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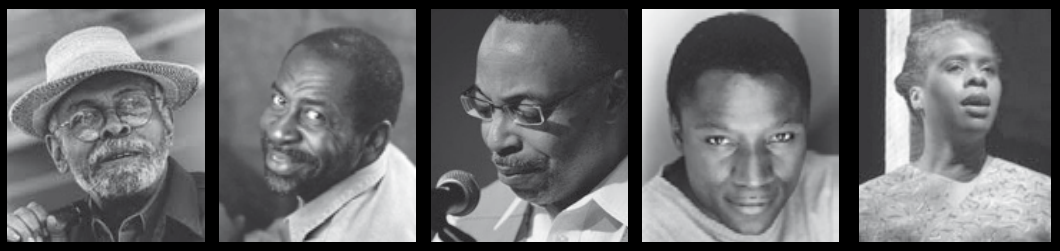

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© Anthony Luvera
A scene from the 2009 Olivier Theatre production of *Mother Courage and Her Children* by Bertolt Brecht in a translation by Tony Kushner. Directed by Deborah Warner.

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AVOIDING THE MISSIONARY POSITION IN THE

Bibliothèque nationale du Québec[1]

BY EDWARD LITTLE

My talk at the Grande Bibliothèque was about floating an idea. I wanted to gauge public interest in having Concordia University students create an ongoing, sustainable neighbourhood theatre project based on oral history interviews with Montreal residents.

Steve High and I are exploring preliminary aspects of the idea in a two-semester course that we are co-teaching at Concordia.[1] The course is connected to our research with the Oral History and Performance working group—one of seven research clusters comprising the project "Life Stories of Montrealers Displaced by War, Genocide, and other Human Rights Violations."[2]

The class is exploring oral history and performance as public art practice—a linking of social activism, oral history, and community-engaged theatre. In subsequent semesters, we hope to launch "The Neighbourhood Theatre"(TNT)—an outreach project involving theatre and oral history students conducting interviews and creating intimate performances for audiences of between twenty to a hundred in local venues. TNT would include an interactive website to house the interviews, video footage of the "shows," and tools for further educational and recreational use through digital storytelling.

Students studying social activism through theatre and public history like the idea. They are eager to undertake experiential learning outside the university classrooms. With new enrolments each year, they represent a practically inexhaustible, renewable resource. Teesri Duniya Theatre, the company I'm associated with, is also interested, and the community workers I have spoken with think it's a good idea. I wanted to talk with people from a broader range of backgrounds. The *Bibliothèque* seemed like a good place to "go public."

The event was part of the University of the Streets Café—an initiative begun in 2003 by Concordia's Institute for Community Development. The Café is about "taking it to the streets" through informal "conversations" held in local gathering spots—neighbourhood cafés, community centres, yoga studios, art galleries, museums, and parks. In June 2010, Concordia's recently ousted president Judith Woodsworth asked the Café to hold two conversations as part of events showcasing her "newly minted partnership with the Bibliothèque et Archives nationale du Québec (BAnQ)."[3] Woodsworth described the alliance as "Concordia University's commitment to the wider community," an opportunity "to extend learning, creativity and innovation to a new space" (Downey). BAnQ's chief executive officer described Concordia as "a role model in terms of the democratization of knowledge and culture." He spoke of the partnership as one of "shared values" and a concrete expression of BAnQ's desire to "become a pillar of the knowledge society" (Downey). The rhetoric seemed in keeping with Woodsworth's promotion of "community engagement" as a "signature area" in her academic plan.

The title for my conversation was "Avoiding the Missionary Position: What Role Might Socially Engaged Theatre Artists Play in Creating Healthy Neighbourhoods?" I wanted to send a clear message that I was interested in community–university partnerships with a collaborative, transparent, accountable, and mutually beneficial structure of "shared authority."[4] It seemed important to claim this territory. Universities everywhere are struggling against an increasingly corporatized structure that tends to promote proprietorial and commercialized approaches to knowledge and top-down administrative decision-making that often seems to run counter to higher education's mission of public education as preparation for participatory democracy. Community engagement became particularly poignant in December 2010 in the wake of Judith Woodsworth's dismissal by the executive committee of Concordia's Board of Governors. There has been widespread outrage over the BOG's lack of transparency and Woodsworth's $700,000 severance package—particularly in the wake of the 2007 departure of president Claude Lajeunesse at a cost of over $1M. Concordia has now joined the ranks of other Canadian universities calling for reviews of governance.[5]

Woodsworth described the alliance as "Concordia University's commitment to the wider community."

In my opening remarks, I outlined my ideas for "The Neighbourhood Theatre" (TNT). I spoke of a theatre which, in the spirit of Molière, would use comedy to explore tensions between good and bad, right and wrong, wisdom and folly—an intimate theatre expressing the hopes, dreams, fears and anxieties of local residents. I asked those present what they liked about where they lived? What they would want to change? And what, if anything, they considered "sacred" about their neighbourhoods? To facilitate the conversation, moderator Jimmy Ung and I asked participants to assemble in small groups based on where they lived—the Plateau, the Village, the McGill Ghetto, the South Shore, Mile End, Hochelaga-East, Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, the West Island. Where groups were too small, we amalgamated—no one protested.

The groups began with introductions, explored common ground, then moved on to speak about the quality of life in their neighbourhoods. Poverty, security, and social justice were a common concern. When we brought the groups back together, they spoke about the positive social forces that already exist in neighbourhoods—the community gardens, the artists and environmentalists engaged in creative expression, the work of social service and community organizations, the importance of individual contact, the need for an ethos of care and caring. Several spoke of their occupations—they identified as community workers, theatre and visual artists, a creative arts therapist, and a semi-retired investment banker.

I spend most of my time in and between two downtown Montreal neighbourhoods—*Quartier Concordia* where I work, and the *Gay Village* where I live. With four large universities, the CGEP Vieux Montreal, and Dawson College nearby, the combined transient and resident student population moving around in Montreal's downtown core easily exceeds 100,000. That's a lot of youth, optimism, and social energy in just a few city blocks. I like to walk this energizing corridor to and from work. As I do, I'm often preoccupied with how TNT might channel a portion of this energy in support of Ramachandra Guha's rhetorical strategy of hope:

> The world over, modern democratic politics has been marked by two rather opposed rhetorical styles. The first appeals to hope, to popular aspirations for economic prosperity and social peace. The second appeals to fear [. . .] about being worsted or swamped by one's historic enemies.[6]

Derek Paget coined the term "Verbatim Theatre" in 1987 to describe a form of documentary theatre constructed "verbatim" from oral history interviews. As Paget observes, documentary theatre "tends to come to the fore in troubled times" (173). Our present troubles include the global maelstrom caused by a rapidly accelerating *crisis of legitimacy*[7] fueled by social inequity, mounting evidence of governmental collusion in corporate corruption, and a vertically organized mainstream media that increasingly attempts to pass off corporate advertisements and neoliberal propaganda as *News*. For their part, verbatim and documentary theatre forms speak to legitimacy through adherence to their defining characteristics—authenticated personal interviews, direct experience, and documented research. The emerging field of oral history and performance—in common with community-engaged theatre—adds to this a range of ethical considerations concerned with notions of ownership and "truth" in public discourse, representation, transparency, accountability, and cultural democracy as an expression of public shared authority.

At this point, TNT is still little more than a concept; however, the work of the Life Stories project suggests that the social and political potential of oral history and performance to address social rupture has much to contribute to healthy neighbourhoods. Locally based projects offer a corrective to globalized media and value systems that denigrate local knowledge and culture as having limited commercial value. As Lorne Shirinian points out, we have a profound and basic need to tell our stories to each other. Shirinian is an academic, poet, activist, and playwright whose life's work has focused on the Armenian Genocide and its aftermath. Shirinian reminds us that stories play a crucial role in converting private history into public knowledge—that even pain and grief can be tolerated and made meaningful as stories.

Historian, writer, playwright, and activist Henry Greenspan has spent over twenty years interviewing and re-interviewing Holocaust survivors. Greenspan believes that we must break down ritualized distinctions between tellers and listeners in order to become "partners in conversation." Greenspan believes this is an essential part of socio-political action to curb genocide. Michael Killburn is looking at oral history and performance as a space where the disjointed flashbacks and fractured narratives common to post-traumatic stress disorder may be re-integrated into a coherent narrative. The Life Stories project approach is to situate difficult stories within the context of *entire* life stories, precisely so that stories of trauma not be sensationalized and otherwise isolated.

We live in an age of social media where the profane, the mundane, and sometimes perhaps even the exalted details of life are shared on Facebook, wall-papered, posted, blogged, twittered, and tweeted. We are immersed in an expanding audience interested in exploring interactive approaches to narrative construction. The social and political promise of contributing to raising the creative and aesthetic *stakes* of this enterprise lies in developing public competencies in reading media and creating message. It's public art exploring how the stories we are told *and* the stories that we tell shape us psychologically and socially. It's about how the performance of art and the performance of life create the "metaphors we live by."[8] It's about reaching towards Charles Taylor's concept of a "modern social imaginary"—particularly as it applies to "the lived practices in which people engage one another and develop a self understanding of their collective life" (Crocker).

We are immersed in an expanding audience interested in exploring interactive approaches to narrative construction.

If it's going to be sustainable, TNT will have to produce good theatre that engages deeply with the humanity of our neighbourhood partners. It will also have to avoid what Sandeep Bhagwati characterizes as the major liability of "confessional drama"—that is, playing into Richard Sennett's ideas of the "tyranny of intimacy," where privileging the "the social veracity of 'authentic' feelings of 'real' people" can weaken intellectual analysis and political awareness. We will get "up close and personal" with a wide range of people and experience that we will directly represent through art. We will need to develop actors whose skills include socio-political analysis *and* the ability to become

"partners in conversation." We will need to hold, move, and delight our local audiences. We will need to be funny and we will need to be sexy. It's probably best that we avoid the missionary position.

NOTES

1 A French-language version of this piece is scheduled to appear in *Cahiers de théâtre Jeu* 139 (June 2011).
2 Actor and director James Forsyth, in Montreal on sabbatical research leave from Brandon University, is also working with the class.
3 The Life Stories project is a five-year, $1M SSHRC Funded, Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) project. Steven High is the PI. For more information visit www.lifestoriesmontreal.ca
4 See Herland. The conversations took place on November 3rd and 25th.
5 Oral historian Michael Frisch popularized the term "Shared Authority" in 1990 to describe the dual authority of the oral history interview—the expert authority of the interviewer and the experiential authority of the interviewee.
6 The February *CAUT Bulletin* reports on calls for a review of governance at the University of Toronto, and controversies over administrative procedures at the University of British Columbia, the University of Alberta, and the University of Saskatchewan.
7 From Ramachandra Guha's *India After Gandhi*. Qtd. in Salutin.
8 Jürgen Habermas brought this concept to the fore in his 1975 work, *Legitimation Crisis*.
9 Cognitive linguist George Lakoff, cited in Killburn.

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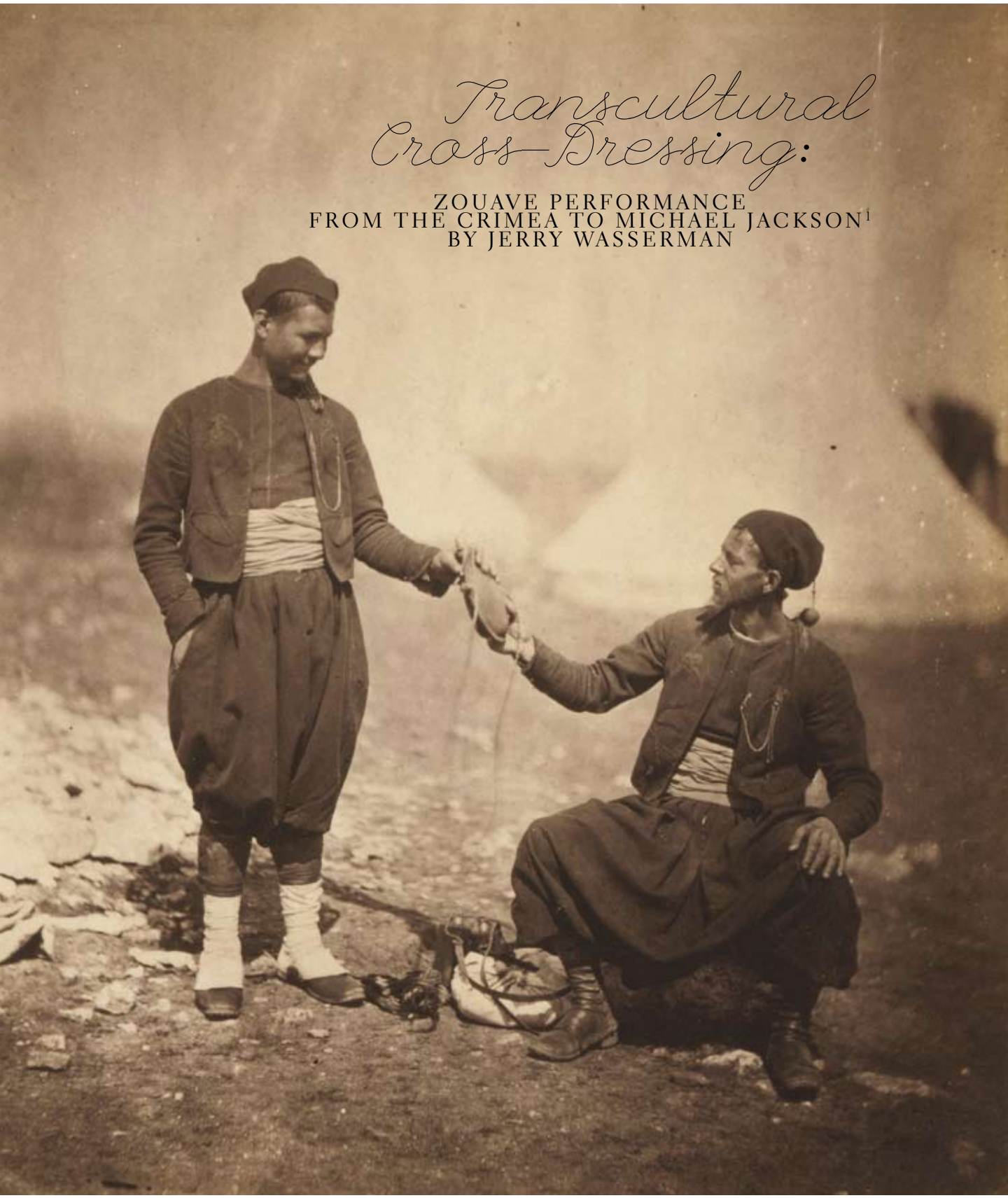
Transcultural Cross-Dressing:

ZOUAVE PERFORMANCE FROM THE CRIMEA TO MICHAEL JACKSON[1]

BY JERRY WASSERMAN



COURTESY OF US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION. *TWO ZOUAVES*, 1855. PHOTOGRAPH BY ROGER FENTON.

