are incorporated into two avant-garde theatre companies, Frank Theatre Austral Asian Performance Ensemble and Zen Zen Zo Physical Theatre. This discussion allows the authors to locate cross-cultural practices within debates of colour-blind casting, the normativity of whiteness, and the politics of representing Orientalism on stage. However, there is no substantial discussion on how cosmopolitanism departs from, or intersects with, interculturalism—the critical precursor of cross-cultural borrowings within theatre studies. Such a consideration would have enabled theatre scholars to situate discourses of cosmopolitanism within the wider genealogies of scholarship on cross-cultural performance practices.

In chapter 6, Gilbert and Lo turn to the “racially marked bodies of Asian Australian performers” and consider how these performances affect prevailing discourses of Asianization and “are in turn are transformed by [. . .] technologies

of Asianization" (167). Working through theories of hybridity from Mikhail Bakhtin to Homi Bhabha, Gilbert and Lo argue that the Asian Australian identity is itself a hybridized identity.

In the seventh and final chapter, Gilbert and Lo turn the critical lens of cosmopolitanism onto the most abject of cosmopolitan subjects – refugees and forced migrants. In what is perhaps the strongest chapter in the book, they differentiate between cultural and ethical cosmopolitanism and locate their discussions on human rights, asylum, and ethics within Immanuel Kant and Jacques Derrida's theories on hospitality. Through an analysis of various site-based political performances and "verbatim dramas" in particular, Gilbert and Lo consider a variety of artistic and political responses to questions of asylum. These performances do more than preach to the converted; it is in their ability to elicit a sense of national shame that the authors locate the radical potential and promise

of this work. They draw on Rosalyn Diprose's argument to suggest that if "affective response is the prerequisite for an ethical rather than merely political, relation with the Other, [. . .] then shame and outrage in this context also potentially set up the conditions for cosmopolitan community" (203).

By locating discourses of cosmopolitanism within embodied performance practices and focusing on material praxis, this book offers an important corrective to the increasingly abstract theories on global citizenship. This is an illuminating and welcome addition to the literature—both on cross-cultural theatre and on Australasian cosmopolitanism.

.....

cosmopolitics

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BIO

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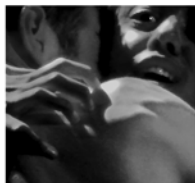
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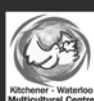
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CTR 138, Spring 2009, FESTIVALS

Edited by Harry Lane

CTR 138 examines aspects of one of Canada's most vigorous theatre sectors, that of the multitudinous theatre and performance festivals that have increasingly crowded our theatre calendars in the last 20 to 30 years. In terms of numbers of productions, personnel, and attendances, they clearly dominate. And they are no longer merely summer phenomena; four of the festivals covered in this issue take place in the winter months, and one (of necessity) in the fall.

The issue's articles range from Vancouver to Dartmouth, as well covering as a diverse array of events, both large and small. Perhaps surprisingly, they do not give major coverage to Stratford or Shaw, both of which have received frequent coverage and comment in *CTR* over the years, but include accounts of some festivals that may be unfamiliar to many readers. Two articles (by Katharine Fournier and James Ashby) focus on specialist international puppet festivals, one in Quebec and one in small-town Ontario. Chris Johnson and Bill Kerr describe an annual Winnipeg festival that gathers most of that city's theatre companies (both professional and community) in exploring the work of a single playwright. On the east coast, David Overton examines the identity of Dartmouth's On the Waterfront festival and its transformation into the present-day Supernova. Visiting the west coast, Montrealer Richard Simas admires the achievements and growth of the PuSh festival, but wonders whether the increased prominence of festivals in Canadian theatre culture may be "part of yet another speculative bubble."

