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POETS' THEATER / PEOPLE'S THEATER

REVIEWS

Poets' Theatre / People's Theatre

PEOPLE'S THEATRE, PEOPLE'S ARMY: MASCULINISM, AGITPROP, REENACTMENT

Alan Filewod

I. Leninist Hero-Combat Plays

The most powerful and seductive icons of the 20th century dream of a politically activist people's theatre are also the most deceptive and atypical. What draws us to the images of political theatre as modernist hero-combat drama for the industrial age? I think of Brecht in his affect as Bolshevik thug, of the machine-gun aesthetics of the Proletbühne, the regimented mass rallies of the Popular Front, and most recently and recurrently, the guerilla artist, masked, confrontational, poised in the ecstasy of combat.

The vast, rhizomatic field of politically engaged radical theatre in its actual operations defies categorizations and refuses these militarized images. Theatre activists and historians know that in this field combative agitprop has been the exception rather than the rule. As Baz Kershaw has aptly summarized, political theatre is not an archive of forms and genres, but a shifting and situated articulation of radicalism working through the entire complex of theatre cultures. Most political theatre ventures are local, grounded in the communities they construct and enact, participatory and interventionist, and they enact the contingent social and ideological processes that produce them. Why then has the very proposition of interventionist political theatre been categorized by images of militant combat?

For most of my career as an academic and artist I have been closely involved with the development of politically engaged theatre in Canada, and I have worked through the stages of its development, from the community documentaries agitprop of the Mummers Troupe in the 1970s, to the growth of the "popular theatre movement" in the 1980s and to the seeding and subsequent corporatization of Theatre of the Oppressed in the 1990s and beyond. For most of that time the radical theatre work I have encountered has been resolutely anti-heroic, anti-masculinist, and resistant rather than militant.

And still, the temptation to think of theatre as a weapon in the struggle of the people, of the theatre artist as a guerilla cadre, of the theatre itself as an insurrectionary front, persists. In recent years we have seen it revived in the streets of the anti-globalization protests. The most disturbing thing about the persistence of these images is the lingering appeal of militarism in radical theatre, and the entrenched (to use a military word) hold of the combat figure as the "real" moment of political engagement. This entrenchment mirrors the wider hold of insurrection as the'"real" moment of revolutionary politics. The imprint of Leninism in the epistemology of political theatre runs deep.

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As I approach this subject, I am keeping before me three principles. Following them, the image of the militarized combat figure in political theatre is not something that emerges out of the historical conditions of struggle, as most agitprop theory would have it, but is rather the recurrence in the domain of radical culture of a condition that is formatively grounded in all theatre culture.

1. *Theatre is an episteme and not an organism*: Why is it when we talk about theatre, we always talk about "the theatre", as if it is a category that supersedes local practices? "The theatre" invokes an immanent formation of which local practices are contingent manifestations. Put another way, "the theatre" is informed by and situated in a larger sense of "theatre" that is the product of material systems of representation, and at the same time a formative principle of those systems. The playhouse, however realized, is a designated site of representation but is simultaneously enclosed and liminal; in that sense, the stage is not an invisible wall but a gate through which images, forms and ideology pass both ways. The formal theatre at any given point encloses only that part of theatre culture that is understood as "art" in the imaginary of the moment.

The theatre that remains outside "the theatre," and the theatre that is imagined but unrealized, are equally crucial to any understanding of what happens on the stage. The theatrical imaginary begins with the material realities of theatre culture, but includes the conceptual structures that legitimize certain practices as "the theatre," and within that, which assign value to particular practices–this is what Baz Kershaw calls the disciplinary regime of "the theatre estate" (91). From the point of view of anthropological performance studies, the half-time show at a football game is as much part of theatre culture as *Hamlet*, but as envisioned in the theatrical imaginary, *Hamlet*—even if it is not performed—is more authentically "theatre" than the half-time show.

2. *"Political theatre" is a category generated by the episteme, and bears no real relation to the practice of radical theatre performance*: The formalizing "movements" of political theatre in the first half of the 20th century were notable for their obsession with scale, professionalism and theory. In the years prior to the submergence of radical discourse in the recuperation of national culture that was the Popular Front, political theatre was understood as a category of power, that is, as a counter-theatre that mirrored the bourgeois theatre in all of its complexes and operations. This was the Leninist model of mobilization. Like the bourgeois stage it countered, it was a movement oriented towards texts, textuality and authorship, secured by the authority of theory and structures of legitimation. In its clearest moments, this principle suggests that "political theatre" may be most effective as a political strategy when there is very little theatre work to contradict the categorization. This was the case with the Canadian iteration of the Workers' Theatre Movement in the 1930s, which I have elsewhere described as a movement without theatres and theatres without a movement. For the most part the Canadian WTM was an exclusion zone from which theatre projects that broke the template were removed. A similar history can be found in the New York workers' theatres

in the pre-Popular Front era, in which the substantial apparatus of a formal movement sustained a few model troupes and effectively disenfranchised many more. Mobilizing political parties have never been able to handle or contain the rhizomatic chaos of theatre practice but their narratives have entered the historical record as primary evidence. Hence the genealogies of political theatre (which mirror the mastery genealogies of the bourgeois modernist stage) follow the historical scripts of the political movements that recruited and used them.

3. *The theatre episteme, materialized in the estates of theatre work, is fundamentally military*: I have for a long time felt that there is a deep relationship between the theatre and the army. There is a way in which theatre and army share a common mission of national survival: as professional disciplines charged with a responsibility to enact and monumentalize the nation. Seen in this perspective, it is no accident that theatre and army share vocabulary and language. In one sense they both originate in structures of male social organization and display. Historically, the theatre has operated with the same structures of command, authority and requisitionary power as armies.

We are all aware that armies deploy in theatres of operations, that they stage invasions, display power in costumes, and maintain cultural continuity through spectacle, parade and ceremony. Theatres in turn organize themselves in fundamentally military hierarchies of authority, control and delivery: a theatre company, a ship's company, and an infantry company are amongst the most authoritarian structures in our liberal democracies, granted the extraordinary privilege to violate the persons of their members. It is notable that the idea of national armies and national theatres emerged in Europe at the same time, in the same place, and for the same reasons. Both are highly structured, hierarchical and conservative estates that value tradition, commemoration, centrality and authority. In their respective ways, they legitimize and occupy the national territory: theatres are armies that don't kill, and armies are theatres that do.

II. Combat Theatre

In his essay, "Notes in Defense of Combative Theater," published in Henry Lesnick's highly influential 1973 anthology, *Guerilla Street Theater*, Charles Brover made the point that "[e]ven theater has a role to play in history, and the role of combative theatre is to expose, challenge, and tell the truth necessary for purposive work" (38). Combat theatre in this articulation is the public projection of authorizing political organs, and only exists in the zone of projection; it is not the moment of performance and reception that defines the political actuality of the theatre but its relation to the authorizing political structure. For most of the 20th century this effectively meant that political theatre was a property claimed by the mass revolutionary socialist parties in their historical course from the Second International to the Cold War. The military discipline of Leninism, the regimentation of Stalinism and the guerilla insurrectionism of the '60s all in turn modeled the relationship of political centre and performance event in terms of the

suppressed popular state that the revolution would restore. Political theatre was thus understood as both tactical (an arm of the party) and popular (the theatre of the people.) In the breakdown of centralizing mass movements in the Cold War, the rhizome of radical theatre began to detach from its location as the theatre estate of the revolution, and post-1968, has experienced a remarkable growth in a cultural world that understands oppression in terms of hegemonies rather than ideological scripts. Rarely today in the industrial world do we hear people speak of "theatre for the people" because the humanist proposition of "the people" has lost purchase and no longer functions as a productive category.

Yet the image of guerilla artist persists as an icon of political theatre. This is a figure that began to circulate in the insurrectionary theatre practices of the 1960s, and came into presence through images of guerilla fighters in national liberation movements. Chief amongst these was the ubiquitous portrait of Che (recently recirculated in the anti-globalization movement) but perhaps more influential was the figure of the Viet Cong guerilla fighter. One of the bestselling titles of the period was Vo Nguyen Giap's "manual for insurrection," *People's War, People's Army*, in which the victor of Dien Bien Phu (and later strategist of the Vietnamese victory over the Americans) summarized guerilla tactics as

> the way of fighting the revolutionary war which relies on the heroic spirit to triumph over modern weapons, avoiding the enemy when he is the stronger and attacking him when he is the weaker, now scattering, now regrouping one's forces, now wearing out, now exterminating the enemy, determined to fight him everywhere, so that wherever the enemy goes he would be submerged in a sea of armed people who hit back him, thus undermining his spirit and exhausting his forces. (104)

Young radical Americans, mostly men, resisted the war and the military draft in postures of combative masculinism, and it is tempting to think that the rhetoric of the guerilla may have had more to do with testosterone and the military complicities of theatre culture than it did to actual cultural strategy. (Certainly no-one could argue that guerilla artists arose from a sea of [culturally] armed people). The guise of the guerilla was as loaded with masculinist heroism as the young Brecht's leather jacket.

If the radical as guerilla is an icon of heroic masculinism in an episteme of political theatre that is produced by the discourse of "the theatre," it can be argued that there must be homologous mirror figures in other theatre domains. This leads to the question of the unwritten history of right-wing political theatre in which these homologues can be located. Political theatre, I have suggested, has been narrated as a property of the left, in the modernist binary of socialist left and imperialist-capitalist right that defined the 20th century political ground. The postmodern refutations of this binary, coming from within struggles against oppression and led by feminist, queer and postcolonial activists, enables us to

recast the binary with the proposition that hegemonic theatrical practices expressed in statist political programs and masculinist heroism straddle the ideological divide.

While much right-wing radical theatre practice disappears into the hegemonic normativities of popular culture, we can still discern traditions of right-wing and indeed fascist political theatre. The party theatrics of the Comintern were fundamentally the same as the theatrics of the fascist parties; Italian futurist performance was exuberantly agitational and fascist, and in North America, populist extreme right-wing parties in the 1930s drew upon their evangelical sources to produce agitprops that were not much different than those of the workers' theatres. (A case in point was "Bible Bill" Aberhart's Social Credit Party in Alberta, which used agitprop in its political campaigns.) In some cases the ideological lines blurred, as with the dozens, perhaps hundreds, of left-wing Ukrainian and Finnish workers theatre troupes in North America in the '30s, which performed Stalinist doctrinaire agitprops and nationalist sentimental melodramas. With greater access to the expanding industries of electronic mass media, right-wing agitprop more quickly adapted to new forms, in radio and TV broadcasting (where it continues to this day in the phenomenon of 'talk radio"). One of the more disturbing contemporary manifestations of right-wing performance occurs in the domain of interactive computer gaming (which in some respects can be seen as an extension of theatre culture, as dimensionally collapsed puppet shows). Computer games have always thrived on adolescent military fantasy, but recently the United States Army has been releasing tactical training software as free home entertainment. On the website for the Pentagon's shareware simulation game,'"America's Army," Colonel Casey Wardynsky, the project director, explains'"America's Army" as

> an entertaining way for young adults to explore the Army and its adventures and opportunities as a virtual Soldier. As such, it is part of the Army's communications strategy designed to leverage the power of the Internet as a portal through which young adults can get a first hand look at what it is like to be a Soldier. The game introduces players to different Army schools, Army training, and life in the Army. Given the popularity of computer games and the ability of the Internet to deliver great content, a game was the perfect venue for highlighting different aspects of the Army.
>
> [...] The game provides a virtual means to explore a variety of Soldier experiences in basic training, advanced training, and training missions in real world Army units, so that young adults can see how our training builds and prepares Soldiers to serve in units in defense of freedom. (United States Army)

By mid-August 2003, over 2,000,000 registered users have downloaded the game. Its relation to theatre culture and the history of the agitprop may be tenuous but in the expanded sense of embodied (or enfigured) mimetic entertainment, "America's

Army" indicates how easily and pervasively the enacted representational cultural production of the right circulates through popular culture.

There is another context in which the theatricality of "America's Army" can be understood, that of reenactment culture. It is in the domains of reenactment that militarist masculinism produces its most popular textual practices. A consideration of reenactment as a theatrical practice, as in fact a kind of political theatre, leads to the disconcerting suggestion that the militarized political theatre – of Eisenstein's Bolshevik spectacles, Piscator's documentary collages, Brecht's early aestheticized agitprop and the guerilla theatre— may have more in common with commemorative Civil War battle reenactments than with the rhizome of radical performance.

III. Reenactment as Imperial Agitprop

Military reenactment is the convergence point at which theatre and army are the same thing. It is neither and both: militarized theatre, theatricalized army, a theatre without playhouses and an army without power. It is also extraordinarily pervasive and popular, and is clearly coming into its own as a professional field. At one point it sits within the theatre estates–think of the immense Bolshevik revolutionary spectacles, medieval dinner theatres, staged spectacles like the Edinburgh Tattoo. At another point it sits within the army, in the pomp and circumstance of ceremonial military commemorations such as the Changing of the Guard ceremonies at Buckingham Palace in London and Parliament Hill in Ottawa and the ceremonial performances of the United States Army's 3rd Infantry Regiment, "The Old Guard,' in Washington. (The Ottawa ceremony is explicitly theatrical because the Ceremonial Guard of the Canadian Armed Forces is comprised of students recruited for it as a summer job and enrolled in a reserve unit for that purpose: army deployed as theatre.)

The most familiar images of reenactment are the parades and battles staged by the civilian reenactor, the person next door who musters on weekends in an imagined but deeply researched past–or futures, in uniformed Star Trek fandom. In the United States, the most common site of reenactment is the Civil War movement, which has become institutionalized to the extent that it has become a familiar trope in American pop culture. Civil War reenactment began shortly after the war itself, when veterans restaged key battles, and has been an instrumental site for the renegotiation of American nationalism. The modern movement may have begun in 1961 with the centenary of the war, when some 4,000 reenactors restaged the battle of Manassas. Today hundreds of constituent groups comprise an economy of exchange that continually renegotiates the terms of historical commemoration and claims place in the narrative of the nation. There is, for example, an Ontario unit that claims to honour the estimated 50,000 Canadians who served in the Union forces during the Civil War (a figure which, if true, suggests that more Canadians may have served in the American than in the British forces in the 19th century.) (2nd Michigan.)

Civil War reenactment began as commemorative practice but has evolved into a performative renegotiation of American democracy, in which both causes are rescripted as just (fighting for the fundamental values of Americanism), and in which the both sides are perceived to have won, because (and this I suspect is the deep text of Civil War reenactment, beyond the rhetorics of "healing" and "sacrifice" which saturate it) only Americans can defeat Americans – and if only Americans can defeat Americans, Americans always win. There is a way in which this may be a governing text of all reenactment in the United States: reenactment retro-recruits armies of all times and places into Americanist historiography.

This suggests that reenactment is not just a performance of a right-wing masculinism but is rather a transcultural practice that expresses contingent and situated national narratives. Reenactors may choose to relive the army of the Confederacy for common reasons (to commemorate rebellion, to honour self-sufficiency, to align with the underdog) but the cultural text of the Confederacy as a signifier shifts across national borders. We can surmise why a Virginian might want to reenact the Confederate army. But why would a New Yorker? Or for that matter a Canadian or Australian? (In Australia, Confederate reenactment is particularly popular in Western Australia, a state that has experienced occasional mutterings for secession). On the level of masculinist camaraderie and self-performance, the genre of Confederate reenactment is transnational, but its political texts are situated in national difference. The fundamental performances of the right are the performances of nation.

This is particularly apparent in the increasingly crowded domain of World War II reenactment, which seems to have begun with collectors of militaria, especially vehicles and aircraft, and which has now spawned a substantial economy of collector exchange and an industry of facsimile reproduction. This industry has become a professional estate on its own terms, with numerous suppliers who will equip and train reenactors for film and television, drawing on local reenactment experts.

The theatre of operations for WWII reenactment is, like the war itself, vast and mobile. There are a dozen parent organizations in the United States, with names like "World War Historical Preservation Group" and "20 Century Tactical Studies Group," each of which organizes numerous local units. Most of them have websites: my count so far in North America is 39 US Army and Marine Corps units, 23 Waffen SS, 13 German Army and 5 Luftwaffe, 10 Soviet Army, and 19 British, Canadian and Polish units.

Of these, the SS units are the most disturbing because they are farthest removed (one hopes) from commemorative practice and thus clearly demonstrate that reenactment has more to do with combat masculinism than historical memory. I am deeply troubled by the SS units. One the one hand, it is axiomatic that battle reenactments generate a need for an enemy. But beyond that there is obviously a level of political creepiness: why must the bad guy be a criminal organization whose very uniform is banned in some countries? Every SS reenactment unit

posts a disclaimer that refuses admission to extremists, but at the same time they all invoke a romanticized image of the SS as an elite formation that models military valor, honour and camaraderie. But all reenactment units evoke these values, because they are the operating scripts of masculinist militarism. There are other texts circulating through SS reenactment. Some of them may in fact be masked racism or sentimentalized fascism (that reputation does seem to circulate through the reenactment communities), but they also have to with extreme masculinist fantasies of the warrior (or "warfighter" to use the Pentagon's current phrase) as hardcore homosocial outlaw Terminator.

The 120-odd WWII units I have tracked are just the ones that have websites. Beyond this there are countless individuals equipped to participate in various units at "walk-in" events. Some of the units have hundreds of members; most have a few dozen, and some of them are just one guy with a jeep. Most commonly, these units parade in public displays, like the Warriors Day parade at the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto, or commemorative public events. The website of one American reenactment unit lists among its events for 2003 a 100-mile vehicle convoy trip in Missouri ("Railsplitters") and invitational battle reenactments, such as the "France 1944 Tactical Battle" in April 2003 in Rensselaer, Indiana, which was restricted to "mid/late-1944 western front American, British & Commonwealth, and German reenactors" with the stern caution that "This is NOT a public spectator event" (Indiana Historical Reenacting). Some of these events take place on land owned or leased for the purpose — there is for example a Great War society that maintains a system of trenches in Pennsylvania. (The Great War is the other coming reenactment domain: The Great War Association in the United States lists 43 member units, including the Fifth Anzac Battalion and the Salvation Army.)

I am particularly interested in the American units that perform the Canadian Army. There are nine WWII Canadian reenactment units, of which six are based in the United States. Of these, three are separate companies of the Canadian Parachute Battalion, which was one of the first allied units to drop into Normandy on D Day. It was the predecessor of the Canadian Airborne Regiment, which was disbanded in disgrace in 1995 after some of its soldiers tortured and murdered a teenage boy in Somalia. Recurrently, WWII reenactment seeks and reproduces the extreme fantasies of elite combat, offering a skewed historical vision of an army in which airborne commandos outnumber read echelon support troops. (Who wants to dress up and reenact a postal clerk? But even as I write this I know that someone does, because reenactment culture is also about identifying and filling niches of distinction.)

Beyond the field of World War II, reenactment culture is vastly diverse and the sphere is expanding. In the United Kingdom, the National Association of Re-enactment Societies lists 31 members, some which are umbrella organizations such as The Sealed Knot Society, with 58 regiments performing the British Civil War, and the American Civil War Association, Inc. (UK), with 28

units. In Australia and New Zealand, the Australasian Register of Living History Organizations lists 397 units. In Canada, the Canadian Reenactor website lists 44 units (performing 17th century to WWII); in the United States, Reenactor.net lists 312 Civil War reenactment units. In addition to the WWII units I have already described, the Commemorative Air Force lists 73 constituent wings and squadrons that fly vintage aircraft, and the Navy and Marine Living History Organization lists 14 units. Worldwide, the Starfleet Marine Corps lists 88 reporting "Marine Strike Groups." When we expand this field to include classical, medieval and Renaissance groups (such as the 82 Roman-era groups listed on Reenactment.net and the 20 "kingdoms" and "principalities" through which the Society for Creative Anachronism, Inc., is organized internationally), we are clearly dealing with thousands of groups.

As a rhizome, reenactment resists categorical analysis, but as an emergent professional estate, it can be analysed in terms of commonalities of practice. I have found the following seven categories useful in examining reenactment as a theatrical practice:

Authenticity: Most, if not all, reenactment groups claim legitimacy as popular historical interventions by allegiance to regimes of authenticity, but terms of authenticity are commonly the most critical subjects of contestation. In performance terms, authenticity is experienced through the exact—or seen-to-be-exact—reproduction of the originary period, and is confirmed by the physical experience of recreated historical conditions. A useful example of this is the Great War Association (GWA) and their recreated western front trench system at The Caesar Krauss Great War Memorial Site, located at Newville, PA. Authenticity can be understood as a condition and a practice that regulate the experience of reenactment and confirm through bodily response the historical knowledges it produces. A secondary problem in this regard has to with the social need for authenticity, which brings into question the individual motives and rewards of participants.

Acting, Enacting and Commemoration: Reenactment is performance insofar as it operates in the spectatorial relationship of actor and audience (however defined and regulated) and is governed by strict performance conventions. Reenactors typically resist the notion of *acting*, preferring instead to speak of creating "impressions" that commemorate historical actuality through the production of authenticity, in body, in location, in material culture and in the sensation of experience. Although on one level, *acting* and *enacting* mean the same thing, they connote differently. In reenactment culture, enacting can be defined provisionally as commemorative acting, that is, acting governed by strict adherence to conventions of dress, appearance, deportment and movement that mark authenticity.

Structure and legitimation: Reenactment groups function in relational communities that structure their enactments. These authorizing structures can be as formalized as state military formations at one end of the spectrum, to **loose**

affinities of self-defined enthusiasts at the other. In each case, the authorizing structure institutes conventions and rules of governance that regulate the sense of community, control access, and generate both social and cultural capital. Commonly, these structures simulate military command hierarchies. The terms of association, membership and event organization (and their auxiliary structures of recruitment, publicity and discussion) can be analysed as performative practices, particularly when unit members communicate and respond in terms of their uniforms and ranks.

Periodization: As popular reconstitutions of historical knowledge, reenactments are shaped by historiographic conventions of nation and period. By so doing, they are instrumental in what Raphael Samuel called the "theatre of memory," the collectively assembled practices by which history is transformed and reproduced in popular knowledge. Reenactment can be understood as a method of *producing* history. In this, periodization manifests arguments about national history, and enables "counterfactual" scenarios that confirm partisan historical readings. In this sense, reenactment is always "about" proving historical arguments with the body.

Most reenacting groups exist to perform, for one another and for the public, because reenactment must be seen, even if only by other reenactors. You don't exist as a reenactor until your impression is confirmed by someone else. Some of these performances are very public: they are essentially living history displays; others are private and exclusive. (SS reenactors tend not to stage themselves as publicly, because in their case the display must invariably produce controversy.) Reenactment culture has a large and rich vocabulary to differentiate these different practices.

One of the more fascinating reenactment domains is the Vietnam War, which in America clearly serves a commemorative purpose. Most of these commemorate American units, although there is an American-based Australian army group, and several Viet Cong and North Vietnamese groups. The Viet Cong 818th Infantry Battalion in Kentucky and Ohio states that in order to give American units "some assistance in re-creating the Vietnamese war we will become their worst nightmare, in effect, a Viet Cong Main Force Unit" (Viet Nam Cong San).

But there are also Vietnam units in Europe, in Britain, the Czech Republic, Poland and Russia. The most interesting is in France, where there is a very dedicated group that calls itself "Grunts." Their stated, Baudrillardian, purpose is "to accurately depict all aspects of the American involvement in South-East Asia from 1960 to 1975, with realistic photographs and super-8 movies" (Grunts). In this case, reenactment stages performance only to produce documentary evidence, which if done exactly, can supersede the real thing and expose its historical constructions. Here the suggestion that reenactment produces history is literally true.

Ideology and Ethics: Although it is probably futile to attempt to generalize about the ideological and political meaning of reenactments, it can be noted that

particular practices register identifiable ideological values. There is, for example, an expressed relationship between some reenactment units in North America and the National Rifle Association. (The website for Reenactor.net, the major gateway to reenactor links, carries a banner link to the NRA with the tag "Why should ah visit the NRA? Ah carrys me a musket.") Although reenactment units and their members manifest social and ideological diversity, and carefully condemn "extremism," they exhibit a general indifference to questions of ethics and history. This is particularly evident and problematic with those units that recreate the Waffen SS. The ethical questions posed by these units are, however, applicable to others. While reenactment cultures offer opportunities for "civilian" reenactment, their fundamental orientation to history as warfare mirrors the centrality of war in the professionalized discipline of academic history.

Reception and Gender: Although reenactment practices vary in the extent to which they are public, all take place in a field of audience and reception. In this sense they "perform" and display within acknowledged structures of convention and value. All reenactments proceed by criteria that define terms of success, and the success of the event is in critical ways a problem of audience. The presence of the spectator, as observer, witness or audience, brings into play questions of aesthetics and ethics: the demands of spectacle and the demands of historical recreation do not always reconcile easily. Just as performers perform only when actualized by the presence of an audience, audience reception is shaped by the conventions of the performance. Understanding the nature of the audience and the conditions it brings to bear on the spectacle is crucial in understanding the meaning of the event.

In reenactment culture, as in other spectatorial arts, the problem of reception is necessarily one of gender. Reenactment is a characteristically masculinist practice, but the politics of gender, in participation and reception, vary widely; in WWII reenactment, women are almost invisible (although there are some women's reenactment groups, and some women in Red Army units); in Civil War reenactment they are present in the simulations of civilian life as ancillaries in a masculinist world; in the Society for Creative Anachronism and Starfleet, gender equity is assumed, within a regulating frame of masculinism.

Economy and Professionalization: Reenactment proceeds from a common belief in the values of amateur community-based practice, but reenactment culture has been shaped by an increasing professionalism (a parallel might be noted here with the emergence of the theatre profession in England in the late 15th/early 16th centuries). This professionalism arises in part from opportunities for remuneration, especially in film and television. Professionalism produces industrial regimes and disciplines.

IV. Auxiliary Nationhoods

If reenactment is produced within the convergence of theatre and army, then it too must like them be a performative embodiment of the nation. But what

nation? When I first began looking at reenactment, I assumed a commemorative linkage of performer, place and unit. This has clearly been the model of Civil War reenactment. But WWII reenactment restages the migrancies and diasporas of 20th century life. A group of Americans reenacting a Canadian unit in California in all likelihood enacts several different motives: specialization in an economy of collecting; personal and family affinities; a claim for distinction in a crowded field. We can posit many reasons, of which commemoration is probably the least.

Although reenactment replays nation, it is clearly transnational. Reenactment commands emotional response to invented nations, but for the most part, these nations are dehistoricized, or perhaps I should say, bearing in mind the pervasive role of commemoration, it is rehistoricized. Reenactment, in all or any of its forms, addresses nation in ways that at first seem contradictory. Reenactors are invested in their performed nations: the "Canada" of American-based Canadian Army reenactors is no more real than the United States of the Vietnam reenactors that have particular purchase in Eastern Europe, or of the United Federation of Planets. All of these textualized nations exist in moments of elation and spectatorial response; all are equally felt to be true in the theatrical moment, and they are made real through the fetishes of authenticity.

At the same time, reenactment is a performative encounter of two nations, merged in the elative moment: the performing nation and the performed. Commemorative and patriotic reenactment monumentalizes this merging, confirming the performing nation in the textualities of the performed. There is a particular monumentalizing of lost causes, in which the mobilization of present reproduction erases defeat. This is clearly the case with Confederate reenactments, which seem to be more popular than the Union forces. It is also the case with Vietnam. A typical example from the Vietnam War domain is a group in the Pacific Northwest which reenacts the 3rd Platoon/Delta Company/2nd Battalion/ 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division, Airmobile —about as specific as they come in reenactment units. They say of their mission,

> We exist to say "thank you" to the true fighting men who fought and bled in Vietnam. They are our credentials. The freedom they bought for us in a far off land is beyond any feeling of gratitude that we can express. (2/5 1st Cavalry.)

What then of the quoted textual nations: the Waffen SS units, or the Canadians who perform Civil War, or fantasized histories and futures? Their commitment, dedication and emotional attachment are no less real. As a process of popular intervention, reenactment is a military occupation of history that claims space and territory through distributed performance and distributed spectators. It is always the performing nation in the uniform of the performed, but in this process of occupation, the performing nation is itself reproduced and altered, and shown to be reproducible.

Reenactment organizes its representations in terms of nations, which it produces through the very real emotional allegiances summoned in performance. But reenactment is also empire in performance: sited in national identities and patriotisms, but moveable, transplantable, convergent. Reenactment culture exposes the historical contingency of nationhood by replaying embodied, reflexive nationalisms, marking them as real, proven somatically in the process of reenactment, and as elective: an emotional knowledge that you can assume and discard. This is the performance of auxiliary nationhood: Canadian confederates, Australian Red Army tankers, New Zealand Vikings, British Starfleet Marines, American Canadian paratroopers. This is not just a field of play and simulation, but the investment of embodied elations that confirm through bodily response the historical knowledges they produce. The emotional affinities and allegiances so produced do for the modern empire, however you define it, exactly what the imperial parade of exotic colonial armies did for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897. But our imperial parade ground is the imperial rhizome: thousands of theatrical battlefields, conventions, websites, assembling in its parts the very plural theatre of the imperial order.

If reenactment is the political agitprop of the right, it is in disconcerting ways more of a people's theatre in practice than most programmatic left-wing ventures have been. But the notion of "the people" is increasingly problematic, and whereas it has lost purchase as a touchstone signifier of left radicalism, it has survived as an invocation of a no less radical right. The Leninist tradition of theatrical vanguardism established a regime of centralized authority and produced a shadow culture that replicated the organizational models of the state. The breakdown of the Leninist model enabled a growth of participatory community performance released from ideological scripts but still captured by the homology of theatre estate and national culture. And as discourses of class diffused in the postmodern discourses of difference, alterity and margin, left politicized performance (Baz Kershaw's radical *in* performance) surrendered its claim to speak for "the people." That claim however is still strongly held on the right, where reenactment thrives as the performative mobilization of the people in the fantasized terms of armed libertarian conservatism. In reenactment culture,"'the people" mobilize into military command hierarchies without the directives of central authority. Reenactment enacts the people as militia and militia as performance, and the figure of the reenactor may be the cultural guerilla of our imperium.

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BREAK

Beth Cleary

Characters:

LOU ("Louanne"), 60, custodial worker 20 years
MEL ("Melanie"), 47, custodial worker 7 years

Setting: A Boiler Room which serves as Lou's and Mel's breakroom. Piping is huge, the room is cavernous; the bowels of the building(s) they work in. Can be suggested minimally. Periodic clanging and hissing of pipes.

MEL *enters the boiler room with her lunch pail. She sets it on the floor, and opens it, taking out two sticks, one long and one short. She lays them on the floor next to her pail, and then takes out her lunch: a sandwich, potato chips, a baggie-full of small carrots, an apple. She rolls onto her back and sighs, bending her legs, stretching, trying to get the soreness out of her body. She goes still, listening for footsteps outside the door. She grabs her sandwich and takes a bite out of it, then closes it up in the baggie. She chews while lying on her back. She takes up the bag of potato chips and begins taking large quantities into her mouth, chewing and licking her lips. She is here, waiting for a good two minutes.*

LOU *enters through the door like a hurricane and slams it, eyes on fire.* MEL *jumps, yelps, the potato chips fly.*

MEL

Jesus!

(*Lou stares.*)

Jesus, Lou.

LOU

What? 'd I scare you? Sorry.

MEL

What do you think, blowing in here like hell, I'm here on time as usual, of course I'm here, you might have thought of that. A door like that one could break a wrestler's leg in two on the smash.

LOU

Could, couldn't it.

(LOU *sits on the edge of a pipe, sets her lunch pail down. Doesn't open it.* MEL *picks up her chips, examines them, replaces them in the bag if they're okay.*)

MEL

What'd you bring today?

LOU

Hunh?

MEL

What'd you bring? Your lunch.

LOU

Oh. I don't know. Not hungry. You want it? What I brought?

MEL

What do you mean? You been here since 4 a.m., amped on coffee. You gotta have some food. Here, take some carrots. Good for your eyes. Vegetables.

LOU

My eyes are fine.

(*Pause.*)

MEL

(*holds up the two sticks from the ground*)

Here. Ready. Pick.

LOU

(*looking at Mel's sticks*)

I'll just do it.

MEL

Come on. Pick. The after-lunch Stick Job. Who's it gonna be?

LOU

I'll do it.

MEL

No! You gotta pick. They're ready.

LOU

I said I'll do it. Eat your carrots.

MEL

Pick, or I'll pick for you.

LOU

Right. Go ahead then. Pick for me.

(*MEL puts the sticks behind her, "shuffles" them back and forth.*)

MEL

I'm confusing myself on purpose. I don't know which one's where. Here we go, I'm right hand, you're left, here we GO! Ha! *(Holds up the shorter stick in her left hand.)* My turn, I'll do it.

LOU

You said I was left.

MEL

Right. You're right. Gotcha! (*Beat.*) It was a joke.

LOU

I'm doin' it. I'll enjoy holding my nose and doing it. Cuz then, I'm going home.

MEL

Home?

LOU

Right.

MEL

What does that mean?

LOU

Cuttin' out.

MEL

You sick?

LOU

Never felt better. As they say.

MEL

You're just "cuttin' out"? Like that's an option.

LOU

I just am, Mel. It's time. Now go on, eat your tunafish on toast with pickles sandwich in front of me one last time. *(Reaches into her lunchbox for a soda.)* Here, I'll even, what do they say, "raise a glass." As a parting gesture.

MEL

A parting gesture.

LOU

Yep. A parting gesture. And you've got hearing problems today.

MEL

Lou.

LOU

(drinking a long swig from her can)

What?

MEL

It's drama day today, I guess.

LOU

(wiping her mouth with her uniform sleeve triumphantly)

Think what you like.

MEL

Oh boy. Drama day. 'Didn't see it coming. No sign of it when we punched in at 4:00, you all perky early smiles and your usual, me with my hair all pulled back and awful, bags under my eyes, no sir, morning as usual at E.J. Cutter Brokerage Company. So why's it Drama Day today? Lou. (Beat, LOU *ignores* MEL.) Somewhere on the fourth floor, after the conference room men's room, and before the exec suite vacuuming, I'll bet...was it Jimmy? *(No response.)* I've been telling you, he's just a punk kid, a nothing, ignore him, he'll be outta here anyways on seasonal layoff...

LOU

Not Jimmy.

MEL

Lou. Come on. This is the only break I get in the day, or night whatever time it is, our little breaks. Otherwise, you and me, on different floors, racing around with our squeegees and hauling big bags of little bags of trash. These little breaks is it. A little lie down, out of the eye of whoever, just catch up on life stuff. Talk a little

bit now, take it easy, take a load off. No drama. (*Pause.*) Not today. I got enough at home.

(LOU *shoots her a look, assesses, turns back to staring straight ahead.*)

LOU
(*deadpan*)
I'm sure you do.

MEL
Yep, I do, just like everybody, but, I'm not going to bring that in here, into our Ladies who Lunch. So. Let's just take our 20 minutes or so now. (*Beat.*) And Lou, I gotta ask you, I know you get fed up, and I look up to you with how worked up you get about it on some days, but a job's a job, and we're kinda lucky, well I won't say lucky, but we're here anyway. (*Pause.*) Which is more than I can say for Cathy, you know, my neighbor, did I tell you that sonofabitch boss o' hers called her in and fired her...

LOU
(*interrupting and overlapping*)
You told me. Cathy's out. History as they say.