A few years ago, I stumbled on a reference to a short-lived troupe of American and Canadian Aboriginal performers called Captain MacDonald's Trained Indians (Evans 123-26). Organized by San Francisco drillmaster Captain Charles MacDonald at the conclusion of the California Indian wars, ostensibly to prove that Native people could in fact be "trained" (specifically to serve the United States military), the company and its particular brand of entertainment were a curious cultural hybrid. Appearing before large audiences in San Francisco, Victoria, New York, London, and Paris between 1874 and 1877, MacDonald's troupe carried out elaborate, precise martial exercises and gymnastic maneuvers, including high speed marching and drilling with muskets and bayonets, sometimes blindfolded. Adding to the spectacle, and to the semiotic complexity of the show, these Comanche, Pawnee, Sioux, Tsimshian, and Haida men and women performed their Euro-American military drills in exotic North African costume.

Both the style of drill and the uniforms of MacDonald's Aboriginal performers were derivations of the "Zouave," a once-familiar term now fallen into obscurity in theatrical circles, like MacDonald's company itself. Zouave signified a type of soldier and a military style. In Canada the term is primarily associated with the Papal Zouaves, a Catholic militia with many volunteers from francophone Quebec that defended the Pope in battles against Garibaldi's Italian nationalists between 1868 and 1870. But variations of the Zouave drill and its characteristic costume were also a frequent feature of what historian Joy Casson calls the "polymorphous performativity" of late nineteenth-century popular entertainment (35). Zouave performance maintained a precarious existence in twentieth-century films, and theatrical traces of the Zouave drill survive in Michael Jackson's final rehearsals.

The fascinating history of Zouave performance—virtually ignored by theatre historians—reveals Euro-American military gestures Orientalized across an array of raced and gendered bodies. Orientalism, Edward Said argued, "was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, 'us') and the strange (the Orient, the East, 'them')" (43). What then were the attractions of this curious hybrid constructed from the combination of familiar Western military masculinities and strange Orientalist costuming? What might Zouave performance have signified to Western audiences when the bodies appearing before them wielding weaponry in Eastern uniform were Aboriginal or African American or female? How might it have been understood by the performers themselves? "The history of this popular form of transnational cross-dressing," in both its military and theatrical modes, "reveals the complex dimensions of its intercultural pageantry" (Marr 292).

Going Zou Zou

During the French colonization of North Africa in the 1830s, the fierce Algerian fighters of the Zouaoua tribe—the "Zouaves," the French called them—were integrated into French army regiments. By the 1840s, the native fighters were entirely replaced by French troops that retained the name Zouaves. Both the original Zouaves and their French impersonators were known for their fighting style as well as their vividly coloured, exotic uniforms: baggy pantaloons with leggings, sashed waist, embroidered jacket, and fez or turban. In this period of intense romantic Orientalism, when writers and painters like Byron, Hugo, Delacroix, and Gérôme were constructing a fantastic, exotic, heroic, sensual, violent, voluptuous Orient, the colourful Zou Zous, as they came to be nicknamed, were fetishized as a swashbuckling military elite. An American Civil War General called them "the beau-ideal of a soldier" (Smith 3).

The photogenic Zouaves gained international attention in the Crimean War of 1854-1856, the first war to be photographed. Reports of their fearlessness in battle were re-inforced in *The Illustrated London News* by photographer Roger Fenton's shots of French Zouave soldiers in casual repose. Fenton's photographic self-portraits in Zouave uniform indicated the theatrical appeal of Zouave iconography. In 1855, British adventurer Richard Burton also published his illustrated memoir detailing his risky pilgrimage to the holiest cities of Islam, dressed in Arabic disguise. Burton's *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah* made him a celebrity, underlining the allure of Orientalist cross-dress.

In 1859, after *Atlantic Monthly* magazine published a series of flattering articles about the French Zouaves, Chicago drillmaster Elmer E. Ellsworth created the first American Zouave militia, the United States Zouave Cadets. He dressed his company in a variation of the Zouave uniform and trained them in a series of elaborate, high-speed maneuvers, including "The Lightning Drill" with musket and bayonet. Media-savvy Ellsworth publicly challenged any militia in the United States or Canada to compete against his Zouaves in a drill contest. Subsequently playing to audiences in the hundreds of thousands on a twenty-city exhibition tour, they sparked a Zouave craze across the United States on the eve of the Civil War. More than fifty Zouave regiments subsequently formed in both the Union and Confederate armies, and many fought with distinction. Google "Zouave" today and you'll find numerous Civil War Zouave re-enactment groups, vividly illustrating the qualities shared by military and theatrical culture (see Filewod).[2]

Those shared qualities were evident in the first company to tour the Zouave drill as theatrical entertainment. Claiming to be French Zouave soldiers-turned-performers who had fought in the Crimea and "instituted a theatre upon the battle field at Inkerman," they played in theatres from New York to New Orleans in 1860-1861. Restaging key Crimean War battles and presenting "popular and Patriotic songs and grand Military Spectacular scenes […] Vaudevilles, Opera Bouffes, Operettas, Military Drill" ("To the Citizens"), along with the "Bayonet Exercise and Fencing With the Bayonet!" ("Theatre"), they set the template for Zouave performance to come. Their act occupied a heterotopian theatrical space able to encompass almost anything.

Zouave fighters themselves seemed an ambiguous agglomeration of contradictory qualities and mutable identities. "[T]heir deeds of glory and devilment go side by side," *Harper's* magazine declared ("The Zou Zou"). Coppens' First Louisiana Zouaves, the most famous—and infamous—Confederate Zouave unit, were considered "the best dressed, best drilled, and best disciplined troops" and at the same time "one of the wildest units around […] the most lawless of all commands," prone to "drunken spree[s] of looting, robbing, and harassing […] civilians" (1st Louisiana). A newspaper cartoon of a stage performance by MacDonald's non-Aboriginal Zouave company in San Francisco is captioned "Capt. McDonald and His Zoo-Zoo Hoodlums" (*Thistleton's Jolly Giant*, 8 June 1873). "By investing themselves in clothes that signified a transgressive expression in gendered, political, and religious fields of representation and performance," historian Timothy Marr argues, "the Zouave soldier […] testified in powerful ways to warfare's disruption of conventional morality" (289). Disciplined, precise, and expert in the group dynamic that military drill requires, the Zouaves were also marked by the transgressive unpredictability that makes for good theatre.

The array of expressive possibilities for theatrical "Zouaverie" also derived from the semiotic variability of the Zouave costume. When the exotic ethnic dress of what Thomas S. Abler calls "hinterland warriors" like the Algerian Zouaouas was adopted first by Western armies, then by Western performers, the contradictory stereotypes associated with those warriors ("noble savage"/"merciless savage") remained for a time metonymically attached to the uniform (6). By the 1860s, the bravery, athleticism and combat ability of the Zouave soldier were sufficiently well established for the uniform to have triggered in spectators mostly positive associations. Contemporary Orientalist paintings also valorized the Eastern warrior as "a masculine ideal," a model for "the active, powerful, dominant Western male" (Mackenzie 58). Yet Said's notion of Orientalism suggests that Western spectators were conditioned to read cultural inferiority and colonial abjection in the Eastern costume; the Western soldier's or performer's cultural cross-dressing in the Zouave uniform would simply have represented "an eloquent distillation of the Western Orientalist's desire for power over the Orient" (Roberts 70). Adding to the mutable meanings of the Zouave costume were the tensions between its casual

© COURTESY OF MCCORD MUSEUM OF CANADIAN HISTORY, MONTREAL, ID # I-34891.1. / *ALFRED LAROQUE, PAPAL ZOUAVE, MONTREAL, QC, 1868.* PHOTOGRAPH BY WILLIAM NOTMAN.

© LEFEVRE FINE ART LTD., LONDON/ THE BRIDGEMAN ART LIBRARY / VINCENT VAN GOGH, *ZOUAVE MILLIET SEATED (AKA THE SEATED ZOUAVE)*, OIL ON CANVAS, 1888. PRIVATE COLLECTION.

individualism—baggy trousers and a wide variety of colours and styles—and the disciplined, regimented choreographies of the military drill. The very term "uniform," a key to military discipline, embodies the Zouave paradox. Very little uniformity marked the multitude of Zouave styles worn sometimes even within the same regiment.

Race, Gender, and Zouave Performance

As the Zouave craze took hold, various ethnic militia adopted the Zouave name and style, influencing in turn the formation of racially distinct Zouave performance troupes. Native American units such as the Junaluska Zouaves[3] —North Carolina Cherokees who fought for the Confederate Army—might have provided a model, a decade later, for Captain MacDonald's Trained Indians, whose raison d'être was ultimately to provide crack Native troops for the American Army. They would be both a troop and a troupe, their training both military and theatrical. As for the transgressive look of their cross-cultural North African dress: "that crossdressing disrupts stable social identities," Anne McClintock points out, "does not guarantee the subversion of gender, race or class power" (67). By having his Native performers submit to the discipline of Western military drill while garbed in the costume of a defeated Eastern people, MacDonald may have intended to signify their status as colonial subjects twice over.

The post-Civil War era saw the formation of fully armed and uniformed African American militia units, whose public drills and parades expressed racial pride and resistance to white harassment (White and White 153-54). Some of those units were Zouaves,[4] perhaps inspired by the dark-skinned North African Zouave troops, known as Turcos, whose continued existence and fighting prowess was celebrated by African American commentators of the era (Marr 293-94).

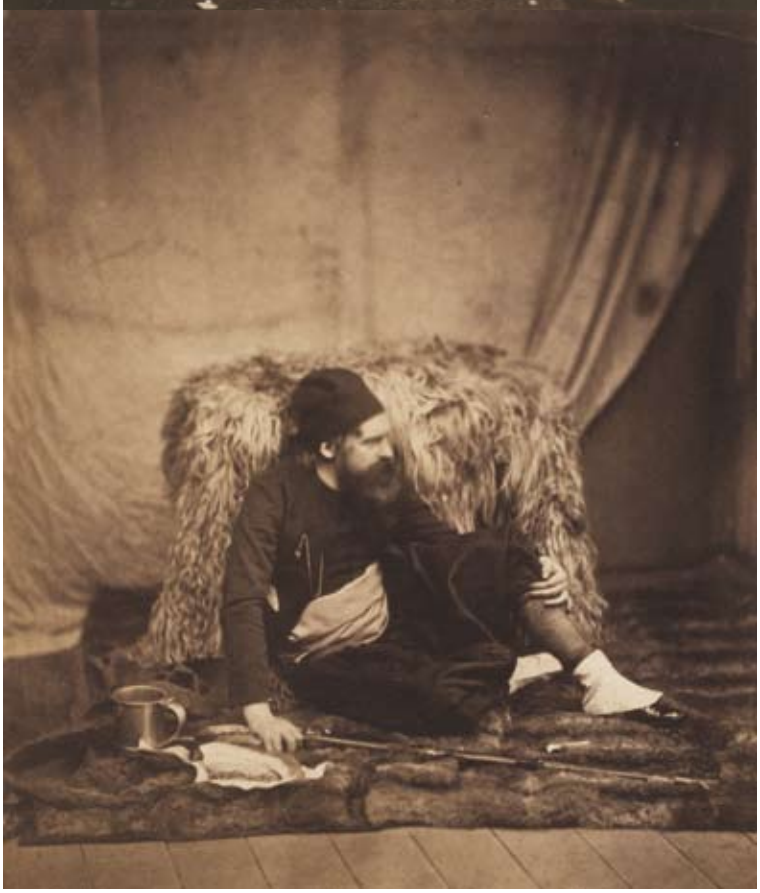
But nineteenth century American racial politics pretty much guaranteed that, on stage, black Zouaves would be blackface Zouaves. Both the theatrical and critical vocabulary of Zouave performance was inflected by the omnipresence of minstrelsy. Even Ellsworth's white Zouave Cadets, performing at New York's Academy of Music in 1860, opened with "a venerable colored individual" whose "deprecating bows [elicited] derisive laughter." The *New York Times* report described how, later in the show, "fixing bayonets quick as a flash, [the Cadets] wheeled around and turned around, and almost jumped Jim Crow …" ("The Zouaves").

So it shouldn't be surprising that many minstrel companies incorporated the Zouave drill in their programs. More often than not, these were African American blackface minstrels. An 1897 poster for Primrose & West's Big Minstrels features their Great Zouave Parade, with dozens of performers in full Zouave costume and weaponry. Other all-black minstrel troupes such as Haverly's Genuine Colored Minstrels and Callendar's Colored Minstrels also performed the Zouave drill. An 1882 poster for Haverly's Minstrels advertising "The Coonville Guards Review" drips with racism, but in smaller print below it promises "Sergeant Wm. Simms in his Lightning Zouave Drill, Escorted by Haverly's Brass Band, Terminating with a Grand Musical Tableaux!" (Southern 12). Along with the self-burlesquing that was part of every minstrel show, African Americans in the Zouave drill got to perform competency at a very high level in a spectacular form of armed, athletic masculinism. Sgt. Simms also performed with Callendar's Minstrels in a program that promised a dress parade of African Zouaves, a grand drill and the lightning bayonet exercise (Winter 235). When the Callendar troupe played London, a reviewer wrote, "The drill of the small army of Zouaves is perhaps the best thing of the kind that we have seen in this country" (*The Entr'acte*, 19 April 1884).