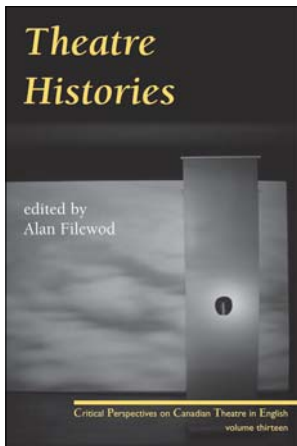
Several authors write from their experience as professional participants in festivals. Mary Vingoe evaluates the achievements of the peripatetic Magnetic North festival that she led from 2003 to 2007. Based on his experiences as a performer, writer, and director at festivals, David van Belle examines the ways in which festivals can be said to "festivalize" various elements of the work they present. Two essays examine the importance of festivals in the development of new scripts: Spy Denommé-Welch examines Native Earth Performing Arts's "Weesageechak Begins to Dance," and Daniel Sadavoy explores the contexts and complexities of Factory Theatre's CrossCurrents. Extending the scope of the issue somewhat further, Laura Levin and Kim Solga offer a witty first-hand account of their experiences at the overnight Nuit Blanche festival, but then pose some troubling questions about what it means when the art at a festival is eclipsed by the personal (and problematically uncritical) experience of merely being there.

The two scripts featured in the issue are both by Jason Maghanoy, a recent graduate of the National Theatre School's playwrighting program, where *dust*, the first of the two, originated as a solo performance before being workshopped at two CrossCurrents festivals and then fully produced at the 2008 SummerWorks festival. *The Corner* also benefited from dramaturgical development at CrossCurrents before a full production at the 2008 Next Stage Theatre Festival.



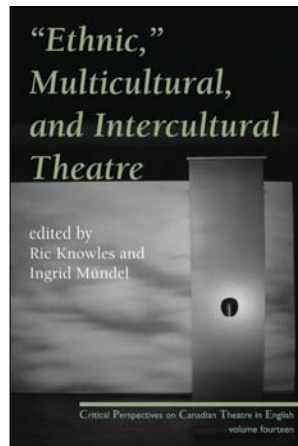
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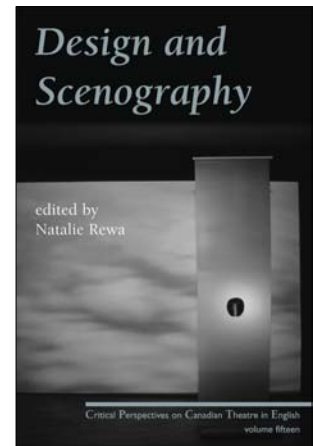
“Released from the ordinate systems that charted theatre history as a process of development in an evolving joint narrative of national culture and national repertoire, researchers have effectively inverted the premise that established their discipline.”

—Alan Filewod



“Productions no longer need appeal either to the traditional white middle-class audience of Canada’s so-called ‘main stages’ (including those of the former ‘alternative’ theatres) nor to communities narrowly defined by culture or interest—what used to be called ‘preaching to the converted...’”

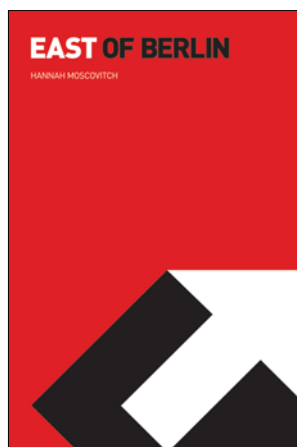
—Ric Knowles & Ingrid Mündel



“In this volume several broad areas of concern may be discerned. A main one is the kinds of understanding and modes of collaboration between creative artists... Then there is the more specifically Canadian preoccupation with designing with an awareness of cultural and regional diversity...”

—Natalie Rewa

THE BEST OF CANADIAN DRAMA



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Drowning Girls follows three women as they dive into the water and discover the truth of how their fates intertwine in a macabre story of love and betrayal. *Comrades* tells the tale of two Italian-immigrant labourers who became activists during the heyday of the American labour movement.



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