MEL
Yeah, and closer to home here, E.J. Cutter, yesterday I heard Curt talking about moving all our schedules around before seasonal, and that they want us to start even earlier in the morning...

LOU
(*overlapping*)
...she's free, that Cathy, if you think about it, free. She'll be broke, but she's sleeping in, sittin' with her coffee, thinking...

MEL
And I know that, like, Mary's got her schedule just perfect right now, coverage for the kids until she gets home, and if they move us all around, it'll mess everything up. Mary's worked up. And she's not the only one. And they don't know...

LOU
(*overlapping*)
And I myself, I'm close, real close, just a year or two 'til I'm sittin' and thinkin'...but I'm sayin' today, loud and clear: Why wait? I'll get partial what I've paid in all

these years, 'won't feel different too much from the squeeze I feel now after that last crappy contract...

MEL

(*trying to carry on a conversation*)

There's plenty of others, maybe even me, who won't be able to juggle, you can't just juggle all of a sudden like that. Cars and kids and everything. Ron in Parking says they want it this way, shake it up and see who falls out. Leaner and meaner.

LOU

Yep, that squeeze, like they say, that squeeze *while* I'm working, after I'm working. What about just being in the day without a clock?

(*Pause.*)

MEL

(*turning onto her back again, with her sandwich*)

Lou. Listen. Last time we went here, it took us days to get you back. Remember? Funky timeclock punches, sick days, no Ladies who Lunch. A first-class funk. I can't do that now, again. Candy could feel it on me. Before. I can't do it, not now. I'm asking you, Lou, please, calm down, have some lunch.

LOU

(*hotly*)

That'd be breakfast. It's 8:00 in the morning. Remember?

MEL

Okay, breakfast, and let's just have a little peace and q.

(*Significant pause.* LOU *begins to pace aimlessly.* MEL *slowly eats her sandwich. There's quiet, except the noise of the big ducts and pipes.*)

MEL

Valerie's bowl has taffy in it today. I took a handful (*reaches into her pocket*), want some?

LOU

No.

MEL

(*dropping the candy in her lunchbox*)

She left a note. Buddy came through the operation good. And she wanted me to take extra taffy for Candy. Candy can't eat taffy, too rough on her teeth. But Valerie don't know that. I like her to think it goes straight to Candy.

Pause.

LOU

How much time we got.

MEL

You got the watch.

LOU

(*looking at it)*

15 minutes. Shit.

MEL

'Nough time to down a sandwich and take a load off. But I'll tell you what's shit. Not being able to eat your lunch and bring your hands to your own mouth without inhaling ammonia. It's on my hands all the time, even with the gloves we got. New gloves, yeah. You think I'm eating tunafish? Beats me, cuz it smells like Mr. Clean on toast. Can't smell nothing else.

LOU

Mel. We know this. Mr. Clean's been your perfume seven years now, me twenty. Regular Shalimar.

MEL

Well I still gotta complain. That's how I know I still got a sense of smell. (*Pause.*) Jesus. Rotten.

LOU

I'm telling you. Parting gesture. Start thinking.

MEL

Right, Mel. Where'd Candy be if I just up and quit? You know, I can't even mouth off about it, or I'll go crazy. Cleaning fluids, party trash we gotta clean up, okay, let's blow off some steam over that day to day. But the big up-and-quit, come on, I can't even mouth off about that.

(LOU shrugs.)

Lou, I told you, Drama Day's been cancelled.

LOU

Sorry to inconvenience you. But you don't make the rules.

MEL

(flaring)

How'd Candy get her bus vouchers and her classroom aide if I quit? 'State don't provide that stuff to people who's not working. Where'd Candy be? I gotta think of that. I can't be thinking about sitting and thinking and calculating this squeeze and that squeeze. It's all a squeeze, Lou, and I'm in it with Candy, and I just gotta keep on. This time, this break in the day, is one of my breathing spots, Lou. Don't fuck it up for me.

LOU

Again, sorry to be a burden as they say.

MEL

Don't start. Don't make like this is just a walk in the park, this talking about up and quitting. Like I don't think about it every day, every damn day. But you don't hear it from me. I keep a lid on it.

LOU

(half smirking)

I thought you were feeling lucky to be here. Y'aren't after all?

MEL

What, I'm blind? And dumb too? Every time I gotta empty Barclay's wastebucket with those used condoms in there, I think about dumping that mess on Cutter's executive office chair and saying there, that's what your employee of the month does on the job, guess that's why he makes the big bucks. Or every time I gotta fish false eyelashes out of TwinkleToes' recycling can, or clean up the spilled booze and wasted food in the conference room kitchen, or listen to mid-morning conversations as they all gripe about their hard lives, standing around the mail room avoiding any kind of work that I can see, or carry on their important conversation, three of 'em across the whole hallway, not even seeing me carrying the stuff to spray the plants, and one of 'em plows into me and I go down as he says 'scuse me and gets back to his big talking. Oh yeah, Lou, it's real great here, this job, I'm so quiet about it all the time cuz I just love it.

LOU

Awright! 'Good to see a little fire there, Mel!

MEL

Don't fuckin' start. It don't do no good to go on and on like this, cuz I gotta be back here tomorrow, and I know you do too, Dick's pension doesn't see you a month of groceries. And I know you don't think Sealey's going to fight for you if

you pull out early, twenty years' seniority or no. Corners to cut, that's what they're watching for, right over the shoulder of Cutter an' Corporate.

LOU

How you know about Dick's pension?

MEL

You told me.

LOU

Oh. (*Pause.*) Three years next week.

MEL

Sorry. I didn't know that. Sorry. Sorry, Lou. (*Pause.*) Vacuuming and scrubbing and keeping our heads down and pretending we're as invisible as they want us to be. (*Pause.*) If you start that talk about quitting, we just go there, and then we're stuck there, and we bring it home on us. Worse smell than the chlorine if you ask me. I bring it home on me, and I don't have nothing left for Candy then. I just don't. And I got to. She can't do nothing for herself.

LOU

I know. So she's...

MEL

Say you're sorry.

LOU

What?

MEL

Say you're sorry.

LOU

For what?

MEL

For starting this, for getting us upset.

LOU

I'm not upset, I'm very clear.

MEL

Oh right.

LOU

And I'm not sorry. I got to say what I'm feeling. And you haven't even asked why, today, I might be more serious than any other day. Maybe you should ask that. Or apologize for not asking it.

MEL

Jesus, Lou, we got ten minutes now. I'm doing the Stick Job, me holding my nose today not you, and then I'm going up to third floor to set up chairs in the conference room, and to bring tubs of ice in for their party. At least it will be cool and ice, not cleaning fluids. That's what I'm doing. And I don't know what you're doing but today it won't include the Stick Job, it'll be somewhere on first, and maybe it'll even be plants and polishing, and then you'll go home. So stop it, just stop it. I got an apple to eat, that's fruit, good for you, I'm going to eat it while neither of us apologizes for nothing. Let's take a load off. I looked forward to your company, ladies that lunch. Tomorrow's another day.

(MEL *takes several napkins out of her box, and uses them to polish her apple. She eats with the napkin between her skin and the apple.* LOU *kicks her lunch box into an obscure corner.*)

LOU

Dick's pension's gone.

MEL

What?

LOU

It's gone. I got nothing coming in.

MEL

What happened?

LOU

It's gone. That's all. Kaput as they say.

MEL

So you're quitting today. Good move.

LOU

Big holding company went bust, all the stocks or whatever were phony, it's like that Enron thing, everything's wiped out. Everyone, everything, all the pensions, all the stock whatevers, all the 401ks, all the way on down to every company they

owned, union or not. Even down to the dead guys like Dick. All I got starting three years ago next week was a lousy $465 a month. And now I got squat.

MEL

When'd all this happen, Lou?

LOU

Month ago.

MEL

God.

LOU

He's not listening.

MEL

Never thought he was.

LOU

And so here, today, when I took my 6 a.m. ...

MEL

Wait, Lou, isn't there some class action thing you can get in on, that's what they do, sue these bastards, and eventually people get something.

LOU

Please. So I took my 6 a.m....

MEL

It'll take awhile, but you'd get more than Dick's pension, much more. If you can hang on, it could be like winning the lottery. Look into that...

LOU

(*interrupting*)

So on 6 a.m. break, I was standing outside the back door having a cigarette, and Sammy comes out. He's got a cuppa coffee, we're talking. Six a.m., pretty windy, barely light out, just nice beginning to come up, you could see it through the trees. So we're talking and watching, and there's birds, and he tells me his son made the football team in high school, and I say great, and he asks me about my grandkids and I tell him good, most of 'em got jobs, you know, all that. And then Sealey drives up to around back, down the end of the lot near the dumpster, he don't see us I'm pretty sure, there's that overhang. And I see him taking a big stack of papers out of his front seat and looking around to make sure no one's

around and he sees the coast is clear and he gets out and chucks the stack into the dumpster. Which is pretty full. And me and Sammy duck inside the back hallway as he drives slowly by. When we figure he's gone, we go out, we don't even say nothing to each other, we go out and walk over toward the dumpster. Some stuff's blowing out, and we're figuring some of it's the stuff that Sealey threw in. We want to see, what's our steward up to that hour, he's on day shift. So we go over and pick up some of the papers that blew out. And we bring 'em back in where there's enough light. And they're those questionnaires we filled out last week about what kind of shifts we want, and what more benefits, and what can the union do for us, yaddyaddy. And Sammy's got a grievance complaint in his stack of stuff. All originals.

MEL

Whoah. (Beat.) Maybe he's got the data, doesn't need...

LOU

Six a.m.? Chucking originals of stuff that's supposed to be his job? No explanation needed as they say.

MEL

I don't know, Lou, he's always been a lousy steward, don't look out for us at all, what do you expect? Did you really fill that questionnaire out thinking it would lead to, I don't know, the lottery?!

LOU

So Sammy goes up to Sealey at his desk, after he comes in with coffee and a box of doughnuts. And he says, Frank, uh, I found these in the parking lot, on the ground. They gotta be yours. Here. And Sealey looks at them, and he turns beet red and he says to Sammy, what are you doing, spying on union business? And Sammy says hey, I was walking outside on my break, and Sealey says he's filing a disciplinary on Sammy and to get out. He's elected, he's doing his job, Sammy's lucky to be in a union.

MEL

Lou, this is stupid. This is why you're upset?

LOU

And then I, me, I get called in by Flynn, at 7:20, and asked when I went on break. And I say I dunno, about 6 this morning. I got asked if I punched in and out and I said yeah, you can check, and no one's ever asked me that in 20 years of working at Cutter. And Flynn says well today we're asking. And I said I want my union steward present if there are going to be any more questions. And Flynn says your union steward is out at a meeting, and I know perfectly well he isn't, cuz I seen

Sammy in with him when I walked by, which I don't say. And Flynn says you better watch it, you've only got a couple years left, you don't want to ruin it with slack behavior at the end. He's seen that happen. And I said...

MEL
(*interjecting*)
I don't like this, Lou, any of it. Cathy mouthed off, and it got her...

LOU
And I said to Flynn, who'd I talk to Mr. Flynn, if I was interested in taking home one of these plants the company's going to throw out?

MEL
(*interjecting*)
You said what?

LOU
Who'd I talk to, Mr. Flynn? And he says, what? And I said, since I'm in here, since you called me in here, after 20 years on the job and counting, and asked me for the first time ever about my timecard which has always been regular and you know it, since I'm in here Mr. Flynn, I'd like to be able to take home one of the plants we're throwing out, I see them lined up outside, and I could drive around and take one, but I figure I'll ask since you might be proprietary as they say about the company's greenery.

MEL
Lou, you're losing it.

LOU
Which is what he kinda thought I think, and he said I could talk to Physical Plant Services but he doubts very much if I can have a plant since they're company property and such. And I said well I've always wanted to rescue one of them perfectly good plants that's property being thrown out but by the time it's the end of my shift I'm not thinking about the thrown out plants I'm thinking about getting home and washing my uniform for the next day and putting my feet up, but since you called me in here today Mr. Flynn, for the first time to question whether I'm doing my job right punching in, staying within break time, what not, it occurs to me to inquire as they say, to inquire about whether after all these years the company might give me something they're going to throw away anyway, something I want, that wouldn't be trash to me, something I'm asking for, on the day you're inquiring as to my loyalty.

MEL

God, Lou.

LOU

He's not listening, we've been over that. And so Flynn, he's kinda floored, he thinks I'm losing it, and I say no, I just want to take home a plant. That's all. A plant that's trash to you, but'd be nice in my picture window.

MEL

So'd he give you the plant?

LOU

Not his to give, he said. He watched me real close and picked up the phone and called Physical Plant Property or some office, and asked on the phone while he kept his eye on me about the company policy on discarded plants, whether they're free for the taking. And after awhile he thanks the guy on the other end, hangs up the phone, and says, "Sorry, Lou, it's Company policy, no removal of property by unauthorized personnel. You're not authorized." It's a plant, I say. That you're throwing out. I know, he says, but it's like the soap or the toilet paper rolls, we inventory all of that, you know, you can't take any even if it's discards. And I say Mr. Flynn think about this a minute, think about this situation real hard, first time I'm in this office in all these years, 'fact I've been here longer than you have, never was in Mr. Boyle's office here before you either, I've kept my head down and done my job all along, I'm just asking for a plant. It's not inventory any more, it's trash. Think about this, Mr. Flynn, think about this in a human way.

MEL

Lou, we gotta...

LOU

And he said if it was up to him he'd give me the plant. No question. And I asked if that was human enough, being human himself but enforcing a non-human policy. And he said I'd better leave his office, he'd called me off the job long enough.

MEL

So where's all this going?

LOU

I'm going.

MEL

You are not, Lou. Pull yourself together. Over a plant, Jesus.

LOU

It's not the plant, Mel.

MEL

I know it's not just the plant, but the whole story makes me tired, the dumpster, Sealey, Flynn, the lying, the stupid policy. It just makes me tired, and I got half my shift to go. And so do you. Now come on.

LOU

This is really it, Mel.

MEL

It is not.

LOU

It really is. I'm gonna crack up if I go back out on that floor, pretending like I wasn't treated like trash in there, pretending like after all these years of keeping my head down but still thinking they knew I came here every day, punched in, worked and sweated and had feelings and had plans and a life like everybody else, and now today I get it proven to me that none of all that, all those years of showing up and staying quiet and doing my job and doing it good, none of that added up to a plant, that they're going to throw away.

MEL

If it's recognition you want, Lou, I'll give that to you. You can clean a window faster an' better 'n anyone.

LOU

I didn't hear you just say that.

MEL

Why not?

LOU

Because you're not that stupid. And I'm not that stupid.

MEL

But you can. Look, Cathy lost her nerve like this...

LOU

Time's up. I'm going.

MEL

(*lunging at her, grabbing her arm*)

Lou! I'm sorry, I didn't know what to say. You can't do this. You've got only a year or a little more to go, *come on*, this is a bad day, it's a really bad day, they've treated you like dirt, and Sealey's a waste of time, but this is one day, just one in twenty years...

LOU

(*interjecting*)

There have been many others, Mel, you know it.

MEL

But my point is, you'll pull out of it, we'll pull out of it. You've got nothing coming in, Lou, you can't forget that.

LOU

I don't. I don't forget that. And I don't' forget that I'm too old to get another job, either. But I'm also no better than the sink scum I clean to these people...

MEL

Lou stop it right now. Stop it. You've got me, and the other girls on shift in this building, and dammit if we had a stinking union worth the dues we pay you'd feel better than all this no matter what Flynn or anyone else said or did. You gotta hold on, Lou. Please. I need you to.

(*Lou and Mel look at each other a good while.*)

LOU

I want that plant.

MEL

I'll help you get it off the dock. After work. We'll get your plant.

LOU

This is all about more than the plant. It's about the plant and more than the plant.

MEL

I know. (*She's backing away from Lou, watching her. She bends down to put her lunch pail together, still keeping an eye on Lou.*)

LOU

It's about the questionnaire and Sammy getting disciplined and being called unauthorized personnel by that worm Flynn.

MEL

I know.

LOU

I'm not unauthorized.

MEL

You're not.

LOU

We're getting that plant. They can write me up. Fire me. I'm taking something home. I'm staying human if they can't.

MEL

I'll help.

LOU

Maybe Candy'd like a plant for her room. We'll take two.

MEL

Right. We'll see.

LOU

Not having the pension, it makes me think crazy maybe. Act crazy maybe, even free.

MEL

I think you gotta think smart now, Lou.

LOU

But it's like, nothing coming in, I'm falling from a building but I never hit ground. Just fall. It's almost free.

MEL

(retrieving Lou's lunch pail from where she kicked it)

Almost free. You've got your own pension coming soon enough, and then you can sit and think. That's why you gotta stay now, stay in the squeeze.

LOU

As you say.

MEL

You got to. With me. And Candy. Breathing in the squeeze. Just stay in it.

LOU

Yeah, that squeeze of yours feels anything but free.

MEL

Not yet, Lou. Come on. Break's over today. And I got the short stick. Don't argue with me. Go on up to seven and take the wood polishing. That's got a nice smell. I'll see you in the elevator in about an hour. (*Lou hesitates.*) Come on. Break's over today.

(*Mel holds the door for Lou as the two women exit.*)

END

SKIN TROUBLE

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

Amiri Baraka

Characters
Ron: 40 year old Black city office worker
Marvin (Mustapha): 20 year old Black devotee to "Five Percenter" Islam
Sally: 30 year old Mulatto woman, Ron's present "main squeeze"
K. (and N.K.): A Klansman about 40 years old
Tippy Beige: Television Host

(Set in the main room of the apartment where Ron and Marvin live. Marvin has recently moved out of their parents' place and in with Ron. Furnished with recent painfully acquired furniture mixed with old stuff they took from "home." Slightly enhanced by reproductions of Black Art, Posters, vacation souvenirs. Ron has brought Sally to the apartment to show off his culinary "mastery." He is getting ready to set the table.)

Sally: So everybody not on your side is crazy or evil?

Ron: I think so...even if they not

Sally: But what is it... Crazy! ...a view?

Ron: Hey, there *is* crazy!

Sally: They said Dahmer wasn't crazy...

Ron: (laughing) But that's because *they* are...more crazy...and *they* couldn't let Dahmer usurp their gloriousness

Sally: I'm glad that's a joke.... but the same *They* we were talking about.

Ron: Everything is a joke but the funny stuff...same they and they ain't no joke. Same they who rich while most beeeees po' (ethnic edge to damp meaning) ...*that* They...

Sally: So you really do have...(as if searching to describe a mysterious illness) an ideology? (Releasing breath.) People warned me about that...

Ron: Oh, come on...I got certain ideas...seem obvious to me and a lot of people...but I wouldn't burden myself with any (mocks her) Ideology! What people?

Sally: What?

Ron: What people told you such a disgusting untruth about yr wonderful companion?

Sally: Maybe it's the same they... (they laugh)

Ron: *But look, I promise not to let my ideas, which that same they think is an* Ideology, get between me... (kisses) and thee...

Sally: Oh, please...but sometimes you do come up with some outer limits stuff.

Ron: Outer Limits... how you get to that... Outer Limits. You got an ideology too. You just comfortable with yours. What is it?

Sally: I don't have any ideology... I'm just a child of God and nature trying to make my way...

Ron: Whoa... now everybody got some ideas about the world, and as disconnected as they might be... they are in essence a partial ideology, at least...

Sally: You know what I mean... I don't have any doctrinaire...hard edge index of yes's and no's prescribing my next move

Ron: Outer Limits, huh...you shd talk to Marvin you really wd get to the Outer Limits.

(Marvin comes though the door. Dressed in the contemporary Black youth uniform of defiance. Beltless pants drooping so at times his behind peeps out, stringless sneakers, a Black stocking cap pulled down with his ears tucked in, a tee shirt, long and white with the inscription ALLAH SAY FUCK THE POLICE with a star at the center with the numeral 5 illuminated with red and gold projections from the points. Marvin, who calls himself, Mustapha, has a boom box on his shoulder when he enters...)

Ron: Marvin

Marvin: Mustapha (emphatic) ...Ain't no Marvins in here...

Ron: Well whoever the hell you are, turn that damned thing down

Marvin: I am I am...damn cant even listen... (he is walking toward the back and his own room)

Sally: Hello, Marvin

Ron: *Yeh, what's happening Marvin?*

Marvin: (Eyeing the woman with a smirk) Ain't no Marvins in here. Nothing happening *here*, but the same o' same o'...

Sally: (Not a whisper) Ron, I don't think your little brother likes me...

Marvin: (Turning as he is about to exit) Do it matter?

Ron: Marvin, why you always bring all this hostility in here...shoulda never let you. Come over here botherin me...

Sally: Ron, don't...

Marvin: Ain't brought nothin in here ...cept what the numbers say...

Ron: What?

Marvin: If it don't be no connection, cant be no current (laughs)

Sally: *(Nervous laugh) ...Oh, boy*

Ron: What is that...some of that Five-Percenter jive?

Marvin: Well, that's all that's gon be alive (long pause for effect)... Five!

Ron: Marvin

Marvin: Bump Marvin

Ron: Yeh, Yeh, Mustapha, Marvin...you get wack and more wack every day

Marvin: Ain't no wack, its just a fact

Sally: Five Percent...? What's that... numerology?

Marvin: It ain't tricknology...(leaving) or anything else understood with your psychology...(through the door, radio goes back up)

Ron: (shouting after him) That spooky dooky gonna drive you over the Been Gone..

Sally: What's all that about? Your little brother into some kind of Muslim Philosophy?

Ron: Philosophy my ass...some of that Black Cultural Nationalism. Some dude uptown started callin himself Allah a few years ago. Allah...and he got a store front on Seventh Ave...Had these young nuts wacked behind him...some number prophecy garbage...

Sally: Allah? (She laughs)

Ron: Shit, Oral Roberts and Falwell, ain't too far behind him.

Sally: Really...what was that Allah saying...I thought Allah was God...how could somebody call themselves...

Ron: Why not...everybody do it...They got seven thousand local Gods right around here, not including white folks. That wd make one hundred seven thousand, plus light-skinned Negroes (glancing at S)...they be "Goding" like a mo mo...

Sally: (With irritated "dismissal") All right...what did this Allah say?

Ron: He said the Black Man was God and that most white folks and non-believing niggers including Elijah Muhammad Farrakhan Petey Wheetstraw and Miles Davis was gonna get wasted and only five percent of the chose Bloods was gonna see themselves later

Sally: That's not very original... is it?

Ron: For slaves it might be...

Sally: So they think the Judeo-Christian tradition is... what...?

Ron: Judeo-Christian...wait a minute...even poor-white-collar-Negro me know JC is Dr. Jive...

Sally: It *is* the dominant thought... isn't it?

Ron: For who? I don't believe Bloods never believed in that...JC...they just say anything to get to the next grit without a whip laid on they ass.

Sally: Ron, You know, I didn't realize you were this cynical.

Ron: Cynical... Please, I'm not cynical... just over twenty-one... and not a drug dealer. But no, it's not very original... that's what wacked Pharaoh and them light-skinned Africans. Start saying they was God...

Sally: Black Men only... What about the women?

Ron: You have to ask Marvin, Mustapha... for the brochure when he remanifests...

Sally: I will not... he actually looks like he wanted to shoot me...

Ron: Don't get actressy on me... It's not that grim... he's just a kid... that stuff is all around here

Sally: I know, Hitler was a kid once too

Ron: Hey, wait a minute... don't go all the way over there...

Sally: What's the difference?

Ron: White people been saying they was God since they stopped worshipping statues

Sally: So... you not telling me something I don't know..

Ron: White Supremacy... you heard of the Last Poets... that number they do... "The white man got a god complex..."

Sally: Ron, don't apotheosize *everything!*

Ron: You just did.

Marvin: (Entering like a Rapper) "The lost tribe found a mouth in the south... lost its force locked up in the north..."

Sally: Mustapha is turned on

Marvin: (Looks at her like he could waste her.)

Ron: Look Marvin all that evil eye Bs got to cool out or you got to split

Marvin: Don't worry

Sally: (A sliver of whispered curiosity...attempts to...) But tell me, Marv... Mustapha... do you dislike me because you think I'm white?

Marvin: You is White!

Sally: (Laughs thinly.)

Ron: See, you don't know what you're talking about...as usual... Sally is Black as you.

Marvin: (In high mock amazement...looking from his own brown self back at the woman...) Well it's a damn good disguise... (smirks) Sho look white to...

Ron: (Laughs) Wrong again. (trying to touch him)

Marvin: (Steps out the way of the familiarity, continuing to laugh in his hands)

Sally: Marvin, I'm Black... I really am!

Marvin: (Looking exaggerately at his arms, &c) This must be some other shade I'm walkin around with...

Ron: Man... you do not know Everything... Sally's mother was white...her father was Black

Marvin: Uh- Uh- Uh coulda fooled me...Yo father was just...

Sally: Which makes me Black, right?

Marvin: (Retreating toward door) Yeh...except for the white part... Still ain't in the Five

Ron: Marvin, you actin like a stone knuckle head... that Five-percent Voodoo BS is takin in you into never never land... you need to check yourself...

Marvin: Me? I'm just tellin the truth (jooging) pardner...
(Pulls pants down so his butt is waving at them.)

Sally: (Hilarious but strained laugh.)

Ron: (Opening arms in futility..) Goddam these hip-hop pseudo (satirical) Moslems... all the way out the box! See them droopy pants...sneakers without shoe strings...that's all jail house culture. So many of these young knuckle heads locked up... the jail culture is taking over the streets.

(A sudden frenzied knock at the door..)

K.: (Outside door banging) Hey, Hey...let me in...please please let me in, will you...

Ron: Sounds like somebody really in trouble...who the...

Sally: Ron... he sounds really panicked... You think its some gang...

Ron: Who is it?

K.: (Banging) Let me in...please let me in... they'll kill me...

Marvin: (Comes out...peering) Who is it?

K.: (Continues banging) Please, for God's sake...

Marvin: (To Ron) Should I open it...?

Ron: Ok, maybe its one of your nutty-Five friends.

Marvin: Huh...we ain't the nuts... (Shouts) Who the hell is it?

K.: (Banging) ...Please let me in...its...please...my life is in danger...
(They look at each other. Ron gestures for Sally to get behind him. Marvin slides his hand under his tee shirt...stands fast...)

Ron: (Opening door. A man dressed in a Klan outfit rushes in... Leans against door frame, out of breath and frightened...but still with a kind of stiff distance.)
What the fuck...what's this... some stupid joke

K.: Joke?!

Marvin: Mother...Fucker (shoving his hand to grab something under his shirt) A fuckin Devil...for real!

Sally: (Screams) God...how could he get...here?

K.: Please...Please...(staggers in) Please...

(All step back...Marvin with hand still under his shirt.)

Marvin: What you think you doin, you sick devil...you betta get yo sorry nasty ass outta here!

Ron: Wait, Marvin (gestures). Look, you ignorant asshole...what the hell you doing down here...and why you at my door?

Mavin: What a Devil...like you...doing in the Hood anyway?

Sally: Unbelievable (a hushed almost awe) A Klansman...dressed up like that...in the blackest ghetto...

K.: Just let me in...I'll explain...just a short while...I'll try to explain...Please I'm being chased..

(All look, Marvin is still snarling...)

Marvin: Damn, Fuckin Shaitan hisself...where my phone...nobody believe this shit...goddam Iblis, Beelzebub, Satan, Santa Claus...stinking pig punk sheet wearing Devil...

K.: People are trying to kill me!

Marvin: (Shoots a hot laugh) Shit... I guess so...hit...Damn, Ron.

Ron: Shut up for a minute, Marvin! (to K.) I dont really care who trying to kill you...get the fuck outta here!

Marvin: (Above a mumble) Damn..., lst Miss Muffett...now the full-up Devil...Brother (to Ron) you got some all-the-way-out-to-lunch visitors. 1st they women come in the hood then here come the straight out wicked faggot in his hood!

Ron: (Opens door so K steps further in...closes it almost.) Look who ever you are...if you simple enough to come down here...you need to get blown away!

Marvin: Humdoolilah!!

Sally: Yes...(looking at Marvin) you betta go... (then with some desperate curiosity, like a missed heartbeat) ...But wait, Ron...let him explain...trying to kill you...who? (Ron & Marvin look from Sally to each other...their faces reporting...Marvin's disgust, Ron's measured shock.)

Marvin: Who? Any motherfucker in they right mind!

K.: (Steps in, tentatively...still looking behind him) Yes...some of your neighbors...are (a slightly haughty "euphemism") psychopaths...someone actually took a shot at me!

Marvin: Damn...probably that blind ass Wadoo...he cant hit shit...wished I'd seen yr Devil ass!

Ron: Marvin, shut up, let this idiot (a sour glance at Sally) explain...then get the hell out!

K.: Look, if you civilized...you'll at least save me from those murderers!

Marvin: Civilized...(hand back under shirt) a really civilized person would blow a hole in your empty head on sight!

Ron: (A mock humor to cool things down.) Hey, he might not even have a head under there...times up...get out! (reaches for K.'s arm)

K.: I'm going...but just a few minutes...give me a few more minutes till those shooters go away!

Marvin: Don't give him shit. (Thinking out loud.) Anybody see you come in here? Damn... I already got to hear about...(Nods toward Sally) I'll never live *this* shit down...

K.: No, No...I gave em the slip...Easy to outwit (nasty sound) shit.

Sally: (Transfixed) God, you must be...

Marvin: (Completing her thought) Hey, you're right... Nuts!

K.: Me? Because I'm being shot at by...some things?

Marvin: What?

Ron: Look...whoever the sick dimwit mf you are...I ain't gonna tell you get out too many more times.

K.: OK OK (He steps in further...spreading his arms for respite). I told you I'll go... I *want* to go...just a few more minutes...just a few...till the danger passes.

Marvin: Fuck you, cracker...Just go! ...Now!

Ron: Right...danger (mocking changes to anger) You people...you sick Klan chumps are the dangers...you been lynching and burning us for years...now you come in here wantin us to save you...WHY?!

K.: Maybe because you want to act...a little more (mocking) civilized.

Marvin: Ron, we should put his ass out. And shine lights on him so that no-shootin Wadoo won't miss!

K.: (Sardonic laughter) That sounds like a savage all right

Marvin: Fuckin...(leaps up at K....Ron steps in his way)

Ron: No, Marvin, we don't need no charges...I know this chump is probably a cop.

K.: Ah reason, sweet reason...that's what we need.

Marvin: You a murderer, Yall kill niggers all the time...I seen you Devils on the TV all the time. Fuckin with Black people I'm surprised we...even talkin to you...I know I'm surprised at me...

Ron: Look, my man, either you get outta here...right now, or we do what (emphasizes) Mustapha here suggests!

(K is budging.)

Sally: (As if she has a rationale now) Wait...Wait...He needs to get out for sure...but I'm curious. I want to hear the story.

Marvin: See! That's why ain't but Five stay alive...this faggot shoulda *been* dead!

Sally: Let him stay long enough to tell...

Marvin: Story? Ron, you know she wrong, this sucker need to go...NOW...he might even be strapped...

Ron: Yeh, Marvin's right... (steps to K.) Raise your hands...Shoulda patted yr funky ass down from the giddy up.

K.: No (snickers) I'm not armed...that's the point!

Sally: What's the point?

K.: I'm unarmed...for Christ Sakes...otherwise I'da sent...what's his name...Wadoo... to Hell where he belongs.

Marvin: (Pulls a Glock automatic from under his tee shirt) What? Mo-ther..Fuck (Sticks it right in K.'s chest)...Devil, I'll send you to The White House under the ground.

Ron: Hey Marvin, be cool, we do something to this fool...our Negro police director , the ACLU and Prof. Warmley Cost will be on our backs. Just let him leave...(laughs) Maybe Wadoo wont miss the next time.

Sally: But why...why are you even here?

K.: Its one of our rituals.

Ron: Talk sense.

Marvin: He cant.

Sally: Rituals? (gesturing at Marvin) Please... I want to hear this.

K.: See, she's got some echo of civilization.

Ron: Look asshole, and dig your self real close now...the lady wants to hear your dumb shit...spit it out...then get the fuck out (Looks at Marvin then at the woman.) Why do you even want to listen to this asshole?

K.: (Coughs to keep from laughing) The rituals are to test and measure each candidate for the Order.

Marvin: Odor is right (sarcastic)

Sally: (Waves at him to be quiet.)

Ron: (Gestures for Marvin to put gun away.)

K.: In order to qualify for the Order, a Neophyte must walk through the valley of the shadow...the worst nig...slums...in full hood dress... (R,M,S Look at K and at each other.)

Ron: What? Damn... Yall really are all the way fucked up! Man, you could get iced just walking up these streets after dark...much less dressed up like Dracula's Ghost.

Sally: (To K.) Go on...

K.: To show that the Neophyte is fearless and contemptuous of the squalid savages he's sworn to... (calculatedly) eliminate!

Marvin: (Out gun) Ron, let me at least blow this chump's foot off...or something... God damn I cant stand yall listening to this sewer in a ghost suit!

Sally: Marvin Marvin... let him finish and then he'll be gone

Ron: Yeh, Marvin put that thing away (disingenuous double take.) ...Hey, what are you doing with that anyway? (Voice lowering as he reflects on situation) I thought I told you...

K.: See? (snicker) How typical of this... (gesture indicating these "Nigger Ghettoes") moral torpor. Here's a father with no control over his offspring

Marvin: Silly Devil, He ain't my father.

Ron: He's my little brother... (a threat) but that ain't a little piece he got...right?

Sally: Don't stop him...

Marvin: Its sick...you wanna hear this sick?

Ron: Sally, (losing patience) this guy is dangerous...a dangerous racist lunatic! We need to throw him out.

Sally: Just let him finish...please... (as if she "needs K.'s words) Don't you want to *hear* this? As evil as it might be.

Marvin: He's a Devil. He even got on the uniform. What can he say we ain't heard?

Ron: (Begins pushing K.) Look, get out!

K.: The woman...She's the only one interested in Civilization. (Reflecting.) But what is a white woman doing with these...

Marvin: (Cracks up laughing, despite himself)

Sally: But I'm *not* white!

K.: Oh, one of those *Octoroons*. Jesus, too bad. But if you had any sense you'd be passing...like that fine actress, Blondie Gump !

Marvin: (Pulls on him and drives him toward the door with the gun.) I'll blow your cave ass into bad ideas... (K. shaken a little...tries to play it off) ...I ain't kiddin!

Sally: (Stands frozen with rage...) You don't know anything about me.

Marvin: (to Sally, partially amused) He peeped you...now you want him gone too!

Ron: (to Sally) You mean you just had to hear the filth for yourself out his mouth?

K.: Ok, Ok... I didn't mean to offend you, Miss, But for your own good...find some white man...don't doom your children...

Marvin: (cocks piece) Watch...I'ma take this sucker's ear right off his empty Devil head!

K.: Ok, I'm going. I guess I can go out now. But I'll tell you this. The Order is a great vehicle of Civilized life. We are the humanizers of the world. (Backing out away from M) And this woman has a chance at *Humanity*... (there is a throbbing hollowness to the word) While, you two...

Ron: (Looking slowly at Marvin as if too passively encourage him)

Marvin: (Shoots, just in front of K., into the floor...)

Sally: No, No, he's crazy...dont you see that's what he wants (a statement as empty as K.'s)

K.: May I have one more word... before this (He is "On Stage").

Ron: (grabs his sheet) Out, Bastard...Out!

K.: Just this! (turning to go.) You (waving haughtily) Fruhmenschen are older than human society...

(Marvin looks astonished, as if shocked at this "agreement")

Marvin: ("Agreeing" with K.) Original Man!