As well as crossing racial and ethnic barriers, Zouave performance blurred gender lines. As early as 1864, the Carter Zouave Troupe, consisting of twenty girls under the age of 13, included in its act "The Celebrated Zouave Drill." The company's illustrated poster suggests that these girls crossdressed in uniforms identical to the (adult) male Zouave costume and marched with similar muskets and bayonets.[5] The Zouave costume itself was androgynous, transgendered in the form of pantaloons that resembled bloomers, so-called "Turkish trousers," which had been introduced as liberating clothing for American women in the 1850s (Garber 314).

The Zouave drill also offered women equal opportunity to showcase their athleticism. In 1902, the *New York Times* reviewed Les Belles Zouaves, "a company of 16 female cadets in a series of military evolutions, during which they scale a mimic fort 20 feet high in the short time of 22 seconds" (16 March 1902). Such wall-scaling was the spectacular grand finale of the famous Aurora Zouaves, a male drill team that toured with Buffalo Bill's Wild West from 1897-1902, at that time the most popular show in the world (Russell 381).

Female Zouaves on North American stages were always culturally cross-dressed but not always cross-gendered. The original French Zouaves included women, called *vivandières*, who had their own distinctive uniform, travelled with the men, supplied them with food and drink, and sometimes fought alongside them. Many Civil War Zouave units included vivandières,[6] and the character frequently appeared in nineteenth-century costume dramas. Popular actress, dancer, and tightrope walker Marietta Ravel toured in the French military drama *Jartine, the Pride of the 14th*, doubling as a vivandière and a Zouave soldier. When she took *Jartine* to Halifax, she was reported to have performed "her celebrated lightning Zouave Drill […] with a skill and grace that any soldier might have envied" (*Halifax Evening Reporter*, 7 June 1872).



COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION. / *VIVANDIÈRE*, 1855. A FRENCH ZOUAVE *CANTINIÈRE* IN THE CRIMEA. PHOTOGRAPH BY ROGER FENTON.

COURTESY OF US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION. / *A ZOUAVE*, 1855. PHOTOGRAPH BY ROGER FENTON. ONE OF AT LEAST THREE PHOTOGRAPHIC SELF-PORTRAITS OF FENTON IN ZOUAVE GUISE.

Zouaves were everywhere in the polymorphous world of North American popular entertainment between the Civil War and the First World War. Even after the rise of cinema and the demise of live touring, the Zouave drill remained familiar enough to be burlesqued. The best record of what live Zouave theatrical performance must have looked like can be found in Buster Keaton's 1921 silent short, *The Playhouse*. The film takes place in a variety theatre, and along with a minstrel show, an animal act, and an underwater routine, Keaton stages a funny mock-Zouave drill with all its familiar elements: the distinctive costumes, formation marching, weaponry, human pyramid, and wall-scaling. (The Zouave sequence runs from 15:07 to 18:17.)

A second cinematic souvenir of the Zouave drill can be found in Danny Kaye's 1956 movie *The Court Jester*, a Pythonesque Robin Hood musical. In one scene[7] Kaye's character gets swept up in a court ritual, a quick-step version of the high-speed Zouave march, performed (as knights in armor) by the American Legion Zouaves of Jackson, Michigan, a company that appeared annually on TV's *Ed Sullivan Show* from 1954 to 1960.

Finally, consider Michael Jackson's neo-Zouave look—his androgyny and racial ambiguity, his embroidered military jackets, his iconic rolled-up pants and white socks a postmodern version of Zouave pantaloons and leggings. In his final performance, the concert tour rehearsals that comprise the 2009 movie *This Is It*, drillmaster Michael leads his male chorus in a dance number called "The Drill" (15:55-17:45). It's nothing less than a hip hop variation of the Zouave drill (sans weaponry but with distinctly neo-Fascist overtones), punctuated by a single lyric line that recalls the bad-boy Zouave soldiers, those attractive Zou Zou hoodlums in their precise formations and regimented, hyper-athletic choreographies: "Who's bad?!"[8]

The transnational Zouave drill offered late-nineteenth century North American performers and their audiences a highly entertaining form of intercultural pageantry and an opportunity to partake of Eastern exoticism in a variety of potentially liberating ways. The multiple meanings encoded in the Zouave uniform, along with the precision, athleticism, and militarism of its drill, allowed African Americans, Aboriginal Canadians and Americans, and women, dressing across culture, race, and gender, opportunities for transformative self-fashioning. Michael Jackson's Zouaverie suggests that the Zou Zou mystique may live on yet.

COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION. / POSTER FOR PRIMROSE & WEST'S BIG MINSTRELS, C.1897. THE BOTTOM FRAME FEATURES "WM. H. WEST'S GRAND PRODUCTION, *THE ZOUAVE PATROL*."

NOTES

1 Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Canadian Association for Theatre Research conference in Montreal in May 2010 and in Prague in November 2010 at the "Performance: Visual Aspects of Performance Practice" conference.
2 See, e.g., www.flickr.com/photos/mikelynaugh/4124449021/
3 See thomaslegion.net/cherokeebattalionthomaslegionofindianandhighlanders.html
4 See www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2003690775/
5 See www.railsplitter.com/sale13/onstage13.htm
6 See www.vivandiere.net
7 See www.youtube.com/watch?v=64Aiyec2czY
8 See www.youtube.com/watch?v=oBGVgPGTmAY&feature=related

It's nothing less than a hip hop variation of the Zouave drill ... punctuated by a single lyric line that recalls the bad-boy Zouave soldiers...

"Who's bad?!"

BIO

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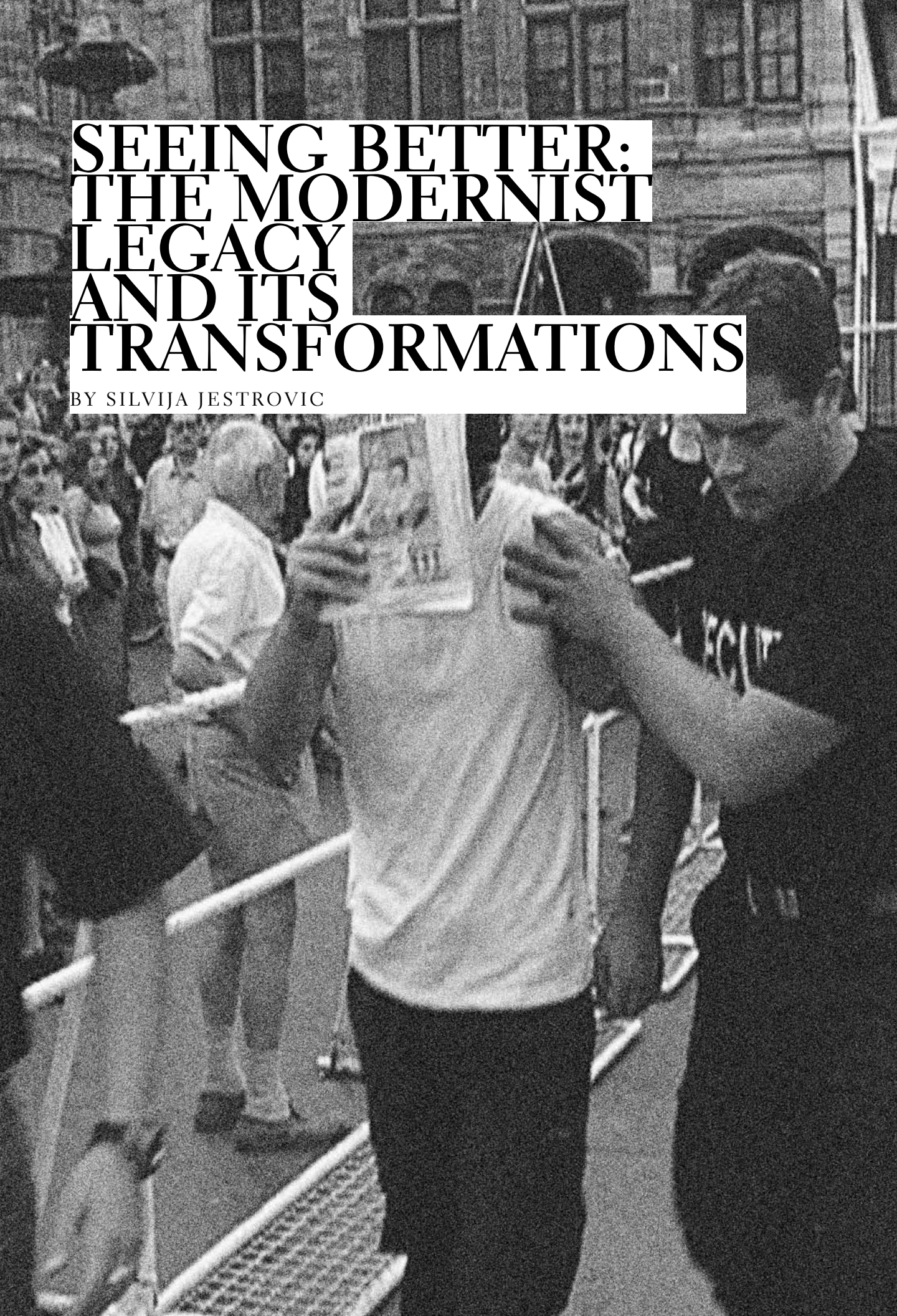
SEEING BETTER: THE MODERNIST LEGACY AND ITS TRANSFORMATIONS

BY SILVIJA JESTROVIC



In watching Harun Farocki's film *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* (1989), spectators assume that archival aerial photographs taken by American pilots in 1944 document a factory complex in Poland. It was not until 1977 that two CIA officers recognized the rows of barracks, the crematoria, and the long lines of blurry figures in the snow for what they really were—images of Auschwitz. Through a simple shift in context or a change in angle, an image can reveal itself in a surprising, sometimes horrific, new light.

Even though artistic devices and theories of estrangement can be traced throughout the history of theatre, art, and critical thought—from Aristotle and Horace to Hegel and Freud—artists of the avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s revealed this concept in its full aesthetic and political complexity, turning it into a language of the epoch. They viewed art as a reverse mimesis, and believed—as Oscar Wilde had earlier put it— that "life imitates art far more than art imitates life" (789). As a result, estrangement became a way of thinking, a means of comprehending the world, and even a lifestyle. For Russian and Italian Futurists, the Dadaists, artists such as Nikolai Evreinov, and others who advocated the concept of everyday life as art, the notion of making the familiar strange was not only an aesthetic strategy but a way of living. The art of estrangement strove to change the aesthetic conventions to correspond to a reality marked by images of the trenches of World War I, on the one side, and dreams of a new society, on the other.

STRATEGIES OF MAKING THE FAMILIAR STRANGE WEAR OUT AND, IN ORDER TO WORK, ALWAYS NEED TO BE RE-INVENTED.

Between the beginning of the twentieth-century and the mid-1930s, two major estrangement theories emerged from avant-garde art and critical thought—those of Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky and Bertolt Brecht. In 1917, Shklovsky, focusing primarily on literary examples, coined the term *ostranenie* to describe the artistic technique of making the familiar strange. *Ostranenie* is a means of counteracting one of the most deadening forces in both art and life—habitualization or automatization—that, as Shklovsky puts it, "devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war" (12).

Brecht's estrangement theory is embodied in his concept of *Verfremdung*. His version of making the familiar strange presupposes a certain ideological goal—it distances the audience from the stage work in order to enable seeing the habitual in a certain political way. Even though Brecht's concept of *Verfremdung* was not fully formulated until 1935, hints of his future theory were evident in one of his earlier plays, *The Exception and the Rule*, where he has suggested "even if it's not very strange, find it estranging/ even if it's usual, find it hard to explain" (109).

I argue that the concept of making the familiar strange was not only an integral part of the avant-garde, but also potentially one of the most important legacies of European modernism especially when the dialectics of aesthetics and politics are concerned. The notion of artistic thinking from the point of view of estrangement as both an ideological position and an artistic strategy with its aesthetic paradigms in European avant-garde becomes a palimpsest, appearing through many different contexts of multiple histories and fragmented narratives of modernism and postmodernism. I am interested here in the immediate impact of the estrangement concept in politicizing contemporary performance and in its theatrical modifications.

In his essay, emerging from the infamous expressionist debate, Brecht wrote, "Literary works cannot be taken over like factories; literary forms of expression cannot be taken over like patterns" (Taylor, 81). This assertion suggests a certain relativism of aesthetic forms and devices, which is particularly true for the concepts of making the familiar strange. Although Brecht textualized his devices—and by doing so, somewhat canonized his methodology—he pointed out here the key aspect of estrangement aesthetics and politics: that is, strategies of making the familiar strange wear out and, in order to work, always need to be re-invented.

I will examine here the workings of *Verfremdung* by looking at two contemporary performances that approach the Brechtian legacy and/or echo his estrangement practices in very different ways: the 2009 staging of Brecht's *Mother Courage* at the National Theatre in London and Christoph Schlingensief's explosive *Ausländer Raus!* (*Foreigners Out!*) performed in Vienna in 2000. As the work of Heiner Müller, who is considered to be the official successor of Brecht in Germany, shows, the only way to remain true to Brecht is by betraying his dramaturgical strategies. The examples that follow tap into this dialectics between faithfulness and betrayal, but with very different aesthetic and political results.

Analogy and Difference

The UK production of *Mother Courage* in the new translation by American playwright Tony Kushner and directed by Deborah Warrner, with Fiona Shaw in the leading role, employed all the well-known Brechtian epic devices. The stage machinery and the technicians were visible, stage-hands were helping the actors through costume changes in between scenes, and video captions were used. Gore Vidal's voice was recorded reading scene descriptions, whose outspoken anti-Americanism in the spirit of patriotic demolition of his own nation foregrounded the link to contemporary

Film stills from *FOREIGNERS OUT! / SCHLINGENSIEFS CONTAINER* (Austria 2002, Di + Written by Paul Poet, DVD / with English Subs available through Monitorpop-label).

politics. Moreover, the aim was to draw a clear political analogy between the play's anti-war approach and the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan led by Britain and the US. This link was reinforced through instances of historicization, again of a Brechtian kind. Kushner's translation occasionally uses the well-known rhetoric of "exporting peace and democracy," heard too often in the context of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and cites lines such as "This is a war for God," echoing speeches of Tony Blair and George Bush.

Deliberate anachronisms also contributed to this kind of historicization, including the sounds of modern warfare that opened the performance and the satellite dish on Mother Courage's cart at the peak of her trading success. Both the program notes and other publicity material—such as the Sky Arts documentary on the making of the show—stress the topicality of this staging of Brecht's play. In the documentary, interviews with Deborah Warner and Fiona Shaw and excerpts from the rehearsals are interspersed with news reports

on British soldiers dying in Afghanistan. Last but not least, its staging at the National Theatre placed this production within the context of politically engaged British theatre that has been struggling lately to renew its strategy and relevance, not only in relation to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, but also in facing the rise of the Right.

The poster for the show further emphasized the intended contemporary resonances of the production: against the backdrop of explosions stands Fiona Shaw, in modern clothes and with a cheeky smile holding a mobile phone camera in the direction of the onlooker. The contrast between the smiling actress and the iconography of war is ironic and *gestic*. The actress' smile is both inviting and somewhat challenging. However, the star actress adorning the poster also promises a good entertainment value to the prospective Brechtian spectator.

This is not untrue to Brecht, as in his later theoretical writing he stresses the need for theatre to be engaging and entertaining while at the same time being political and dialectical. Thus epic devices, most notably Brecht's songs providing commentary to the stage action, were coupled with spectacle and entertainment. This production's rhythm, energy, and music at times created the atmosphere of a rock concert—a culture Brecht might have even embraced, as he did boxing and cabaret, had he lived long enough to witness it.

The reviews of the show were mixed. Charles Spencer of *The Telegraph* was overtly negative: "I have no doubt that some will claim to find all this compelling and describe the production as a telling commentary on Iraq and Afghanistan. In fact, the show struck me as merely idiotic, full of sound and gimmickry, and signifying almost nothing." But Michael Billington in *The Guardian* concludes, "The good thing about Deborah Warner's revival is that it frees Brecht's play from pious reverences and releases its dynamic energy. Even if Warner's production occasionally throws the baby out with the bathwater, it presents the play as a piece of living theatre."

However, both reviews, despite Billington's assertion that this production showed Brecht's play is by no means dated from a dramaturgical and theatrical point of view, seem to question the performance's political edge. How did a production so conscious of its contemporary political relevance and so faithful to Brecht's strategies of estrangement fail to become politically thought-provoking?

The enjoyment for the spectator of this production of *Mother Courage* occurs on two main levels: the intellectual, which relates to the play's inter-theatrical links, and the sensory, which comes from its rock'n'roll energy. The pleasure of inter-theatricality, however, only comes to those equipped with knowledge of Brecht, his writing and performance methodology, and with the experience of previous stage incarnations of *Mother Courage*. Does the pleasure derive from watching how and when the epic devices are employed? Or what kind of acting choices have been made? Or how these choices pay homage to past productions or depart from them? When confronted with the dead body of her son Swiss Cheese, for instance, will Fiona Shaw's Mother Courage opt for the silent scream, quoting the legendary performance of Courage by Helene Weigel, or not? In a way, distancing here comes less from the

relationship between a topical political subject matter and epic devices and more from the aesthetic of theatrical estrangement against the backdrop of inter-theatrical links with past productions.

With or without the ammunition of a theatre scholar, however, one is drawn, emotionally and sensuously, into the stage world through music and spectacle. Nevertheless, amidst various intellectual and sensory pleasures, the question of the UK's involvement in the most recent "wars for God," for instance, remained on the level of vague allusion. The foregrounded topical aspects of the production never really became a provocation to the audience.

Why in this performance did some of the most recognizable Brechtian strategies fail to be politically provocative? The "Rehearsal Diary" notes that the creative team's research involved looking at images of war in the last 180 years. By way of analogy, *Mother Courage* became an "Everywar" paradigm and the context-specific dimensions of both the war as

VERFREMDUNG DEVICES COME ACROSS AS ORNAMENTAL FEATURES RATHER THAN INSTRUMENTAL ASPECTS OF THE CONTENT THAT WOULD ENABLE A NEW SEEING OF THE FAMILIAR.

subject matter and estrangement devices as a means of elucidating this subject matter became neutralized. Hence, *Verfremdung* devices come across as ornamental features rather than instrumental aspects of the content that would enable a new seeing of the familiar. In other words, this production of *Mother Courage* did not betray Brecht's strategies enough to foreground estrangement as a way of political thinking.

Brechtian *Verfremdung* without Brecht

My second case study does not use Brecht's text (or any pre-existing script) as a point of departure and does not even claim any specific links to Brecht, but I would argue that it makes familiar strange with very strong and wide-reaching political resonances. The work in question is Christoph Schlingensief's performance intervention, *Ausländer Raus!* (*Foreigners Out!*) (2000) staged in Wienna and commissioned by Wiener Festwochen. Schlingensief placed a group of asylum seekers in a container in the city centre. Although very little was revealed about the participants outside the context of Schlingensief's reality show, they were not actors and their immigration status was presumably real.

This project was a reaction to a series of electoral successes of Austria's far-Right Freedom Party and its leader, Joerg Haider, whose strong anti-immigration views defined his campaign for government (1999/2000). One of his electoral posters featured the overtly xenophobic term *überfremdung*, previously employed by the Nazis, to describe the country overrun with foreigners. This move towards the far Right prompted the European Union to put Austria under diplomatic sanctions as a way of voicing its outrage not only over Freedom Party's exclusionist approach, but also over what that party represents with its chequered history, which includes strong Nazi ties.

Schlingensief set up his project with a sense of political urgency to explore the ambivalence of the Austrian populace who, on the one hand, unmasked their xenophobic sentiments and cast their ballots overwhelmingly in favour of Haider, and, on the other hand, staged a wave of political protests against the Freedom Party and its anti-immigration campaign.

For one week, Schlingensief kept his asylum seekers confined in a container that represented a detention centre, but also resembled a concentration camp. It stood in the heart of the city in the Herbert-von-Karajan square in front of the *Staadsoper* making a stark contrast to the opera building's architectural grandeur. On the top of the container a huge banner proclaimed AUSLÄNDER RAUS! The last one to remain was promised a monetary prize and marriage to an Austrian citizen to get immigration papers. Biographies of the protagonists, describing them in terms of exaggerated cultural and racial stereotypes, were posted on the director's website. Schlingensief acted as a kind of MC of the event, giving provocative, sometimes contradictory speeches and engaging in debates with the public that in the course of the event grew increasingly heated, even physical, in some instances.

This performance worked out its own devices of estrangement that are radically different from Brecht's methodology, but its political resonance and impact resemble some key aspect of Brecht estrangement epistemology. Although Brecht belonged to those avant-garde directors who removed the footlights to break the fourth-wall aesthetic, he deliberately kept the demarcation line between stage artifice and life. Physical demarcation between the performance and the audience was necessary for Brecht's defamiliarization devices to work—offering a scenic synecdoche, a stage microcosm, through which the individual and the society became objects of study—so that what had previously been taken for granted became revealed in its contradictions and ambiguities.

Schlingensief's methods, however, also revealed contradictions and ambiguities destabilizing previously held attitudes and convictions, yet methodologically he worked in the opposite direction from Brecht. Schlingensief deliberately obscured the relationship between performance and reality, pushing the limits

of both. In the case of Brecht, even when the roles of subject and object were shifted, they were never blurred. Schlingensief's estrangement depended much more heavily on the process of turning the onlookers into active participants, in circumstances where the director had limited control over the unfolding of the performance.

In light of all these methodological, aesthetic, even to some degree ethical differences, how can I claim that Schlingensief's performance was Brechtian in nature? And how can I possibly argue that this performance invoked estrangement as a means of politicizing performance much more strongly than any theatre production adorned with exposed stage machinery, projections of titles and scene descriptions, and direct addresses to the audience, such as Warner's staging of *Mother Courage*?

Schlingensief's performance took Brecht's notion of the engaged and the agitated spectator to the next level—it prompted a massive and controversial public debate. He staged a kind of political morality play for the Austrian public—a genre Brecht has explored too, albeit through very different means and never on Schlingensief's scale. Brecht envisioned theatre as a boxing arena with mass audiences, loud and argumentative, in a politically charged atmosphere, but he never fully achieved this vision, not even when performing his didactic operas in boxing rings.

Schlingensief's *Foreigners Out!* fully realised the notion of boxing-ring theatre, reaching far beyond the theatre-going public and provoking responses from different social and political strata of the society. Schlingesief's different estrangement methods worked in a fashion similar to Brecht's—they destabilized previous firmly held political positions. Schlingensief's performance not only brought the issue of asylum and xenophobia centre-stage, but also revealed activism, agency, and finally ethics of representation in their contradictions and ambiguities. This was not only a matter of taking the performance outside theatre buildings, a strategy explored to a great extent decades before Schlingensief, but of reinventing devices of estrangement that could fully politicise the public.

Schlingensief defamiliarized and utilized the public space almost in a manner of Brecht's scenic synecdoche, who in the set designs often used one significant element, but most potent in meaning, as a microcosm that has a semantic capacity to stand for ambiguities and contradictions of the wider environment of his plays. One such element is the cart in *Mother Courage:* it is her business and her home, her means of survival and her burden, and it stands both for her tragedy and for her complicity in war profiting. At the very end of the play, after she has lost all her children, the only thing that remains is her cart. She pulls it with great effort and walks in circles—there is nowhere to go, but she cannot stop moving. It is possible to think of Schlingensief's container semantically, much in the same way we contemplate the *gestic* significance of the cart in Brecht's *Mother Courage*. Both the cart and the container go back to the politics and economies of war, as well to its victims: ordinary people far removed from centres of power where decisions have been made in their names.

Schlingensief political attitude and estrangement devices are closer to Brecht's than to the performance practices of neo–avant-garde and postmodernism. Likewise, the legacy of Brechtian estrangement emerged most strongly where it was perhaps least expected—in Schlingensief's new, radical, political theatre rather than in actual stagings of Brecht. In Warner's version of *Mother Courage*, ornamental epic devices become inter-theatrical references rather than a politicised aesthetic. But Schlingesief managed to prove the full vitality and urgency of estrangement strategies, and he did this not even through betrayal of Brecht, but through radical reinvention of *Verfremdung* as a device of political performance—a kind of *Verfremdung* without Brecht. The value of this endeavour is neither aesthetic nor dialectical but political, not only in its subject matter but in pointing to both the possibility and the need to constantly extend and push the limits of the political capacity of performance.

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BIO

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What Consolation? INCENDIES *on stage and screen*

BY ERIN HURLEY

© Cylla von Tiedemann
Richard Rose's Tarragon Theatre production at Centaur Theatre.
Sophie Goulet, Alex Poch-Goldin, Sergio Di Zio, Alon Nashman, David Fox, Nicola Lipman, Kelli Fox, Valerie Buhagiar, Janick Hebert.

When Denis Villeneuve's film, *Incendies*, took Montreal cinemas by storm this past summer, I only reluctantly entered the movie theatre at Montreal's former hockey temple, the Forum. I'd seen the play on which the film is based, Wajdi Mouawad's *Incendies*, three times already. First was in 2006 at the Théâtre du nouveau monde (then in its second run, after its creation three years previously at the Théâtre de Quat'Sous); then as *Scorched* in 2008 at the Centaur Theatre in the Tarragon's English-language production (trans. Linda Gaboriau); and most recently in May 2010 at the Festival transamériques (FTA), where it was part of an eleven-hour marathon at the Place des Arts, sandwiched between two other plays from Mouawad's monumental series of four that he calls *Le Sang des promesses [Blood of promises]*. Each time I saw the play—twice in productions under Mouawad's direction; *Scorched* was directed by Richard Rose—I fell completely under its spell. I was loath to enter its brutal poetic reality again as a cinema-goer, uncertain about two things: first, that a film could capture the play's deeply theatrical poetics; and second that the film would be able to retain Mouawad's primary consolation in the context of horror, hate, and devastation—the creative power of words. I was both right and wrong in my fears.

Incendies is a sprawling, tragic, talky, funny, gorgeous piece of theatre whose action unfolds from the last wishes of one Nawal Marwan of Montreal to her twenty-two year-old twin children, Jeanne and Simon. She obliges them to search for relatives they did not know they had. Jeanne is to search for a brother; Simon is to find a father they had been told died a hero in the civil war that had ravaged their mother's homeland, an unnamed but only thinly veiled Lebanon. To each lost relative, the twins are to deliver a letter from their mother. Nawal, to facilitate their quest, bequeaths each a clue: to Jeanne, a khaki jacket with the number 72 on the back; to Simon, a red notebook.

HOW, I wondered
could this piece
be turned into
a film where
a chair is
generally
a chair
and a gravestone
a gravestone

Resistant heroes of an imposed quest, Jeanne and Simon reconstitute their family's history by moving ever closer to the moment of their birth—in a prison. Their mother's story as enacted onstage develops in an opposite, that is to say forward, chronological movement. We see Nawal's life unfold in three time frames: first as an adolescent she gives birth to a child who is taken away from her, which begins her life-long search for that son; then as a middle-aged activist and writer/publisher; then as a sixty year-old witness at a war crimes tribunal.