Sally: Fruhmenschen...?

K.: Yes, Primitive Man...older than actual humans...But that was the beginning and end of your mission...from the mud back to the mud...you see?

Marvin: Listen to this wicked bastard!

Ron: (Slaps him) You wanna die?

K.: But the Fruhmenschen will soon be extinct. It is our glory to aid (laughs at his pun) AIDS...from the monkeys to the monkeys...to aid and accelerate this extinction.

Marvin: God Damn...Listen to this!

K.: I don't mean to make you angry...it's just a fact...sad for you joyous for us. It's just a fact. Fruhmenschen have no place in modern society...except as slaves and servants and soon modern Aryan technology, and gene splicing, plus foreign Aid (laughs) will make you obsolete.

Ron: (Slaps K. again, it seems, with little effect) I'll break your racist ass!

Marvin: That slappin ain't doin it man, lemme slap him with this (aiming coldly).

Sally: You really *believe* that garbage?

K.: OK (to Marvin, not altogether "calm") don't resort to your mindless violence. There is one way you can survive... (to Sally) those of you who can accept, yet transcend your role.

Marvin: (Shoots again, this time closer, between his feet.)

Sally: Transcend our role? You're crazy!

K.: No, I'm perfectly sane...Look (rips off hood...it is a Black man of about thirty five with medium brown skin).

Sally: My God!

Marvin: (Letting gun slowly down) What kind of wack-out nigger are you?

K.: You're interested now, huh?

Sally: (Almost blinking in disbelief) I'm interested.

Ron: What kind of sick...what are you...?

Marvin: I heard of Oreos...but you passed that...You like a record company cover Like Elvis Presley covering Jackie Wilson.

Sally: But why...why are you wearing that stuff?...Are you that sick?

Ron: The real Klan would kill you if they caught you!

K.: Poor fools. Don't you know even the Klan has modernized?

Marvin: But you ain't white...at least your skin ain't.

Ron: I'd love to be there when the Klan catches you.

K.: Jesus...The Klan *sent* me! I'm a new initiate. One of the Chosen Ones. (Hearing this last makes everyone, even Marvin, suddenly almost fearful)

Ron: OK, you're all the way fucked up...Get outta here anyway...talking some mindless madness

K.: The Klan has understood that there really *are* (hypnotic vibes) worthy Darker People (sweeping obscure gestures of psychological "Great Me-ness")...who are Qualified to continue living...even at the margins of Aryan-Nordic greatness...who can *think*...who know who THEY are...Not in any slavish Unca Remus way, but with the eyeball to eyeball comprehension of the Great Creator's Master Plan.

Marvin: A Master Plan...Dig that! Wow...open the windows, open the doors, flush the toilet.

Sally: You are quite mad, you know...

Marvin: Wicked is what...Crazy and Wicked!

Ron: (Stiff from actual fright...very slowly and pondering) I thought I 'd seen it all...but...never...something like this...You frighten me...you know that...you actually scare the living shit outta me!

K.: Of course...how could you be ready for advanced evolutionary science? (Brightens with the telling, but almost confidentially) You know the Order spots you...spots the DF's who're worthy...They approached me at Stanford...and took me to see the cross-eyed lady...and she taught me the Hoch-Weise. I had to study in secret...a few skeptics...but I zoomed zoomed and heard their prey doomed in my sleep. And awoke one afternoon floating around the Sun itself.

Marvin: Ok, Ok (under shirt again) Beat it, Chump...for I throw up all over yr ass...

Sally: You're ...*serious*...(she shrinks)

K.: You see, after the Fruhmenschen are eliminated, the Order will allow a select few of the DF's to Live and parade at the edges of the Aryan Nations.

Marvin: They gon change your color?

K.: In the future , we are promised the fruits of Advanced Aryanology. All things are possible under the Order. Don't you see...its not even about (deprecating the idea) *Color!* It's about *Class!*

Sally: My God! (She is still backing away, hand over mouth) My God!

Ron: Then you'll be turned White?

K: Of course... (Ecstasy to Rational) but it wont even matter...then...The Fruhmenschen will be gone!

Sally: My God!

Ron: (Shoves him roughly through the door) Good Bye!!

Sally: And until that glorious day... of technology...?

K.: (Over his shoulder) Until that day, we wear the robe and hood...as proof that We will belong!

Ron: (Turning on the exiting K., suddenly) What? Get the fuck outta here!

Marvin: (Howling with laughter) Can you believe...I mean can you really believe it...

Sally: (Still backing away, hand over mouth) But...how...how can that be...?

Marvin: (Still laughing) Oh my God!

Ron: (Looking out the door...Marvin to the window)...Marvin...Mustapha...I don't think its funny at all!

Sally: No...it's very very sad.

Ron: No, it ain't sad neither.

Marvin: Sick.

Ron: Its something altogether other than those...it's actually...(measuring his words) ...frightening...very very frightening!

K.: (His voice comes shooting back out of the darkness back into the room) You you simply can't understand advanced thought. Perhaps...(this is like slapstick to him) Perhaps, if you tried to look at it as really meaningful Affirmative Action...!
(K.'s laughter trails him in the darkness, finally fading away)

Ron: (To Marvin, as he rushes out the door...) Just to make sure... (Shouting after K.) Put the hood back on...punk...put the hood back on! Hey, Wadooo... Look out for the Klan!

(Ron & Sally stand looking at each other without speaking, regarding each other with some sharpened objectivity)

Marvin: (Still shouting) Yo! Yo! Yo! Stupid inside out Oreo...Put yr goddam hood back on and head for that tall apartment building ...Yo! Chump...put your hood back on...

Sally: (to anyone) You think...that was some kind of hoax...of one kind or...

Marvin: Crazy Crazy Crazy Crazy Crazy Crazy Negro...(screams) Affirmative Action.

Ron: (Stares...says nothing.)

Marvin: Probably was some kind of joke...Dude was playing us that's all...(not altogether joking)...All yall went for it too!

Ron: I hate to say this...but...I think Mustapha here had the right line...

Marvin: Yeh, you shoulda let me kill the motherfucker...joke or not. Besides, you know you not sposed to dress up like that here in Brick City...its against the law...we one of the only city's got that law!

Sally: But no one...(looks) is that...crazy.

Marvin: Wow ! Ain't that all the way Out!...(at Sally, only half joking) You white outside just like him. But he Black under, but white under the Black. You claim you Black under the white... Integration is deep.

Ron: Look, Marvin...keep that up... Im'a slap the shit outta you...

Marvin: Yeh, why didn't you slap that Klan nigger?

Sally: (Staring strangely into the dark) Marvin you have no right to say such a thing to me! (a sad anger.)

Marvin: Aw...I was just... (Lights fade to black with all frozen. Then lights rise slowly. The three are sitting at the table eating.)

Ron: I wish you didn't dislike me so much, Marvin.

Marvin: I don't dislike you...I just get spooked by white...I mean white looking...damn... (He rises and turns on the TV, to change the subject. The News is coming on.)

(The Three Figures sit contemplating the departed, obviously demented Negro, who has just left them, and at the same time half hearing and beginning to look at the television (Large Projector), the older brother still shaking his head at the madness that has just gone down. The younger brother mumbling something...)

YB: "Now that was some wild ass shit...Whew...&c"

(The woman looks very slowly at each brother, then from her stiff, fear like posture rises slowly, then at the first sound of the TV' SHOW'S theme song for the nightly news program, she sits up sharply:)

W.: Oh My God, I've got to go to work...

(The others do not even seem to realize it, but she stands up, turns and runs out the door.)

(The T& B show is coming on, and when the two co-hosts' names are announced, the Neely-Tippy News Hour with Neely Krawl (the negro klansman comes bubbling out and sits), Tippy Beige. Sally enters with (slightly breathless from getting there) and sits next to the man who was at the house earlier.

As the woman begins her On-Air patter, with a voice quite unlike the one she spoke with earlier, the two brothers look at each other in miniature, but grotesque, jerks, until they are facing each other.)

K.: Good Evening, This is Neely Krawl (Woman seated next to him)

TB: And Tippy Beige.

K. &TB (together): With the Neely & Tippy American News Report

TB: (Hilarious) But before any of that...we've got to hear from Neely, who I understand really had some heavy adventures over the weekend First he gets a $250,000 "Homo Locus Subsidere Caucasian Chalk Circle Award" and then, believe it or not, he almost gets mugged by some of the (derisive) brothers and a *sister*...whose excuse...can you believe it...is that they thought he was a Klansman! (All laugh.)

K.: But first a word from our sponsor...DF PEST CONTROL...who say "Put Yr Pest To Rest!

(As the two Hosts Disinformate the earlier incident, both brothers stand, still looking at each other, as if for confirmation, but do not move.)

BLACK

TAKING THE STAGE:
THEATRE BY AND FOR THE WORKING CLASS DURING THE DEPRESSION ERA

Beth Cherne

During the Depression years, many leftist artists responded to the economic crisis by becoming politically engaged. Theatre artists were no exception. Leftists involved in theatre had already developed drama in labor education and pageants for working class audiences by the 'teens and '20s, and were familiar with propaganda theatre in Germany and the Soviet Union. These artists envisioned a theatre of and for the working class, focused on working class issues. This article focuses on the work of the radical, Communist-influenced League of Workers Theatres, which worked for the revolutionary transformation of capitalist America.[1]

Politically engaged workers theatre practitioners endeavored to motivate the working class to engage in active struggle for better economic conditions. They sought to reposition theatre itself so that it would be a more effective political tool of and for the working class, and they sought to work in tandem with the unions' drive to organize workers.[2] Analyzing the techniques used by the radical theatre of the '30s helps us better understand the working class movement, as well as the possibilities and limitations of theatre as a tool for political change.

In order to fully develop theatre as a political tool, the theatre of and for the working class during the 1930s attempted to reconfigure many attributes of traditional theatrical practice to better serve the audience of workers and the League's goals. The theatres in the League of Workers Theatres attempted to create performances that were hospitable to the working class, to create a theatre with which the audience could connect directly and to create plays with enough impact to animate the audience — to get them to actively support workers' causes. There were many methods League theatres used to achieve these goals. This article examines three major methods employed by Leftist theatre practitioners: first, they re-configured the spaces in which performances were delivered, both by giving performances in non-traditional settings and by changing the physical relationship between actors and audience; next, they developed plays targeted to an audience of 'insiders' who possessed special knowledge to decode the performance in appropriate ways; they also re-configured the us/them dichotomy between actor as elite specialist and audience as passive consumer of theatre art.

League theatres re-configured the spaces used for performances in several ways. Their goals were to alter the theatre-going experience so that worker audiences were simultaneously 'at home' in the space while being empowered to act, politically. Multiple aspects of the commercial Broadway theatre or 'art' theatre going experience reflected an orientation toward middle- or upper-class perspectives. The ticket prices were too expensive for the working class. In New

York, the location required travel to mid-town Manhattan. In addition, the very theatre building and design produced what Baz Kershaw calls a 'coercive' space, in which middle- and upper-class standards of decorum in dress, manner, and attitude were expected. These standards were enforced by, for example, the luxurious decor of the theatre space itself with velvet drapes, ornate decoration and the presence of theatre workers (ushers) positioned as servants for patrons. These theatre practices were designed to reassure the patrons that they were deserving of special treatment. They comprise some of the pleasure of theatre-going: the sense of pampering that takes place in the theatre.

These attributes were clearly marked by middle- or upper-class values, and needed to be re-thought or re-coded for the working classes. Particularly in the early part of the decade, only a small number of performances of the radical workers' theatre took place in traditional theatre spaces. Most performances were instead in union halls, on street corners, on truck beds or front porches, at picket lines, and at rallies. Radical theatres developed 'mobile' theatre pieces designed to be adaptable to any performance conditions; they went where their audiences already were accustomed to gathering rather than asking the audiences to leave familiar places to come to a formal theatre building. To borrow Nadine Holdsworth's words from her study of 7:84 Theatre in Great Britain in the 1970s, the workers' mobile theatre in the 1930s left 'ownership of the context' in the hands of the audience (31).

This strategy, while perfectly obvious as a way to reach large numbers of people that may be interested in the performance, is also a move that demystifies performance by avoiding the trappings of the formal theatre. Audiences are not required to conform to unfamiliar rules for decorum; they need not worry about proper dress; they need not travel to an unfamiliar area. Instead, the performance comes to them, to familiar surroundings that the audiences 'own' as a form of home turf, and in which they feel a sense of belonging.

Indeed, there were several attempts at activist theatre in professional, traditional settings on Broadway. Perhaps most notable were the Theatre Union's seasons, which performed in the 14th Street theatre that had housed Eva LeGalliane's Civic Repertory Theatre, and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union's (ILGWU) production of the labor-oriented musical review *Pins and Needles,* which moved to a Broadway house during its four-year run. However, the Theatre Union and the ILGWU worked hard to make working class audiences feel welcome in these formal theatre spaces. They focused on group sales to workers, and developed theatre-going parties comprised of union members; they advertised in places familiar to many workers: union publications, leftist publications such as *The Daily Worker,* and similar venues. Ads placed in familiar publications communicated a welcome to working class people that ads in more mainstream publications might not. Perhaps most importantly, ticket prices were kept very low to accommodate working class budgets.

Radical theatres also re-configured the physical relationship between the audience and the stage in order to position audience members as active participants rather than passive spectators. Most traditional theatre presented in traditional spaces is designed to be absorbed by quiet spectators who sit in a darkened auditorium, allowing the performance to wash over them. The traditional performance space is a proscenium theatre in which the performance space is clearly delineated from the audience space by the conventional 'fourth wall."[3] Many plays produced by the League blurred the imaginary boundary created by the conventional "fourth wall" through a variety of techniques in order to change the theatre-going experience from a passive to an active one, for political reasons.

One method was through direct address, a performance technique frequently used in the agit-prop play. Early in the decade of the'30s, the non-realistic agitation-propaganda (agit-prop) was the preferred style in the radical theatre's repertoire. This form is highly stylized, with chanting of slogans, simplified situations of conflict, and allegorical figures representing social functions, such as "worker" "boss" and "capitalist" rather than individual personalities as its characters. It frequently uses direct address, and uses it in several ways.[4] For example, in the first moment of John Bonn's sketch, *15 Minute Red Review,* written for the Prolet-Buehne[5], actors march onto the stage and speak directly to the audience. They shout: "Comrades, workers, listen, stop/ Prolet-Buehne agit- prop" (11). Both the form of the speech — direct address — and the content, which instantly established a connection by identifying actors as comrades of the workers in the audience, work to bridge the gulf between producers and consumers of art.

Another example of using direct address to breach the fourth wall occurs in the realistic play called *It's Funny as Hell* by Jack and Hyam Shapiro.[6] The setting for the play was a meeting hall where unemployed people were assembling to hear four speakers. *It's Funny as Hell* attempted to recast the play's audience as characters in the play rather than spectators. Throughout the play, the theatre audience was addressed as if it was the audience of the unemployed within the script. In addition, three actors began the play by walking through the auditorium to a position just in front of the stage, while discussing, in character, the upcoming program of speakers. The opening of the play presented these actors as though they were not performers at all, but rather ordinary audience members. They discussed the upcoming events within the play as though they were actual, real-world events that would affect the audience, which was cast in the role of unemployed citizens of the town.

This simple physical placement of the opening action re-framed the onstage theatre event as a real-world event through a sort of hyper-realism. It invited the audience to witness and to participate from an altered position: that of participants. During subsequent action, characters in the play directly addressed the theatre audience from the speaker's platform onstage, a move designed to encourage the theatre audience to function as characters. Actors planted in the

audience responded to the speakers as though they also were part of the unemployed in order to draw other (non-actor) audience members into the action with them. The performance blurred the line between theatre audience and performers in order to intensify the emotional climax of the play, which was a passionate plea for compassion toward starving unemployed citizens. The staging choices invited direct involvement of audience members, who were likely to be struggling with problems similar to those in the play.

These hyper-realistic techniques attempted to extend the play's action into the audience and were repeated and built upon in other workers theatre plays, most notably in *Waiting for Lefty.* In this famous play by Clifford Odets, the cab drivers' union leaders directly address the theatre audience as though it is composed of rank-and-file union members. These techniques were popular and were featured in many radical plays of the period.

In addition to these techniques for creating connections between the audience members and the performance, the scripts themselves played upon the idea of an audience of insiders. Marco de Marinis, following Umberto Eco's ideas, writes of the need for a 'precise' audience for what Eco terms the "closed" work of art. The "closed" work of art is constructed so the audience most likely will decode it only in the way the authors intended. Meanings are relatively fixed, rather than loose or open to interpretation. There are few 'blanks' or ambiguities in the performance that the intended audience member must determine or interpret. Marinis' 'precise' audience is one composed of members whose prior knowledge, ideology, and attitudes relative to the performance's content will position them to receive the intended meanings that others—those whose backgrounds do not position them similarly—will not perceive correctly. In other words, the 'precise' audience is an 'insider' audience, an audience of 'us' rather than 'them' (Marinis 103-104).

This positioning within the text is apparent in many ways in radical theatre of the 1930s. For example, in the vaudeville-style sketch "Liberty in the U.S.A." published in *Workers Theater* magazine in 1932, a policeman and the Statue of Liberty meet on the streets of New York. She is wheeling a baby carriage with the "children of liberty" in it. They are identical triplets including little Democrat and little Republican, to whom, Liberty explains, everything belongs: "the money, the munitions factories, the railroads, the churches . . . . they fix everything. . . and run those damn reds into prison" (*Liberty* 15). The policeman observes that the third of the triplets has wet his pants, to which Liberty responds, "That's the little socialist. . . . He's always doing that, but otherwise he's a good obedient child who wouldn't harm a soul." She continues, "The child is cross-eyed. When he seems to be looking to the left, he is really looking to the right" (*Liberty* 15).

Workers theatre also attempted to re-configure the traditional 'us/them' relationship between the expert artists on stage and the audience of workers. There are two component parts to the techniques that radical theatre developed to solve

this problem. One was based in the nature of the characters in the plays; the second was related to the class identity of the people playing those characters.

From a working class perspective, most traditional theatre was for and about 'them' on some level; that is, its heroes and heroines were mostly people of middle class or higher social or economic standing. Few traditional playwrights engaged the problems of working class people, and if they did, those plays tended to be about either attempts to 'make it' economically or romanticizations of the virtues of poverty and struggle. That is, any plays about working class people frequently were either about how to leave the working class rather than how to improve blue-collar working and living conditions or they presented working class life in ways unrecognizable to those living it.

In traditional, psychological/realistic theatre, empathy plays a central role. The audience is presumed to be able to relate to the concerns and tribulations of the characters presented—to identify, in fact, with the characters. Indeed, in this construct, the play only works if the audience member can envision him or herself as one of the characters, and imaginatively engage in the same emotions the character experiences. Working class people's identification with upper-class or middle-class characters must of necessity involve a desire, even if temporary, to move out of the working class and into the circumstances of a higher economic strata. Radical theatre artists critiqued this effect of traditional "bourgeois" theatre as debilitating to the union movement and effectively distracting viewers from the pressing injustices that made many workers' lives miserable. Workers, they feared, who focused on the problems of the rich were less likely to engage in resolving the problems of the working class.

Therefore the radical theatre chose as subject matter only those issues that directly impacted the working class. It presented it in unambiguous terms, with clearly delineated sides. The characters with whom the audience identified sympathetically were working class people, and evidence is abundant that working class audiences were thrilled to see 'themselves' onstage. While the 'owning class,' the capitalists and the bosses, were clearly represented as unsympathetic, working class folks in the plays were depicted as struggling, but clear minded about the right path to economic reform once they were exposed to the reasoned arguments of the union organizer. The relatively simple construct of right and wrong in the plays helped develop a sense of purpose and solidarity in the audience and assisted with bolstering morale among the members of the working class audience who could easily see and side with the side of 'right.'

Radical theatre also reconfigured the us/them dichotomy of performer/consumer by re-conceiving actors as worker/actors. Indeed, the League of Workers Theatres and other 1930's leftist theatres aspired to collectivist methods for theatre production. Serious attempts were made in the League to write and direct plays collectively. Several articles devoted to playwriting and directing in early issues of *Workers Theatre* magazine[7] assumed that workers theatres used a collective production method. These articles described the method in this way: first, ideas

for plays were generated in group meetings; the writing was then entrusted to one comrade and brought back to the committee for criticism and re-writing according to collective assessments; a committee discussed the script and possibilities for staging; and the directing collective then produced a general plan for the production. One person was selected to be in charge during each rehearsal, but the directing committee watched rehearsals and privately critiqued them afterward with the director in charge. The League encouraged these methods for a time, but from that period there is little evidence for any sustained success in collective playwriting or directing among its affiliate theatres (Reines 3).

The method by which actors developed their roles was also viewed through a collectivist ideological lens. Ideally, actors and other theatre artists were to come from the proletariat, and were to be considered 'worker-artists.' In 1931, Hyam Shapiro wrote: "It . . . is not necessary to portray a particular character, but rather a class angle or conception of that character, which should not be difficult for a class-conscious worker" (*Training* 3). Shapiro's assumption was that the actors were members of the working class and therefore should already be class-conscious. Since, in this construct, the worker/actors were conflated with the characters they played, the actors should naturally be able to understand and communicate the characters' traits, aspirations and emotions. This assumption would obviate the need for traditional character development techniques. Further, the assumption was that both audience and the actors were of the same class and therefore shared the same values and concerns.

In reality, the League's class assumptions rendered invisible many divisions within the working class along ethnic, political, trade, or gender lines. In fact, the performers involved in radical theatre often were intellectuals or artists from other-than proletarian roots. In many cases, they were primarily motivated by ideals of social change, but some were more interested in the relative ease of finding acting work on a non-professional stage. Yet, the radical theatre's ideal was that the actor was of the same working class community as the audience and was therefore not a member of a separate group of elite specialists called artists.

Workers theatre practitioners attempted to create unity among worker/actors, writers, directors, and their audience members, in order to reinforce the 'us' that is the working class against the 'them' that is the owning class and the bosses. Their plays frequently demonstrated that membership in that group – to be one of 'us' – was the most important feature of personal identity for workers. The plays often focused on the message that membership in the 'insider' group, the working class, was not to be abandoned under any circumstances. In *Take My Stand,* a worker named Clay achieves enough education to rise to the role of bookkeeper at the Southern textile mill for which he works. He then marries the boss's daughter. Clay is caught in the middle of class struggle because his position at work and his marriage test his allegiance to the working class. When he declares that all he wants is to make a living in peace, "and not have to fight like a dog," the union leader informs him that "there is no place like that" (*Take My Stand* 9).

The world of the play is one of inherent and continuous class struggle. Everyone is on one side or the other: there is no middle, neutral ground. When the conflict escalates to the verge of a violent strike, Clay aligns himself with the union and refuses to bring in scabs to replace the striking workers. His character demonstrates for the audience the torment of a man weighing the benefits of higher income and more power against ties to his own class and its legitimate needs. The characters onstage move in the same community in which the audience members move; therefore, many in the audience could imagine having to make similar choices. *Take My Stand* both sympathizes with the difficulty of a choice like Clay's and demonstrates the correct response.

This theme is repeated in many leftist plays of the period. Often plays are structured to delineate the struggles of the worker who must decide whether to maintain class loyalty or switch sides and join the ruling class. The situations do not always revolve directly around economics. In the play *Private Hicks,* the title character is a member of the National Guard who is called upon to fire on unarmed striking workers. Officers pressure Hicks with threats of court-marshal and a jail term that will dog his record for years. He does not fire, however, because the National Guard had shot at his own father in an earlier labor-related conflict, and he refuses to do the same. Hicks chooses the working class and all the struggles that choice involves rather than betraying his own community. In *Private Hicks* and other radical theatre of the time, loyalty to the working class is of paramount importance.

These plays demonstrate the difficulty of such choices. They clearly show tangible rewards in the form of higher income that would derive from betrayal of the working class. They also show the very real and distinct dangers involved in maintaining class loyalty against the threats of the bosses. Yet, curiously, most of the plays offer only future, intangible rewards for the working class member who remains loyal. There may, for example, be a promise of ultimate class victory sometime in the future; or perhaps there is simply the knowledge that he or she is in the right. But most importantly it seems, there is a renewed sense of belonging and support from other members of the working class. The rewards are meager, in the tangible sense, but rich in the sense of moral rightness and the sense of community.

The feeling of belonging, of membership in the working class, is central in the plays. Workers are encouraged to think of the class itself as 'home' and of other workers as 'brothers and sisters.' The League's plays worked to cultivate this strong sense of belonging on several levels – within the performance space, through involvement in the characters and the subject matter, and through the embrace of an inclusive community of worker-performers and worker-audience.

Ultimately, the idea of class membership is fundamental to the techniques used to reposition the working class audience in the workers' theatre. The League reconfigured the use and location of performance space to extend a form of ownership to the radical theatre's audience. It re-framed the relationship between

action onstage and the audience in the house in order to place the audience in an active "subject" position. It emphasized the importance of membership in the community of workers, through 'insider' content for the 'precise' audience, through the worker/actor, and through scripts that depicted the dangers of abandoning class loyalty. Through these techniques, the theatres further reinforced the value of class solidarity. All these endeavors reflect innovations in strategies for reclaiming the theatre for the particular community of the 1930's working class.

Endnotes

[1]Because the League itself did not use the possessive in the term "workers" I will follow suit.

[2] Because the League of Workers Theatres was connected to the Commmunist Party in the early years of the decade, it advocated for the unions of the Trade Union Unity League, which were competitors with the mainstream AFL-CIO. For more on T.U.U.L., see Harvey Klehr *The American Communist Movement,* and James R. Barrett, "Boring from Within and without" in *Labor Histories.*

[3] The 'fourth wall' is a theoretical notion derived from the realistic 'box set' – a set consisting of three walls of an interior room, such as a living room. This scenic style was prevalent in the late nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century. The fourth wall of the room is omitted to allow the audience to observe the action. This "fourth wall" that is removed is the imaginary dividing line between the audience and the stage.

[4] "Direct address" is a theatre technique in which the actor speaks directly to the audience, rather than to another character onstage.

[5] "Prolet-Beuhne" means "Worker's Theatre" in German.

[6] The term 'realistic' describes a performance style in which everyday details of setting are replicated as accurately as possible, along with psychologically believable human behavior. This style is best understood when contrasted with the very non-realistic 'agit-prop.'

[7] The League of Workers Theatres published a magazine, usually on a monthly basis, to help it build connections with political theatres across the country.

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Scene I

Narrator: Dear audience, thank you for attending this performance. In this play, our nation wages war in a nation far away. The first scene is set in the operations headquarters, a large, mostly empty tent in the midst of the Army camp. Captain Kerkennek, Captain Shernan and their Secretary, Miss Hathaway, are meeting. Capt. Shernan prepares to leave, to repose at a fort. Then Capt. Kerkennek receives a map from scout, showing the enemy position. The map resembles a hand.

Capt. Shernan: I fall to fort.

Capt. Kerkennek: Continue.

Capt. Shernan: Yes.

Capt. Shernan leaves.

Capt. Kerkennek: Miss Hathaway, have we messaging?

Miss Hathaway: Col. Sern marked a design,
Willed to us by foot-patrol.

Capt. Kerkennek: Design?

Miss Hathaway: I say it is a hand.

Capt. Kerkennek: May I see? [Examines her page.] Yes, a hand! Hand, not foot! Hand, not neck! I join the hand!

Capt. Kerkennek exits.

Scene II

Capt. Kerkennek and an aide ride on horseback. They are searching for the area shown on the map.

Capt. Kerkennek: In pursuit of a hand, we jog;
By this mountain, exalt as human fate.

Aide: A hand?

Capt. Kerkennek: Yes, a suspect hand.
A message from a wandered
Scout contains a shape;
He drew this to descry
The enemy encampment.
The shape seems a hand.

[They ride, silent.]

Capt. Kerkennek: Fair, halt!
[To horse.] Dear burden-raising cousin, close your legs!
A finger! My eyes combine to view one finger?

Aide: Also I see a finger.

Capt. Kerkennek: Finger! Long as a ship, yet occupies no strand!

Aide: One knuckle is bent.

Capt. Kerkennek: Ah! Ah! Knuckle bent! One bent knuckle!
Let us retrace!

[They turn their horses around, and ride.]

Scene III

Capt. Kerkennek and the aide return to Operations Headquarters.

Capt. Kerkennek: Do you have the hand?

Miss Hathaway: I have two.

Capt. Kerkennek: Not you, but the third.

Miss Hathaway: The third hand? Here!

She shows him the drawing.

Capt. Kerkennek: [To aide] True, as we know! Crooked knuckle!

Aide: The forefinger.

Capt. Kerkennek: [To Miss Hathaway] We rose over the forefinger
Like a bald jeweler with a ring.

Miss Hathaway: And where is the ring?

Capt. Kerkennek: Tonight the ring will touch
The finger's skin.
Call Capt. Shernan, at fort!

A soldier enters the room.

Soldier: Two men here know a native. Shall they come?

Capt. Kerkennek: Bring close the three.

Two soldiers and a native enter. Capt. Kerkennek bows. The native bows.

Capt. Kerkennek: [To native] Would you sit upon our chair?

Native: Sfert noz ulep.

Capt. Kerkennek: Is translation a talent
Anyone tries?

Soldier: I know a man.

Capt. Kerkennek: My gratitude uplifts.

Soldier exits.

Capt. Kerkennek: [To Miss Hathaway] May you partition an orange?

Miss Hathaway: Yes, now.

Capt. Kerkennek: [To native] We present an orange.

Native: Ster.

Miss Hathaway sections the orange, and offers it on a plate. The native eats one piece grimly. Two soldiers enter.

Soldier: Here is our translator.

Capt. Kerkennek: [Bowing] Thanks, and swift thanks.

Translator: [To native] Leswettev megfass inj?

Native: Trenm denno quaci sa befnukin.

Translator: He knows a cave, a cave filled with gold.

Capt. Kerkennek: Can he lead men
To its mouth?

Translator: Mez sondrat reti yuj?

Native: Gotl.

Translator: Yes, he may lead.

Capt. Kerkennek: In the present?

Translator: Stap tou?

Native: Gotl.

Translator: Now.

Capt. Kerkennek: Does he request
A gratuity or payment?

Translator: Jihak nhunde uil fooyk?

Native: Yem.

Translator: None.

Capt. Kerkennek: Then hasten, adventure,
To brilliant cave-opening.

The translator, soldier and native depart.

Capt. Shernan enters. He has returned from the fort. Capt. Kerkennek asks him about his observations at the fort.

Capt. Shernan: I return, upon
Receipt of a call.

Capt. Kerkennek: I savor your entry.
And at fort?

Capt. Shernan: Solitude, below two skies.
And at night, on Rampart South,
I viewed three boats cut the bay.

Capt. Kerkennek: Suppliers' ships?

Capt. Shernan: I did not view.

Capt. Kerkennek: Were the three close?

Capt. Shernan: Close as doves.

Capt. Kerkennek: Doves! Flying
Into the hand.

Capt. Shernan: Yes? One hand?

Capt. Kerkennek: Let me explicate
By design. Miss Hathaway!

Miss Hathaway brings the drawing, which the three of them regard.

Miss Hathaway: We three fingers watch a hand!

Capt. Kerkennek: Captain, let us plan
An evening.

The two men move to a corner, whispering.

Miss Hathaway: I have an errand in camp.

Capt. Kerkennek nods. Miss Hathaway leaves. The captains continue to confer. The nurse enters.

Nurse: The men are struck with griping belly-unrest.

Capt. Kerkennek: Yes? May I view
This distortion?

Nurse: Men!

Six soldiers enter, doubled over, groaning.

Soldiers: Eeyan! Cadhh! Verrrsh! Jugk!

Capt. Kerkennek: What last did you imbibe
Or chew?

Soldier: Rice and chicken, at last night's meal.

Soldier: Aye.

Soldier: Chickenrice.

Capt. Kerkennek: Send for our cook
To hear testimonial.

The nurse departs. The men continue groaning.

Soldiers: Emmmn! Rahnb! Gepp!

The nurse returns with the cook.

Capt. Kerkennek: Did you define
Last night's repast?

Cook: No.

Capt. Kerkennek: You did not compile
The meal yester-eve?

Cook: No. I chose the day as recreation.

Capt. Kerkennek: Then who formed

The ingrediential stew?

Cook: The chaplain's cook agreed to be my incumbent.

Capt. Kerkennek: May we locate
This vegetable savant?

Cook: I am direct.

The cook and nurse leave.

Capt. Kerkennek: With patience the true
Chef is found.
I never fear delay.

Soldiers: Gisss! Troummm!

The nurse and chaplain's cook arrive.

Chaplain's Cook: Yes, I composed that feast.

Capt. Kerkennek: Did you notice any false
Dire hints, in the food?

Chaplain's Cook: The chicken breasts were lightly pink.

Soldiers: Pink! Yes, pink! Unearthly pink!

Capt. Kerkennek: And have you some anodyne
For these cold cramps?

Chaplain's Cook: I possess a moldy bread.

Soldier: Discolored bread?

Soldier: Molded?

Capt. Kerkennek: Let our hopes pursue
The promised route.

Chaplain's Cook: I shall be hurried.

The chaplain's cook departs.

Capt. Kerkennek: [To nurse.] Do you know this postulation
Of our cook?

Nurse: I have heard of the Green Bread Cure.

Soldiers: Ehhhhnn! Jocch!

The chaplain's cook returns, and distributes the moldy bread to the soldiers.

Soldier: My taste is delighted.

Soldier: I praise this mold.

The soldiers stand, relieved of their symptoms.

Capt. Kerkennek: [To nurse.] Are there more
In this cramped dolor?

Nurse: Yes, many.

Capt. Kerkennek: [To chaplain's cook.] Can you divide
Your moldy medicine
Among them?

Chaplain's Cook: With a cook's pride.

Capt. Kerkennek: Beneficial!

The chaplain's cook, nurse and soldiers exeunt.

Capt. Kerkennek: See, the answer often
Couples with the woe.

Capt. Shernan: The same man has poison
And anti-poison!

Miss Hathaway returns.

Capt. Kerkennek: Did you call in on Earl?

Miss Hathaway: Yes.

Capt. Kerkennek: And how is his day

In stockade?

Miss Hathaway: Lost within barriers.

Scene IV

Miss Hathaway is at the stockade. Earl is within his cell; she is outside.

Miss Hathaway: I wish I were more often, and more faithful.

Earl: No, you are as faithful as the heavenly skies.

Miss Hathaway: With clouds?

Earl: With clouds or no, the skies are graciously punctual.

Miss Hathaway: Thank you.

Earl: No, I am not for thanking.

Miss Hathaway: Yes, you are truly for thanking.

Earl: Then my thanks also concede.

Miss Hathaway: The food today?

Earl: Beans. Toast. Water.

Miss Hathaway: Not a festival.

Earl: No. A Spartan sample. And your food?

Miss Hathaway: Salmon, and a small salad. Here is a piece of the tea cake.

Earl: Precious!

She hands him the cake. They kiss.

Scene V

In the Operations Headquarters, Capt. Kerkennek and Capt. Shernan continue to confer. Miss Hathaway enters.

Capt. Kerkennek: Don't take off your hat.
We prepare our positional
Assault.

The translator and native enter.

Translator: Returning from our interior cave!

Native: Faclo nor!

Capt. Kerkennek: And what were your
Beholdings?

Translator: More than beholdings! Holdings!

The translator removes four small packets from a bag. He unwraps the paper from each.