There is something so perfectly, almost ridiculously, theatrical about the piece: the delivery of letters at propitious moments (Sardou!), the search for identity (Sophocles!), the terrible drama of internecine war (Greeks again!). In each of the productions, the *mises-en-scène* likewise highlighted the work's classically "theatrical" (in the disciplinary sense of the term) nature. Rose's direction had the main characters walking literally in large circles on the sand-covered proscenium stage as they "travelled" from village to village on their respective quests. These movements visibly trace the cyclical effects of poverty, ignorance, and war on Nawal's family and, more broadly, on the region.

But this walking in circles also bodies forth a latent sense in the play that echoes Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, which Mouawad avows served as one point of inspiration for *Incendies*. That is, the sense of returning to a self and an origin which are always somehow already known yet when encountered still unbearably unexpected. In other words, we've seen this play before. When the lost brother and father are revealed to be one and the same person, a character named Nihad Harmanni, it is as though we are seeing what has been in front of us the whole time, but to which we have been blind. This blindness is of course a strategy of self-protection—the refusal to believe that something so awful could also be true. In all its parts, Mouawad's play and its productions evoke this difficult relation to truth, to what we think we know.

Each production's staging extended the theatricality of the play text. Mouawad's 2006 staging—which transpired on an almost-bare, tiled stage with tall opaque screens partitioned by mullions—capitalized on the transformative poetics of theatre. These poetics, whereby ladders became birthing chambers and trees, chairs stood in for tombstones and missing persons, and actors played multiple characters, are hopeful signs of change in the midst of a seemingly ceaseless, ever-repeating war. A chair that was an anonymous gravestone in one scene transformed through actors' use into a seat on a shared bench for a reconstructed family portrait at play's end.

For Mouawad's 2010 production, the backdrop was a sheer black curtain drawn across the rear wall of the large Théâtre Maisonneuve of the Place des Arts. It alternately covered the obvious evidence of the stage and revealed it when front-lit. Among the production's pleasures were its inventive *coups de théâtre*, including a fight between Simon and an anonymous opponent in an amateur boxing match (in which they "bled" red paint), a rain storm, and practicable, pulsating lawn sprinklers whose *tack-tack-tack* sound morphed into that of machine-gun fire, thereby linking the two stories and their separate times and places (Montreal and Lebanon; the early 2000s and the 1970s-1990s).

How, I wondered, could this piece be turned into a film, where a chair is, generally, a chair, and a gravestone a gravestone? As difficult to adapt as its evident—even flaunted—theatricality is the fact of its talkiness. *Incendies* is a torrent of words and images. The play ends, fittingly, with the whole cast caught in a downpour. There are several searing *tirades* in the spirit of the French dramatic tradition as well as claims to and about identity in the Quebecois dramatic tradition of holding forth in *la langue française*. In most mainstream film, driven by action and dialogue, this would be dead time—extravagant.

Indeed, words set the fires of *Incendies*; it is a play that relies on and is about the power of words. Pierre L'Hérault suggests that this is the power to name people and their relationships, which can liberate the speaker from "une histoire de violence qui ne doit pas être vue comme l'origine de tout" [a history of violence that must not be seen as the origin of everything] (101). Speech acts of naming—such as, "Nihad is father and brother to Jeanne and Simon"—forge new identities for those named, identities that are not subsumed or determined by the violence of their origins. I understand this act as

© Yves Renaud / At Nawal's grave in Mouawad's 2006 remount at Théâtre du nouveau monde (note the chairs as headstones). Richard Thériault as Hermile Lebel, Isabelle Leblanc as Jeanne, Reda Guerinik as Simon.

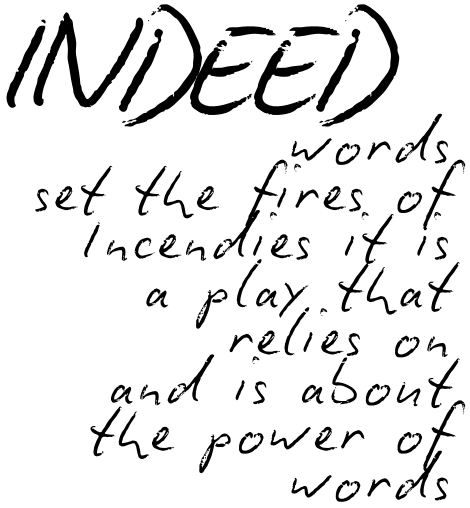
a means of preserving or even summoning humanity in conditions of violence and terror that threaten to overwhelm. But the power of words in *Incendies* is not limited to their capacity to name; rather, *Incendies* celebrates *poesis* more broadly—the poetic power (or, in theatrical parlance, the performativity) of words to make reality. Mouawad's speech acts also create beautiful and brutal images; for instance, Nawal's eye-witness account of a group of Christian soldiers massacring a bus-load of Muslim civilians sears into the imagination the vision of a flaming bus and war's twisted logic.

But Mouawad is also clearly invested in the power of words to do something about that logic and its casualties, for characters persuade and inspire one another to end the cycles of violence in which they are embroiled; indeed, Nawal's grandmother makes Nawal promise to learn to "read and write, count and speak" so that she might walk straight out of her natal village instead of remaining within its illiterate circle. Nawal in turn teaches her best friend, Sawda, how to read and write by reciting Arabic poetry; they go on to publish an underground newspaper exposing the civil war's atrocities. And, of course, the words of Nawal's will that enjoin the twins to fulfill a promise their mother could not—that is, to find their brother, her first child—catalyze the action of the play.

In Villeneuve's *Incendies*, however, he sets fire to words. It is an adaptation in the best sense; it takes on the setting, story, characters, and themes of Mouawad's play to reformulate them in the terms, interests, and capacities of its own genre. To J. Kelly Nestruck of *The Globe and Mail*, Villeneuve confided, "all the beautiful words: I had to burn them. […] My dream was to get rid of all the words—to make it a silent film—but it was too expensive. The only way to respect the play was to be totally far away from it." And so, words are few and far-between in the film, the soundtrack an infrequent and restrained companion to the action, the background noise—where it exists—mixed to a low hum. I find that Villeneuve's directorial and dramaturgical choices evince a clear sympathy with and care for the poetic power of words in which Mouawad's theatre is deeply invested—but this by deploying them only rarely, parcelling them out as gifts and curses.

Villeneuve exercises a similar restraint with respect to the filmic image. Where Mouawad's staging emphasized fullness—another kind of extravagance (twenty-two actors participated in the three-play, eleven-hour FTA event)—Villeneuve's cinematography lingers frequently over empty spaces, both interior and exterior. We pass from Nawal's drab Montreal apartment (Montreal is particularly ugly in this film—this is no promised land to which Nawal has escaped), to burned-out orphanages, to anonymous hotel rooms. Unhurried long shots capture the sun-baked, hillside villages, none of which seems populated; one particularly patient stationary shot has us wait a good thirty seconds for a bus to come into view around the curve of a dusty road. The most widely circulated still from the film that also graces its poster—Nawal in profile, kneeling about a hundred metres in front of a bus engulfed by flames—is actually unrepresentative of the film's "look" as a whole; while the poster features colour and movement, the film's overall palette is more chiaroscuro than fiery.

In his brief *avant-propos* to the new edition of *Incendies*, published in 2009, Mouawad describes the theatre as "un lieu de consolation impitoyable" [a scene of ruthless consolation]. Its ruthlessness lies in its revelation of horrible truths, its engagement with harsh and complex realities. The story of *Incendies* is partly inspired by the true story of Souha Béchara, a Lebanese woman who joined the resistance to Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon and was imprisoned from 1988 to 1998 for the attempted assassination of a militia leader in charge of the region.



© Yves Renaud / Théâtre du nouveau monde: final scene of the play at Nawal's grave. Nihad (Éric Bernier), Nawal's nurse (Gérald Gagnon), Sawda (Marie-Claude Langlois), Nawal at 14 (Isabelle Roy), Nawal at 60 (Andrée Lachappelle), Nawal at 35 (Annick Bergeron), Jeanne (Isabelle Leblanc), Simon (Reda Guerinik), Hermile Lebel (Richard Thériault).

Nawal commits a similar act of resistance that lands her in the prison where she is repeatedly raped by a torturer who turns out to be her first child, Nihad. The doubled ties of kinship that bind the story's main characters in knots of love and hate, joy and shame, hope and dread—Nawal as mother/victim to Nihad son/torturer; Nihad as brother/father to siblings/children Jeanne and Simon—constitute the most unflinching depiction of reality's awful complexity. These doubles are all "twos" that are also "ones"; each character instantiates the binary calculus of this family and this region—where one plus one may look like two (two people, two sides) but actually equals one. These doubles-that-are-not telegraph too a truth about war: that it is always internecine.

© André Turpin/Film *Incendies*, courtesy microscope. Lubna Azabal, winner of the Genie and Jutra best actress awards for her role as Nawal.

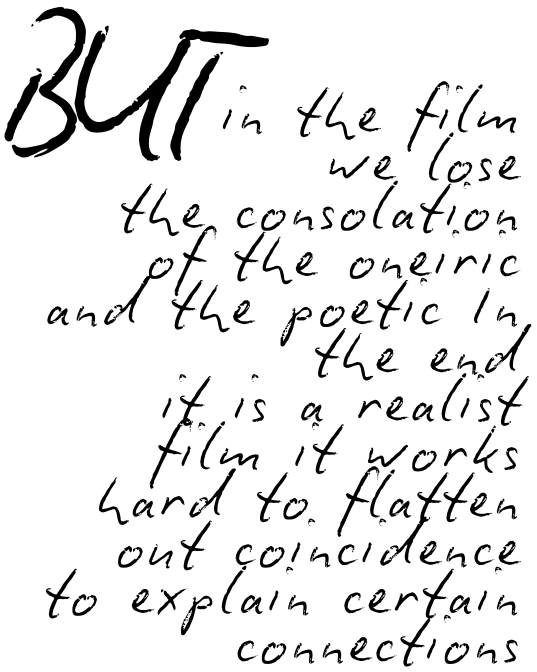
A similar ruthlessness with respect to truth-telling marks Villeneuve's adaptation; he creates a sense that the realities lived by Nawal and its truths as uncovered by her children are loud, painful to the ear. Thus, Jeanne's visit to her mother's natal village, where she takes tea with a group of town-women, devolves into a cacophony of strident female voices berating Nawal in Arabic, a language Jeanne does not understand. Nawal, crossing the border of her country to the war-torn "South" in search of her son, walks from the silence on its secure Northern side to the desperate and chaotic sounds of refugees fleeing their homes. Over and over in the film, characters emerge from silence into sound—through quiet tunnels into busy city streets, from under the water of swimming pools to the surface sounds of splashing and laughter—a trope reinforcing the idea that this family is "breaking the silence" about their history.

Mouawad and Villeneuve's consolations, however, strike me as somewhat different. They both depict the consolation of being together as a family, as a people. The play as staged by Mouawad closed with the entire cast sitting on chairs under a large tarp in a downpour; Nihad was the last to slip in under its protection. For its part, the film closes with Nihad at his mother/victim's grave; his back is to the camera and we can read the words of her epitaph, words that identify the person he called in prison "Whore number 72" as his mother, Nawal Marwan.

But in the film we lose the consolation of the oneiric and the poetic. In the end it is a realist film; it works hard to flatten out coincidence, to explain certain connections. For instance, Villeneuve inserts a scene showing how Simon, accompanied by the notary Hermile Lebel, executor of Nawal's will, meets with an important and secretive militia leader who holds the key to his brother's identity. Villeneuve also seems to put greater stock in the kind of history that is recorded and filed. His notary, Lebel (Rémy Girard), is upstanding, serious, yet kind, a contrast to Mouawad's Lebel, beautifully played by Richard Thériault, who is the comic relief in the play. Villeneuve's Lebel is joined by a Lebanese counterpart, Notary Maddad, whose records yield the name of Nawal's first son. The film lacks the kind of contrapuntal voices in the form of different tones and the role of chance in relation to destiny of the play. This imbued the latter with both its richness of texture and its call to assume a more complicated yet ultimately more humane or yielding view of what we call "reality" or "fact."

Villeneuve's film also highlights causality, and this most clearly, perhaps, with respect to Nihad. In the play, Nihad has clearly gone mad from war. In the TNM remount, played by Éric Bernier, he first appears on stage in a perversely enthralling virtuosic turn—holding a long gun, firing at off-stage pedestrians, and singing along to Supertramp's "The Logical Song." The irony of the song title gets thicker as Nihad's actions (killing a photographer; pretending he is being interviewed about his job as a sniper like a celebrity on television) demonstrate just how completely divorced he is from reality. In the movie, however, Nihad, like Lebel, is played straight. The film opens with a scene of a group of boys of between five and ten years old having their heads shaved by soldiers. The camera focuses on one boy in particular who has three dots tattooed on the back of his heel; this is the mark that will allow his mother, Nawal, to recognize him as her first-born later on.

Mouawad and Villeneuve's different treatments of Nihad and the means by which Nawal comes to recognize him highlight again the directors' different consolations. Villeneuve's Nihad is introduced first as a casualty of war who then comes to incarnate first the randomness and then the casualness of war's



violence. Here another cycle of violence is intimated: the orphan becomes child soldier becomes sniper becomes torturer—and then orphan again at film's end. Villeneuve puts the mark of Nihad's belonging on the body whereas Mouawad's mark of belonging is a clown-nose given Nihad by his birth-mother. Thus, instead of a physical sign of identity—an identity literally written on the body—Mouawad's Nihad is furnished with an expressly poetic or artistic sign of identity, one that calls for *interpretation* as much as it does for recognition.