Translator: Three emeralds and one ruby!

Capt. Kerkennek: Are these gifts
Or exhibits?

Translator: Sanx is a generous guide.

Capt. Kerkennek: Sanx, this wealth, your giving,
Creases our hearts
With honor.

Sanx: Vergamn so byetal! Tearn spedf!

Translator: Sanx wishes you peace, and often grand days.

Capt. Kerkennek: [Dropping to his knees.] O Lord, we hear your advice
In Sanx's unknown tongue.
Peace, soft as sand, may we
Invoke, to hallow Sanx.
Forget we war soon!

The nurse enters.

Nurse: Did you send for my appearance, Captain?

Capt. Kerkennek: Yes. And are the men
Improving in stomach?

Nurse: They are well-ready to move.

Capt. Kerkennek: The cook's fungus
Has permeated wonders.

Nurse: Despite its foul and pustulant face.

Capt. Kerkennek: Yes. Beauty heals
Yet unbeauty heals speedier.

Capt. Shernan: So, Captain...

Capt. Kerkennek: [Rising to his feet.] Tonight we will move.
And, Sanx, even in this war ploy,
Saluting you, we attach
Peace to our steps.

Scene VI

Capt. Kerkennek and Capt. Shernan crouch atop a ridge, that night. They observe the view below, and whisper. They must decide the best moment to attack.

Capt. Kerkennek: Here displays the
Whole prospect. The future
Is below us.

Capt. Shernan: But when does
The future begin?

Capt. Kerkennek: We must choose the minute
Sanguine to our spirit.

Capt. Shernan: And how intuit
That central minute?

Capt. Kerkennek: Sanx!

Capt. Shernan: I run to his
Direction.

Capt. Shernan exits.

Capt. Kerkennek: 10,000 hairs on the mane
Of a lion. But if I must
Pull just one?

Capt. Shernan, Sanx and the translator enter.

Capt. Kerkennek: We wish your soul
To name a minute.

Translator: Name a minute?

Capt. Shernan: A time for our troops
To descend. Tonight.

Translator: Veff ac grount hera xeri?

Sanx: Tearf ult janeg.

Translator: 1:37.

Capt. Kerkennek: 1:37! It rings
Inevitable and valued.

Capt. Shernan: I will embroider the camp
With this choice.

Capt. Kerkennek: Yes! Spread
The minute — softly.

Capt. Shernan exits.

Capt. Kerkennek: Again, Sanx, we endeavor
Gratitude, for you. Let us bring
Peace, out of war, as your
Answering gift.

Translator: Boxt cuffo neag outs feab loure venerni.

Sanx: Tryg norit manoo trembe latti.

Translator: Peace and war are not opposites.

Capt. Kerkennek: Your wisdom abrades
My military costume.

Capt. Shernan enters.

Capt. Shernan: It is 1:35.

Capt. Kerkennek: Let us mount
Our definitive advance.

Sanx: Nank peeru follj gonn harryl.

Translator: Sanx hopes you find what you search.

Scene VII

Capt. Kerkennek, Miss Hathaway and Capt. Shernan speak, in Operations Headquarters. The two captains explain the attack, the night before.

Capt. Kerkennek: ... and that is our
Summary tale.

Miss Hathaway: So no one was inside?

Capt. Kerkennek: No being in a body,
Or clothes.

Capt. Shernan: All we captured were
20 eggs, still warm, in pans,
And one copy of their scriptures,
The Varna.

Miss Hathaway: How did they escape?

Capt. Kerkennek: With no light, and stealth.

We cannot draw their plan.

Miss Hathaway: Then is the war over?

Capt. Shernan: We are not yet certain.

Capt. Kerkennek: Without enemy
A war becomes a solitary
Dance.

Miss Hathaway: Have you the Scripture?

Capt. Kerkennek: Here, upon this wooden
Stand weighs one thick tome.

He hands her the book.

Miss Hathaway: The writing is like stalks of wheat.

Capt. Kerkennek: Yes, and we
Await their harvest.

Sanx enters, with the Translator.

Sanx: Refta!

Translator: Sanx blesses your mouths.

Capt. Kerkennek: Sanx, we always welcome
Your maximal entrance.

Miss Hathaway: Sanx, can you read this book?

Translator: Errf vew dequin gy?

Sanx: Rogeg.

Translator: Of course.

Miss Hathaway: Will you read us a segment?

Translator: Errf juy himnet po?

Sanx: Rogeg.

Sanx begins to read.

Sanx: "Terrm hourl vengad huij greffu jasd menm
Benm jossi haret mas nikod billh."

Translator: "No matter how red a cloud is,
Its rain has no color."

Capt. Shernan: Remarkable!

Capt. Kerkennek: [To Sanx] May I touch
Your left hand?

Sanx: Rogeg.

Translator: Yes.

Capt. Kerkennek touches Sanx' hand.

Capt. Kerkennek: I admire wisdom
Even in a hand.

Curtain

INFESTATION OF GNATS

Gabrielle Civil

This piece was written in the strange heaviness of fall 2001, after the destruction of the World Trade Centers in New York and the day after the US began bombing Afghanistan. (All nature seemed gone awry; everywhere victims had become victimizers.)

Starting first with text and a few images, the actual ritual/ understory emerged through collaboration with the amazing director Miré Regulus and significant rehearsal.

In short, this was the ritual: tearing paper; walking around and in an environment of dangling mesh screens, one covered with "gnat paper;" laying a charcoal path to a targeted stone, grey with a yellow spiral painted on its face; bundling the paper in a diaphanous carnelian scarf; climbing a ladder and hanging the bundle there, getting out of the way so the preparations could ensue; breaking through to discover gnat-like seeds; caressing myself with them; spreading the gnat-seeds into a hieroglyphic pattern within the charcoal path; throwing the gnat-seeds against the screens; climbing back up the ladder, taking down the bundle, unraveling it into a bucket with coal; moving the scarf to a babooshka, a slave rag, a bandit; setting the paper on fire.

The third performance art piece in a triptych tentatively called Hieroglyphics, this piece was developed with the support of the Red Eye Works in Progress Series. Featuring the collaboration of theatre, sound and paper arts, it premiered February 2002 at the Red Eye Collaborative in Minneapolis, MN.

Gabrielle Civil	writer & performer
Miré Regulus	director
Mankwe Ndosi	voiceovers
Rosamond S. King	paper art
Donald R. Harrison	sound compositions
Ron Albert	light design
Tom Scott	additional sound

Note: Voiced-over poems were heard in their entirety

voiceover: directive:

I stand a brown seed, now wound in diaphanous
paper, honey and ash smeared in a halo of earthen light . . .
glow of ecru, hints of sunray, kernel, pomegranate seed. . .
throughout this, it is the permeation and permutation of light
that creates the effect of beauty and also of war
throughout, I am raveling, unraveling . . . the light grows

voiceover : Emily Dickinson's "534"

i came here to be buried
in mud
or burned
hot rocks
unfurling
beauty treatment
rest
i can't find—
i can't wait—
rest
mud
mud
mud
smeary memory
mud
mud
mud
i can't find—
i can't wait—
for life
mud
i came here for
beauty rest
nature is never
beauty
rest
i should have gone
to the big apple
the steel apple
ash
fifth avenue

("We see—Comparatively—
The Thing so towering high . . . .

chelsea
downtown
mud
hot rocks
mud . . . The waking in a Gnat's embrace—
smoldering under the ash
Our Giants—furthered on—")
nature is never
i need to wash this away

voiceover: *Emily Dickinson's "465"*

("I heard a fly buzz when I died . . .

. . .And then the Windows failed—and then

I could not see to see)

Lucille Clifton's "last night we killed the roaches"

("last night we killed the roaches, mama and me . . .

. . . and it was murder murder all over the place")

light permeates, dims. the effect of Balthazar's feast: the writing on the wall.

sometimes

i feel like

I am walking

through a swarm

an intelligence

my own

seeping through

a war

my skin

he doesn't like it when i say

discombulated

imbricated

inextricable

he doesn't like it

he doesn't say

he doesn't like it

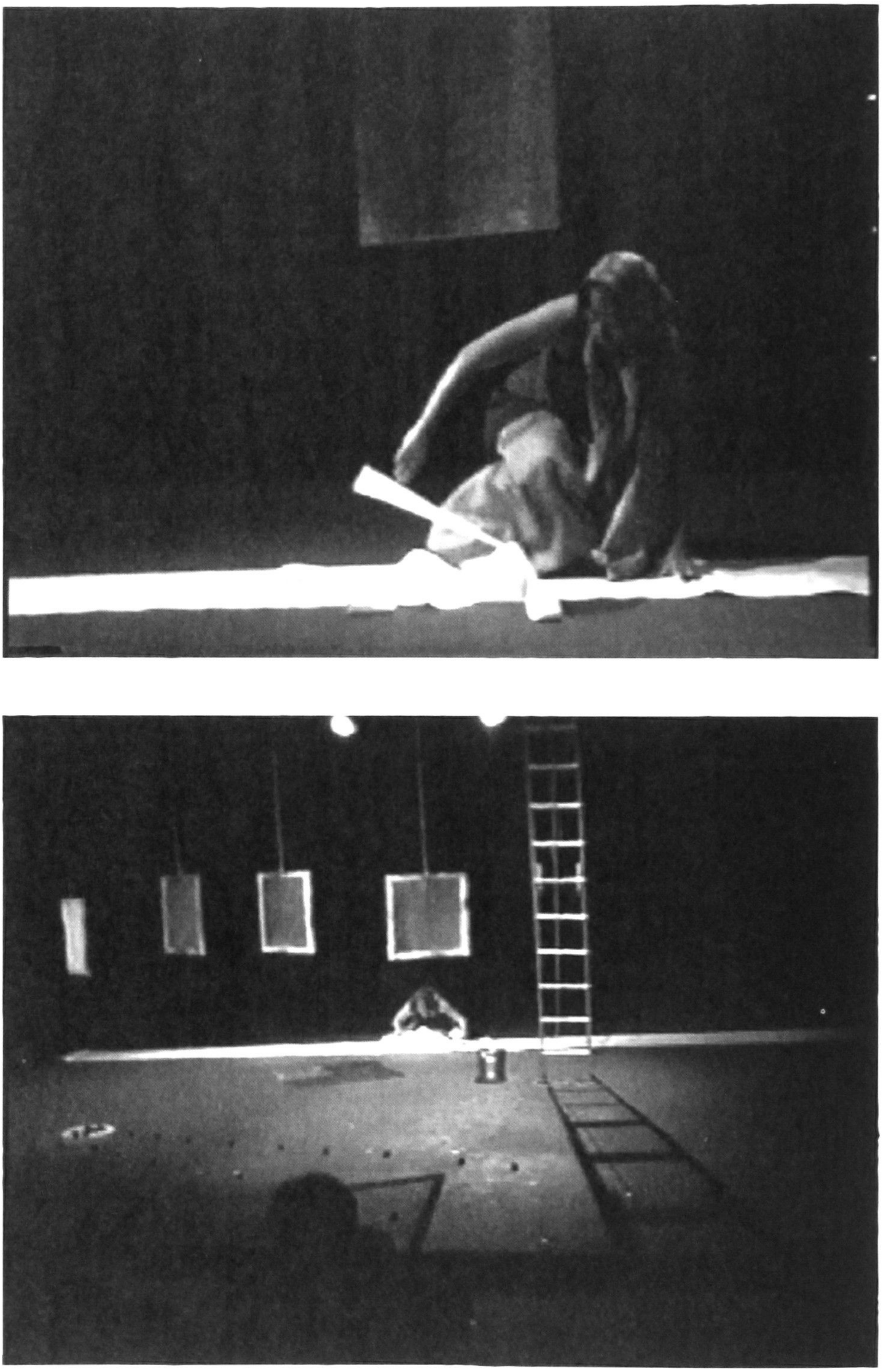
he doesn't say

he likes it either

a war

a swarm

ten of them on a pencil eraser
fifty on the fit of my nail
cluttering the corners of my door frame
a million
pressed, dying, blurred against my skin
an intelligence, a madness
not killing, buzzing furious
like that poem by alice notley
that time i read
to my best friend
and she wished i was her boyfriend
and i bought a crepe from the afghan
(was he really an afghan,
have i rearranged his skin)
and i flirted with him like a man



TWO VIDEO STILLS FROM "INFESTATION OF GNATS"

voiceover: Rumi's "Gnats in the Wind"

and it was sugar and lemon
and he was so shocked
and he almost fell into a man hole
and steam
and fly smelled the lemon
and buzzed in her mouth
and came apart and burst
and fragmented into the confetti of swarm
and a war, a swarm
and slathers itself on the front of my house
and it smushes and it stills and threatens and it calls
and i tie a rag around my head
and i spray the green off onto another clean rag
and i clean them off my art/ not art postcards
and the circular for vacuums and planter's nuts
and the electric bill
and on the mail box
and in the mail box
and off the porch
and especially off the screen with its mesh gritted teeth
and my heart is meshed beating furiously
and i'm thinking how many crushed under the head of my nail
and the angels dancing on a pin
and *electroluminescence*
and *cathexis*
and *palimpsest*
and *intelligence*
and *glow*
and *you*

("first there's union, then dying like gnats in the wind")

Racial Actors, Liberal Myths

Josephine Lee

Some years ago at the University of Minnesota, in a class on contemporary American drama by playwrights of color, my students and I discussed a set of debates that took place in 1996 between playwright August Wilson and Robert Brustein. In this debate (transcribed on the pages of *American Theatre* magazine and continued in other venues[1]) Wilson differentiated between "art that is conceived and designed to entertain white society, and art that feeds the spirit and celebrates the life of black America by designing its strategies for survival and prosperity" ("Ground," 16). What Wilson promoted was the continuing development of black theater for black audiences, theater that would rally supporters in the vision of radical social change: "We can make a difference. Artists, playwrights, actors—we can be the spearhead of a movement to reignite and reunite our people's positive energy for a political and social change that is reflective of our spiritual truths rather than economic fallacies" ("Ground," 73).

Brustein, on the other hand, used the debate to voice once again his longstanding criticism of what he has called "racial exclusionism" in the theater, and to differentiate between what he in an earlier essay called two versions of "cultural diversity":

> The first category, inspired by Martin Luther King's dream of integration, believes in open opportunity according to merit rather than color—as reflected, for example, in the "nontraditional" casting of roles on the basis of talent rather than racial or ethnic background. The second, which is driven by such divisive energies as the black-power fires ignited after King's assassination by figures like Malcolm X, is committed to strict racial and ethnic orthodoxy, and the empowerment of disadvantaged people through the agency of culture. The first category tries to unify, the second to separate."[2]

For Brustein, "minority theaters" had outlived their usefulness, and serve only to perpetuate an outmoded separatism. In his heated reply to Wilson's criticism, Brustein warns: "Must history be rolled back to the days of segregated theatres? ("Subsidized Separatism," 27). Instead, he advocated the well-worn idea of great theater as "universal": "I was talking about transcendence, about recognizing that the greatest art embraces a common humanity" ("Subsidized Separatism," 27).

My students' responses to this debate proved to be quite different from what I expected, given the general tone and politics of the class. They had responded to the plays we read (many of which were overtly "separatist" in their politics) with enthusiasm. Some told me how particular plays had radically

changed the ways they thought about race. So I was confused and disturbed when many of these students sided with Brustein. Even students who were somewhat sympathetic to Wilson's cause (the siphoning away of money and support for black theaters, particularly in light of the multicultural initiatives for already well-funded white-dominated regional theaters), ultimately found Brustein's arguments to be more persuasive. In particular, they felt that Wilson's resistance to principles of "color-blind casting" and "multicultural theaters" was outmoded, even racist. A number of students openly praised Brustein's arguments in favor of casting for "talent" rather than "race," agreeing with his point that "universal" art "transcends racial difference." These students loudly proclaimed their excitement over writers who had been nurtured and fostered by the existence of "minority theaters" and cultural nationalism. Yet they saw no apparent contradiction between their support of Brustein's views and their embrace of works by writers such as Amiri Baraka, Luís Valdez, Frank Chin, Ntozake Shange, and yes, August Wilson. Much to my chagrin, Brustein emerged victorious in my classroom's rehashing of this debate, and I was left wondering what had happened.

As far as teaching horror stories go, this particular incident is fairly tame. At the same time, it made me realize that simply teaching more works by writers of color isn't enough, when students lack not only a historical, but also an ideological context for these works. I had assumed that I could concentrate on setting the stage for works that for me exemplified the radical legacies of civil rights and cultural nationalist activism. Because so few students remembered this time, I rationalized, the plays could perhaps bring these powerful forces for change back to life. But while the spirit of those revolutionary, dangerous, and hopeful times might have been resurrected through the plays we read, it remained detached from my students' experiences. When asked to speak about racism in its most blatant forms, they rose to the occasion; when confronted with the more hidden racisms embedded in neoconservative arguments over meritocracy, white privilege, and affirmative action, they covered their own confusion with polite assertions of color-blindness. And while teaching liberal-minded students to be very critical of clear instances of racism is fairly straightforward, teaching them to be critical of the fault-lines of their own liberalism is not.

That experience reinforced both what for me has long been a complex and ambivalent attitude towards the "official" post-civil rights discourse of race in this country, and, ultimately, the value of studying theater in the hopes of better understanding this attitude. Theater, of course, has served many a scholar as a metaphor for racial performance in everyday life. But studying the theater not only as metaphor, but as actual practice, can even further illuminate the complexities of contemporary racial politics. Theatrical performance focuses attention on the human body in action; constructions of race, of course, rely on the perception and interpretation of live bodies. Studying the theater thus brings to the forefront—makes visible in a particular direct and immediate way—how our contemporary lives are in fact shaped by race. And studying the theater can,

in fact, also highlight the contradictions that so many Americans experience over the terms of racial progress in the post-civil rights era.

How is the liberal emphasis on transcending racial categories, which might seem like such a promising foundation for anti-racist action, ultimately insufficient? Broadly, several critiques might well be made here: among them, how the partial success of civil rights reforms created a false sense of "progress" and "safety" in the past few decades; how neoconservative appropriations of terms such as "color-blindness" have been made that in fact maintain and perpetuate exclusionary practices and racist ways of thinking; and finally, how the liberal management of racial difference might lend itself to a "multiculturalism" that carefully displays racial visibility in order to "sell itself" as progress. More thorough philosophical discussions of liberal humanism might be found in a variety of sources.[3] However, theater might remind us that the *need* for these critiques emerges in a much less concerted and sustained way, less through rigorous philosophical or political argument than through the confusion of experience.

The reminder of this essay will examine several instances of what we might call the "racial actor," both metaphorical and literal: as stereotypical body; as a seemingly more flexible incarnation, the "liberal" actor; and finally, in the new versions of racial performance that emerged with cultural nationalism. I use various examples at turns tragic, theatrical, and whimsical; in each case, these examples suggest the power that such concepts of racial acting have over our imaginations today.

TWO TRAGEDIES

In 2000, two tragic stories of racial actors garnered widespread media attention. The more famous story was that of 61-year old Taiwan-born scientist Wen Ho Lee. Lee was working at a bomb-design unit of Los Alamos Laboratory, specializing in hydrodynamics and computer modeling.[4] He was dismissed from his job and jailed for nine months on charges of acting with "intent to injure the United States, and with the intent to secure an advantage to a foreign nation" (Purdy, 5 February 2001; 7). In prison, he was kept in solitary confinement in his cell 23 hours a day, shackled when he left his cell for exercise or meetings with lawyers, and only allowed to see his family one hour a week for English-only conversations supervised by the FBI. The case became highly polarized, with prosecutors accusing Lee of giving China and other countries access to information on nuclear weapons that could "in the wrong hands, change the global strategic balance" and Lee's defenders accusing the FBI and prosecution of overzealous exaggeration and racial profiling. Wen Ho Lee was finally released on August 24, 2000 after pleading guilty to one felony count of illegally gathering and retaining national security data, with a sentence of time served and an agreement to undergo 60 hours of debriefing under oath by the government. At the time of his release,

Judge James A. Parker apologized to Dr. Lee "for the unfair manner you were held in custody by the executive branch" (Purdy, 5 February 2001; 14).

From investigator's charges, Wen Ho Lee was typecast as a spy, a man who disguised his "true" face underneath the otherwise assimilated mask of quiet citizen and family man. Lee "had always left investigators feeling that he was hiding something" (Purdy, 5 February 2001; 3). Prosecutors based their case on his "secretive manner" which to them indicated proof of intentional wrongdoing (Purdy, 5 February 2001; 7). "We may not be able to show he was a spy," said one F. B. I. official, "but we can show he was not just a wayward scientist" (Purdy, 5 February 2001; 6). The bureau's final conclusion was ultimately voiced by a top official: "I don't think anyone fully understands Wen Ho Lee" (Purdy, 5 February 2001; 3). This image was furthered by its extensive converage in the New York Times; even after Lee was acquitted of the most serious charges of espionage, the *Times* reported that: "In a tale laced with cross-cultural subtleties, the arcana of atomic science and the feints of the intelligence world, the most indecipherable character is the man at the center" (Purdy, 4 February 2001; 4). [5]

Another story also got wide media coverage, although for a much shorter period of time. Anthony Dwain Lee was a 36-year-old actor who was just beginning to receive more widespread recognition for his supporting work on television (*NYPD Blue, Brooklyn South, E.R.*) and film (*Liar, Liar*). Lee had also had extensive work in regional theatre: *The Kentucky Cycle* at the Intiman Theatre, *Spunk* and *The Cider House Rules* at the Seattle Repertory Theatre, *A Raisin in the Sun* at the Seattle Group Theatre, and the title role of *Othello* at the Seattle Shakespeare Festival. Police officers were responding to a complaint about noise at a Halloween Party in the exclusive Benedict Canyon area of Los Angeles at about 1 a.m. on October 28 when one of the officers fired nine shots at guest Lee, hitting him four times in the back and head. The LAPD said Hopper fired after he shone his flashlight into a room from outside and Lee pointed a gun at him. The gun turned out to be a rubber replica of a .357 magnum Desert Eagle. The case became more controversial after Lee's family decided to sue the LAPD for a $100 million dollars. Attorney Johnnie L. Cochran represented the family; Cochran commented that the Los Angeles Police Department "has never seen a shooting they didn't think they could justify."[6]

In the circumstances behind this tragedy, false appearances also seemed important. News accounts stated that Lee, a 6-foot, 4-inch African American, was dressed in a devil mask and long black cape.[7] The policeman, Tarriel Hopper, claimed that he "feared for his life because he believed Lee was pointing a pistol at him."[8] It wasn't clear if Lee knew that Hopper, who is also African American, was a real policeman and not just another party guest. Some at the party said other guests were wearing LAPD uniforms as Halloween costumes. [9] It is not clear whether Officer Hopper gave Lee any warning before he killed him. However, Rick Hull, one of the party hosts, said that the officers did not identify themselves.[10]

Both the tragedies of Wen Ho Lee and Anthony Dwain Lee suggest judgments and misjudgments based on a highly racialized perception of bodies and actions. The contradictions involved here, however, also make us aware that racial actors are currently subject to a far more complex script than might at first be imagined. In one interpretation, both men are the victims of racial profiling, singled out, cast, and judged by certain familiar racial stereotypes. Hopper might well have reacted to the vision of Anthony Dwain Lee as the devil incarnate; the menacing black man with the gun standing in a darkened room. Those who accused Wen Ho Lee of spying saw him as the "inscrutable" and untrustworthy alien, who despite his American citizenship remained loyal to the enemy state. Ironically, in Lee's case that the prosecution's case broke down in court in part because it could not determine the enemy with any certainty. China, Taiwan, and even Australia and Switzerland were all countries that Lee was accused of trying to aid.

But there is another aspect of these stories, one that complicates this straightforward interpretation. A different vision of the racial actor emerges through the news accounts of these tragedies: a contrast between the stereotype and the other roles that were presumably available to both Wen Ho Lee and Anthony Dwain Lee. News stories stressed that both were successful professional men, whose mobility might be held in stark contrast to the typecasting to which both were subjected. In other words, these two stories seem all the more tragic because both Wen Ho Lee and Anthony Dwain Lee were also presented as racial actors who presumably had many more choices than those usually held in thrall by limited and exaggerated stereotypes. This leads to the charge—implicit in various accounts of both situations—that while these men may have been indeed "mislabeled," perhaps they themselves invited their own misjudgment by inadvertently "acting" in a misleading manner. Perhaps they played their "dark" selves in front of audiences all too willing to believe that that role revealed the entire man. If not a spy, why did Wen Ho Lee copy classified information and then destroy a series of tapes? Why did he take trips to China and Taiwan that allowed him to sustain scientific exchange? Why did he write job letters that suggested that he might in fact be willing to work for anyone other than the United States government? Why did Anthony Dwain Lee dress up in a devil costume and invite violence by pointing a rubber gun?

Why they did so is a matter of speculation, but perhaps the easiest explanation has to do with the illusion of safety and the easing of cautiousness—typed sometimes as racial paranoia— in a supposedly more progressive society. This fantasy of safety is fostered by a official discourse that celebrates its post-civil rights status, touting the elimination many of the most easily-identified legal forms of racism and relegating racism in general to the evils of the past. It is also encouraged by the particular spaces in which both men lived and worked, communities where scientific collaboration and artistic expression could take place apparently safe from the intrusion of racial violence. The contradiction between this myth of racial safety and the continued presence of racism is particularly

painful in Anthony Dwain Lee's story. One friend told the *Los Angeles Times*, "His biggest fear was getting killed by cops, because he's a tall Black man."[11] But Lee also inhabited a seemingly much more liberal world. Of a recent Seattle production of *Uncle Vanya* (in which he played Astrov) under Russian director Leonid Anisimov, he is quoted as saying, "The thing about Chekhov's work is that it's really about playing scenes with great integrity. Being black or white or anything else is irrelevant. It's about the truth of the words and the feelings"[12] (Misha Berson, *American Theatre* Jan. 2001).

THE LIBERAL ACTOR: MAKE-UP BOOKS AND RACIAL PASSING

American and European theaters have long made race the dividing line between bodies that can act and bodies that can not. Historically the white male body has been privileged as the neutral body par excellence, the blank slate upon which an entire range of characters could be enacted. Richard Dyer has suggested, "[W]hite power secures its dominance by seeming not to be anything in particular"[13]; this form of power and privilege is given to white actors lauded for their ability to play characters of other races. "Colored" bodies, on the other hand, were valued far differently, as natural bodies that were incapable of being anything other than themselves. Thus while the white male body was thought of in terms of its art, the "colored" body was noted for its artlessness, its "authenticity." If the white male actor is privileged as the "neutral body"—able to play roles from minstrelsy to realism—performers of color were for centuries marked in ways that made their racial characteristics incompatible with any idea of "talent." From Ira Aldridge to Sessue Hayakawa, performers of color clearly demonstrated their prowess on the stage and in film, but unfortunately, only a few had opportunities to demonstrate their talents in playing anything other than stereotypical roles.

In many ways, this situation changed for the better in the civil rights period, with the encouragement of new productions of plays by writers of color, the establishment of "minority" theaters, and the beginnings of a push for "non-traditional" casting in commercial theaters. The ideal of "color-blind" casting was particularly well suited to the liberal ethos of the time, and promised a radical challenge not only to the dominance of white body as the ideal actor. Liberal integrationism's strategy was to emphasize the assimilative potential of those who had been racially excluded; it responded to the material reality of racial difference and its effects through a framework based on Enlightenment ideas of individualism, rationality, and progress. As Gary Peller suggests, much of conventional law and legal scholarship adheres to this ideology, that "which locates racial oppression in the social structure of prejudice and stereotype based on skin color, and which identifies progress with the transcendence of a racial consciousness about the world."[14] Once legal barriers toward equal rights for individuals had been dissolved,

it would become clear over time that the "Others" would be in essence just like those who had excluded them. Racism must be blamed on prejudice and ignorance; once people could be made to see the true sides of one another, to "see past" race, then an enlightened populace would live in harmony. Though a concerted effort to educate people to emphasize their common, more "universal" characteristics" rather than their superficial differences, "ethnic identity" would "become a thing of the past."[15]

What liberal integrationism suggested was a particular notion of the racial actor that imagined race as simply a surface or "false mask" over a "true self," a mask that ultimately must be disregarded if the society were to progress towards its color-blind ideal. Color-blind casting seemed to embody this in the most immediate ways. The 1964 casting of African American actress Diana Sands opposite Alan Alda in Broadway's *The Owl and the Pussycat* was deemed a great success by critic Otis Guernsey; this is not just "a sample of casual integration onstage" because "Miss Sands is a charming and abundantly talented actress." Where "integrated" productions did not work, according to Guernsey, were instances in which racial concerns got in the way of the "true" play. He writes of the 1974 staging of Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, in which the role of Lennie was played by James Earl Jones, that "the added interracial tensions gave little to the drama and actually blurred it in some scenes."[16]

Thus the paradox of color-blind casting is also the paradox of the ideology of liberal integrationism." On the one hand, since integrationism honed its racial philosophy in response to open demonstrations of racial inequality, it had to acknowledge and disprove the significance of existing differences and group affinities. On the other hand, integrationism saw these traits simply as exterior "masks" over an integral self, which must ultimately be rejected or at least relegated to secondary importance in order to achieve its ideal of color-blindness. Any emphasis on racial identity that would complicate the individual's entry into an unqualified "American" identity had to be discarded. Race thus became the actor's false mask over a more "universal" humanness; nonetheless it was a mask that maintained its stubborn presence no matter how hard one worked to eradicate it.

Two types of racial actors emerge in the post-civil rights period: the liberal ideal of the self free from its racial mask, and the egregious racial stereotype that such a construction was designed to counter. Make-up books from the twentieth century provide a particularly striking set of examples by which to illustrate this contrast. If we look at how racial performance was constructed through the art of stage make-up, we see clear evidence of the racial actor as envisioned through stereotype; we also see, in much more recent make-up manuals the beginning of a much more liberal incarnation.

Significant sections in a variety of theatrical make-up books are devoted to the details of how white actors might be most convincingly transformed into other racial types, using various cosmetics, tape, and (later) latex appliances.[17] [Fig. 1] For the most part, such a charge remains consistent even in books written

relatively recently; in particular, playing "Oriental" characters is still seen to be the province of white actors.[18] [Fig 2] These illustrations suggest the persistence of yellowface's popularity, despite the challenge; as Yoti Lane's *Stage Make-up* claims, "Of all make-up the transformation of Europeans into Orientals is one of the most difficult."[19]

However, another vision of the racial actor might indeed be seen in more recent theatrical make-up books. A 1975 edition of Richard Corson's *Stage Makeup* (called "the Bible of stage make-up") includes a section which at first focuses on the problem of creating "Oriental Eyes" for the non-Asian actor. But Corson also includes a section on advice for eyes for "Orientals who wish to play Caucasians," these actors, he suggests, can also alter their eyes: "Slanting eyes, unless they are very pronounced, are not always a problem, since Caucasian eyes are sometimes slanted. But if they *are* a problem, the slant can be counteracted to some extent by bringing the shadow at the outer corner of the eye downward instead of upward."[20] To illustrate, he includes a striking set of photographs of the actor Randall Kim as Titus Andronicus. [Fig. 3]

The example of Kim's transformation seems to indicate, again, that racial difference is a mask that can be, with some careful makeup, removed in order to show the "true" merit of the actor underneath. Yet though the main impulse—to insist that Kim is a meritorious actor, worthy of any role regardless of his racial exterior—is a laudable one, such transformations remain complex. The example of Kim playing Titus, transforming through the magic of stage makeup the "Oriental" into the "Caucasian" does offer a challenge to the primacy of the white actor, but it is a challenge that can easily co-exist with a more basic assumption of the book: that the book's consumers will primarily be white character actors called upon to play a host of "others." Clearly this illustrates, to some measure, the desire to extend the privilege of the "neutral body"—so long confined to whiteness—to the actor of color, but such an inclusion raises rather than answers a host of questions. To what has Kim been transformed? Why is the Shakespearean fantasy of the character Titus typed as "Caucasian" rather than "Asian"? Why include this example, rather than Kim in a role such as Tam Lum in Chin's *The Chickencoop Chinaman* (a role he originated in New York)? And does Kim really look "Caucasian"? Does he look "Asian" or rather like the stereotypical stage "Oriental"?

My point here is that rather than effectively ending the stereotyping of "colored" bodies, the liberal impulse of cross-racial casting, particularly in its color-blind incarnation, wound up complicating the issue of racial visibility. It did so by first by de-politicizing the racialized body, imagining race as a superficial quality that had to be transcended in order to ascertain the true merits of the actor. Bodies of color that could or would be so easily de-racinated would in fact be at a loss. This paradox of seeing and not seeing race—where visible difference is important only to suggest that ultimately "color doesn't really matter"—in a sense

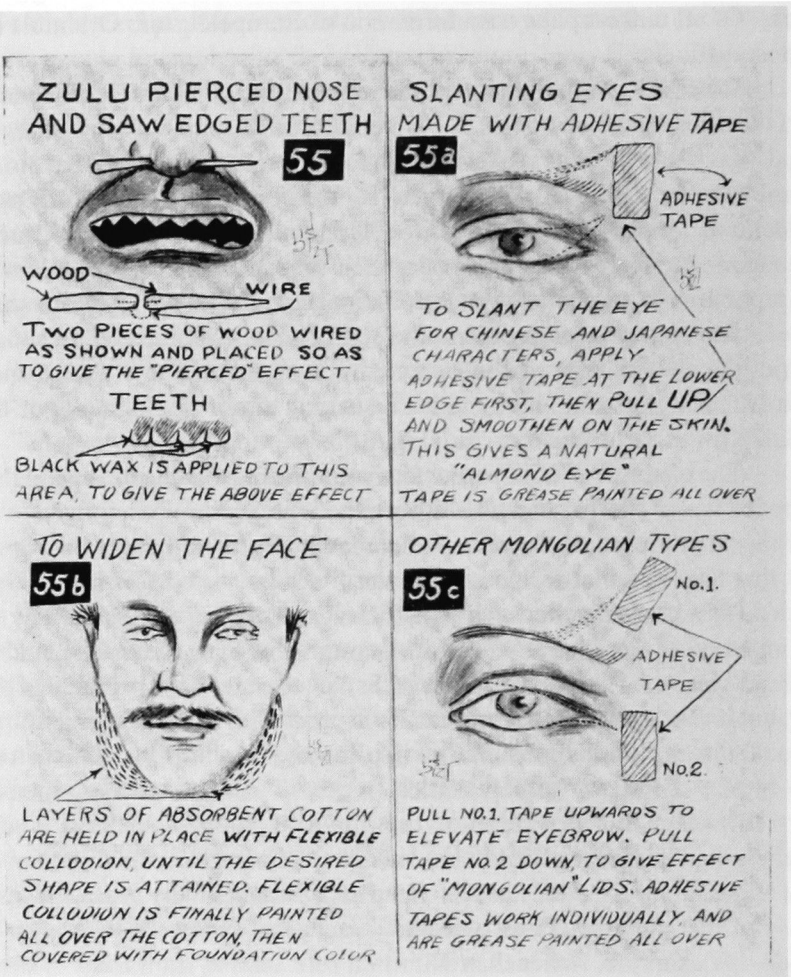


FIG. 55. *Note: In the lower part of square No. 55 (teeth) The white section is reversed by the application of black wax. Dotted lines show eyebrow and eye lining.*

FIGURE 1

FIG. 32. MANDARIN

The Author in his own make-up of a Chinese character so often misinterpreted.