These differences, necessary to Villeneuve's medium, illuminate most clearly, I think, the roles Mouawad understands the *poesis* of words and the performativity of theatre to play in the face of a brutal, all-too-present, ever-repeating reality. In his theatre of ruthless consolation, words not only reveal but also perform. For the notary and executor of Nawal's will, Hermile Lebel, "Death is never the end of the story" because, of course, a last will and testament is in itself a speech act that solicits more story. For Nawal, one's birth is never the beginning of the story. Rather, as she writes to the twins in her final letter, whose words close the play, their story begins with Nawal writing her grandmother's name on her tomb. This is in keeping with Nawal's promise to learn to "read and write, count and speak," to counter her family's history of illiteracy, misunderstanding, and anger—a set of problems that beset the larger "family" of the region. "[V]otre histoire, son origine, / Remonte au jour où une jeune fille / Revint à son village natal pour y graver le nom de sa grand-mère Nazira sur sa tombe" (92). Thus, their story begins with a word—a name—and a promise kept.

BIO

Erin Hurley TEACHES AT MCGILL UNIVERSITY AND IS THE AUTHOR OF *NATIONAL PERFORMANCE: REPRESENTING QUEBEC FROM EXPO 67 TO CÉLINE DION* (UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS, 2011) AND *THEATRE AND FEELING* (PALGRAVE, 2010). HER CURRENT RESEARCH FOCUSES ON THE AUTOMATIC IN CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE.

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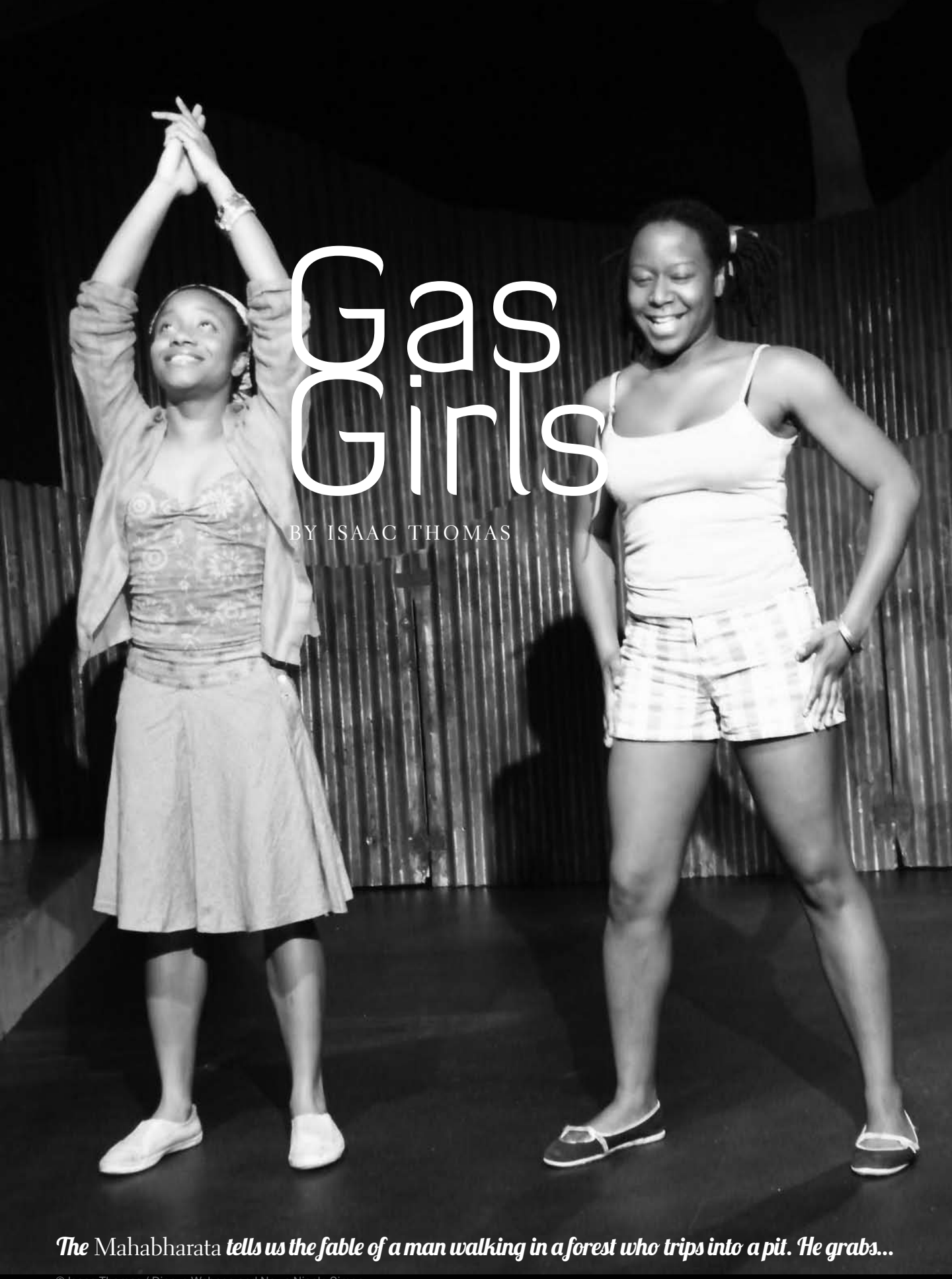
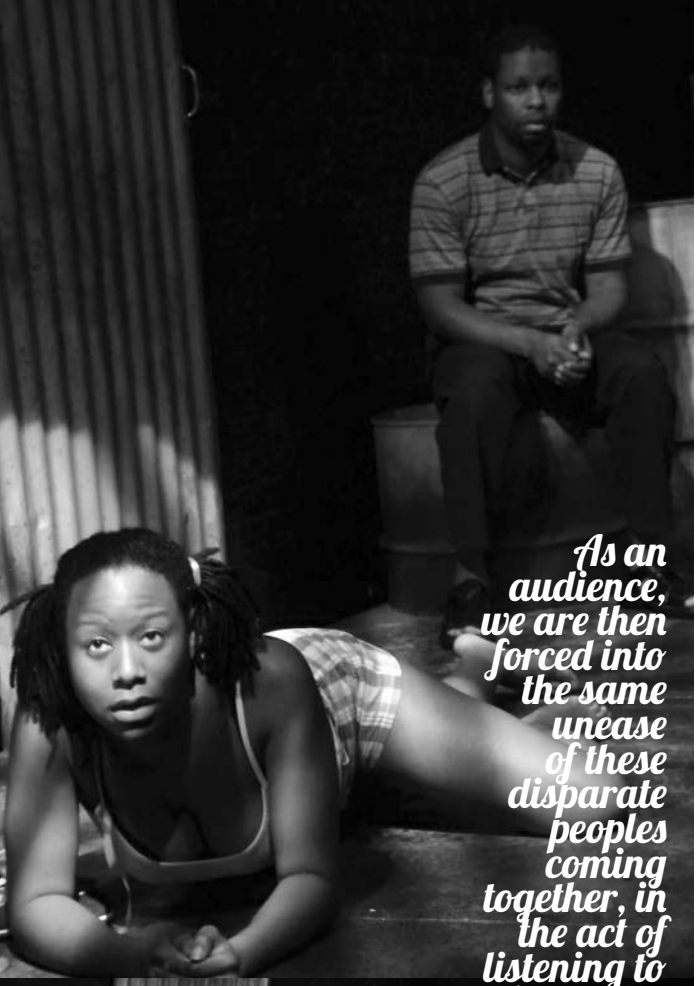


Gas Girls

BY ISAAC THOMAS

The Mahabharata *tells us the fable of a man walking in a forest who trips into a pit. He grabs...*



As an audience, we are then forced into the same unease of these disparate peoples coming together, in the act of listening to this cobbled together language.

a thin tree root to stop himself from falling down. Below him is a trapped, hungry tiger reaching up to claw the man down, next to him is a honey-laden beehive swarming with angry forest bees, and to top it all off the root he is holding is shifting and cracking under the strain of his weight. Very carefully, trying not to dislodge the root, the man stretches one hand out to catch a drop of honey.

It is this outrageously optimistic but so very human hope that we find in Donna-Michelle St. Bernard's *Gas Girls*. It was produced at Theatre Passe Muraille's Backspace in November 2009, directed and dramaturged by Philip Adams.

The gas girls of the title are Gigi and Lola, young women at a highway truck stop in Zimbabwe. They sell sex to truckers and are paid in gas. They then sell the gas for cash. Gigi is the wiser and more experienced prostitute, who mentors Lola. They sell their gas to Chickn, who is possibly Lola's elder brother. Chickn is courting Gigi. Gigi is also looking after an older sick relative. Mr. Man is a trucker who periodically has sex with both Gigi and Lola. Mr. Man rapes Gigi and then does not pay her. She attempts to revenge herself by setting him on fire. She does not succeed and Mr. Man kills her. Chickn is then seen counting money as Mr. Man drives off with Lola.

* * *

Africa is scored by about nine transnational highways, or road corridors as they are more commonly called. These road corridors are considered the arteries of goods and services through the continent. In reality they are also arteries of disease. Truckers with disposable cash travel the roads. They have sex with numerous women selling sex at the highway truck stops. Impoverished young women and girls gravitate towards the truck stops as a place where money can be made relatively swiftly. Inevitably, both the truckers and the women are infected at these truck stops. The truckers continue to travel across the highways spreading infection to other women at other truck stops, and then infecting their sexual partners once they return home to their villages and cities further away from the highways, deeper inside the continent. The swift spread of AIDS has given rise to a particular phenomenon: where adults have fallen ill with the disease, grandparents then look after the adults

and the children. As the adults die there is a whole generation decimated by AIDS. As the children grow older, they will then look after their grandparents, until one or the other succumbs to the disease. This is the backdrop of *Gas Girls*.

The truck stop was initially set "somewhere in Africa," before St. Bernard finally fixed it in Zimbabwe. The truck stop is populated by truckers and migrant workers who depend upon them. This transient population could be found at any truck stop in Africa. And as such, could indeed be "somewhere in Africa," and not necessarily specific to Zimbabwe. Jackie Chau's set incorporates a stylized baobab tree on the rear wall, which echoes the bulbous top of the continent itself. The rusting metal of corrugated iron fences and oil barrels imply a decaying world. The truck stop is a world unto itself, and within this transient world, language, place/space relationships, and attendant morality are all amorphous, shaped and re-shaped by the changing population.

St. Bernard has created a patois that reflects a society of migrants who communicate with one other in a language that is not their mother tongue. She creates words that are familiar to us but uses them to mean something completely different. She upends and abbreviates syntactical structures and uses those structures with a remarkable consistency. But most importantly, she uses this minimalist language to force the audience to infer meaning and action. As an audience, we are then forced into the same unease of these disparate peoples coming together, in the act of listening to this cobbled together language. The relationships in the play are similarly undefined. Lola and Chickn may be siblings. Chickn is prostituting her, but feels a responsibility to her. So he depends upon Gigi to look after her. He trusts Gigi to teach Lola how to survive and profit at the truck stop.

The production opens with Gigi and Lola teaching each other patty cake games. In the dim light we see the two girls, whispering and laughing and dancing. Their sound floats in and out as if this is a dream-state, or a world that is constantly shifting in and out of existence. They learn each others' step, dance, and clap routines, and then adapt each routine in the same way that the truck stop assimilates and adapts every new component that enters their world.

Through the play, Gigi teaches Lola the step, dance, and clap routine for everything from cooking cassava and dealing with her first period to professional taboos. "No kissing. No cutting. No freebies. No cuddling up. No taken my man." Which translates as there are to be no demonstrations of affection, the sex is purely commercial, and never poach another girl's customer. These are the rules by which the gas girls live. The rules have been created by Gigi and translated into this particular form for Lola. They have created their own social mores and laws.

Gigi is also looking after what is described in the script as "a withered figure." This is another amorphous relation, perhaps a parent or a grandparent, perhaps in the last stages of death or disease. We don't know; we can only assume. Gigi has financial responsibility for this person and her care. We see Gigi comforting the offstage figure with her vision for the future. Gigi kneels into a harsh beam of light singing this song of hope. Gigi is suspended in a corridor of light, which on the one hand illuminates her and on the other traps her. In Gigi's world loyalty and kinship still count for something even if it traps her and holds her hostage at the truck stop.

> **Gigi**: Sometime you gonna come out of bed. Sometime I gonna make babies for you to see and teach your stories. Sometime we gonna fish that river. Fish gonna come back. *(opens a bottle)* You gonna drink this water, yeah? Gonna wash all the dust, your throat, feel good and clean. Sometime, we gonna have trees, like before. Remember? Gonna push their roots under, so far, turn up all the earth, shaken dem little things live down there. Tree got a nice few years, gonna put down yams, keep dem roots company. Everything liven need some company, yeah? Nice fat yam, breaken open and the sun come out of dem. Never mind tired. Gonna be jumping over the fence when you come from the market, sometime.

Gigi and Lola too create and share their dreams and hopes for the future. They call the dreams "sometime." Their vision includes babies, love-letters, an education, prosperity. Gigi, at least, knows that this "sometime" will never come but that it is essential to hold on to the pretence that it will come, sometime. That is what drives her to continue scrabbling for survival and to not give up.

Gigi's chances of survival are remote. She is surrounded by sickness and the fear of sickness. The "withered figure" whom she looks after is probably dying. She constantly has to warn naive Lola about using condoms, or if not condoms then saran wrap and mouthwash. When Gigi is raped by Mr. Man, she knows that she has been infected and it is only a matter

of time before she dies. "Sometime" is difficult to hold on to but essential to get through every day.

Chickn is determined to survive at the truck stop. He cheerfully gets Lola to sell sex to the truckers even though he knows she is incapable of looking after herself. So he cajoles, flirts, and manipulates Gigi into looking after her. His life is in the details of his little business of buying gas from the girls and selling it back to the truckers at exorbitant rates. He enjoys his life, flirting with the prostitutes, drinking, and mocking his friends' vanities. He asks Gigi out for a drive. They sit in a wrecked truck and "drive" down the highway, and Chickn describes the sights as if they were actually driving down. Gigi initially balks at the imaginary journey and then leaps into the spirit of things and "drives" the truck onwards.

Gigi: Ah, here we are.
Chickn: We here?
Gigi: Yeah.
Chickn: Getten out now?
Gigi: No, not yet. Now we looken.
Chickn: Looken where?
Gigi: That way.
Chickn: Okay. *(they look)* What we looken at?
Chickn: *(pause)* Border. *(breathes)*

In that one word, Gigi compresses all her hopes, dreams and her desire for escape from her life at the truck stop. But Chickn wrenches the wheel around and they "drive" back in silence. He does not break their imaginary creation of a functioning truck and a drive, but he refuses to entertain the notion of an escape from the truck stop.

We see in that scene how hope is an effective paralysis. As long as one passively longs for an opportunity, as long as one dreams, one can anticipate a better life. The hope is what sustains one. The fear is that if one actually acts on that opportunity and then the hope is not fulfilled, there is nothing left to live for. Chickn is the greater realist and fearful. He knows that the border will not offer any escape. He knows he has to find his satisfaction in his lot. He knows that if Gigi were to actually cross the border and find her life exactly the same as at the truck stop, she would be suicidal.

Mr. Man is written as one character representing a generic trucker on the highway — searching for sex, happier not to pay for it or to get it cheap. He is casually exploitative and violent. In this production, Mr. Man was split into two distinct characters. One as written and the other tentative and gentle. It is the tentative and gentle Mr. Man who courts and eventually drives off with Lola. In the final scene Mr. Man and Lola sit in the same place where Chickn and Gigi had had their imaginary drive. Gigi's body is lying beside and behind them, just another faceless corpse on the road. Chickn is contentedly counting out the money he has been paid for Lola. And Lola talks about her vision of the highway and how she has always been happy. Then she turns to Mr. Man and asks whether this is "sometime." It is as if all the dreams and visions that Gigi and she had created were so unreal that she is uncertain as to whether this is really that ultimate happiness. Mr. Man says, "sure," as if to say if you want this to be "sometime," this can be "sometime." And in contrast to Gigi's desperate dreams and visions, certainly Lola can be happy for now. Whether she lives married and baby-happy with a sensitive Mr. Man or forced to be a sex-slave to a brutish Mr. Man is left to our imaginations and our own hopes for Lola.

Like Lola and Gigi (and the hunter from the *Mahabharata*) we are left reaching out for a tiny morsel of sweetness in the face of a reality that tells us that there is no hope for Lola. We hope that there is a greater good in all humanity and that there can indeed be a sensitive, kind Mr. Man who will save Lola. This is what makes us human. Obtusely so, but human nonetheless.

BIO

Isaac Thomas HAS WORKED EXTENSIVELY IN THE THEATRE IN CANADA, THE US, AND INDIA. HE COMPLETED HIS MFA IN ACTING AT OHIO UNIVERSITY. SINCE COMING TO CANADA, HE HAS WORKED PRIMARILY AS A STAGE MANAGER WITH COMPANIES SUCH AS THE CANADIAN STAGE, FU-GEN, FACTORY THEATRE, LKTYP, NATIVE EARTH, THEATRE COLUMBUS, THEATRE DIRECT, AND THEATRE KINGSTON. HE OCCASIONALLY ACTS, DIRECTS, AND DRAMATURGES NEW WORK AND CURRENTLY OVERSEES THE DRAMA SCHOOL AT LKTYP.

Lynn Nottage—Simply Complex

In Kate Whoriskey's introduction to the published edition of Lynn Nottage's *Ruined*, she quotes an unnamed Rwandan refugee who, when asked about life after the genocide, said, "We must fight to sustain the complexity." While this complexity is a key feature in *Ruined*, I believe that it is a hallmark of Lynn's work. And that complexity is the first thing to hold onto when directing her plays.

In *POOF!* Lynn encapsulates the complex issue of spousal abuse in a ten-minute play. In *Crumbs from the Table of Joy*, she deals with the American black family and interracial relationships in the 1960s. And in *Intimate Apparel*, she explores the pull of the lonely heart.

It is quite easy to read her works and think that they are quite ordinary stories. In *Intimate Apparel*, George could be just a philandering liar who takes advantage of a naïve Esther. But if he comes instead from a place of being just as trapped as Esther and with a desire to better himself as she does, then their final scene is not a simple one of duplicity versus naivety. It becomes a marvelous moment where hope and possibility will surely conquer.

In truth, many audiences will go for the easy answer, but when George is revealed to be equally a victim, they will also respond to that fact. The actor playing George will often get booed at the curtain call, but when talking to the audience afterward, you will almost always get a qualifying statement: he was awful to Esther *but* he also had limited choices.

Lynn has often been called a modern day Lorraine Hansberry, and I think there is a feel to her work that echoes Hansberry's plays. There is true storytelling. I don't know how many times audience members came up to me after *Intimate Apparel* and enthused "What a great evening of theatre" and "What a great story." And one way that storytelling is achieved is that Lynn, like Lorraine, is not afraid to write long scenes. That in itself is a bit of an anomaly these days.

Many modern plays that I have directed have quick-cut movie roots, and much of the rehearsal time is spent on the innumerable transitions rather than on exploring the scenes. While a quick-cut technique gives you a multilayered collage for character development, the longer scene arc is a different kind of music. It demands a particular type of acting/directing muscle. Artists must develop the emotional and physical stamina to sustain scenes that run twenty to thirty minutes. This stamina is most often developed at major festivals or through a classical repertoire, and that repertoire is not the usual training ground for many black artists.

Longer scenes also allow the characters to develop in wider internal arcs. By that I mean that they are allowed to have complex and contradictory moments all within one scene. We are constantly travelling with them on their journey in a way that is shaped through bigger sections as opposed to snippets. These longer arcs, I believe, allow us to more easily emotionally invest in the characters, and thus we gain a richer theatrical experience.

Philip Akin

BIO

Philip Akin WAS LAST SEEN IN *OTHELLO, OF MICE AND MEN* (STRATFORD FESTIVAL), *THE LAST DAYS OF JUDAS ISCARIOT* (BIRDLAND THEATRE), AND THE TELEVISION SERIES *FLASHPOINT*. HE HAS BEEN DIRECTING SINCE 1995 AND IS THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF THE OBSIDIAN THEATRE COMPANY. DIRECTING CREDITS INCLUDE *TORONTO THE GOOD*, *EL PASO* (FACTORY THEATRE), *BLACK MEDEA, INTIMATE APPAREL, BORN READY* (OBSIDIAN THEATRE), AND THE UPCOMING *RUINED* (OBSIDIAN THEATRE IN ASSOCIATION WITH NIGHTWOOD THEATRE).

The music starts up while the house lights are still on. The set contains a trunk, a large Persian carpet, a stool, an easel, a riser, and a backdrop of stitched together canvas that looks like a tent. The show starts with a slide show tribute to Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi projected onto the tent, joining him (through Photoshop) are the faces Camyar Chai and Marcus Youssef, co-writers and performers of the Ali and Ali characters. After the photos, another projection, this time a video of Marcus and Camyar's faces on Chippendale dancers partly just for laughs,[1] but their placement at the top of the show was intentional. The dance and the tribute to Gaddafi are meant to confuse the audience, causing us to question assumptions (isn't Gaddafi one of the bad-guy-communist-dictators? or did that end with the Cold War?), emphasizing the body in a cringingly vulgar way (male erotic dancers?), and preparing us for more shocks to come. An announcer presents *Ali and Ali 7*: while a tangled string of lights and banners of shiny cloth descend, Marcus and Camyar enter with Raugi, welcome us back to the Ali and Ali show. They do a bit of a dance, introduce Raugi Yu (whom they call Yogi Roo) as Canada's foremost "yellow actor." The images of Gaddafi, the Chippendale dancer gag, and the basic misunderstanding of Raugi/Yogi set us up for the kinds of border lands in which the show will take place.

Eventually, after a bit of satire about Canadian theatre, the Alis find themselves at a hearing run by an RCMP officer, played by Laara Sadiq, for their supposed security breaches. They manage to have a lot of fun by disregarding protocols, but when the Taser comes out, things start to feel more serious. We then experience the sharp satire that has driven this work from the beginning, when the Ali and Ali characters were created shortly after 9/11, first for CBC radio and then eventually developed with Guillermo Verdecchia into *The Adventures of Ali and Ali and the aXes of Evil: A Divertimento for Warlords* for its stage premiere in 2004. As with the first play, when they are funny, they are irreverent and hilarious (e.g., a puppet show that includes a scene of Obama waterboarding George W. Bush in a toilet), but at some point in the work—no matter how much fun it has been—it is no longer laughable.

The RCMP officer wants to finish off the hearing; she tells Raugi/Yogi (who has stepped in as legal counsel because he once worked in a law office) to get his clients to take this seriously. Raugi tells them to stop fooling around, that they may end up in the Kingston Pen, like the five men who have been held without charges or trial for eight years. Ali and Ali then project photos of the men (Hassan Almrei, Adil Charkaoui, Mohamed Harkat, Mahmoud Jaballah, and Mohammad Mahjoub), explaining who they are and how they ended up as Canadian security certificate detainees.

I'm surprised by how involved I am with the characters in this sequel; I really care about Ali Hakim and Ali Ababwa. They are more subtly portrayed, less caricatures and more worn out men without a home. Left alone on stage for a few moments, Raugi makes a speech about them that helps to create more soulful characters—he recognizes them, listens to them, and appreciates them. The show seems less angry to me—more sad and compassionate. The humour is still goofy and in some ways I have no idea what they might do next—there is a frantic-ness to the pace of the show. It matches well the pace at which someone who doesn't know what might happen to him at any minute might live. In contrast to the first *Ali and Ali*—when at the end I felt angry about the state of the world and the abuse of power—at the end of this show I am outraged by the state abuse of power but also very touched by the portrayal of these characters. Their lives are so hard and unsure: to be a stateless refugee is no joke.

Selena Couture

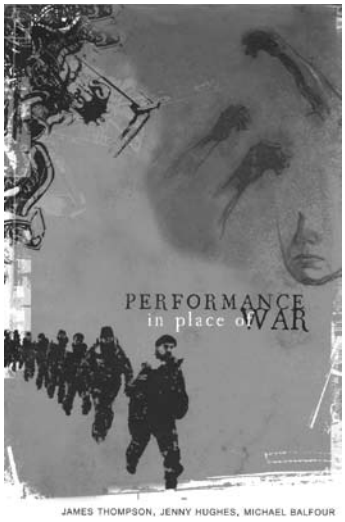
Ali and Ali 7: Hey Brother (or Sister) Can You Spare Some Hope and Change?
Created by: Camyar Chai, Guillermo Verdecchia and Marcus Youssef
Performed by: Camyar Chai, Marcus Youssef, Raugi Yu, and Laara Sadiq
Directed by Guillermo Verdecchia
24 April 2010, Vancouver East Cultural Centre.

BIO

Selena Couture IS A GRADUATE STUDENT IN THEATRE STUDIES AT THE UBC. SHE HAS LIVED AND WORKED AS AN ALTERNATE SCHOOL TEACHER IN EAST VANCOUVER FOR TWENTY YEARS. SHE IS ON THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF *ARTS IN ACTION,* WITH A SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PURPLE THISTLE CENTRE, A YOUTH ARTS AND ACTIVISM CENTRE. SHE IS ALSO AN ARDENT OBSERVER AND SOMETIMES CHEERLEADER OF THE INDEPENDENT THEATRE SCENE IN VANCOUVER.

NOTE

1 See http://sendables.jibjab.com/sendables/203006/chippendales_dance



BOOK REVIEW

BY JAMES MCKINNON

Performance in Place of War,
by James Thompson, Jenny Hughes, and Michael Balfour.
London, New York, and Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2009. Pp. xii & 351.

This ambitious book sets out to explore how performance might mitigate or ameliorate the negative effects of war. "Performance" and "war" are defined quite broadly and the "place[s]," too, span most of the globe, but the historical scale of the investigation is relatively specific: the case studies involve performances and wars occurring in the past ten years or so.

Sadly, even one decade offers too many wars to fit into one book, so the authors, as UK-based researchers, have focused on conflicts that have some connection to or basis in a history of British intervention or colonization: the Middle East, Africa, Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, and Kosovo. These limits are hardly narrow, but some readers may wish there were examples from the Americas, or more historical depth (as the authors point out, drama has been intertwined with war since its beginning, citing Phrynichus' lost play *The Capture of Miletus*, ca. 492 BCE, as the first documented example).

But it is the nature of scholarly inquiry to lead to further inquiry, and the best scholarship opens more cases than it closes: one of the many strengths of this book is that it compels readers to follow the threads that its authors could not. Those who wish to do so will find the critical methods and perspectives developed in the book very helpful for examining the places, performances, or wars of their choice.

The authors adopt an expansive definition of "performance," partly in keeping with current trends—the book is, after all, part of the *Enactments* series, edited by performance studies guru Richard Schechner, which seeks to "encompass performance in as many ways of its aspects and realities as there are authors able to write about them" ("Enactments"). As the authors point out, war and performance share both terminology and conceptual territory: for example, "'theatres of war' are places where the destruction [...] of human lives are[...] rehearsed and [...] enacted," and war zones are "highly performative places where simple statements of identity and survival can become performative acts with dangerous social consequences" (2).

The broad definition of "performance" also allows the authors to include case studies with which they are personally acquainted (they identify as practitioners as well as scholars) and to include a wide variety of locations and contexts. Thus, the book examines not just conventional theatrical performances but also such phenomena as the Butterfly Peace Garden in Sri

Lanka, which "broadly focuses on providing space for [...] children to explore the impact of the war through interaction with each other" (52); the Exodus Festival in Manchester, a celebration of arts and culture by Manchester's diverse refugee communities including world music and dance; and a variety of bus and walking tours through Belfast.