FIGURE 2

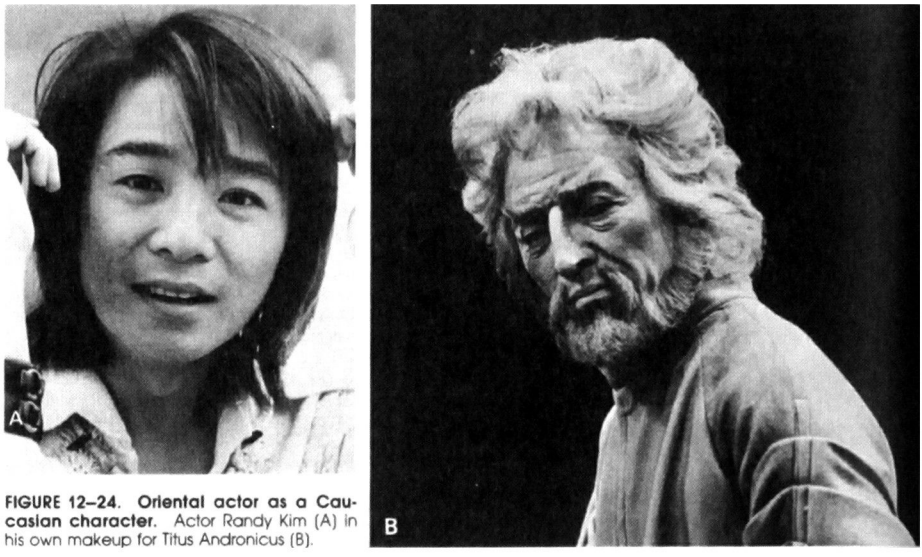


FIGURE 12–24. Oriental actor as a Caucasian character. Actor Randy Kim (A) in his own makeup for Titus Andronicus (B).

FIGURE 3

allows this liberal thought to co-exist with the very racism that it had tried to eradicate.

The sad irony is, of course, that this rhetoric of liberalism on the one hand promises inclusion and racial equality, but on the other hand not only fails to counter, but perhaps even serves to disguise racism. It does so by suppressing or erasing reminders of racial and social difference, promoting instead stories of racial success that assure us that we shall, if not have, overcome. There might be gentle reminders of the "work that still has to be done," but without any indication that institutionalized racism is still really present. Thus, to return to my opening example, Robert Brustein can tout a "color-blind" notion of theater as an art that ought to transcend race and "embraces a common humanity," no matter what the color of the playwright or actor; and, in the next breath, accuse those artists who point to the political and social nature of racial inequality of disqualifying themselves from greatness. Thus Brustein comments on Wilson's plays that "by choosing to chronicle the oppression of black people through each of the decades, Wilson has fallen into a monotonous tone of victimization which happens to be the leitmotif of his TCG [Theatre Communications Group] speech" (Brustein 27).

Ultimately, this paradox provides not only a convenient way of silencing discussions of racism ("Why can't you people stop talking about race?"), but also allows a deeper conservative stance. Race is seen as a "choice" of the actor now presumably allowed many possible roles. Those inclined towards a more radical politics are faulted for being self-segregating, choosing to "play the race card." Race should only be allowed as a statement of its own obsolescence, its ultimate lack of importance; racial visibility should only declare itself in terms of its desired

invisibility. The problem of race lies not with the perpetuation of racist institutions and systems of thinking, but with individuals who somehow get "stuck in the past," whether they are white supremacists or nostalgic cultural nationalists.

If the myth of the model minority is any indication, this is particularly felicitous fantasy by which to mark Asian Americans. For some, Asian Americans have entered the realm of white privilege; they no longer qualify as disadvantaged minorities and thus presumably no longer have to worry about racial discrimination, at least not in the way that African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans do. If racism and adversity can be mentioned, it is only in the context of success stories that demonstrate how persistence and hard work overcome such obstacles. Examples of famous Asian Americans are inevitably accompanied by familiar narratives demonstrating immigrant "success" and the American way. At the same time, these Asian Americans "count"—as long as their numbers remain modest—as proof of diversity. In this way, Asian Americans too have become managed and manageable bodies of color, whose inclusion can easily be touted as proof of racial progress. With this in mind, we might well be cautious about seeing how the bodies of professional Asian American actors are transformed into privileged, "white" bodies, or less drastically, impressed into the service of touting a "multicultural" look that suggests that civil rights has really put an end to racism in this country.

Liberalism not only weakens the initiative to address racial tension and social inequality; it also makes possible the appropriation of its terms by neoconservatives, who use terms such as "color-blindness" and "meritocracy" in order to wage war against affirmative action and other inclusive measures. In the next section, we will explore how this might be revealed through some of the contemporary discourse of cross-racial casting.

DISAPPOINTING OTHELLOS: CROSS-RACIAL CASTING AND THE BAGGAGE OF RACE

In a review entitled "New Clarity From a Colorblind 'Othello'," the *New York Times* reviewer D. J. R. Bruckner praises a production of *Othello* by the National Asian American Theater Company, based in New York:

> Remove the appearance of sharp racial differences from "Othello" and the difference in the play is so striking that it makes you wonder how many other stories have been distorted in our imaginations by our historical obsession with race.
>
> In the National Asian-American Theater Company's production at the Connelly Theater, all the actors are Americans of Asian descent—Korea, China, Japan or the Philippines—and the references to Othello as "black" or "dark" quickly become nothing more than mutters in the

catalog of slanders hurled at him by Iago and Roderigo. That Othello is different from the Venetians is hardly remarkable on a stage filled with actors so strikingly different from one another.

What happens is that the tragedy becomes much more insistently a contest between a great warrior who is largely innocent of the manipulative malice of the world around him and a subordinate of quick imagination and boundless evil who acknowledges to a confederate too stupid to understand him that "I am not what I am."

. . . after three hours one still leaves this performance thinking mostly about how clear the plot is and how swift its development if all the baggage of race we tend to bring to it is simply left at the door.[21]

To those of us familiar with the directives of contemporary Asian American theater companies, the ironies and contradictions of such praise are hard to miss. In one respect, the very establishment of an Asian American theater company is of course all about racial politics in their most overt form. Asian American theater companies were founded, beginning in 1965 with East West Players in Los Angeles, as a means of providing training, employment, and visibility for Asian American actors, directors, and playwrights who had been traditionally excluded from appearing in American theaters. Even a company such as the National Asian American Theater Company, founded with the purpose of playing European and American "classics" by authors such as Chekhov, Brecht, MoliÈre, O'Neill, and Lorca, sees this racially-defined "promotion" as part of its mission.[22] So what is the mechanism by which these performances by actors of color are judged successful only in terms of their perceived ability to "erase" race—even from a play that is as full of racial politics as is Shakespeare's *Othello*?

The ideology of liberalism—seeing race as simply a "surface" over the "core" of the individual—was easily adapted to characterizations and situations already familiar to audiences, including plays that centered around middle-class family struggles and a characteristically "American" style of actor training that valued the demonstration of interior motivations and a coherent and essential self. [23] On the one hand, since liberal integration was developed to address racial inequality and ameliorate racism, it had to acknowledge perceived, pre-existing racial differences. On the other hand, these traits were imagined simply as exterior "masks" over an integral self, that must ultimately be rejected, or at least relegated to secondary importance, in order to achieve full integration. Racial features, whether physiological, linguistic, or gestural, would matter in that they would assure the audience of the authenticity of the surface; however, the character must also reveal a deracinated "self" of a more "universal" constitution that could "correct" this perception. Liberalism thus promoted two visions of the "authentic"—one located in the "reality" of the "colored" body, the other imagined "beneath" its surface—dual, contradictory imperatives that made necessary

acknowledging the visible impact of race even while ultimately disclaiming its importance.

Contemporary versions of cross-racial casting demonstrate some of these fault-lines: the tensions that arise around integrationism's agendas for racial representation and its dual imperative of staging and upstaging race. I would argue that the recent emphasis on "color-blind" casting (and its attendant problems) originates in this split. Clinton Turner Davis and Harry Newman, list four broad categories of "non-traditional" casting formalized in the 1980s by the non-Traditional Casting Project—these include:

- societal casting "ethnic, female or disabled actors are cast in roles they perform in society as a whole"
- cross-cultural casting "the entire world of a play is translated to a different cultural setting"
- conceptual casting "an ethnic, female or disabled actor is a cast in a role to give a play greater resonance"
- blind casting "all actors are cast without regard to their race, ethnicity, gender or physical capability"[24]

Examined in terms of race, what these categories reveal is precisely that anxiety around either "seeing" or "not seeing" racial difference. "Societal," "cross-cultural" and "conceptual" casting all have the potential to highlight racial difference; "[color]blind" casting, on the other hand, actively does not recognize it. The ordering of these categories first looks at "race, ethnicity, gender or physical capability" and then looks away, towards a kind of integrated utopia brought into being by color-blind casting, in which actors are valued for their "true" abilities rather than the color of their skin and acting talent is measured in terms that do not encompass race.

As suggested in Davis and Newman's terms, contemporary cross-racial casting can be seen as a way to re-envision racial difference—to "see" it anew. It does this through challenging the traditional domain of the actor's art. As suggested earlier, the white male body has long been privileged as the ideal "neutral" body. White male actors have been allowed to represent a range of "authentic" Others, receiving praise for their "artfulness"; actors of color, on the other hand, have often been valued for their "natural" abilities (for instance African American singers and dancers) rather than for their ability to create, impersonate, or otherwise inhabit other characters. "Cross-racial" casting challenges this privilege, permitting actors of color to play and be judged by their ability to represent a range of characterizations, rather than to be relegated to the stereotypes of the "natural"—rather than artful—body. If we look at this in one way, cross-racial casting in its many incarnations is truly radical—challenging, at least in acting terms, one aspect of example of what George Lipsitz has called the "possessive investment in

whiteness" by allowing actors of color to appear in a range of roles previously barred from them. [25]

However, the pragmatic redistribution of artistic capital, not to mention actual money, was upstaged by another aim for cross-racial casting—this time one that located its hopes more specifically in "color-blind" casting. Liberal integrationism's progressive mission used the theater to teach the lesson that is race is but an inconsequential "surface" or "mask" over an actor's "essential" self. Theater could help educate its audience as to the inconsequentiality of racial difference, preserving the valued "neutrality" of the actor's body—its reputed ability to stand in for all "humanity"—even while extending it, presumably, to more actors of color on the basis of some deracinated notion of "merit" alone.

As long as the ideal of "color-blindness" existed in tandem with a certain degree of "race-consciousness," such a message could speak for social reform. "Color-blind" casting could create a theatrical utopia whose race-neutral principles in fact served as reminders of the all-too-conspicuous racial inequalities of the world outside. The integrated stage was held a stark contrast to the bleakly segregated world outside the theater. However, as the tensions and drama of civil rights activism became less of a focus of media attention, and as racial tensions dropped out of the public eye, "color-blindness" took on a new, much more insidious meaning. The imperative to somehow "free" the play, the performance, the actor from his or her race becomes a dismissal of racial difference as something inconsequential. Critics could marvel, as Mr. Bruckner does, at how the talents of the actor of color allows one to see through the "baggage of race" to some truthful insight that lay below the skin.

"Color-blindness" has become deployed not as an idealized vision of a world without inequality, but as a weapon against racial consciousness. This shifting of terms arose in response to liberalism's paradox: "that it requires the use of race as a socially significant category, despite the fact that the deepest aims of integrationist ideology point toward the transcendence of race consciousness" (Peller 131). Color-blind casting moved from being a mode of contrast—a vision of an idealized color-blind world that intensified one's awareness of the color-conscious world off the stage—to barring the open discussion of racial difference; thus effectively reinstating racial silence rather than the hoped for racial "invisibility."

Thus the concept of "color-bindness" at best makes us question what can be done with cross-racial casting, and at worst, serves as a tool of neoconservative agendas. If cross-racial casting was instituted to give economic equality to actors of color, "color-blind" casting debilitates this goal by removing "race" as a consideration for employment and instead positing some criteria of "merit" that is not racially inflected. Even while American theater remains largely dominated by white actors, white directors, and white playwrights, there is the insinuation that efforts at minority inclusion have gone too far and that whites are now the victims of "preferential treatment." In an interview, Helen Hunt reminisces

about an audition for *Measure for Measure* that she did for the Public Theatre in New York; and how she uses her own sense of disempowerment in order to fuel her audition scene.

> This is an interesting audition to talk about . . . because I went in knowing that the odds were 1000 to one against me. They were a breath away from hiring a black actress and from casting the whole play around the fact that she was black—but I somehow got them to say that they would see me and I had to fly in for it. I had read so many bad movie scripts and so many things I didn't want to do, that to find something that I really wanted to do that much—not going for it would have just haunted me; I would have felt like a wimp. . . so I worked on it. I worked with a coach and I sat down with my dictionaries and my thesaurus and my four different editions of the play and pads of paper and just worked and worked and worked . . . and by the time I went in I practically knew it, and I had written things in the margin that I wanted to play. Here's a scene about a woman pleading with this man "Please don't kill my brother." She's coming up against a big authority figure and she's scared, so there I am at the Public Theatre coming up against this big fancy director and Kevin Kline who wanted an actress with a different color of skin. So I could use the "You have what I want and I feel small and you look big" dynamic in the scene, and I left there knowing that I probably didn't get this part, but I felt that it was thrilling for me.[26]

Hunt's feelings—which she uses to her advantage in playing the scene—are built around a perception of her being intrinsically disadvantaged simply because she doesn't have the right "color of skin." Underlying her account is the argument that merit, hard work, talent, inspiration all come to nothing because they are pitted against a racial barrier that—one cannot help but conclude—is indefensible. The arguments that allowed contemporary cross-racial casting to challenge an almost exclusively white stage have now come full circle. A much more blunt statement of this resentment might be found in a interview with the British actor Ian Richardson, where Richardson discusses how he was cast for the role of Nehru for the series *Lord Mountbatten—The Last Viceroy:*

> It didn't seem to trouble anyone in India that I was playing an Asiatic, but in England, yes. We did one scene before we went out to India, in the Islington County Hall, which has a rotunda that is exactly like the rotunda in the Indian Parliament in Delhi, and we did the 'Freedom at midnight' speech. I only did one take, because at the end of the one take, not Indians, but West Indians, came in with placards saying 'No white actors with black faces', and so we had to abandon filming for that day. In India, on the contrary, the people who were the extras actually thought

I was a reincarnation of the man himself. They had to be physically stopped from bending down and kissing my sandals; it was quite, quite bizarre. It's typical of England and of Islington in particular.

In actual fact, for the record, I was not initially considered for Pandit Nehru at all. My photograph was submitted, with my height, my weight, my CV, as a contender for the role of Mountbatten. I was not considered right for that, so I was turned down, but they kept my photograph and my details, because there were so many English establishment figures going to be in it, that there'd got to be something for me to play. The producer, said to her office staff 'Run these photographs through the copying machine, so that we can pout them up on the wall.' My photograph was the first one to go through the copying machine, and it came out rather dark, but they pinned it up on the wall anyway. I wasn't there, but the story goes that the producer looked at it, and then she got some of that white type-correcting fluid, and painted a little congress cap on the top of my head, and then took her pencil and darkened the eyes a bit, and then she said to the girls 'Who's that?' and they said 'Oh, it's Nehru', and she said 'No, it's Ian Richardson', and that's how I got the part. She'd come that day from having sat through four hundred auditions among the Asian community of actors.

Four hundred, and not one of them was right. Now, unfortunately, since they're obliged to cast within the Asian community, or, indeed within the black community, only now and again, will one get a really wonderful performance. I know this is a cruel thing to say, but I rather suspect that we're in for several decades of rather disappointing Othellos.[27]

NEW RACIAL IDENTIFICATIONS: OUTING KEANU

We have been talking mainly about how the liberal conception of the racial actor both counters the limitations of racial stereotype, but at the same time produces its own contradictions. In treating race as merely a mask in order to maintain that the true self is "beyond" race, the liberal actor makes itself vulnerable to a host of imposters: insidious neoconservative claims of "color-blindness" and meritocracy, or a carefully managed "multiculturalism" that changes only the face of privilege.

I would like to end somewhat more hopefully, with a somewhat playful example of how a third kind of racial actor—radically different from the deracinated liberal actor—might likewise occupy significant attention on the stage of contemporary American racial politics. Elsewhere, I've written about how the racial actors who arose from the consciousness-raising of cultural nationalism challenge both the racial stereotype and, even more significantly, the liberal actor's racially "neutral" body.[28] If liberalism, fearing the stereotype's power, attempted

to render racial visibility ultimately meaningless—a "surface" characteristic over an essential self—cultural nationalism remade the racialized body into a reminder of past and existing inequalities, a gesture of protest at white domination, and a thing of pride. The racial markers of skin, hair, facial feature, gesture, clothing, language became signals of a positive, rather than negative difference: a difference that, moreover, must be intensified and heightened. Cultural nationalism's reinvention of race sought to stress what it felt to be an indelible and inescapable racial difference, both biological and cultural. In direct opposition to liberal integrationism, cultural nationalism reiterated, even insisted upon, the racial body as a reminder—not just a declarative statement, but an imperative —of difference. Thus the characteristic way that these performances made race not simply "reality" but in fact "larger than life," played up its spectacular qualities. If liberal integrationism felt that race was a false "mask" over the deracinated real self, cultural nationalism insisted on the importance of the racial "mask" as a ritualized enactment that would bring forth the "true self." Not only was a new vocabulary for the performance of racial identity unleashed by cultural nationalism but also a new paradigm for how one might relate to these bodies in the process of racial transformation: how these bodies become the objects of interest, attraction, and desire. Even though cultural nationalist performances failed to supplant the ruling sentiments of liberalism, they nonetheless impressed themselves indelibly upon how an American public might think of racial actors today.

Although politicians may argue on the basis of one or another, in popular discourse it is clear the impact of all versions of these racial actors is ever present. One way of seeing this is through looking at how professional actors' bodies, particularly celebrities, are "theorized" by their audiences, interpreted and re-interpreted in light of how they might suit or challenge each of these models.

A few years ago, while doing an internet search for "Asian American actors," I came upon a lively debate around a web-based poll that asked the questions, "Who is the Greatest Asian Male Star of All Time?" and Who is the Greatest Asian Female Star of All Time?"[29]

What inspired the most heated debate, however, was the survey's leading question:"Is Keanu Reeves (*Speed, A Walk in the Clouds, The Matrix*) an Asian American actor?" [30] Embedded in this discussion were many of the arguments and attitudes around the concept of "racial actors"; like our earlier examples, one argument seems to be inseparable from another. Keanu, a number of contributors suggested, could not be counted as Asian American because he had chosen to identify himself as white. Others argued that, biologically speaking, Keanu had to be included as Asian American (or Canadian) because of his part-Chinese father. Is biological racial lineage is (at least in part) what identifies the actor and defines his or her roles? Or is it some aspect of "choice" —whether the actor's race depends on how the actor chooses to identify himself, either through his roles or through his celebrity life (such as interviews)?

- It's really simple. Keanu passes as white and is therefore 'white' to society's eyes.
- Keanu Reeves was cast in "Little Buddha" How more Asian can you be?
- ok..i am no keanu fan but the comments here about him not being aa are just hilarious. so you want him to just say in an interview that he is half asian? "oh the matrix was fun, by the way i'm half asian" (?).."yes, i am currently making more projects, and oh, my dad is chinese-hawaiian" (?) give me a break. perhaps he's not being asked! didn't that ever occur to you people? well have your read ALL his interviews? and i just read a rolling stone article where he is the cover and his being asian was mentioned. and it says that he chose to keep his exotic keanu name bec he was offered to change it.
- Keanu Reeves is so not Asian. Yeah, he is an Asian mix, but he doesn't consider himself Asian. He calls himself a white boy! When has he ever been visible in the Asian community??? Plus, white[s] consider him white because he looks white. Russell Wong is a mix too but he's considered Asian because he looks Asian and he considers himself Asian. Plus...he loves Asian women. hehe =)
- How do you know what Keanu would say if someone asked him if he was Asian. Obviously, he has told people that he is part Asian, how else would we know then??? Also, he works with Yuen Ping as his choreographer for the Matrix and he has only good things to say about his Asian Martial Arts Coach!
- I am half-Asian and half-white, but I have never had an opportunity to "choose" my race, since I take after my Japanese father more than my mother. If I told someone I was white, they would probably laugh at me. I am proud of being Asian, but I have a natural (I suppose) resentment for someone like Keanu Reeves.
- So what if Keanu never said he was Asian in any interviews. Why would he bring it up unless the interviewer asked him? If he was asked, he wouldn't deny it. He has Chinese blood and that's all that matters. I am 100% Chinese and even if I thought I was white, or like I was white or looked like I was white-it doesn't make me white!
- Keanu Reeves is not Asian!!!!! How can he be Asian when he doesn't consider himself to be Asian? And who cares if he has some Chinese blood. Have you ever heard Keanu Reeves say he was in any magazine articles or interviews? The answer is no. Some people who are mixed of Asian and white can choose which race he or she wishes to be . . . And Keanu Reeves is not Asian because he chooses not to be.

The liberal impulse to make race a matter of choice, a mere "surface" over a "true" self is hopelessly complicated in this discussion by the constant, ever-present awareness that such "choices" are mitigated by pre-existing categories. Keanu's is never a neutral body, no matter how "white" it seems. Even the

commentators who insist that the actor's race doesn't matter, nonetheless preface their arguments with this racial disclaimer.

- Keanu is Asian, but who cares? We're all humans. What difference does it make? Are we all going to see his movies just because he is part asian?
- How about Naomi Campbell? She is Asian too. She has Asian blood which accounts for her beautifully slanted eyes. Let us forget about race and all just intermarry for love. Race only accounts for 10 per cent of our differences. We are all creatures of God and Love is the most important. Rather than focussing on the body, let us focus on our souls!

Embedded within this debate about the ability of the multiracial body to pass as white, or about the liberal actor's "choice," is a desire to claim the figure of the celebrity as a source of racial pride, or to dismiss him on the same grounds.

- Wake up my Asian people!! Why do you guys even care if Keanu Reeves or Naomi Campbell is Asian or not?? You act as if these two celebrities play a major role in Asian-American culture. They don't even identify as being Asian. And if they read some of these comments about them being labeled Asian, they would laugh their asses off. I know what you guys are doing. You wanna "claim" these people as being a part of our race because it gives you a sense of pride. And that they are a part of our culture. As Asians and minorities of America, let's embrace people who are actually Asian and actually talk about their Asian ancestry. And let's not worry about these celebrities with questionable Asian roots.

It would not be appropriate, by any stretch of the imagination, to wrestle Keanu into the vision of the politically radical vision of cultural nationalism; as one contributor to the discussion posted, "Who really cares if he's Asian American or not? He doesn't do anything for Asian Americans anyways, he's not blazing the way for any new Asian American actors. Yes he's biologically part-Asian but he's NOT AN 'ASIAN-AMERICAN ACTOR." Yet in a conversation dominated by talk of racial passing and "choice," there *is* another way of reading Keanu, albeit somewhat against the grain of what I've just said. Perhaps in a few of the comments about Keanu, as spontaneous as they are, we can still catch a glimpse of this third type of racial actor: the body that is racially identifiable, but whose race is neither a stereotype, a burden, nor a false mask. Keanu by no means deserves the title of "Asian American" if one thinks about such a term as requiring a certain openly political allegiance, visible difference yoked to activism. But even as this imperative prevents him, for some, from being truly "Asian American," the rampant fetishism of Keanu's body, and particularly his eyes, also point to a kind of desire that marks his body as different from that of both the stereotype and the liberal actor who is able to "choose" multiple racial identifications with ease.

- Keanu, that hottie is definitely asian. Love that guy!
- He has chinese eyes and is part chinese. He's an asian actor.
- Keanu is an Asian American. His eyes are almond shaped, there's no doubt. He's such a cutie.
- NO doubt about it. Keanu is Asian American. Look at his eyes. He is definitely part Chinese. He is so sexy.

Some might claim that these comments smack of the stereotypical exoticism of feminized Asian bodies with beautiful eyes; Keanu is described as "hot" or "exotic." At the same time, such heartfelt remarks also open another avenue of desire. Keanu's body is not only sexy; its sexiness allows it to become a different kind of empowering icon, a fetish reminiscent of some of those revolutionary bodies created by much more radical art such as the cultural nationalist movements of the 1960s and 1970s. For these viewers, Keanu cannot "pass" as white; however, his "Asian" eyes are precisely what makes him so "hot."

It is again the actor's eyes—so difficult to disguise even through the use of the most meticulous stage make-up or latex appliances—that give him away. However, in the final comments, praise, desire, and racial power have a somewhat different blend—rendering Keanu another type of racial actor altogether.

Endnotes

[1] "The Ground On Which I Stand," Wilson's address to the 11th annual Theatre Communications Group conference appears in *American Theater,* September 1996, pp. 14-16, 71-74; Brustein's reply "Subsized Separatism," appears in *American Theater,* October 1996, pp. 26-27, 100-105. Wilson and Brustein met for a live continuation of their debate, moderated by Anna Deavere Smith, on January 27, 1997, at Town Hall in New York City. Responses to the debate were published in a host of subsequent venues, including Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s "The Chitlin Circuit" in *The New Yorker,* Feb. 3, 1997: 44-55 and subsequent issues of *American Theater.*

[2] Brustein, Robert, "A House Divided," *American Theater* (October 1991): 44-46, 140-143, p. 46.

[3] See, for instance, David Theo Goldberg's *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993) and Michael Omi and Howard Winant's *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

[4] Parenthetical sources refers to two articles in particular, Matthew Purdy's "The Making of a Suspect: The Case of Wen Ho Lee" *New York Times* (February 4, 2001); and Matthew Purdy with James Sterngold, "The Prosecution Unravels: The Case of Wen Ho Lee," *New York Times* (February 5, 2001).

[5] Among the acts that the NY Times called "curious, if not criminal" behavior was a particular "appearance": "In 1994, Dr. Lee surprised laboratory officials when he appeared uninvited at a Los Alamos briefing for visiting Chinese scientists and warmly greeted China's leading bomb designer." Investigators wondered about the familiarity revealed

here. "Dr. Lee, it turned out, had met the bomb designer in a Beijing hotel room years before" (Purdy, Feb. 4; 3), an encounter he had not disclosed to laboratory officials. According to F. B.I. experts, China prefers to spy by "mining nuggets from countless foreigners bearing secret knowledge rather than relying on a few master spies" (Purdy, Feb. 4; 3-4). "Mr. Moore, the F.B.I's former China espionage analyst, said that while the Chinese routinely seek information from visiting scientists of all nationalities, they concentrate on ethnic Chinese, including Taiwanese, by appeling to a "perceived obligation to help China" (Feb. 4; 13)

[6] "Newsmakers: $ 100 million claim," *The Houston Chronicle* (December 13, 2000) A- 2.

[7] Meyer, Josh, Carla Hall, and Kurt Streeter, "2 Lives Shattered in a Moment at the Castle," *Los Angeles Times*, November 5, 2000, p. 1.

[8] Meyer, Josh, Ted Rohrlich and Sue Fox, "Despite Many Precautions, Party Ended in Tragedy." *Los Angeles Times*; October 30, 2000, p. A-1.

[9] "Noted Seattle actor killed by L.A. police," *The Seattle Times*, October 30, 2000, Pg. A1.

[10] Simon Davis, "Hallowe'en party actor with toy gun shot dead by police," *The Daily Telegraph* (London) October 30, 2000, p. 03.

[11] "L.A. Police Woes Worsen with Shooting at Party," *The Arizona Republic* October 30, Pg. A1.

[12] Misha Berson, "Anthony Dwain Lee: 1961-2000. " *American Theatre* (January 2001): 19-20; p. 20.

[13] Dyer, "White," *Screen* 29, 4 (Fall 1998): p. 44.

[14] Gary Peller, "Race-Consciousness," in *Critical Race Theory* (New York: New Press 1995) p. 127.

[15] T. Shibutani and K. Kwan, *Ethnic Stratification: A Comparative Approach,* 589 (1965); quoted in Peller, p.136.

[16] Otis L. Guernsey, Jr. *Curtain Times: The New York Theater 1965-1987.* New York: Dodd, Mead & Co, 1987. p. 8, 308.

[17] Fig. 32 "Mandarin"; Fig. 55-55c "Zulu Pierced Nose". . . "Other Mongolian Types" from Rudolph J. Liszt, *The Last Word in Make-Up* (New York: Dramatists Play Service: First published 1942, rev. 1977).

[18] "Oriental Makeup" from Lee Bayan, *Makeup for Theater, Film, and Television* (NY: Drama Book Publishers, 1982) p. 142.

[19] Yoti Lane, *Stage Make-up* (Minneapolis: The Northwestern Press, 1950) p. 80.

[20] "Oriental actor as a Caucasian character"; "Actor Randy Kim in his own makeup for Titus Andronicus" from Richard Corson, *Stage Makeup* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall: first published 1942, illustrations appear in 5th edition (1975) and later; these taken from 6th edition, p. 105).

[21] "New Clarity From a Colorblind 'Othello'," *The New York Times,* February 17, 2000; p. B5.

[22] See the NAATCO mission statement at <http://www.naatco.org>: The National Asian American Theatre Company (NAATCO) was "founded in 1989 by Richard Eng and Mia Katigbak to: promote and support Asian American actors, directors, designers, and technicians through the performance of European and American classical and contemporary works; actively develop an Asian American audience and encourage Asian Americans to become a significant part of a more diverse audience in American theatre; cultivate in non-Asian Americans an appreciation of Asian American contributions to the development of theatre arts in America today." Viewed September 19, 2003.

[23] Through the emphasis on capturing the "inner life" of characters, the Method actor could seek to create an "authentic" characterization that could encompass both an *outer* racial characteristic, yet reveal an *inner* self that could be seen as ultimately free from race. Though marked as "black" or "Oriental" or "Hispanic" on the surface, such characterizations could also be shown to be "like" any white character.

[24] *Beyond Tradition: Transcripts of the First National Symposium on Non-Traditional Casting*, edited by Clinton Turner Davis and Harry Newman (New York: Non-Traditional Casting Project, Inc., 1988) p. xii.

[25] *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple 1998).

26. Richard Dyer "[W]hite power secures its dominance by seeming not to be anything in particular" ("White," Screen 29, 4 (Fall 1998): 44.

[27] Gordon Hunt, *How to Audition for TV, Movies, Commercials, Plays and Musicals* (New York, HarperCollins, 1995) p. 289.

[28] "Interview with Ian Richardson," in Carole Zucker, *In the Company of Actors: Reflections on the Craft of Acting* (London: Routledge, 1999) pp. 135-36.

[29] "Bodies, Revolutions, and Magic: Cultural Nationalism and Racial Fetishism." *Modern Drama* 44.1 (Spring 2001): pp. 72-90. Reprinted in *Modern Drama: Defining the Field*, edited by Ric Knowles, Joanne Tompkins, and W.B. Worthen. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003.

[30] http://goldsea.com/Poll/Actors/actors_0122.html. Viewed February 2001.

[31] The poll results as of February 20, 2001:

"No, because few people know he has any Asian blood." 23%

"Yes, because his natural father is a Chinese American born and raised in Hawaii." 77%

*Illustrations courtesy of Dramatists Play Service, Inc.

AFROFUTURISTIC

Tracie Morris

NEAR PRESENT: SCENE ONE: Sirena at home

(Overheard: Sirena is going about her business)

Visual cue: [Sirena was a minor magician. In this day and time, everyone was. I mean, you had to have some protection.]

When the buildings split, the big ones, lots of things went with them. Like: luck. "How quaint," anybody outta Philly said, looking at the 12A's on the push-button dash. Cute. Like the lions on libraries. An effect. Tell the truth: they had they own who does going – act like you know. Ever seen a dollar? The pyramid got its own James Brown holla. They be laughing at Minnie sure, but Mickey's no joke. Him and them brooms back in the day? Now that was saying something. See what's left standing? Empire, you damn skippy. And Chrysler, what do you suppose that mean? Now I *know* you ain't think it was the Art Deco! Not a flat top in sight, above a certain height.

After the burning, the white soot, the sand with brown edges in everyone's eyes, the Do-Bees *did* offer their services. "See, see, see?" They said "You were being silly. Notice how they were the only ones around sans 'God We Trust'. Forget Papal dispensation, we have the Sirius shit. Think Dogon's a fluke all you want, you betta aks somebody." "Not ones ta brag, silly rabbits, we will happily hook y'all up for a fee – needless to say, we'll be choosing the number."

Sound cue and visual cue: [*We should know there are ghosts/spirits in the place with her: benign and looking out for things. A little disruptive but not frightening. Soft wailing sounds] (improvised and recorded). [Sirena eventually goes into meditative pose. She seems like she can't get settled down, is distracted, pained slightly.]*

"Oh, yeah. Hungry," [she says]

The commentary voice over continues: {Thank goodness her third eye stays shut, with a bit of crust in the corners. If she had that Haley Joel Osmet joint, she'd be even more distracted. Bad enough her perfect hearing gets all that paper rustling and door slamming when the windows are all closed. Why they gotta be see-thew and rowdy?} - [Voice Over Sound Cue]

SCENE TWO: SIRENA GOES OUTSIDE
Sound cue: [Crowd mulling about]
Off – stage dialogue (maybe from band member?): "Hey baby, I know you a credit to the race, don't pick yo pace! Hook me up with a little credit. Can't afford a tin cup, but I got hands..."

"Spare a dollar credit, Sirena, spend a dollar."
Sirena responds: "Y'all know I'm just trying to get by. Move, man! I'll hook you all up with some crackers on the way back. I know y'all ain't eatin' nothin' fresh but them nasty pigeons." To herself: "Dudes be all up in my doorbell. It's rough as a junkie's toenails these days."

Begins to recite a ditty:
There once was a girl and her name was Lisa
Pretty type those who liked her said "It's nice ta meecha"
But after Lisa lost her job and got on the dole
huddled in a hefty bag like she was some sorta mole.

There once was a fella by the name of Carl
Who nobody messed with 'cause he had this snarl
But Carl put a smile on his face real quick
When his muvah lost her place, he had to bum for the credit
(continues to hum the melody)

SCENE THREE: SIRENA AT MARKET [visual cue]
Sirena gets to the market, which is totally automated.

(Overheard):

Even her sex-fi fantasy life is boring. Reading tarot cards doesn't get you a date, it just tells you, specifically, that you don't have one. Creative visualization doesn't extend to *this* arena, to be sure. "No wonder I'm single. I can't even imagine anything interesting to do. " Not that I haven't had a chance to find out, that's for sure. Freaks of the week *always* look for the naive P to turn out. "Hmm. That's a whole other kind of hunger. For now, the health food sto'."

She picks up this and that, still thinking to herself

[sound cue: crashing carts]

"Blam!" right into another cart.

[TANGO 1]

(Overheard)
"Damn, hope he not a Warlock." Thinking involuntarily of Samantha Stevens. What a contrast – in hair styles to start with.

Then she looks up again – *tmtps* –too many thoughts per second. "Sorry," she's about to pull off. "Damn, and fine, too." Another thought. In the diaphragm bands this time. "Uhm, hungry". And she pulls the thin tape away from the jalapeno style air popped soy chips nearby. "Waited too late to get some complex sugars in my system." She feels the rough bubble of pain around the base of her neck.

"No problem." She almost forgot someone was around her. The fine guy. Assuming this will be another fleeting thought, she smiles, briefly nods and is about to continue on. But those damn little hooks in the front of the cart are locked with his little hooks. Sirena bends down to hook them off and can tell the guy is checking out my/her chest in the tightish tee. "Whatever" first fleeting thought. "Straighten your shoulders" the second. Not that it'll get her anywhere.

She goes to the checkout counter (of like a subway entry for the metro card) swipes her credit card and is let out.

SCENE FOUR: SIRENA LEAVES THE MARKET AND GOES BACK OUT. TRANSITION TO SECTION TWO: DYSTOPIA

She drops off a box of crackers. It's gone in seconds. Before reentering her place, she looks across the street at lights flashing: it's a disco. We see another character inside the disco dancing after checking out the leers, partial nudity and strobe light effect of the other club goers. Then the poem "Love in 2010" is read by the scantily clad dancer:

SCENE FIVE: DISCO
[Love in 2010]
click, flicker, click
click flicker
click – click flicker click
click flicker

Gaze of the radius
between light rays
spectral bands play
with features, faces.

half-human machinations
of the alienated.

click, flicker, click
click flicker
click – click flicker click
click flicker

Make up grafted on faces.
Corpus second skin of bacteria
Encoded with chameleon genes
— Strategic fat shifters

click, flicker, click
click flicker
click – click flicker click
click flicker

The hotties got a Jennifer Janet ass
fall season had hottentots out of holographs

click, flicker, click
click flicker
click – click flicker click
click flicker

Thin except for lipids which form
figures in the midst.
Distended labia are plateless
made from – oh! — multiple dead men's lips

click, flicker, click
click flicker
click – click flicker click
click flicker – Click!

SCENE SIX: SIRENA IS AT HOME
Sirena is back in the house. She checks to see if she has any messages.] Papers flutter for no reason. [She recites the following blues poem as she prepares for work. (Reveals a low-cut blouse beneath her sweater):

[Twice as Good]

All day, day it's all work and no play
Everyday day the cred only go halfway
Ma useta say "gotta be twice as good as they"

So I get my textbooks and sit
{ Goodness know, I can't be sayin' No}
Hopin' that some good luck will hit { Goodness know, I can't be layin' low.}
It kinda did, with the money, but honey not how I got it

Lord I know it could always get worser tho'
Folks so po' they layin' front a my do'
So I go and do what they say so

Goodness know, I can't be sayin' No
Goodness know, I can't be layin' low.

Computer opens up. There's a sound. Sirena's voice is hyper-actively nice.

Sirena: "Rick, Hi!"

Rick: "Right on time. It really is not true what they say about you people. I tell my friends that all the time"

Sirena: "Well, thanks. How are thing going?"

Rick: "Well, tough. The lodge was flooded again. So, no skiing. I buy all these clothes for the cool weather and end up needing a bathing suit! And we pay all this money to change the weather there."

Sirena: "Even the best technology can be fallable, um, *wack*."

Rick: "And you *know* that." "So, of course we went swimming. But it wasn't the same."

Sirena: "You must be a bit winded. We should get to the assignment."

Rick: "I feel a little down but not winded at all. I'm in top shape! All I *do* is exercise!"

"Okay, Ser. I love how that almost rhymes with Cher. We have two girls up here named Cher. We're considering them for implants. Good genes. Maybe even retrofit them for twin boys. They're thinned, though..."

Sirena: "Great, and good luck. Hope *that* technology doesn't fail!"

Rick: "Right. Until they get the DNA check, it's protein sheaths for all us boys! Anyway, we have to. There's only two of them and six of us, so it's the rule. We *have* to work on that deregulation bill. As soon as I'm elected, it's first on the agenda."

Sirena: "Sounds serious. Hey, I'm here to help you get there. So should we talk about the assignment now?

Rick: "History – chapters 1-20 in the first book. 1-5 in the other three. Math – the equations on 1-8. Geopolitics – The Rhodes book, Battenberg and the Prescott book. Whew! That's it. Let me, uh, know what you think. The teacher says that my work is outstanding, so. Would you like a small bonus? Would you?"

Sirena: "That'd be great, great. So glad you are pleased with my service. I so enjoy learning! I'll get right on it after I take the next test"

Rick: "Off."

Sirena waves at the screen as it shuts down. She goes to a row of little computers and opens one, begins to read off the answers for the computer.

"B"

Correct.

"L"

Correct.

"C"

Correct.

"S"

Incorrect.

"Make that T"

Correct.

[She begins to say the answers faster and the screen blinks faster. The machine can barely get out the syllable "Cor" before she's on to the next one. After about a minute of this, the computer says "Thank you." And shuts off.]

"This job is gonna kill me."
She says, sighs. "I need some air."

She puts on her coat, a jacket with a flashing ad that comes on when she places her arm in the sleeve. She puts on a heavier mask with a cute scarf that is connected to a small oxygen apparatus that fits into a cute bag.

SCENE SEVEN: DYSTOPIA OUTDOORS

Sirena tip toes around. She's tentative. No people around but there's a rumble from the earth.
(Overheard)

[Vertical]
A rainbowed sky is the fixed horizon
among the alleyways of light.

Recurring building towers have Quazimoto humps,
their spires, dowsing rods.

Lengthy, heavily-boned people,
inhalers affixed like ornate Spanish
combs of flamenco Doñas,
quickly tiptoe the panorama.

Terra vibratoes, soft-pedals.
Her spontaneity uneven – reactors
balloon and deflate their half-lives.
Degraded lungs of the world's crust,
at the ball's melting, melding center.

Under the rubble, under the graves
The ancient dead shake such angry fists.

Visual Cue: conveys many Black folks being erased. Some speaking in slow motion while the following is overheard:

[Afrofuturism: Dystopic Unity]

My first word was an error. According to the machine I spoke it in. Whispering into an orifice used to be intimate. Now, the neural network noir twitters from every misplaced exclamation. Deep spell – check.

Not set yet, the rhythm hasn't been bleached. I was the first class to be spoon-fed the suspicious cereal. "Look at the swirls" we said as the glucose crystals segregated from the genetic grains.

"Crunch-crunch-crunch" they marched through the esophagus, the sarcophagi between us, rolling over.

The first time we dared to play the underground numbers straight and they hit on the regular, when somebody dreamed of a black cat and ran into one the next day, we thought those folks on the down low we all know who shook them bones was finally coming into the light – with the upper hand.

But then, the "git-cho-man-back" gooba wasn't happening. He disappeared. We could feel the ooh's and aah's of the clients getting done by the meth girls who were turned out and made to turn tricks. That was more than we wanted to know.

In a covert bell curve moment, the lower than average intelligence quotient allocated 20 mill, a buck a pop, to equalize Negroes with psychic self-correcting breakfast which would allow their leaders to auto-repair the rest of 'em. Above grounded, it was guaranteed to have everybody knowing your business. (Leno quipped that we talked too much anyway and this would, at least, save us from all that yelling on the subway.)

It was all the Babalawos and Iyalochas could do to stay out of the loop, much less help anyone else. Conversion was officially closed in those circles. You had to be in line to stay in line. This was the concession allowed to stave off complaints of attrition.

SCENE EIGHT: ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST MEETING

Sirena gets to an environmental meeting in public but without the crowd noticing. Sirena says Hi all around.

Sirena: "I finished work early and needed a break. I think I look cuter virtually, though."

Visual cue: Panorama of the destroyed earth.
Then, the Muse's voice, among others, chimes in.
Muse: "Girl, what you talking about? I like your mask, though. Where'd you get it? I didn't see that from the Store's catalogue. And the bag is cute."

Sirena: "Thanks, boo. I just picked stuff up around and pulled it together. Saved some *creditos* from going to the Store."
"Who here?"

Muse: "Everybody but Bill. He stopping in for about five. He promises to have the minutes read though so we can use the moment."

Sirena: "'Kay. Anyone else from the Kinko DL's?"

Muse: "All accounted for. Including Richard and Josh, can you believe it?"

Sirena: "Now that the lovebirds *got* a room, I'm surprised they can get out of it to get to a Kinko's."

Muse: "That behavior is too risky. *Nooobody* wants to be caught out there. They be in front of your door too."

Muse: "Okay everybody. The latest moves are the following:
Fast food wrappers secret organic tofu. Bananas have grow lights in closets – the only spot away from the TV/DVD/internet satellite. Fake the BOTOX angle. We've got one doc with a clean needle – age discrimination my ass, that thing's still poison. But y'all look good so we gotta be careful. Code words – shea and banku. They'll never get it, except our woman.

Now for the news: The scoop is, the seedlings are doing okay. About half made it as their original species. We got a few animals breathing and breeding on their own...fish and frogs still zilch. The dolphins..."

Discussion fades out, dissolves to next scene. Sirena's on her way home, negotiating the bleak landscape. We hear more pronounced ghostly sounds. She sees a small tree, gnarled and leafless. Before she enters her home, the following poem is heard:

[Shango's Wife]:
Red is my love's hair.

Masai mud. His face
Painted white with chalk.
The outline
A black line, a seam of
Skin so round round the
Nose his cleft chin.
Nina's lips, vagina.
The color of blackberry
Sains them. Brenda Sykes'
Luster.
Matted hair he has, coiled
At the base with a borrowed
Senegalese palm roll.
Look at how the oil reddens
The skin. Iron ore.
That coagulates the
Blood – brings it together
That color.
The hidden head,
His uncir-
Cumsized self
Mischievous peek-a-boo
My own peak
In the monds
He was along the tree like dog
Doo, in the trees like cob
Webs, up the tree, a nest
The hollow sounds' a skull,
A seashell to the ear.
See? The un-God's wind's a tangle.

SCENE NINE: SIRENA RETURNS HOME

It's been a long day for our heroine and she's beat. There is less in her apartment and no presence of the cats, who've died from whatever destroyed the earth. She flops on the couch or chair and then looks in the refrigerator which is practically empty. She goes to the back of it and pulls out a beaten up book to read. It's a coffee table book with pictures of the earth and text. Sirena says the following poem:

[Apology to Pangea]

I sent you
blue: silk on a peacock feathered eyelet

corona around pupil of the old
Dye with expensive tastes:
red — corpuscles of the dyers.
In the underbelly of current,
coffin canoes heavily down.

And here we be with capes, spandex and big hair
hieroglyphs spelling *superduper*, people who made atoms,
his momma, molecules before morning.
Dat was me with the buck dance and chicken head.
Me, making
Grits gris-gris, wif.
Can I say sorry for dem sweep yo feet, Mam?
Do I throw coarse salt over mah shoulder?

The scene with Sirena fades out. She goes to sleep. We see the panorama of the world again. Here we see the beginnings of a revitalization, little shoot by shoot, buds and small birds. As the scenes play out, the following poem is heard:

[Mother Earth]
The whole boiling, burning sea
has finally begun to smolder.
The dolphins, leaving land again,
search deeply for remaining whales.

Green is peeking out under
the garish day-glow of
useless things.

The manipulated animals,
their biology fundamentally
flawed by human hands,
have created fawns with
sharp teeth, does with claws.

Goats somehow can consume
tiny tastes of uranium. Convert
them to harmless pebbles under foot, walk away.

The eagles have come down from
their stratospheric heights, carrying
nests from clouds.

Sirena gets up, stretches, feels better. Plays with her cats who have (reappeared) slept near her, feeds them. Gets dressed and goes outdoors. The landscape is now beautiful: sunny with animals walking along the street with (Black) people of different types and trees. She's still in the 'hood. An excerpt from Richard Pryor's character, Mudbone's famously delivered line: "We are gathered here today..." should be sampled and cut off.

MUSIC CUE:
Music is playing, up tempo. She goes to a round about, sort of like Washington Square to hear the latest:

UTOPIA SECTION
SCENE TEN: THE SQUARE

Muse :
Safe
1.
Knock-knock
Who there?
A safe cracker
Ain't no such thing! (*Hee-yuck, yuck yuck!)*
Ah-ight. Lemme be nice. You know I love ya! (canned laughter)
2.
9 holes in the body because men do the counting.
If it wasn't a hole, it wouldn't fill. If it couldn't fill, it wouldn't stick out, around trimester 2. Where the
dust gathers, the collection of residue from shorn lambs, flower bulbs, factory plastic spun becomes thread.

3.
There are cameras smaller than that. Smaller than where the tape is criss-crossed over the child. Everywhere eyes in plaster. Jigsaw puzzling your face on the street, don't wear a mask but your smile.

4.
The distance between your eyes and nostril, the retinal patterns. The finger prints, the inflection of your tone – watch that ghetto 'tude, girl! See the hand? Your life line and your love life be data banked, used for the personals they say, and sometimes, *click* a love connection. But still...

Muse:

Florida was a check. A let's see...Back in the day, boom shacka lack! It was like dat. Y'all *know* we had ta snap! And I mean that the niggerati *and* psycho way. Tell me I'm lying! Sookie Mama, look. Don't scrunch up your face ackin' good 'cause it's integrated up in here. Stop playin'! And didn't they snap back? Shit from shinola, and you know that!

So to reverb, or renown or replay, y'all know the story, chime in it. Said too many Negroes and colored others. Started irradiating and 'radicating. Working on de-pop and lockin' the nation. Butchu know ev'rybody got a bit a melanation, or there wouldn't be no tanning bed business, so they fell hard, too. Did that white light put a freeze frame on people? *What?*
Band: "You know it."
"Ahem. Dolphins have the bigger brains and played the Flipper/flapper: entertainment. On the low, they was hiding fishies jump starting them, God only knows how. Shoot. They was smart enough to leave is all I know. Hiding seaweed in the guano while we trying to revive some peppers.
It got hot all up in here, reacting from under. Between this and the ozone in no zone.
And ya know Mamma don't play dat wif the neckbones so they had ta go, even though some good folks got swallowed up, my Ma'am included.
Like keeping ya head above water wasn't enough work as it was. Muva went down at the three count like James Brown. Boo hooed when I found her. I told my boy everything 'bout her. He got my kinda memory. Baby, thangs gotta be lookin' up

The latest is: we got a little more frosting in the north. Not a cakeful, but more than a nibble. Two penguins have suited up already and peckin' so we hopeful. That's about 500,000 different things altogether. It's a lot less than – I ain't even going there. Let's just say things are looking up, *okay*?

[Backchannel]
Papas from Peru are more than a notion. From 500 years to fifty p. And tomatoes to go with hoe cakes. Slow baked on an oven day. Between the hole making heat and the rising of the sea, we 'bout even but some landmasses have passed on, Nauru included, and took the goods. Sea divers keep coming up with corny pirate booty. Drowned in a sea of love the other species be or the fire to so-called save the trees. 'Course we got into a huddle and know what's up with everybody. So ain't no secrets among friends and kin, right?

Tell me if I'm right!

Sirena and band: "You right!"

Sirena: All right, then. Y'all know the rest of the story so that's how it go!

Sirena and the muse take a seat after his performance and listen to the band play some avant-blues music.

SCENE ELEVEN: SIRENA GOES HOME

After the number, Sirena goes on home. The Muse is muse-y again and is in the background as she takes off her shoes and gets back to her daily life. She pulls up a television and it turns on. She flips through an odd array of speech in the present.

After the Dust Settles

and the people vroom
and the cars peep
and the doink opens the registers before
ching,

snow backflips quadriceps-heavy, on a wind.

The contents of a briefcase.
The Dewey decimals on a paycheck,
the needle clicks on crickets' antennae.

Flakes glow on light and in
the space between stars

There is no need for gloves
to test the pristine

what is pure:
soap from animal fat
dishwashing liquid you can lay your hand in.

How hungry are you,
what you are prepared to eat?

Honey, distended bellies are
out!

Sirena tells the end of the story as a wind blows on her face. A soothing hum is heard, coming seemingly out of nowhere.

If it were just the dearly departed, well, that'd be one thing. But the "all of the above" category of beings, was just too much to sort out. Wondering what kind of signal her intuition is giving her grumbling around inside and making her feel lightheaded. "Mom, check. Bro, check. Cats, check. Business, check. Home, check." "No nether world bell ringin', she hasn't eaten, really, since yesterday afternoon. Betta get some grub in my mug or it's all about the migraine tinitis in about *2* minutes."

[BLISS]
The kente cloth and quilts are playing joda. Which one has the best left "hook?" Who can say? Who cares? It's the stance people admire.
Architecture of the beauty parlor meets and new hand stand called "the hut." In Brooklyn we say, on the low meaning that old Angola shim sham shimmy.
Shadow touches the Muse who moves but doesn't speak. Sirena looks behind her in his direction but she can't visibly see him.

(Overheard):

I can feel this one for me breathing on my neck. The back of it where the hairs are short and soft. The down part. So, I turn around to chat, go for coffee. I am afraid of my shoulders moving away from my ears.

But you know what? Someone is sneaking behind me with deep-tissue thumbs. Out of my periphery I think see the flurry of wings.

Apocalypse Eternity

Bob Holman

Characters:

God
Child
Snake
Earth
Eternity

God: In the beginning I was thinking of something
Which rapidly disintegrated
Boy: Hello
Snake: Pleasant evening (Yawns)
Earth: Happiness
Eternity: Which dances

(A wind, a train, the theater turns inside out, we are on a cold deserted hillside, wet and slick with rain. The grass smells so fresh it's decadent. Our characters are happy (or not) as they go on, which may be repetition (or not). They do not know they are characters even. We watch them as if it were a play, but, you know, it's not, probably, because the actors aren't aware they are actors. All we can do is watch them and enjoy the show and wonder how we got here. And is that so different from what we do, anyway, every day?)

Us (in revelation!): Apocalypse Eternity!

(and, need I add?)

The End

Reviews

FEMINISM WITHOUT BORDERS:
DECOLONIZING THEORY, PRACTICING SOLIDARITY

Chandra Talpade Mohanty
Duke University Press, 2003

> *"One other little thing, don't ever forget about how they treat women. That's a big part of this."*
>
> Laura Bush giving some wifely advice to President Bush before his address to the nation about the justification for the war with Iraq in the TV drama, "DC 9/11: Time of Crisis. "

> *This is also part of the old colonial scenario. White men saving brown women from brown men. What is forgotten in this are the Islamic and Afghani women who have been drawing attention to their plight under the Taliban for some time; who have, in fact, been taking precisely these patriarchal misogynist forms of abuse and control of women. In order for the old colonial scenario to work, the revolutionary Afghanistan Women's Association, and the many feminists from all over the Islamic world, have to be erased.*
>
> Chandra Talpade Mohanty (Dua and Trotz 70)

The disjunct between the positions of these two worldviews encapsulates the theme of Mohanty's most famous essay to date, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." Reprinted almost every year after it was first published in 1986, this essay remains contentious in its challenge to Western feminism. In fact, Mohanty was one of the scholars who added the qualifying and locational term "Western" to the until-then-universalist notion of feminism. By insisting on the various boundaries that criss-cross the subjectivities of women, Mohanty delimits the Western feminist world view in the same way that Edward Said did in the earlier decade with Western colonial discourse. Questioning the monolithic notion of universal sisterhood based on the pre-given category of "woman," Mohanty demonstrates systematically how Western feminism constructs a unified, singular Third World woman who is always a victim and never an agent.

This essay raised many hackles when it was first published and continues to evoke strong reactions from some readers, especially women, because they see in Mohanty a feminist renegade who wants to break ranks and weaken the movement. That essay contains in its seed a refutation of such claims but the new book, with its juxtapositions of essays dealing with this same theme in different contexts, clarifies all the theoretical grounds of "Under Western Eyes" in a manner that is comprehensive.

Mohanty gives deceptively simple titles to her writings, as to this book—for instance, "What's Home Got to Do With It?" and now, "Feminism Without

Borders." We know right away what this essay or this book is going to be, right? The essay, co-authored with Biddy Martin, will be about challenging simplistic notions of home; this book is going to be about the universal nature of the feminist agenda. But on reading that essay, you realize that it is a reclamation of the woman's subjectivity in the face of unitary notions of nation/home/community in a manner that is as confrontational as the alluded Tina Turner song that declares love to be a second-hand emotion. Or take the title of this book, "Feminism Without Borders": simple; very clear; an advocacy of international feminist practice. But then you read that "without borders" does not imply a denial of borders; rather, it involves an honest acknowledgment of the varied borders that traverse the lives of women. On its heels comes the explanation in the introduction about the allusion to the enterprise of Doctors without Borders, "[a] project that embodies the urgency and the internationalist commitment that I see in the best feminist praxis." And after you read the whole book, with its insistent advocacy of activism and praxis over armchair theorizing, the title of the book gains nuances that you had never suspected before.

The introduction to the book not only gives the mandatory background to the work—it also analyzes the structure of the book, highlights the internal connections across essays, differentiates between seemingly similar utterances and provides a "road map" of the book. (That is the sub-heading that Mohanty gave to the last part of her introduction that effectively functions as a review of her work: "Feminism Without Borders: A Road Map." George Bush and Mohanty sharing a vocabulary—I can see Mohanty cringing at this hijacking of the phrase.) It is a little disconcerting to read the author articulating so clear-sightedly about her voice, her location, her affiliations, and her differences. For example, Mohanty gives a whole list of activists/writers who have influenced her or from whose work she has taken inspiration, and the list is unusually comprehensive—there would have been the potential danger of seeming derivative, since this list indicates the commonality of approach between her and other writers like Biddy Martin, bell hooks, Minnie Bruce Pratt, Jaqui Alexander and so on. But as Mohanty declares, "I offer this partial history of ideas to anchor, in part, my own feminist thinking and to clarify the deeply collective nature of feminist thought." Solidarity is the mantra in her activism and in her writing and it is heartening to see the anti-capitalist urge inform all the aspects of her work.

"Under Western Eyes" opens the book and its counterpart—an exciting revision of the theoretical positioning in this essay, in "Under Western eyes revisited"- closes the book. Between these are bracketed her essays that look at the academy, at texts written by women, at her own personal history, and at grassroots activism. Reading most of her work together in one place, one realizes the strong unifying thread of activism, feminism and concerns with locations in and of the Third World/South through the essays in this book. As Mohanty notes, "Whereas my concerns remain the same, my vision, my experiences, and my communities, have in part changed because of shifts in my location..." This

common undergirding is a triad of concerns: a) the need to bring activist struggles into academic discussions; b) the need to voice opposition to the Americanization/ corporatization of the feminist agenda; c) the desire to assert the importance of identitarian struggles based on material locations and practices. At different points in her career, Mohanty emphasizes different aspects of these same concerns, so that while the essays address widely ranging topics of material concern to women, all are connected by the same urgency to mobilize against oppression and to affirm solidarity.

The book is divided into three parts: Part I ("Demystifying Feminism"); Part II ("Demystifying Capitalism"); Part III ("Reorienting Feminism"). Part I contains essays that argue forcefully for a more calibrated understanding of the subjectivity of the women of the Third World/South through a variety of locations and voices—through personal history (Chap 5); through an analysis of Minnie Bruce Pratt's writing (Chap 3); through a theoretical dialogue with two texts by women (Chap 4). Part II focuses on the questions of race, gender and ethnicity in the US academies and how they are assimilated or ignored. Part III consists of the single, newly written essay, "Under Western Eyes Revisited: Feminist Solidarity Through Anticapitalist Struggles." This essay redirects the first essay of the book, and all the readers, towards a new formation of the same concerns but with a focalization upon the anti-corporate struggle that is seen as the urgent need of today.

The last essay in the book is the one that readers will be most enthused about. It brings together the related concerns of all her work so far and points at a new convergence of feminist, Third World/South concerns on the engagement with global capitalist exploitation. Mohanty reaffirms many of her bases and clarifies several commonly held doubts about her philosophical position. Using the terms "One-Thirds World" and "Two-Thirds World" in place of the earlier "Third World/South" and "First World/North," she shows dramatically the incompleteness of such terms in the end and the connections between the two: " I am clearly located in the One-Thirds World. Then again... I straddle both categories. I am of the Two-Thirds World in the One-Thirds World... I speak as a person situated in the One-Thirds World, but from a space and vision of, and in solidarity with, communities in struggle in the Two-Thirds World." She also acknowledges the gap that "Under Western Eyes" left exposed when it emphasized the difference of Third World women over their alignments with women all over the world: "In 1986 I wrote mainly to challenge the false universality of Eurocentric discourses and was perhaps not sufficiently critical of the valorization of difference over commonality in postmodern discourse. Now I find myself wanting to reemphasize the connections between local and universal." If, then, Mohanty was concerned with including the women of the Third World/South as subjects into the feminist discourse, she sees today's urgent need to add the concerns of international feminism into the conversations of anti-capitalism.

There is an energetic refusal to be submissive in all of Mohanty's work—evidence of which one gets in amplitude in this book. It is not enough that today Third World voices are included in academies—Mohanty goes on to demonstrate the tokenism in this effort. It is not enough that feminists have taken note of their oppressive monolithic categorization of the women from the Two-Thirds World—today that battle has been realigned against global capital and Mohanty is as vociferous in deconstructing its myths as she was in demystifying the notions of universal sisterhood in the eighties. This ardor is connected to her unwavering belief in solidarity and communal struggles—women's organizations and movements figure large in her theoretical discussions, thus opening the gates of the academy to a multi-layered discourse about the battles of feminism and anti-globalization The very structure of her work—dialoguing with other women's texts, taking cognizance of material realities of women's lives, the ardent exposition of activist battles all over the world, and most important, an insistent and overwhelming honesty in declaring her own location and history—make this book a remarkable attempt at creating a common front for feminist struggles in "the very house of different" that Audre Lorde talks about in "Zami: A New Spelling of my Name":

> Being women together was not enough. We were different. Being gay-girls together was not enough. We were different. Being Black together was not enough. We were different. Being black woman together was not enough. We were different. Being Black dykes together was not enough. We were different. Each of us had our own needs and pursuits, and many different alliances. Self-preservation warned some of us that we could not afford to settle for one easy definition, one narrow individuation of self... It was a while before we came to realize that our place was the very house of different rather [than] the security of any one particular difference (Lorde 226)

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Anjali Nerlaker

BLACK DIONYSUS:
GREEK TRAGEDY AND AFRICAN AMERICAN THEATRE

Kevin Wetmore, Jr.
McFarland & Company Publishers, 2003

Kevin Wetmore Junior's book *Black Dionysus: Greek Tragedy and African American Theatre* concerns itself primarily with contemporary African American interpretations of Greek tragedies. Wetmore does an impressive job of laying out the ideological ground upon which these interpretations are based, challenged, and debated in the fields of African American studies, cultural studies, theater history, and performance studies. In order to discuss contemporary African American productions of Greek material, Wetmore rightly devotes a substantial amount of his book to earlier uses of Greek mythology that have intersected with and shaped the lives of African Americans culturally, ideological, artistically, and even politically. Some of the fascinating issues surrounding both the historic and contemporary performances analyzed in this book include the use of Greek tragedies and Greek culture in general to perpetuate the myth of the superiority and/or universality of European culture, the Afro-centric theory of ancient Greek culture as derivative of Egyptian culture (what Wetmore calls the Black Athena theory), issues about colorblind or color conscious casting, and broader questions about cultural ownership and agency in our contemporary multiethnic society.

Eighteenth and Nineteenth century justifications of slavery based upon the dependence on slavery in ancient Greece and the referencing and portrayal of Margaret Garner as the Modern Medea after her much publicized 1856 murder of her daughter to prevent the child's recapture into slavery are two examples that Wetmore highlights to show how conceptions of Greek mythology impacted and influenced American politic thought and intersected with the lives of African Americans. Wetmore brings up these examples to show the political and cultural stakes of America's early reliance on a construction of classical Greek culture in order to mythologize America, in terms of both an original mythology and a continual reinvention of America based upon contemporaneous interpretation of ancient Greek democracy. Joseph Roach, among others, has written extensively about eighteenth and nineteenth century American constructions and manipulations of classical Greece that become evident in establishing both the ideological basis of the United States government/legal system and the physical space of America, evident in the neo-classical architecture of Washington D.C.

Artistically, the use of classical Greek and Roman material in American theatrical productions holds just as much weight. These productions result in cultural, social, and political consequences that impact the collective consciousness of the nation and either reinforce, reinterpret, or challenge assumptions about both the material and ideological place of African Americans and their culture in America. Wetmore separates African American performances of Greek tragedies

into three ideological camps, what he calls the Black Orpheus, Black Athena, and Black Dionysus models. These categories situate the use of classical Greek material as the vehicle with which certain cultural and ideological stances are articulated and put into practice. It is the quite extensive coverage and articulation of these ideologies which is the most interesting aspect of this book to me rather than the specific examples of how certain productions either adhere of depart from traditional i.e. "white" productions of the classics. However, Wetmore does do a good job of pointing out the fallacy of considering white productions of Greek material "traditional" and African or Asian productions "adaptations." In all contemporary cases, the production of this material is filtered through drastically different cultural and artistic media and methodology than those which were in place during the city Dionysia. Therefore, all contemporary productions of Greek tragedies are in some ways adaptations. The theatrical traditions of ancient Greece and Rome are inaccessible to us as a contemporary audience. We can never truly know how these plays were performed; we can only encounter these texts in our own historic moment with our own cultural apparatus.

The three models that Wetmore sets up—Black Orpheus, Black Athena, and Black Dionysus—are examples of three different encounters between African Americans and Greek Tragedy. The Black Orpheus model is named after Marcel Camus' 1959 film set in Brazil during Carnival and Ulli Beier's West African journal of the same title that began publication in 1957. According to Wetmore, the Black Orpheus model takes a Greek myth and simply transfers the setting and cultural signifiers into a black context, thereby doing a disservice to the African culture(s) that it appropriates. Another problematic aspect of the Black Orpheus model is the assumption that Greek culture can stand in for, illuminate, or explain African culture. These types of artwork subtly insinuate that ancient Greek culture is somehow universal, whereas African and African American culture is specific or particularized. During his analysis of the Black Orpheus model, Wetmore discusses productions of Greek tragedies that were written and produced by whites, utilizing a cast of African Americans, and set in pseudo African locations in order to add an either "exotic" or "primitive" sensibility to the productions. Wetmore counts Marcel Camus' film *Orfeu Negro* [Black Orpheus] as the definitive example of this type of encounter. While inarguably visually and musically stunning, I have to agree with Wetmore that this film does nothing more than scratch the surface, if that, of the African based culture that it ostensibly reveals. When I rented this video in the foreign language section of my local video store, the blurb on the jacket cover proclaimed "an exotic and sensual journey into the Rio slums." This unfortunate marketing illuminates the many problematic aspects of this type of encounter where the subject matter is African, but the African material is used to perpetuate a colonialist or neo-colonialist interpretation of the African.

In the first chapter of his book Wetmore asserts that some African studies scholars find any use of Greek material to interpret or present African culture to be colonialist. In the second chapter, Wetmore details how other scholars follow

the Black Athena paradigm and believe that ancient Greek culture is derivative of African culture. Therefore, by recontextualizing Greek tragedies into African or African-based situations and settings, the artist actually reclaims the rightfully African. I find the argument over what constitutes African and what constitutes European (both contemporary constructions that were most likely meaningless in ancient times) a somewhat fruitless endeavor. However, I did appreciate the few historic tidbits such as the fact the Terrence, the legendary Roman playwright, was definitely originally from somewhere in present day North Africa interesting and useful because facts like these reveal that contemporary portrayals of Greek and Roman antiquity as somehow monolithically "white" or even "European" are constructions which reflect not ancient culture, but our contemporary one. As constructed history, the ideology behind these representations should not be taken as truth, but should rather be interrogated and examined.

The third model of encounter, Black Dionysus, is clearly Wetmore's preferred method, hence its significance as the book's title. Wetmore states, "Black Dionysus is a god who is transformative—his theatre is a creative force, a revolutionary force, a confrontational force that can reshape the world and the way we look at it." The productions that Wetmore feels fall into the Black Dionysus model are productions that are truly intercultural in that they respect the deep structure of cultures that they engage for a specific social or political purpose. "In the Black Dionysus paradigm, the foreign (whether cultural or historical) is not a mirror for the reflection of the self or an object for othering. Rather, it is recognized and valued in and of itself. Familiarity is celebrated, but not used to erase difference. Greek tragedy becomes a means by which diverse communities might be encountered in public spaces and the historical forces that have shaped them might be exposed." Some examples of theatre productions that have followed the Black Dionysus model are Rita Dove's *Darker Face of the Earth*, a play that is inspired by, rather than strictly adapted from the Oedipal story. Set during slavery, this play illustrates how the condition and practice of slavery "predestines" the tragic fate of the play's characters.

Another example of theatre that exhibits the qualities of the Black Dionysus model is *The Medea Project: Theatre for Incarcerated Women*, which Rhodessa Jones began in 1992 in the San Francisco County Jail. This workshop included the participation of female inmates and used their stories to develop a piece entitled *There are Women Waiting: The Tragedy of Medea Jackson*. Wetmore sees the story of Medea as applicable to the female inmates. "Medea-the outsider, the woman, the foreigner—all repressed, silenced groups in ancient Athens- made visible that repression through her terrible revenge and gave voice to the silenced." Whether Euripides' tragedy *Medea* gives voice to the silenced or enacts a revenge fantasy meant to strengthen and support the exclusion of foreigners from participation in Athenian society is debatable. However, in *The Medea Project*, you can see the contemporary popularity of the construction of the Medea figure as a person who has been wronged, has lost almost everything of personal

importance to herself, but is not a victim and retains a great amount of personal agency. One can see how this conceptualization of Medea would be a useful and compelling tool from incarcerated women to portray and evaluate their own lives. The Medea story is not used to explain or translate the lives of the incarcerated women; rather the women take the Medea story as inspiration to tell their own stories.

In one of the last sections of the book Wetmore draws a parallel between Mediterranean and Caribbean culture. "The peoples of the Peloponnesian archipelago and the various islands of the Caribbean both understand the many moods of the ocean... In any island culture, from Caribbean to Mediterranean islands; the sea plays an important role in the art, music, literature, and theatre." As a reader I was uncomfortable with assertions like the one quoted above that try in very general ways to link one culture to another by claiming, for example, that because both are seafaring cultures there are many commonalities between ancient Greece and the contemporary Caribbean. In this section Wetmore seems to be falling into the Black Orpheus model that he criticized earlier in his book by equating two disparate and unique cultural entities. Even though this book's focus is on Greek theatre in the Americas, an analysis of Wole Soyinka's essay "The fourth stage," would have provided a deeper exploration of how Yoruba conceptions of theatre, ritual, and tragedy differ from and interact with European conceptions and constructions of Greek tragedy. Because so many of the cultures in the Caribbean and Brazil are influenced by Yoruba culture, Soyinka's essay would have been a more thoughtful entry into this section of the book rather than a generalized statement that implies that because both cultures are islands, there is a shared cultural space.

Wetmore deepens his analysis later in the Mediterranean/Caribbean chapter when he explores the use of ritual in the Caribbean and what has been taught about the use of ritual in Greek theatre and literature not as two entities that can substitute or explain each other but rather as two parts of a society that includes a colonial educational system, and an African based religious and cultural legacy. In this vein, I found Wetmore analysis of Derek Walcott's work particularly thoughtful. "Walcott's early work was influenced by Greek tragedy... In later life he would continue by taking Greek source material and not merely recontextualizing it but using it as a springboard for his own mythic and dramatic writing." Wetmore describes Walcott's process of pulling from many cultural, educational, and artistic sources as an example of Greek tragedy's place in the syncretic productions and cultures of the Caribbean and Brazil.