These diverse performances are linked not by similar aesthetic ideals, but ethical ones: each case study centres on the practices of performers and performances that seek to ameliorate the worst effects of war. This is not the same as exploring how theatre resists war: the authors, noting that extant research on theatre and war is preoccupied with examining such performances as either pro- or anti-war propaganda, seek instead to "locate, document, and highlight [performances] that seek *in their own terms* to counter, resist, or cope with war while acknowledging the systems within which they are embedded" (8, emphasis in original).

The authors have developed an elaborate and sophisticated framework to address this central objective. The book is organized into five sections (plus the introduction and "epilogue"), each of which links three to five case studies of performance in conceptually similar, but geographically diverse, "places of war." The first section, "In Place," covers performances within "hot" war zones in Sri Lanka, Israel/Palestine, and Beirut. "Displaced" focuses on performances by, for, and within refugee communities in England, Sudan, and Israel. "In Between War and Peace" examines performances in the moment after hostilities cease but before peace is formally secured or stabilized. This section is at once particularly encouraging, in its study of peace-building performances in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi, and heartbreaking, in its coverage of three projects in Sri Lanka, which, however promising, were derailed by the return of war in 2008, at the time the authors were writing the book. The fourth section, "Aftermaths," covers performances in places that are officially "post-war" but possibly still precarious, such as Belfast, Kosovo, and Rwanda. And, finally, "Other Places" disturbs all assumptions about the phrase "in place of war," pointing out that in a globalized world characterized by proxy wars, unregulated transnational economic exploitation, digital media and communication technology, and the ubiquitous "war on terror," the "place of war" encompasses not only battlefields, but diamond markets in Antwerp, the virtual world of the internet, and the London Tube. This section examines a performance inspired by the Beslan hostage-taking a convent school in ostensibly "peaceful" southern Sri Lanka, the world-wide (but US-based), anti-war protest known as *The Lysistrata Project*, and *This Is Camp X-Ray*, a simulation of the Guantanamo Bay detention centre "performed" for 10 days in Manchester in October 2003.

In addition to exploring a particular "place of war," each section links its case studies to three main themes "that seek to review a set of discourses [...] relevant to the projects" discussed in the section. So "In Between War and Peace," for example, is linked to the themes "Space and Place," "Building Peace," and "Insider-Outsider Relationships." The themes are cumulative, in the sense that once they are introduced, they frequently recur in subsequent sections: discourses of "trauma and healing," for example, are introduced in the first section but feature prominently throughout the book. Moreover, the themes are not meant to "explain" the performances; rather, the performances are used to challenge and problematize dominant discourses about relationships between war and art.

For example, "In Place" locates its case studies in relation to themes of "Trauma and Healing"—not to validate widespread assumptions about how art heals trauma, but to disturb them. The authors, noting that "trauma" theory has become "ubiquitous" in recent years, are deeply suspicious of its central claims—that is, that victims of trauma "must transform this traumatic memory into narrative memory so that the past can be confronted and contained" (33). Instead, they argue that not only is trauma theory rooted in "Western psychological models" that do not consider how "different communities deal with terrible experience," but that forcing people to narrate their traumas (particularly through public performance) is very likely to repeat or aggravate the trauma, not to heal it (33, 35). Similarly, confronting the assumption that performances in places torn by conflict must always seek "reconciliation" between the conflicted communities, case studies in Africa and Europe show that bringing conflicted communities together is often dangerous or impossible. The presence of "outsiders" as mediating influences may also be problematic, but it is often helpful or even necessary when the "insiders" in question are not yet equipped to deal with one another directly without returning to violence. The case study on the *Habuze Iki* (What Is Missing?) performance project in Burundi intervention shows how being a white, female outsider made it possible for Belgian director Frédérique Lecomte to negotiate with both Tutsi and Hutu factions in creating a performance that could be acceptable to both—thus guaranteeing the safety of her actors.

The authors' commitment to shattering naive assumptions about art as an uncomplicated means of healing, preserving cultural assets, or facilitating reconciliation is admirable and exciting. So is the sophisticated organization of the case studies according to spatial and intellectual concepts. This structural complexity is not without certain liabilities, however. Because every theme represents discourses which frame our understanding but also need to be questioned, a predictable pattern emerges, wherein readers are warned again and again that whatever they might assume to be true about a given theme, they will prove to be both correct and incorrect. Phrases such as "we might question this optimism" pop up with tiresome

frequency. Five sections, with three themes each, adds up to fifteen slightly different ways to say, "don't accept any discourse uncritically or apply any solution universally." Although the themes are an important part of the structure and content of the book, they also constitute a large proportion (over 20 percent) of a work that is ostensibly devoted to case studies.

The case studies are the lifeblood of this book: instructive, sensitive, and often gripping. As documents of real and often heroic creative efforts, they are more compelling than the abstract thematic material surrounding them (both for the reader and also, perhaps, for the writers, whose writing about the performances is consistently more immediate, direct, and urgent than their occasionally turgid ruminations on the themes). The case studies do not always exemplify the themes as neatly as the book's structure seeks to imply, exemplifying Moltke's famous maxim that "no plan survives contact with the enemy." But this is to be expected, since the performances discussed here are powerfully shaped by material crises in the "real" world, and were not premeditated with the authors' themes in mind—and indeed part of their argument is that we should not expect such performances to be neatly congruent with our perhaps naive ideals about what art should do in places of war. If they do not always engage directly with the themes, the case studies are nevertheless provocative, engaging, and instructive, and they complement one another well while also suggesting the vast range of possible and actual practices encompassed by "performance in place of war."

The creative tactics and goals exposed here are as varied and complicated as the conflicts that spawned them. There are street festivals, art camps for children, forum theatre, guided tours, and even a couple of conventional plays, spanning a breathtaking spectrum of social, cultural, and geographical contexts (notwithstanding the authors' decision to focus largely on Sri Lanka, the Middle East, and Africa), and responding to an equally, but differently, breathtaking array of war-induced trauma. Some of these performances directly confront the conflicts that birthed them, while others avoid mentioning them completely—the creators of the Butterfly Peace Garden, for example, have no intention of getting children to talk about their war trauma, but quite the opposite: giving them a space to create experiences that, for once, might have nothing to do with war. Performance can also entail "beautiful resistance," offering young people a means to resist war without becoming militants themselves: an especially noble and important cause in areas which, like the Palestinian Territories, have been militarized for so long that its children have never known peace.

Some performances address the "place" of performance, seeking reconciliation and peace-making, while others are speak *of* their place to others, attempting to attract the attention of the outside world. Some, like conventional drama, ask spectators to reflect on their behaviour, such as the Search for Common Ground project in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which attempted to facilitate demobilization by persuading Congolese civilians to accept former combatants back into their communities.

But other performances are largely or entirely for the benefit of the "performers" themselves: the Centre for Performing Arts and the Butterfly Peace Garden, both in Sri Lanka, offer children opportunities to develop creative communication and expression skills for their own benefit, not for the edification of spectators. In some contexts, participants use performance to remember or commemorate a horrific experience, while in others the emphasis is on forgetting or moving on, finding ways to live that *don't* entail the obsessive commemoration or repetition of the conflict and its traumas. Indeed, the performances here may only have one thing in common, other than their relationship to war: unlike conventional theatre projects, which typically aspire to indefinite continuity, these ones all have, at their heart, an implicit hope that someday they will no longer be needed and will cease to exist. The more "effective" a West End musical is, the longer it runs, but success for these performances would mean cessation—which makes their documentation here all the more valuable.

If anything, these performances demand more documentation. I repeatedly found myself wanting *more* description, *more* detail—and less opaque pontificating about the dangers of embracing too optimistically the idea of "trauma and healing (or "peace-making," or "hybridity," etc.). Too often, the authors put too much of their labour (and the reader's) into painstakingly framing the case studies in relations to the abstract themes, or in describing their geopolitical context, and not enough in actually describing the performances themselves. For example, the book conveys very clearly the crisis that director Sharif Abdunnur confronted when, in Beirut in 2006, his theatre was very suddenly transformed into a refugee camp/bomb shelter; but it offers only a vague sense of what the resulting performance—*Laughter Under the Bombs*—was actually like. The excerpt from the script and the interview with Abdunnur are both valuable in this regard, but frustratingly brief, and the same can be said about many or even most of the other case studies. Fortunately, the authors are generous in letting the performers and participants speak in their own words, but almost every case study cries out for more thorough description (which would also make the analyses more convincing).

The most riveting parts of the book, in fact, are those in which the authors intrude the least. After each section, there are a series of "Interludes," which comprise extracts from interviews with performers and spectators. Some continue or expand on the case studies, others are from performers not discussed or quoted elsewhere in the book, such as Paul Heritage's description of an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* in a community in Rio de Janeiro that annually witnesses

more deaths by gunfire than many of the "official" war zones discussed in the book. These vivid interludes are a perfect example of how good scholarship raises more questions than it answers: readers with existing interests in this field, or whose interests have been piqued by the book, will want to track these sources down and write their own books about them.

Although its narrative advance sometimes grinds to a halt when the authors get bogged down in their own semantic trenches, and in spite of my impression that the case studies demand more thorough description, *Performance in Place of War* is an exciting, stimulating, valuable book. It makes significant advances in an under-explored field, and readers will be inspired to pick up where the authors left off. When they do, they will be inspired by the stories told by performers and greatly assisted by the appendices, which supply valuable lists of key organizations and people to assist future research. The book's methodological framework, too, could be productively adapted: "performance" is always "in place of" something, but it might be something other than "war." For example, as the authors imply, performance can also (like war) be thought of as the continuation of politics by other means. This book will provoke some readers to continue work in this area, and offers others exciting new ways to think about their own scholarly and performative battlefields.

BIO

Dr. James McKinnon IS A RESEARCHER, DRAMATURGE, AND EDUCATOR. TRAINED IN CANADA AT MCGILL AND THE UNIVERSITIES OF CALGARY, ALBERTA, AND TORONTO, HE RECENTLY STARTED A NEW LIFE AS A LECTURER AT VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND. HIS PRIMARY RESEARCH AND CREATIVE INTERESTS INCLUDE ADAPTATION AND APPROPRIATION, DRAMATURGY, THEATRE HISTORY, AND PEDAGOGY.

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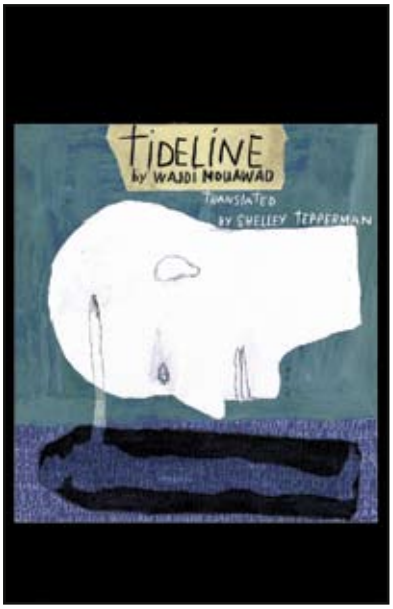

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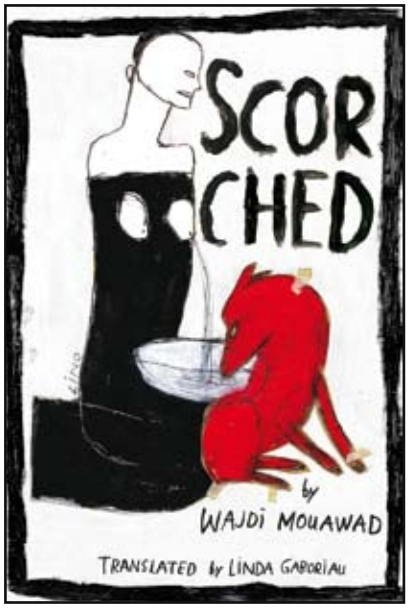

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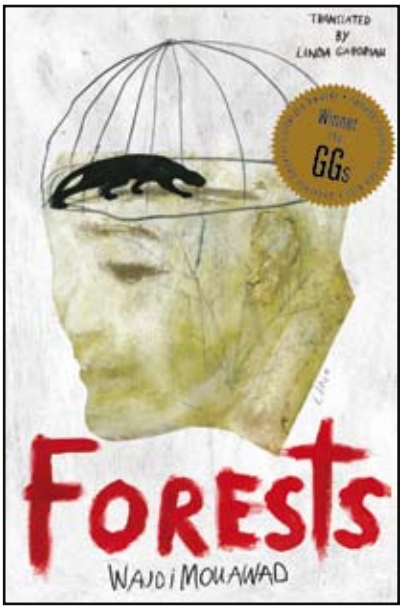

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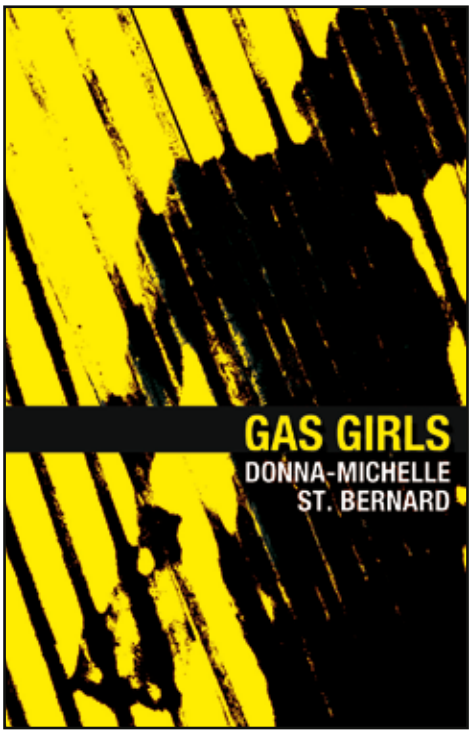

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