Black Dionysus: Greek Tragedy and African American Theatre is a comprehensive, thoughtful analysis of contemporary African American productions and interpretations of Greek tragedies. I found Wetmore's three models—Black Orpheus, Black Athena, and Black Dionysus—useful as organizational tools to touch upon several different ideologies and approaches to this kind of theatre. I was also extremely pleased that Wetmore included playwrights and productions

that fell outside of his organizational models, such as Adrienne Kennedy's Julliard-commissioned versions of *Electra* and *Orestes,* because their inclusion shows that Wetmore is using the Black Orpheus, Athena, and Dionysus categories as an organizational strategy as opposed to a dogmatic or prescriptive educational rubric. The subject matter of this book is fascinating, and the scholarship is generally smartly and responsibly articulated.

May Mahala

SILENCING POLITICAL DISSENT:
HOW POST-SEPTEMBER 11 ANTI-TERRORISM MEASURES THREATEN OUR CIVIL LIBERTIES

Nancy Chang and the Center for Constitutional Rights
Seven Stories Press, 2002

TERRORISM AND THE CONSTITUTION:
SACRIFICING CIVIL LIBERTIES IN THE NAME OF NATIONAL SECURITY

David Cole and James X. Dempsey
The New Press, 2002 (2nd ed.)

> *"Now we don't want to go it alone. We want allies...We hope we shall never have to go it alone," declared a powerful U.S. politician. "At the same time," he continued, "we can't have allies who cringe and surrender in the face of an enemy threat or who lick the enemy's hand and furnish him with the weapons of war. A nation cannot be half loyal to the free world. Those allies and alleged allies must be for us or against us."*

Sound familiar? Although hauntingly reminiscent of President George W. Bush's post-September 11 speech in which he proclaimed, "Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists,"[1] the opening quote actually comes from a 1953 speech by Senator Joseph McCarthy, who at the time was assailing Communist China.[2] Just as McCarthy's persistent attacks on international Communism helped fashion an atmosphere conducive to the suppression of leftist dissent in the United States, President Bush's with-us-or-against-us logic has set the table for the suppression of those who challenge the so-called 'War on Terrorism.' Just as, under McCarthyism, all domestic dissent with a vaguely reddish hue was compressed into the convenient label "Communist," modern-day dissidence may be flattened into the new legal term "domestic terrorism," as delineated by the Bush regime and the USA PATRIOT Act.[3]

The USA PATRIOT Act—passed in a paroxysm of 9/11-induced haste—emerged as the legislative centerpiece for not only combating terrorism but also, tacitly, for squelching domestic political dissent. Two recent books—Nancy Chang's *Silencing Political Dissent* and *Terrorism and the Constitution* by David Cole and James X. Dempsey—take us a long way in comprehending the specifics of this important law, along the way providing the much-needed historical context that affords us a deeper understanding of the law's implications for the practice of dissent.

Should we be concerned if the ever-present societal trade-off between freedom and security is shifting noticeably toward the latter? The authors of both

books answer this question fervently in the affirmative. In doing so, Cole and Dempsey, two constitutional law scholars, emphasize that the USA PATRIOT Act is not a thing, but a process. The assault on civil liberties, they remind us, did not begin with the USA PATRIOT Act. An important precursor to this law is the 1996 Anti-terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA), which the authors dub "one of the worst assaults on the Constitution in decades." The 1996 AEDPA, which President Bill Clinton helped ram through Congress, contained many shades and mechanisms that are either replicated or intensified in the PATRIOT Act, including: a shift of focus onto political activity, especially of people with non-mainstream beliefs and opinions; the resurrection of guilt by association as the go-to paradigm for both criminal and immigration law; the loosening of FBI surveillance standards so that the Bureau might more easily surveil, investigate, and infiltrate political, religious, and ethnic groups; and the criminalization of peaceful—albeit dissident—activity by transforming support for the humanitarian and political activities of certain foreign-based groups into a federal crime.

Cole and Dempsey explicitly state the multi-pronged purpose of their book: "to examine the civil liberties issues raised by government responses to terrorism, and to identify what is necessary to ensure that counterterrorism activities (especially of the FBI) are reliably consistent with the Constitution" and "to place the terrorism problem in historical context by reviewing the FBI's persistent infringements on the First Amendment and its avoidance of meaningful controls on its discretion." The authors make a point of showing that the FBI's infamous Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) did not end in 1971 with the Citizens' Commission to Investigate the FBI's stunningly revelatory burglary of an FBI office in Media, Pennsylvania, or with the subsequent Church Committee hearings and reports in 1975 and 1976.[4] They root their analysis in U.S. history, peppering their critique of unfettered FBI power with specific examples of political suppression. More specifically, they look at the Bureau's concerted efforts in the 1980s and 1990s to squelch the activities of the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES),[5] to invasively investigate and attempt to deport the Los Angeles 8 (LA 8),[6] and to carry out intelligence activities on such groups as Amnesty International, AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP), and Earth First!.

In *Silencing Political Dissent*, Nancy Chang also grounds her analysis in history, offering concise sections on the effects of the Sedition Act of 1798, the Espionage Act of 1917, and the Smith Act of 1940. Chang also proffers succinct, informative segments on the suppression of dissent during the Cold War and during the FBI's COINTELPRO era. She concludes her smart, focused historical foray by exploring the detention and deportation of perceived enemies during the USAmerican Civil War, the Palmer Raids of World War I, and the Japanese internment during World War II.

After helping the reader get centered in the historical process of state suppression, Chang goes on to perform an immensely useful, well-organized

analysis of how the USA PATRIOT Act undermines civil liberties. She argues that the PATRIOT Act sacrifices freedom on the altar of national security in three important ways:

> First, the act places our First Amendment rights to freedom of speech and political association in jeopardy by creating a broad new crime of "domestic terrorism" and denying entry to noncitizens on the basis of ideology. Second, the act reduces our already low expectations of privacy by granting the government enhanced surveillance powers. Third, the act erodes the due process right of noncitizens by allowing the government to place them in mandatory detention and deport them from the United States based on political activities that have been recast under the act as terrorist activities.

Chang makes it clear that many of the provisions included in the PATRIOT Act have little or nothing to do with terrorism. Ironically, this is perhaps nowhere more evident than in Section 802 of the act, which creates the federal crime of "domestic terrorism." The PATRIOT Act defines "domestic terrorism" as "activities that involve acts dangerous to human life that are in violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any State" that "appear to be intended" (1) "to intimidate or coerce a civilian population," (2) "to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion," or (3) "to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping" that occur in the territorial United States. The inherent vagueness of this newly created legal category serves as a veritable vortex for dissident activity. After all, contentious protests, marches, rallies, and other actions are, by design, meant "to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion" and sometimes the state's response to protests—even peaceful ones—can create situations that may be construed as "acts dangerous to human life."

Chang also notes that under the new law, acts of civil disobedience that take place in the United States could also be reconfigured as acts of "domestic terrorism" since they inherently meet many of the tenets of the "domestic terrorism" definition. In other words, under the new law, acts of civil disobedience that were formerly violations of local laws like refusing to obey a police officer or disorderly conduct are transformed into violations of federal anti-terrorism laws. As Chang notes, the definitional promiscuity inherent in Section 802 "allows the government to group nonviolent civil disobedience in the tradition of Thoreau, Gandhi, and King together with the Al Qaeda network's ruthless attacks on civilians, all under the single banner of terrorism."[7]

The PATRIOT Act also codifies the use of political ideology as legal criteria for entry into the United States. Section 411 of the act affects the ability of foreign nationals to practice dissent in the U.S., as it essentially establishes an ideological audition at the border in order to gain entry into the country. According

to Section 411, delegates representing political or social groups, "whose public endorsement of acts of terrorist activity the Secretary of State has determined undermines United States efforts to reduce or eliminate terrorist activities" are barred from entering the country. Also, the law states that noncitizens who have utilized their "position of prominence within any country to endorse or espouse terrorist activity" or if the Secretary of State says that their communication "undermines United States efforts to reduce or eliminate terrorist activities," may also be denied entry. This section of the act imposes a guilt-by-association logic, and, as Chang observes, resembles the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952, which afforded the State Department the legal leverage to prohibit entrance to foreign speakers based on their political viewpoints. This Cold-War relic was only repealed in 1990, and before that, it was used to prohibit entry to political-cultural workers like Pablo Neruda, Gabriel García Marquez, Ernst Mandel, Dario Fo, Carlos Fuentes, and many others. Relatedly, the unchecked power of the Secretary of State to determine who is and who is not a foreign terrorist organization (FTO) is also deeply problematic, in that the determination process is drenched in politics that often have little to do with terrorism. Were FTO statutes in place during the 1980s, the Secretary of State may well have designated the African National Congress (ANC) an FTO, as politically motivated violence was part of the ANC's repertoire of resistance. Once marked as an FTO, Section 411 of the USA PATRIOT Act, if in place at the time, would have barred Nelson Mandela, as a leader of the ANC, from entering the U.S., even if he were coming to negotiate a peace treaty.

Herbert Marcuse once wrote, "Technology serves to institute new, more effective, more pleasant forms of social control."[8] This observation is particularly pertinent to the USA PATRIOT Act, which is likely to extend technology-facilitated surveillance as a staple mechanism of suppression for years to come. In *Silencing Political Dissent*, Chang demonstrates, section by section, how the PATRIOT Act gives the government—and more specifically, the FBI—new and improved surveillance powers. In fact, these enhanced surveillance capabilities serve as a twenty-first century Orwellian how-to kit. For example, Section 213 allows federal agents to carry out "sneak-and-peek searches"—surreptitious searches of an individual's home or office without showing a search warrant until after the search has already been carried out. This delayed notice may occur as long as the Bureau can show "reasonable cause to believe that providing immediate notification...may have an adverse result" (which they can, of course, do all the time). Notice that "reasonable cause" replaces the probable cause standard; this is a repeated feature of the PATRIOT Act. Importantly, Chang comments that, "Section 213 *is not limited to terrorism investigations but extends to all criminal investigations*" (emphasis added). In other words, it applies equally to Zacarias Moussaoui and the community college student from your town who provides false information on her student loan application, whether she meant to or not.

In practice, under a "sneak-and-peek" warrant an FBI agent can covertly enter your house when you are not there and can seize your possessions, copy,

photograph, and/or alter them, and not tell you that s/he was there for a "reasonable period thereafter." Well, what exactly is the "reasonable period" before the FBI must notify you that it has performed a sneak-and-peek at your residence? Actually, the term "reasonable period" is undefined in the PATRIOT Act, although the Administration's *Field Guidance* booklet advises that this is a "flexible standard." In *Terrorism and the Constitution*, Cole and Dempsey report that the Justice Department interprets "reasonable period" to mean ninety days.

Section 213 undercuts the well-established "knock and announce" principle that, in conformity to the Fourth Amendment, required law enforcement officials to inform the resident that a search was imminent before the search was actually carried out. It is worth noting that this new sneak-and-peek provision—an enormous expansion of FBI power—has virtually nothing to do with combating terrorism. Under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) the U.S. government already had the authority to carry out covert searches in international terrorism cases.[9] The PATRIOT Act's codification of sneak-and-peek searches, and its expansion to criminal investigations, is an extraordinary measure that could potentially routinize clandestine entries by law enforcement agents. Unlike other provisions in the PATRIOT Act, Section 213 is not scheduled to sunset.[10]

Chang also details other incursions against our civil liberties that result from the vamping of the U.S. government's surveillance capabilities. Other areas of the PATRIOT Act she excavates include: the government's access to records in surveillance (Section 215); the tracking of Internet usage (Section 216); the rules for wiretapping and searches in foreign intelligence investigations (Section 218); the stipulations on roving wiretaps (Section 206); and the cross-agency sharing of sensitive criminal and foreign intelligence information (Section 203). Throughout the entire text, she does an admirable job taking the complex Legalese of the PATRIOT Act and distilling it into cogent, readable analysis.

Both books also take a close look at how the PATRIOT Act corrodes the due process rights of noncitizens as it augments the government's ability to detain and deport them. Chang outlines how Section 411 enlarges the category of noncitizens that can be deported because of their alleged participation in terrorism by loosening the definition of "terrorist activity." While terrorism is usually viewed as pre-planned, politically driven violence carried out against civilians, Section 411 distends the definition to include all crimes that involve the use of "a weapon or dangerous device (other than for mere personal or monetary gain)." As Chang points out, "Under this broad definition, a noncitizen who...grabs a knife or makeshift weapon in the midst of a heat-of-the-moment altercation or in committing a crime of passion may be subject to deportation as a 'terrorist'." The law's term "engaging in terrorist activity" has also been widened to include First Amendment activity that is directed toward furthering the wholly lawful political and humanitarian goals of a "terrorist organization." The definition of "terrorist organization" has also been expanded to mean any collection of two or more individuals who have engaged in violence or who threaten to engage in violence.

Under such strategically slackened standards, "an alien who sent coloring books to a day-care center run by a designated [terrorist] organization would apparently be deportable as a terrorist, even if she could show that the coloring books were used only by 3-year olds" (Cole and Dempsey 153-154). This resurrection of guilt by association has myriad implications for foreign nationals in the United States.

In the conclusion of *Terrorism and the Constitution*, the authors ponder why the United States has not been "a fertile breeding ground for home-grown terrorism." They point to a number of explanatory factors, including a political culture in the U.S. that ostensibly values diversity, inclusion, and tolerance, which makes it more difficult to scare up the requisite ideological, ethnic, and religious hatred that seems to fuel a lot of terrorism. They also note the constitutional system of checks and balances as well as the relative dearth of outright censorship and relatively high level of political freedom that allows people to voice their grievances. "Unfortunately," they then go on to say, "much of our official response to the threat of terrorism is incompatible with these core civil liberties values."

In August 2003, Attorney General John Ashcroft made like a rock star and embarked on a nationwide multi-city tour designed to defend the PATRIOT Act. As one Justice Department official (who, incidentally, under the influence of hyper-secretivity, refused to be identified) put it, Ashcroft was going to "get out there and talk about the successes" of the act in order "to set the record straight."[11] Meanwhile, more than 150 localities across the country—as well as the state legislatures in Alaska, Hawaii, and Vermont—have passed resolutions that condemn the Patriot Act and, in some cases, that refuse to enforce it, thereby creating PATRIOT-Act-free zones.

Perhaps this resistance to the strict social discipline that is inherent in the PATRIOT Act is rooted in the realization that in historical hindsight, dissident citizens are often held up as national heroes and heroines, from Thomas Jefferson to Susan B. Anthony to W.E.B. DuBois to Elizabeth Gurley Flynn to Martin Luther King Junior. The importance of these dissidents in U.S. history is indisputable: they are lauded for the courage they showed while challenging the prevailing social relations of the time. It is therefore crucial that we deeply interrogate new legislation like the USA PATRIOT Act, asking ourselves: How many potential Thomas Jeffersons, Elizabeth Gurley Flynns, and Martin Luther King Juniors are we silencing in the name of national security?

Cole and Dempsey add: "Political freedom is a society's safety valve, allowing the passionately critical a nonviolent way to express their dissatisfaction with the status quo. Dissent is the mechanism for initiating social change. Shutting off this safety valve only encourages those who have no desire to see the process of peaceful change work." Both *Silencing Political Dissent* and *Terrorism and the Constitution* highlight the important—albeit often forgotten—fact that political dissent is not a sign of societal peril, but rather the mark of a healthy society.

(Endnotes)

[1] President George W. Bush. "Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People." United States Capitol. Washington, D.C. 20 September 2001. See: http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html More recently, and remarkably parallel with McCarthy's railings, Bush said, "No free nation can be neutral in the fight between civilization and chaos." Mike Allen. "Bush Urges Support for U.N.-Backed Multinational Force in Iraq." *Washington Post*, 13 September 2003, A16.

[2]"McCarthy Demands Boycott By Allies." *New York Times*, 24 September 1953 p. 10.

[3] USA PATRIOT Act is an acronym for "Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing the Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism" Act of 2001. It is interesting to note that on 10 September, the day before the attacks in Washington, DC and New York, Attorney General John Ashcroft rejected an FBI request for an additional $58 million to fund a strengthening of its counterterrorism effort. See Steven J. Schulhofer *The Enemy Within: Intelligence Gathering, Law Enforcement, and Civil Liberties in the Wake of September 11*. (Washington, DC: The Century Foundation, 2002) 32.

[4] On 8 March 1971 the Citizens' Commission to Investigate the FBI burgled an FBI office in Media, Pennsylvania, and pilfered thousands of pages of information from classified files. When the *Washington Post* printed a summary of these documents the next week, people first became aware of the FBI's shocking elaborate network of counter-intelligence programs, or COINTELPRO. The Church Committee was a Senate Select Committee headed by Frank Church (D—Idaho). It was established in January 1975 and issued a three-book report in April 1976 in response to alleged malfeasance in intelligence activity.

[5] For a book-length exposé of the FBI's concerted efforts to suppress the activities of CISPES, see Ross Gelbspan. *Break-ins, Death Threats, and the FBI: The Covert War against the Central America Movement.* (Boston: South End Press, 1991).

[6] The LA 8 were seven Palestinians and one Kenyan who were arrested by FBI and INS agents in early 1987 for their alleged affiliation with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). The U.S. government tried to deport the LA 8 based on McCarran-Walter Act of 1952, which outlawed associating with a group that advocated the "doctrines of world communism." Their case dragged on for more than a decade, with government prosecutors shifting the rationale for the LA 8's detention and potential deportation with each and every political and legal change in the wind direction (for instance, the McCarran-Walter Act was repealed in 1990, which meant the government had to shift its legal reasoning).

[7] The real-world effect of Section 802 remains to be fully seen. However, Attorney General Ashcroft's severe warnings for "terrorists" do not bode well for dissidents whose actions are pulled into the orbit of the USA PATRIOT Act. In a speech to the U.S. Conference of Mayors, Ashcroft said, "Let the terrorists among us be warned...If you violate a local law, we will...work to make sure that you are put in jail and...kept in custody as long as possible. We will use every available statute. We will seek every prosecutorial advantage. We will use all our weapons within the law and under the Constitution to protect life and enhance security for America" (see Dan Eggen. "Tough Anti-Terror Campaign Pledged: Ashcroft Tells Mayors He Will Use New Law to the Fullest Extent." *Washington Post*, 26 October 2001, A1). Ashcroft wasn't kidding around: federal prosecutions of terrorism cases have increased tenfold since the September 11 attacks in 2001, (from 115 in the year prior to September 11 to more than 1,200 the year after), and much of this has to do with the fact that the USA PATRIOT Act expanded the types of activities that are included under the

"terrorist" rubric (see "Terrorism Prosecutions Up Tenfold." *Washington Post*, 14 Feb 2003, A8).

[8] Herbert Marcuse. *The One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964) xv.

[9] In 1978, Congress passed the FISA, in order to establish a separate legal realm for "foreign intelligence" surveillance. FISA is only one of more than fifteen major statutes that the USA PATRIOT Act amends.

[10] However, in July 2003, the House voted 309 to 118 to cut off funding for the part of Section 213 that allows the government to conduct sneak-and-peek searches of private property. The Senate has not followed the House's lead, though, and even if it does, it is questionable whether de-funding sneak-and-peeks will make a difference in the real world. Symbolically, though, the action may have some value.

[11] Dan Eggen. "Ashcroft Planning Trip to Defend Patriot Act." *Washington Post*, 13 August 2003, A2.

Jules Boykoff

RACE AND REVOLUTION

Max Shachtman
Verso, 2003

Race and Revolution makes the imagined dialogue between Leon Trotsky, Max Shachtman, and C. L. R. James possible. Those who are interested in the study of Black Marxism and the history of radicalism in the United States should welcome this book. It includes Shachtman's never published work, *Communism and the Negro*, originally drafted in 1933, and Christopher Phelps's indispensable introduction. Phelps brilliantly situates the Trotsky-Shachtman-James connection historically. He reopens the debate over the dynamics of class and race in American society, as it unfolded in the American left in the 1930s and 1940s, and explains how this debate continues to inform the best scholarship of American radicalism, U.S. labor history, and African American history today.

Above all, *Race and Revolution* helps explain how Shachtman and James studied the debate over the right of Black masses to struggle for self-determination in the United States, commonly known as the "Negro question," and reached different conclusions. Since Shachtman had generated preliminary notes on Black working-class militancy and its significance for the proletarian revolution before James's entry into this Marxist debate, the book offers a perspective that sharpens the understanding of James's trajectory. For those who are not familiar with James's work, the book must be read along *C. L. R. James on the 'Negro Question'* (1996), a collection of writings during his American years, which has been superbly edited and introduced by Scott McLemee. The comparative analysis of these historical documents creates the forum through which to come to grip with the complexities of linking Black nationalism and revolutionary socialism at theoretical and practical levels.

These three revolutionaries—Trotsky, Shachtman, and James—never met together. However, both Shachtman and James, in different times, did discuss Marxist-Leninist perspectives on world revolution with Trotsky to clarify the directionality of the struggle for socialism. A leader of the Trotskyist movement in the United States throughout the 1930s, Shachtman was a staunch critic of the bureaucratic and murderous state that Joseph Stalin built in the Soviet Union. He became involved in a radical politics of New York City early in his life during the World War I era and joined the Workers (Communist) Party. In 1928, however, he and other activists, such as James P. Cannon and Martin Abern, were expelled from the Party for advocating Trotskyism, but they organized an alternative to Stalinism, the Communist League of America. In 1930, Shachtman met Trotsky in Turkey and several years later helped to organize the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). He continued to play an important role in the movement until his break

with the SWP in 1939-40, which resulted from his disagreement with Trotsky's call to defend the Soviet Union during the Second World War.

Aspiring to become a writer, James, born and raised in a small village of Tunapuna, Trinidad, moved to England in 1932. Upon encountering Trotsky's three-volume *History of the Russian Revolution*, he immersed himself in the study of Marxism and completed, in 1937, the Trotskyist history of the Communist International, *World Revolution, 1917-1936*. He also became active in the Pan-African movement in London. After the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, he worked closely with leading Pan-African intellectuals and activists, such as George Padmore, Jomo Kenyatta, Amy Ashwood Garvey, and I. T. A. Wallace-Johnson and edited the monthly journal of the International African Service Bureau, *International African Opinion*. In 1938, during the year he moved to the United States, he published two now classic historical studies: *A History of Negro Revolt* and *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. Soon after James met Trotsky in Mexico and returned to the United States in 1939, he began to study the dialectical relationship between revolutionary internationalism and the right of Black masses to struggle for self-determination.

Shachtman and James's life intersected briefly in the Trotskyist movement in the United States. Despite their disagreements over the role of Black workers in the struggle for socialism, Shachtman's *Communism and the Negro* most likely, as Phelps discusses, served as one of the points of entry for James to take the intellectual journey, often independently of the Trotskyist movement, to rethink the existing Marxist categories and concepts as they related to the dynamics of working-class self-activity in the Black community.

Communism and the Negro is a synthesis of historical studies and a critique of the political economy of racism. It was a draft of a pamphlet that was originally intended to be circulated among the Trotskyists to study the imperative of interracial solidarity between Black and white workers in the struggle for revolutionary socialism. As a theorist of historical materialism, Shachtman studied the dialectical relationship between Black labor and capitalist development in the United States. He started this study of dialectical materialism with the arrival of Africans in the New World and the international reach of Atlantic slave trade. He then charted the long history of the exploitation of Black labor and the expansion of wealth through the periods of slavery, Civil War, Reconstruction, and Black nadir.

Shachtman's sweeping historical narrative placed the logic of capitalism at its center to re-plot the emergence of the Black proletariat in the 1930s. In so doing, *Communism and the Negro* offered an outline of the materialist historiography of slavery and emancipation. It emphasized, as W. E. B. Du Bois later presented marvelously in *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935), the centrality of African American history in understanding American history, racism, and capitalism. Shachtman undertook the study of the historical development of Black people because he was determined to convey that the "conditions of his

development in the capitalist order makes it impossible for the Negro to advance any longer by a single step if he relies upon his own resource and efforts."

Communism and the Negro called for "Black and White, Unite and Fight" as the principle around which to struggle for socialism. He wrote: "The class struggle in the United States has reached the stage where this unity of the Negro race with the white proletariat and poor farmers is not only possible and necessary, but inevitable."

Shachtman demanded the centrality of interracial solidarity with an ironclad emphasis, observing that "[t]he failure of the white workers to assist the Negroes in their attempts to organize into the trade union movement only accentuated the friction and the difficulties." He wrote: "It is impossible for the American workers to make any real progress towards freedom without gaining the support of the vast reservoir of strength and militancy constituted by the twelve million black people." In one remarkable sentence, Shachtman noted that the emancipation of Black labor ran straight to the emancipation of labor: "In the process of his own liberation the Negro will help emancipate the proletariat as a whole, just as the proletariat will emancipate the whole of humanity in freeing itself." Such an antiracist statement and a revolutionary position, however, did not mean that he was at work in theorizing the self-activity and autonomous movement of the Black working class, as James did rigorously and imaginatively during his stay in the United States.

Rather, the main reason for drafting *Communism and the Negro* was to oppose the Communist International's call to support the right of Black masses to struggle for self-determination in the American South, or the Black Belt. Stressing the absurdity of conceiving Black people as a national minority whose interests were different from white workers, he argued that such a Stalinist program conflicted "with the position taken by the whole Communist International prior to 1928, in the period where the polices of Lenin, Trotsky, and other founders of the International still prevailed within its ranks." Race-based activism was nothing but a petty bourgeois movement. Thus, he criticized the work of American Negro Labor Congress and the League of Struggle for Negro Rights, as well as nationalist tendencies within the Black community. However much working people considered themselves as members of particular national, racial, and ethnic groups, he reasoned, there were common interests that drew them close to the fellow proletariat.

In order to demonstrate the emerging proletarian movement around interracial solidarity, Shachtman set out to explain the stages of the historical development of Black people in the United States. First, he discussed slave rebellions led by African Americans, such as Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner, but argued that these uprisings did not materialize liberation from racial and class oppressions during the antebellum era. In the next stage of historical development, Black labor experienced the Civil War, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow segregation, all of which, he argued, unleashed social, economic, and political forces that helped

achieve "the *national unity* of the country, not on the old basis of a 'house divided against itself', but on the new basis of the universal predominance of modern capitalism." The abolition of slavery in the South and the subsequent work of Reconstruction, he wrote, "did not bring the struggle to an end. In some respects, it only opened up a sharper and more decisive stage of development."

In Shachtman's analysis, at the center of the "decisive stage of development" was Black labor. As emancipated Blacks were incorporated into nationalized capitalist social order in the aftermath of the Civil War, they increasingly faced the strong hold of white supremacy and experienced internal conflicts within the Black community. White resistance to Black freedom and the reformist tendency among Black leaders encouraged the development of the new system of exploitation and racial subordination and accelerated the rate of the proletarianization of Blacks. Sharecropping, combined with legally sanctioned racial segregation and white terror in the South, as well as Black flight to metropolis throughout the early 1900s, contributed to the making of the Black working class. He explained: "The United States has not only produced a numerous and well-defined proletariat; it has also caused to emerge upon the proscenium an even more clearly defined Negro proletariat... The far-reaching historical consequences of this development can scarcely be overestimated. It has opened up a new period in the history of the American Negro, the period of his final and triumphant struggle for emancipation from *all* slavery."

Anticipating the emerging social proletariat as the agent of historical development in the United States, Shachtman remained resolute in his support for interracial solidarity in the workers' movement. According to him, the programmatic study of the historical development of Black people in the United States showed that they were "entering into the next and final stage of their fight for real liberation." He applied the theory of dialectical materialism rigidly to Black historical experience to chart the path toward the proletarian revolution. In so doing, however, he overlooked the presence of independent struggles of Black working-class masses and ended up casting the white proletariat as the vanguard of historical development. In his analysis, white workers appeared as the linchpin: "It depends entirely upon the white proletariat whether the colored masses of America will form a bulwark of reaction or a battering ram of revolution and progress."

Trotsky, meanwhile, was open to the idea of the autonomous Black freedom movement playing an important role in the struggle for socialism. James also explored this possibility. Contrary to Shachtman, what James discovered, in the process of studying the dialectics of race, class, and capitalism and working closely with sharecroppers in southern Missouri, was the revolutionary potential of the independent movement led by Black masses. Shachtman never crossed over into Black freedom creatively in the way James did to emphasize Black workers' readiness to break through the dominant concepts of freedom and liberty to oppose the norms, expectations, and values of bourgeois society. The difference

between these two revolutionaries was that one did not bury the race question under the class question in the final analysis. James was aware of the limits of the concept of the vanguard party, sensitive to the arrogance of race within the American left, and attentive to the outbursts of Black masses' aspirations for freedom. Above all, unlike Shachtman, James placed utmost confidence in the revolutionary potential of the self-activity of Black masses to transform existing society. James drew insights from Shachtman's work, but he did so only to sharpen his critique of Shachtman's inadequate grasp of the dynamics of class and race in American society.

In 1948, James completed the essay called "The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the United States," in which he concluded that the seeds of world revolution were to be found in the self-activity of the Black working class. The strength of *Race and Revolution* is that it clarifies the path that James took to theorize the dynamics of Black self-emancipation as the motor of the struggle for socialism. The utility of this book, however, does not stop there. The challenge now is to critique Shachtman's work scrupulously, as James did in the past, to discover ways to locate the dynamics of the "Jamesian logic" in ordinary people's struggles against global systems of domination today.

Yuichiro Onishi

DEMONOLOGY
Kelly Stuart
Green Integer, 2003

THE MASSES ARE ASSES
Pedro Pietri
Green Integer, 2003

The home page of Green Integer's website bears this list: Essays, Manifestos, Statements, Speeches, Maxims, Epistles, Diaristic Jottings, Notes, Narratives, Natural Histories, Poems, Plays, Performances, Ramblings, Revelations, and all such ephemera as may appear necessary to bring society into a slight tremolo of confusion and fright at least. Both of these plays newly published by Green Integer fit nicely under this blissfully broad tent with its criterion of dissent or something like it. *Demonology,* a one-set, full-length play by Los Angeles playwright Kelly Stuart fits the bill as a devilish satire of the corporate world's dominion over the production and distribution of what one might call artificial life: baby formula. The company is an archetypal male dominated hierarchy with an expendable female temporary workforce (the main female character is from "Budget Temp") and its strained gender relations reflect its chauvinistic capitalism. Stuart's strength is in making an easy target for parody (a corporate environment) a very dark psychological playground. It's the surface sterility and rule-bound nature that gives contrast to the fabulously messy Freudian dynamics that ensue.

The company has been accused in the past of making "bad," as in toxic, formula that killed hundreds of babies, and this knowledge—among other things—marks the main female character as potentially destabilizing to the power structure in which men make all the decisions and the females do the filing. The rising action involves sabotage of the baby formula orders—possibly from within—in addition to strange sexualized encounters between the two major characters, a male executive in his 40s (Joe De Martini) and his "beautiful, ambiguous 20s" secretary (Gina). Gina at first behaves in a subordinate, agreeable manner, restraining and putting up her hair when De Martini tells her that it's "a bit casual" and it "gives [her] a fluffy-headed appearance, and, we like our people, that is... we prefer, rather, a...glossy helmet of hair." Dialogue like this will have people squirming with mild revulsion, wishing we weren't so familiar with the type of unselfconscious middle-aged American male De Martini represents. Although De Martini's lines sometimes seem over the top, his physical attraction to Gina and his diffident manner puts some of the power in her corner, although she doesn't wield it until later in the play. The fact that Gina is a breast-feeding mother who refuses the offer of free formula from the company is central to her character's quiet and growing authority.

One of the many gifts of theater is how it heightens the sense of physical space and a character's importance within the social world of the characters. Gina is kept in her "place" as a female by being given literally *no* workplace in the physical coordinates of the stage—De Martini tells her, "Your workspace is—there" and the stage directions indicate "*He gestures to somewhere distant and far away off stage.*" It becomes her character's implicit task throughout the play to claim that space in subversive ways and it's fascinating to watch the unpredictable turns she makes.

One-way communication, mixed messages, and confusion are the semantic channels of the sexual politics that are both obvious through sexist banter and more mysterious and fed from an ancient well of danger and destruction; we come to realize that the Shiva-esque forces of creation/destruction are being activated. A crass junior executive, Skip Collins (note that the names of the men parody '60s-style suburban suave and sporty males and their last names evoke popular cocktails of the swinging era), relates to De Martini his S & M fantasies about another female worker, "Oh what a pleasure she was on the eyes. Her [Veronica's] breasts always seem to be pointing at me. It's as if they were laser beams blasting me." Things start to get really threatening (for the men) when bizarre notes are sent anonymously to the men in the office, "I want to devour you. I want to choke to death on you."

De Martini becomes more preoccupied with Gina—he hears a baby crying, steals a bag of her milk, comments with surprise, "It's so warm," and later drinks it. Meanwhile the company is also breaking down: orders are being rerouted and credit to loyal customers is being revoked. Someone or something has put images of breasts and body parts into "Johnson's" presentation and a character named Child Assassin starts appearing to only De Martini and says things like, "The baby knows [that you drank its milk]" and when De Martini claims that the baby can't tell anyone the Child Assassin replies "Everything talks when you learn how to listen."

The demonology deepens as De Martini and Gina morph (through voiceovers, altered shadows, and other theatrical devices) respectively into a devil and a character named Xena, which we are told means "strange" in Greek, and behaves in a Succubus-like or witch-like manner, sitting on his chest in his dreams and sucking the air out of him. But apparently De Martini likes it—he tells Gina that he loves her and she replies, "You don't even know me." So do women have supernatural power or is it all in the men's minds? Is Gina a regular secretary tired of being bossed around by overpaid idiots or is she some kind of lactating avenging demon? Obviously within the world of the play both of these levels of discourse intermingle to produce their own truth. Stuart avoids any sermonizing but instead moves the play towards its disconcerting conclusion.

The Masses are Asses, a play by Pedro Pietri, a Nuyorican poet and playwright, is more hilarious in a looser, campier way than *Demonology*, but is just as sharp and if possible more brutal because of the poverty of its characters'

universe and the irreverent gloves-off commentary. *The Masses* is one of those plays that make you believe in the power of the one-room play again (if you ever had faith and lost it). The dialogue is New York fast and though first performed in 1974 it could work in almost any telephone-era period with a little tweaking, since it's essentially about classic revolutionary class warfare and the all-encompassing inequities between the rich and the poor. Of course, as evident in its mocking title, it also undermines any knee-jerk sentimentalizing or idealizing of "the masses" and concerns itself with the fantasies and outrage of two persons. We find ourselves in a "one-act play that takes place in a fancy restaurant or an empty apartment. The time is sometime last week" and the characters begin by congratulating themselves:

LADY: You look official.
GENTLEMAN: You look legitimate.
LADY: You look important.
GENTLEMAN: You look interesting.
LADY: You look uptodate.
GENTLEMAN: You look futuristic.
LADY: You look futuristicker.

The stage directions often give precise temporal instructions, which adds to the slightly absurd mechanistic behavior: "*Clear their throats (snobbishly) as they read menus for the next 17 seconds. They put menus down and stare at each other for 18 seconds.*"

They go on in this manner, hilariously, punctuated by the woman asking the man if they should order from the menu and the man saying they should wait a bit longer. Clearly we are in some kind of *Waiting for Godot* set in a run-down inner-city apartment building where food is the most immediate "Godot." And if we weren't already aware that they aren't in a fancy restaurant because on stage it's actually a bare room with a toilet and a bathtub, we are aware at least that the man is not yet willing to let that reality intrude on the mutual illusion that they are on a luxurious vacation in Europe.

The phone's ringing is the first intrusion from the world outside the room. We're in a pre-answering machine/voicemail world, so the phone rings 10 times while the characters are silent and immobile. I imagine these moments to be full of black physical comedy as we stare at the characters, stylized and petrified, "innocently" persecuted by the uncontrollable, hostile outside world.

The play then gives us a double dipping of voyeurism when the gentleman introduces a new piece of technology and tells his partner that he has a surprise for her that is more precious than gold: "I have been secretly taping all the compliments we have exchanged." They listen to the recording and they love it, "We sound intellectually romantic. Let's drink to the sound of our voices." But as they are listening to the tape gunshots are heard; they hide under the table and the

recording plays as the firing continues. Then police sirens are heard. *"The tape malfunctions, keeps repeating* line: YOU LOOK MAGNIFICENT!" Upon reading stage directions like this and others, experiencing the bountiful use Pietri makes of sound to enrich the scope of the play's world, one wonders why we need bloated movies with million-dollar special effects when a play can be so evocative with so little, when the human-scale immediacy can create an atmosphere of tension between player and audience that remains unmatched. Who is not complicit when breathing the very same air?

The outside world becomes more insistent as the play escalates and the players continue their romping: "Let's have some fun before we order. Let's pretend that we are poor people with many problems in the world. You pretend to be an eternal factory worker earning minimum wages and I'll pretend to be a full-time pathological street loiterer with an incorrigible drinking problem." Side-splitting jive ensues, but one character becomes uncomfortable when the other inhabits her poor urban character a little too convincingly. And eventually the fun stops (at least temporarily) as they begin to clash and argue when one of them doesn't want to pretend anymore and the phone keeps ringing and the world outside their thin door becomes more violent. Like an Albee play, the pair's illusions are trashed and smoking on the floor by the end, but some unkillable delusional sweetness remains. Our heroes do not fail us, noting that even though the ruling classes vacation in Europe and drink expensive champagne and the poor line up at the methadone clinic and drink cheap wine and wait for their welfare checks and "the smell of shit is back and it stinks worse than before... hopefully my dreams will smell better..."

Both *Demonology* and *The Masses are Asses* provide relief from dreary realism and embody serious social critique about our enduring axes of domination (capitalism, sexism, classism) as well as the surprising, bizarre, idiosyncratic personal extremes we'll go to in order to consume, be consumed, and resist those forces.

Sun Yung Shin

QUIET RUMOURS:
AN ANARCHA-FEMINIST READER

Texts collected by Dark Star
AK Press/Dark Star, 2002

"For the umpteenth time, let it be said that, unless we examine inner psychic shackles, at the same time we study outer, political structures and the relationship between the two, we will not succeed in creating a force to challenge our enemy; in fact, we will not even know the enemy." So begins the lively collision that is anarcha-feminism and its assertion that one without the other makes no revolutionary sense at all. *Quiet Rumours,* the second anthology produced by Dark Star Collective, is a vital if somewhat chaotic reprinting of 18 feminist and anarcha-feminist pamphlets, articles and interviews covering more than a century. Infused with labor intensive woodcut illustrations in the socialrealist tradition of Rini Templeton, this square black book with its blood red cover lettering and poignantly understated title presents itself with all the bravado and allure that has made and continues to make anarcha-feminism such a threatening and potent combination.

Perhaps anticipating criticism for the bourgeois act of creating a potentially marketable book such as *Quiet Rumours,* Dark Star Collective's introduction sets out to justify why a collection of this nature is an essential part of revolutionary practice, how it is also practical within current economic and social trends of information sharing and how most importantly, pamphlets themselves, despite collections such as this, remain an important part of the dissemination of radical thought. Thus begins a series of historical and ethical contradictions, of self-consciousness and self/group/movement examination, of apologetic but in no way paralyzing explanations/justifications that typify any engaged revolutionary practice and energize the book.

The collection critiques the reformist tendencies of established feminism while championing the tangible strides of the movement itself and the argument for using the model of the 1970s women's consciousness raising groups. At the same time, it takes the Left to task, stating that "any revolutionary movement which doesn't address why there are so few women in its ranks isn't a true revolutionary movement, just a complacent reflection of the status quo." (91)

Most exciting are the pieces such as Jo Freeman's "The Tyranny of Structurelessness" that clearly map out approaches for organizing non-hierarchical working methods. Less applicable but electrifying in their bold claims and strident language are some of the second wave feminist texts that encourage women, for instance, to "sleep with their sisters" as a legitimate revolutionary act.

While the floating juxtaposition of these various voices may better reflect the nonlinear progression of the various movements themselves, the lack of chronology and historical context within the anthology itself soon frustrates. Many

of these essays are significant in their historical specificity, unapologetically giving us the tenor, vocabulary and ambition of the day that we might better understand where we have been and importantly, where we are going. Appearing frequently without dates and references, these pieces float out of context, frustrating the desire to better understand the climate and strategies of our predecessors. Sweeping generalizations polarizing men and women on the grounds of their inherent natures, such as "women have no vested interest in theoretical assumptions and their implications and hence no practice in the arts of verbal domination," fall flat when taken out of historical context. A clearer sense of when these words were written, and in what environment, would help the reader to a greater understanding of the evolution of anarcha-feminism and what that means for us today.

Still, the collection is riveting. Reading many of these essays I was reminded as to how watered down the feminist movement has become in the United States. How post-feminism has given us "Stepford wives with better thighs" and the double bind of the "liberated" woman who supports a capitalist economy by day with her fulltime job and fulfills her "inherent desire to nurture" by night, slipping out of her power-suit to tend to husband, children and home.

Particularly productive were frequent arguments for the often belittled women's consciousness raising groups of the early 1970s and the necessity of both external and internal revolutionary work. With refreshing candor the argument is made that while getting in touch with one's inner goddess may be desirable, even necessary, the work must not end there. Revolution must be built on a model of trust and friendship (what these consciousness raising groups often provided for women)." Mutual trust groups" fight elitism on a basic, integrated level. While the second wave of feminism is soundly critiqued for its "goddess crap," it is also examined within the context of the Left at large, asking the important and all too often ignored questions—why do women join revolutionary groups in the first place, and how or if they are rewarded. Acknowledging that capitalism needs women to work and that fully half of the potential work force is female, the questions are essential to any leftist pursuit.

The objective of the collection is to "preserve and pass on" the writings of anarcha-feminist; as such, *Quiet Rumours* is an invaluable collection of material, as applicable and necessary today as it ever was. Many pieces, such as those originally collected under the title "Untying the Knot," should be considered essential reading for anyone interested in understanding organizational practices. "Blood on the Flower" maps women's positions inside and outside Leftist movements and the core conflicts in a way that makes clearer the work yet to be done. Throughout the collection the elitism of mainstream Feminism is addressed while simultaneously complicating the all too easy dismissal of the movement as simply middle class. It argues convincingly that while times may appear apathetic, radical women's "movements" are alive on an individual or cluster level, *living* anarchy so to speak. It demonstrates the power of these clusters and the ultimate necessity of Anarchos, from the Greek, meaning simply, without a ruler. Lynne

Farrow argues in "Feminism as Anarchism" that Feminism practices what Anarchism preaches and calls for what she terms "apolitical activities" that identify as neither Right nor Left but are project specific, such as defending abortion clinics or shutting down sweat shops.

Quiet Rumours closes with several pieces exploring aspects of Rote Zora, a "militant feminist anti-patriarchal wimmin's urban guerrilla group" based in Germany, and Mujeres Creando, a collective of Bolivian Anarcha-Feminist street activists. Rote Zora (Red Zora) grew out of the Revolutionary Cells (RZ) which "first appeared on November 16, 1973, with an attack against ITT in West Berlin to point out the participation of this multinational corporation in Pinochet's military putsche in Chile." With further actions, the Revolutionary Cells divided and from 1977 onward, Rote Zora acted autonomously and independently, though some women still participated in the Revolutionary Cells. Tracking the evolution of this group and its continuum of militant actions gives one a sense of the possibility, the ebb and flow of movements and the broader implications of a single action. Since the early 1970's, Red Zora and the RZ have carried out over 200 attacks. In 1987 Red Zora fire bombed 10 branches of one of West Germany's largest clothing manufacturers (who utilized sweat shops in South Korea and Sri Lanka), causing millions of dollars worth of damage. Because of the action, the manufacturer agreed to meet the demands of the textile workers. The statement "We aren't fighting for the wimmin in the Third World, we're fighting alongside them" seems to typify Red Zora's attitude towards imperialism. The piece closes with a list of revolutionaries sentenced to prison for participating in the actions of the group. This brief and powerful history is followed by an interview with Rote Zora which was first published in 1984 in *Emma*, a German women's magazine. The interview explores both who they are and perhaps most interestingly, why they work autonomously within the largely male Revolutionary Cells and the intricacies of their relationship to the women's movement. The group expresses what seems to be a pervasive sentiment throughout the book regardless of group or decade of origin, chiefly (and here it is stated much more tactfully/generously than elsewhere):"Sometimes men who otherwise transform their radical breaking with this system (capitalism) into a consequent practice are alarmingly far away from realizing what anti-sexist struggle means and what meaning it has for social-revolutionary perspective."

Mujeres Creando, the Bolivian Anarcha-Feminist Activist group with a "politics of creativity," is first explored in general through an article from *New Internationalist,* July 2002; then an article published in *Juventudes Libertarias* (Anarchist Youth), Bolivia, July 2, 2001, chronicling a direct militant action on the part of Mujeres Creando and calling on "the anarchist movement in particular and anticapitalists in general to protest at Bolivian embassies" world-wide; thirdly, by an interview with one of the founders of Mujeres Creando; and fourth with an essay by another Mujeres Creando member. This four pronged approach offered what I think would have benefited the collection as a whole—not only more

perspectives on a given group, but a material tracking of the impact of the group (be it feminist or anarchist or Marxist, etc.) on other groups, movements, publications and political rulings of its day. In this way, the reader (read potential activist, as the collection does assume a certain level of familiarity with the Left on the part of its readership) gains a broader sense of history, community, one's place and potential within that community, and the pivotal role of communication and documentation—be it verbal or in the form of pamphlets, graffiti or anthologies—in the making of inclusive revolution.

Again and again the question is either overtly posited or implied—what is the best strategy for change, or how can minorities of all types move forward with political efficacy within a leaderless, structureless group? While the feminist movement has been charged by some on the Left with being divisive, reformist and self-satisfying, this critical attention to the very nature of change and how to develop strategies to support it, functions as a corrective to the prevailing notion that women in general are more concerned with daily life than revolution. At the same time, the frequent answer to the question of change and how best to achieve it is a resounding—*we are, and have been, and will.* The prevailing sentiment among the more contemporary writers in the collection is that women from all walks of life, around the globe, are working locally, individually, and in groups, and that—*that* is anarchism. Thoughout the book there is a championing of actions that may seem passe, a reminder of the importance of action, however small, a reminder that, if nothing else, "going out into the streets together shatters passivity and creates a spirit of communal effort."

In the words of the great anarcha-feminist Emma Goldman, who contributes two seminal works to the collection, "Pettiness separates; breadth unites. Let us be broad and big. Let us not overlook vital things because of the bulk of trifles confronting us. A true conception of the relation of the sexes will not admit of conqueror and conquered; it knows of but one great thing: to give of one's self boundlessly, in order to find one's self richer, deeper, better. That alone can fill the emptiness, and transform the tragedy of woman's emancipation into joy, limitless joy."

Yedda Morrison

THE WRITE WAY HOME:
A CUBAN-AMERICAN STORY

Emilio Bejel (Trans. Stephen J. Clark)
Versal Editorial Group, 2003

Latino/a poets, novelists, essayists and public intellectuals of Cuban descent are radically reshaping ideas of what it means to be American. I think of Ruth Behar, Rafael Campos, Cristina García, Oscar Hijuelos, Reinaldo Arenas, Gustavo Pérez-Firmat, Virgil Suárez, and Junot Diaz, to name a few, who have employed different forms—scholarly essay, memoir, novel, and poetry—to re-map territories of Cuban identity and experience in the U.S. Poet and academic, Emilio Bejel, is one such writer and intellectual. His published collections of poetry—from his earlier *Del aire y la piedra* (1974) to his later *Huellas/Footprints*, and *Casas deshabitadas*—as well as his scholarship on Spanish American literature (see his more recent, *Gay Cuban Nation*) make visible this rich landscape of Cuban (American) creativity, identity, and experience. Many of the creative and intellectual threads of these works come together in his memoir, *The Write Way Home: A Cuban-American Story*, where a vivid and complex self-portrait brings alive a pre- and post-1959 Cuba and U.S. experience. Through a series of vignettes (interspersed with poetry and newspaper articles) that move back and forth in time and that crisscross nations, Bejel makes tangible the experience of the so-called "one-and-a-half generation;" while he was born in Cuba, Bejel spent his late teens and all of his adulthood in the U.S. As a response to his condition of exile, he discovers that it is the "magic of the written word" that becomes his refuge—his "ever-renewable home."

Bejel doesn't choose to survive an alienating mainstream U.S. by writing himself into isolation, but rather to write as a way to create bridges between many different spaces and experiences. Nor does Bejel write his way home by romanticizing a mythical, prelapsarian Cuban island space. Rather, he writes his memoir to affirm that hybrid space where Cuban and American cultures, histories, and aesthetic practices fluidly intermingle and come to express a new Latino/a identity. To mirror this hybridizing fluid migration of bodies and cultures, he intercuts into his memoir poetry and journalistic reportage. This works to provide his own sense of ever-shifting self with a form and also allows him to reflect formally a world where the lines between national histories, collective myths, and individual memories blur. His collage-memoir mirrors in form and content, then, the dynamic interplay of time and geopolitical space as experienced by this new generation of Cuban Americans.

The Write Way Home opens not with Bejel's birth, but rather *in media res*: he's a young teen listening to the bishop of Santiago de Cuba's condemnation of Castro's communist government. In a circuitous fashion, as Bejel moves from chapter to chapter, proximate and distant pasts collide and different events and

people are fleshed out. He blurs the line between verifiable fact and narrative fiction to destabilize a tradition of auto-bio-graphé—writing the story of self—that cover over and make seamless the otherwise disparate and contradictory elements that make up one's life. Non-linear and open-ended, *The Write Way Home* encourages the reader to see all the chaos and confusion that fed into Bejel's formation into a creative writer and intellectual. It is also, as he warns, his tapping into a "primeval desire" to represent the world as both incoherent and "magical."

Going against the fragmentary impulse of the memoir, I here rethread briefly his life story. Emilio Bejel was born in 1944 in Southeast Cuba (Guacanayabo Bay) in the town, Manzanillo. He grew up with his "Mamá", aunt Nina (both of whom escaped the chains of Cuban patriarchal society to earn degrees in education at Columbia University), "Madrina" (godmother), and his grandfather, Don Miguel Aguilera. His absent father existed only in the stories recounted by his Mamá. His childhood was filled with love, affection, and a delight in learning. However, it wasn't entirely cut off from the violence that filled a Cuba bursting at the seams with social transformation. He heard the sound of gunshots ringing across the nearby mountains: Fidel and his rebel soldier's emerging to attack Batista soldiers; one of his early voyeuristic thrills was to witness a wounded rebel soldier uncover his bullet shorn rump. Later, Emilio was expelled from high school for his supposed anti-Castro sentiments—he belonged to the Catholic Youth League that protested Castro's inhumane treatment of the people—so made tracks for Miami. It is here that Bejel's journey kicks into high gear. He worked a number of odd jobs (messenger boy and crop picker, for example) to make ends meet, learned English at night school, and finished high school. After earning a B.A. and while studying for his Ph.D. in Spanish literature, he wrote poetry, read Sartre and Wallace Stevens, and found his foot tapping to Bob Dylan and the Beatles. He narrowly avoided Vietnam, thanks to high blood pressure and a heart murmur, and instead took a job as a professor, first in Connecticut, where he spent his nights and weekends in New York indulging in its gay sexual extravaganzas, then back in Florida. All this while helping to organize Areíto that would later make possible dialogues between the U.S. and Cuba—even the first return of 100,000 Cuban émigrés to visit friends and family. Emilio's odyssey also includes several of his own eye-opening visits where he witnessed first-hand Castro's repression of gays and lesbians: the UMAP camps and the *acto de repudio* that allowed neighbors to turn in anyone they thought a traitor to the cause—usually those neighbors who didn't quite fit in, like Emilio's close gay and lesbian friends. But Emilio's run-in with a repressive state apparatus didn't just happen during his trips to Cuba. He found himself the subject of a witch-hunt as a professor at the University of Florida in Gainsville. The target of Cuban-American students as well as the famed gay Cuban writer, Reinaldo Arenas (see his article, "The Battle of Gainesville and the Trojan Horse"), Bejel was called out as a traitor and communist spy. Indeed, Bejel never forgave Arenas for becoming, as he writes, a "furious revenge-seeker who lashed out against anyone he considered to be in the wrong political camp." After

winning his tenure at UF, Bejel faced yet another massive obstacle: the struggle of being a gay Cuban man during the early 1980s, AIDS hysteria homophobic backlash. After suffering through the trauma of testing positive for HIV then to be retested and confirmed negative, this decade filled with fear and loss of loved ones proved more than traumatic. The journey comes to a close when Bejel takes a position at the University of Colorado, Boulder, and finds his life partner, Gary. There is only a hint here of his meteoric rise to become one the nation's pre-eminent Cuban American poets and scholars.

Bejel reorders chronology and recollected events to make his memoir memorable. Here, it is sounds, smells, tastes, and touch—and not necessarily verifiable biographical fact and historical event—that invigorate the telling and the reading. The objective, as he explains, is to "create a somewhat fictionalized personal history that draws on memory as a political evocation of the past." For example, when he recalls his grandfather, Don Miguel Aguilera, he subordinates historical event—he immigrated from Spain to Cuba in 1898, the year the American battleship *Maine* exploded—to the texturing of his grandfather's sartorial style and womanizing ways. And, when he recalls the days when "puberty was in full splendor," this takes precedence over a detailing of Castro's triumph over Batista. For Bejel, the self's experience of the world (fictional or biographically verifiable) are the center and the historical event the margin.

The Write Way Home is Bejel's kaleidoscopic exploration of contradictory ways belonging in the world. He expresses disdain for and respect for Castro, celebrating advances in providing equal access to education yet condemning his "kangaroo-court" trials that led to public executions. On other occasions, Bejel's allegiance to the Catholic church is torn by its racism and homophobia. Likewise, he fears the *machismo* that permeates Cuban society that restricts sexual behavior and gender role-play. He's critical of José Martí's late-19th century construction of a Cuban nationalist masculinity (we also see this in Bejel's scholarly work) as a model of behavior for all Cuban men that indirectly fueled the homophobic policies of Castro's First Congress of Education and Culture. And, although he positively identifies the U.S. as the space where he could more freely explore his sexual identity, he is also critical of the U.S., calling it "monstrously immoral" when it comes to providing basic services to the Have-nots. When it comes to his sense of belonging, he finds himself all upside down where there are "no rules and compasses."

The Write Way Home explores the many unresolved conflicts that inform this one-and-a-half-generation gay Cuban poet and intellectual's journey. Indeed, it is because of such thinkers and writers that we can imagine so vividly a complex Cuban and post-Cuban experience. Finally, *The Write Way Home* provides powerful testament to those who choose the difficult task of making sure spaces are cleared for the imagination to endure and experience to flourish—émigré or otherwise.

Frederick Luis Aldama

WORLD BANK LITERATURE

Amitava Kumar, editor
University of Minnesota Press, 2003

"'Tiko can't be developed,' Manu declared, 'unless the ancient gods are killed.'

'But the ancient gods are dead. The Sabbatarians killed them long ago,' countered the ancient preacher.

'Never believe that, sir. Had they died Tiko would have developed long ago. Look around you.'"

—Epeli Hau'ofa, *Tales of the Tikongs*

In *World Bank Literature,* editor Amitava Kumar has brought together a number of engaged literary critics, political economists, ethnographers, and cultural critics, to explore the possibility of new avenues for theory and criticism in the wake of fundamental shifts in the landscapes of global politics and cultural practice, as well as in academic and financial institutions around the world. At stake is a critical understanding of the processes of capitalist globalization (in its current stage), and the multiple and varied articulations of ideology, culture, and political discourse that both undergird and reflect (as well as potentially protest and counter) such processes. Kumar's move is an attempt to shift critical analytical frames and pedagogical infrastructures from the Western, "liberal-diversity model" of World Literature, as well as from the increasingly theoretical domain of postcolonial studies, to a broader, interventionist framework that understands literature (and, one would expect, cultural practice in general) as inherently linked to the political and economic realms of what is generally understood as "globalization." Kumar's proposal is intended to be a provocation, and in many ways this collection succeeds in demonstrating an open willingness to collectively explore some of the various possibilities and limitations that such a political and theoretical shift can bring about for the work of literary critics, political economists, and activists in general. It also provides suggestive new reading strategies, necessary to adapt to a wider, global transformation that is both economic as well as cultural in its multiple manifestations. At the same time, the book furthers the impression of a fundamental gap between academic politics and the "on-the-ground" mobilizations of the so-called anti-globalization forces, revealed in Kumar's claim that this collection is a necessary "theoretical response to what emerged so dramatically on the streets of Seattle as excitement but not always as an explanation, and as protest but not so much as pedagogy." If this book is inspired by, and in response to, actions such as those in Seattle that helped put the WTO, IMF, and World Bank on the world stage, it seems that there was plenty of effective pedagogy in such protests. Nonetheless, this book is a crucial addition to recent attempts to rethink and theorize the cultural logics of globalization and counter-globalization struggles around the

world, and cannot be dismissed as merely another academic colonization of trend-setting political struggles. The vital spirit and sharply critical energies in evidence here lend to the sense of a general shift from the cynicism and defeatism of the last twenty or so years, towards a hopeful (if realistic) horizon of new and wider fronts in the struggle against Western imperialism.

The collection seems designed as a casebook for a new humanities pedagogy, one that attempts to fuse literary studies with the more recent political and economic focus on globalization. Some of the essays read as thought-experiments in direct response to Kumar's call for a study of "World Bank literature," teasing out several different theoretical and pedagogical issues that arise from such an approach. As such, there is an experimentalism that at times can be quite refreshing, as writers avoid conventional academic platitudes and risk forays into multi-disciplinary territory. At the same time, the apparent presumption of an academic audience—of fellow teachers as well as advanced students—also lends the book something of the feel of an academic conference, with insiders talking amongst themselves, often with the result that "globalization" feels like it might become simply one more discourse for the humanities to colonize. For instance, the first section of the book—a "Dossier on the Academy"—is devoted to economic and political conditions within American academic institutions, with a focus on the humanities and student activism. While the corporatization of the university and the revitalized engagement of campus activists in "anti-globalization" movements are both important trends worth investigating, the specific connections to transnational capitalism and the broader themes of the book are not clearly articulated. It may be true that the "onset of the severe job crisis [in U.S. humanities departments] turned English professors into economists almost overnight," as Kumar puts it in his introduction, and that student organizers have opened some professors' eyes to exploitative labor conditions within the university (from grad students to cafeteria and janitorial workers); however, placing such issues at the beginning of this collection threatens to privilege concerns of the primarily American intellectual classes. Nonetheless, to the extent that this book may be read alongside Naomi Klein's *No Logo* and/or Cary Nelson's *Manifesto of a Tenured Radical*, themselves both undergraduate-level introductions to campus politics and their connection to wider international issues, it is a useful reminder to include a look at the conditions on the ground of the academy as part of any pedagogical and theoretical intervention within the humanities.

Though weighted towards the cultural studies side of things, there are some helpful analyses that focus more directly on the economic and political-economic issues confronting any contemporary critic of globalization. Doug Henwood successfully dismantles many of the presumptions and cliches of what tends to fall under the rubric of "globalization," redirecting our attention to the long historical view that sees the current period as an continuing expansion of Western imperialism. In a similar vein, Gautam Premnath helps burst the myth of the weakening nation-state, showing how the U.S. and its dominant partners have

continued to use military, political, and economic force to act on behalf of its own "interests" (i.e., the interests of the corporations that largely fund the ruling power structure). Richard Wolff reminds us of the frequent absence of class analysis in discussions of globalization, both in the neoliberal ideologies of the World Bank and WTO, as well as within non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other oppositional movements.

Other critics look more specifically at the policies and practices of the World Bank itself (and other organizations like it), interrogating its rhetoric and ideologies for the deeper logics of transnational capital and, quite often, Western racism. Bret Benjamin unpacks the discourses of racism, power, and the control of women's bodies (literally, the reproduction of labor, in all respects) in various groups working on the issues of overpopulation and population control. In another interrogation of racist paternalism, Suzanne Bergeron looks at how the World Bank and the IMF both promote notions of development that tend to erase both women's roles and well as non-Western approaches to autonomous rule. Subir Sinha reveals how Western social movements and NGOs, defending the environment or promoting "sustainable development," can often mirror World Bank and IMF ideologies in both their paternalism as well as their "developmentalist" discourses. At the same time, many of these deconstructions read as exercises in literary criticism, of the sort that can read almost any social and material practice as "discourse," and thus render it into a series of texts and narratives to be interpreted. This is all fine and necessary, though one hopes that we can continue to distinguish from the textual *character* of certain policies and practices and the *actual material and social effects* such practices have in the world outside of the strictly "discursive."

Other contributors focus more strictly on cultural objects and practices, in order to see how reading culture under the sign of "World Bank Literature" might bring about new interpretations and critical strategies. In "Developing Fictions," Rashimi Varma looks at the figure of the "tribal" in English-language writing from India (as well as Indian literary criticism), heeding Kumar's call for a "different protocol for reading," especially in regards to the "literature of [India's] New Economic Policy." Claire F. Fox investigates what she calls the "left sensationalism" of U.S.-Mexico border discourses, focusing primarily on border detective fiction. In an exploration of (white) American, Mexican-American, and Mexican novels, ranging from the ecofeminism of Judith Van Gieson to the leftist-noir of Paco Ignacio Taibo II, Fox details how the trappings of genre create both limitations to, and new openings for, different kinds of utopic possibilities. Her essay is also exemplary for its critical reading of a popular cultural form without either condescending to the material or overly-romanticizing its oppositional politics. Phillip E. Wegner also takes on a popular genre, science fiction, to explore alternative modes of mapping global relations. Working from Jameson's notions of cognitive mapping and the "geopolitical unconscious," Wegner reads the novels

of Joe Halderman as complex allegories for the uneven geographical development of global capitalism.

Anthony Alessandrini pays perhaps the most attention to questions of form and genre. With the rise of postcolonial studies over the last twenty years, especially in regards to literary criticism, there has been a disturbing split in terms of what constitutes the proper object of study. While Western avant-garde texts continue to retain privileged status in English departments, where literary history is largely the history of formal innovation, postcolonial (as well as many Western "multicultural" or "ethnic") texts are read primarily for an easily recoupable content, in a process that Gayatri Spivak has called "information retrieval." This mimics the international literary marketplace, which tends to celebrate non-Western realist novels that include enough "local color" and exotic difference to mark them as other, with an expectation that such realism offers an authentic "experience" for the Western reader, or what Alessandrini terms "a demand for representational accuracy." Focusing on retrievable themes and motifs in such texts can provide the left-leaning critic with forceful tools with which to interrogate conditions of postcoloniality; however, by avoiding questions of form and innovation, critics limit potential reading strategies as well as condescend to presume a kind of transparency and authenticity from postcolonial writers (as with the "native informant" of the "old" ethnographies), a tactic that is understandable from a certain political perspective ('look here, see how bad things are for *them*') and yet is ultimately a disservice to both the literature and the cause (as with the recent scandal over Rigoberta Menchu's "autobiography"). Similarly, the continued privileging of conventional Western forms and genres can blur the extent to which, especially in the realms of popular culture, they can be used to promote a variety of ideologies, leading to the rise of what Lila Abu-Lughod has elsewhere termed "developmental realism."

How such forms and practices are received, recycled, and reappropriated is another question. In postcolonial Africa, for instance, the dumping of Western goods has quite often led to a complicated and dynamic hybridity. Both Manthia Diawara and Grant Farred, for instance, take on mainstream and leftist discourses of "Afro-pessimism," that see postcolonial Africa as either a backwater of corruption and hopelessness or completely crushed by Western-imposed market policies. Instead, both authors look at the role of regional and local markets, from informal trade networks to above-ground "black markets," as sites for alternative negotiations of transnational trade and economic regulations. Here the cultural and the economic meet and co-mingle, as illegal currency markets co-exist with a healthy trade in knock-off American apparel, pirated videotapes and CDs, and other cross-cultural consumer goods. While such markets perhaps do not always challenge outright the increasing fetishization of the West and its products, they do help create an arena for resistance to the dominant financial logics of global capital, as well as providing agency to local traders and consumers—mostly women, peasants, and lumpen proletarians—who, as Diawara puts it, become

"modernized in the marketplace." Against the oversimplified binary of Western capitalism vs. "traditional" African culture and customs, such locations help construct what Diawara calls a "regional imaginary," in which cultural (re)appropriation and transnational trade can carve out spaces for new forms of non-Western modernities. At the same time, World Bank and IMF platitudes about development and modernization require the policing, and eventual erasure, of such alternative spaces for such practices, severely limiting the terms by which "development" could be said to occur outside a strictly Western capitalist model of debt, austerity, and a sacrificing of autonomy and sovereignty.

Here we might begin to see linkages between discourses of development and those of modernity (or more specifically, Western notions of modernization). As uneven development becomes not simply a byproduct of capitalist globalization, but increasingly *its intended result,* a certain kind of uneven modernity could be said to manifest itself as well. Often characterized variously under rubrics of postmodernity and postcolonialism, contemporary conditions in most of the world are marked by the violent continuation and expansion of a centuries-long imperialist project that promises "modernity" (in political, economic and cultural forms) while at the same time, through policies of primitive accumulation and neoliberal structural adjustment programs, severely limiting the possibilities for any autonomous and sovereign polities and cultures to emerge on their own terms. Western notions of modernity simply cannot be created by loans or by force, not because the rest of the world is somehow 'backward' or mired in 'pre-modernity' (one of the current tropes of anti-Islamic racism), but because the conditions under which Euro-American modernity was forged (five hundred years of global imperialism underwriting the slow march to bourgeois democratic society) cannot be recreated in the contemporary context. The current phase of post-1989 developmentalism could be read as the capitalist West's attempt—in the aftermath of the demise of its main imperialist rival—to consolidate its global hegemony and avoid potential crises of over-accumulation at the same time. "Globalization" might then be seen as less of a force of homogenizing American "sameness" (though it is often that as well), but as the (often violent) creation and exploitation of difference, as long as such difference is contained within the logic of capitalist exchange value. Although organizing against cultural imperialism is easier than 'naming the enemy' as capitalism itself—how many activists know Jose Bové as 'that crazy French peasant who crashed his tractor into a McDonald's' and not as the founder of the workerist, environmentalist Condédération Paysanne?—it remains crucial to continue to construct a "dual-front" of strategic resistance to both Western and global-capitalist hegemonies.

What then, are the cultural logics of such transformations? Are there direct homologies between, to use Hung Q. Tu's phrasing, "uneven development, uneven poetics"? Could there be a viable, radical, and (to update Gramsci's term) transnational-popular "World Bank Literature" that did not succumb to the institutional hegemony of "Western Lit"? Is the battleground for such struggles

the academy and the canon, or in the daily cultural practices of those global citizens whose (physical *and* intellectual) labor power is fast becoming the transnational commodity *par excellance*? These kinds of questions are not answered definitively in this collection, but that they are beginning to be framed and debated in this way is the kind of development worth investing in.

This review is dedicated to the memory of Lee Kyung-Hae.

David Buuck

The Future Is a Wish:
Emily Jacir Travels Tight Spaces

At this point in history, the number of societies and cultures eluding media-saturation is rapidly diminishing. Whether the result of satellite TV technology, the ubiquity of the Internet, or the deregulation of the media resulting from the import—or imposition—of neo-liberal policies, it is by now almost a platitude to say that modern and contemporary media seep into every corner of the world. Even a place such as rural Chiapas, Mexico, with its lack of televisions and computers—to say nothing of the electricity needed to power them—produced one of the most media savvy figures of the 1990s in Subcomandante Marcos. And think of the power Osama bin Laden has been able to wield over the US media, which has chosen—with no little pressure from the Bush administration—to self-censor his audio and video dispatches, sent out from an unwired, low-tech "cave"—or so it's usually imagined—somewhere on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

To posit an ineluctable media proliferation is not, however, to project conditions in North America and Western Europe onto the rest of the globe. The complexity of each person's relationship to the media is unique everywhere, including in different parts of one of the centers of media and information production: New York City. After all, the media isn't simply something one turns on or off, or switches channels or clicks links within, at one's leisure. Conceiving it as such overlooks one of the crucial points Guy Debord makes in his analysis of "the society of the spectacle": that these spectacles are the products of a specific capitalist socio-economic system. This is too often forgotten by both critics and acolytes of Debord when they posit "the spectacle," "the simulacrum," or "the matrix" as an autonomous and self-generating realm.

Susan Sontag commits this rather common error in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, her recent book on photography and mass media images. She also asks the provocative question whether images or narratives make a more powerful impression on perception, and whether one or the other is more likely to instigate an awareness of the need for political change and social justice. For Sontag, narrative is more effective because time, with its capacity for sustained engagement, is structurally inherent to it. Images, however shocking and disturbing, however much they might cry out for a rectification of the horrors they depict, usually flicker by quickly, unless in printed form. Yet even then, the ability to turn the page, or to turn one's face away, potentially lessens their force. In comparison, narratives allow for a fuller understanding of an event or situation.

But within the image-bombarded societies Sontag is describing, where does narrative primarily occur? Ironically (or not), its most popular modes are movies and television. Commercial radio and most theater are fundamentally rooted in a television-derived image-based model. Alternatives—what once might have been called the avant-garde—in the form of experimental music, independent

cinema, and non-mainstream literature have always treated narrative skeptically. Furthermore, and at the risk of sounding glib, who has time for extended narratives? Who has the luxury to sit around in the afternoon listening to NPR's relatively slowly unfolding stories? Who goes to see documentaries by anyone other than Michael Moore? And more to the point, what suburban multiplex would ever show them? And in any case, are narratives really experienced these days in the uninterrupted way Sontag seems to imagine?[1]

Walter Benjamin was always very astute about remaining close enough to the avant-garde to pick up on its most significant insights and tendencies while staying at enough of a remove not to adopt its rhetorical fantasies and elitist self-involvement. In his 1936 essay "The Storyteller," he already sketched the demise of the millenniums-old art of storytelling—again, in European and North American society—with, as was Benjamin's wont, more than a whiff of elegiac nostalgia combined with a penetrating scrutiny of the present and an occasionally prophetic sense of the future. For instance, his declaration that "experience has fallen in value" (83-84) and his description of "information" as a "new form of communication" developed by the "middle class" of a "fully developed capitalism" (88)—a "new form" that directly threatens storytelling and its most sophisticated modern variety, the novel—anticipate much that was later written about "the society of the spectacle" and its accompanying "Information Age," as well as the Situationists espousal of "lived experience" as a radical response to these.

Like later media critics, and in language nearly identical to Sontag's in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Benjamin bemoans the fact that: "Every morning brings us the news of the globe, and yet we are poor in noteworthy stories" (89). This resolute distinction between information and stories no longer seems tenable, whether in relation to the producers of information and stories or their receivers, even if Benjamin's ultimate point about the failure to be informed by information holds true. But not being informed is as much a problem with stories as it is with information. Moreover, information may embed ideology differently than stories, but it embeds it nonetheless. In fact, by not allowing for the sense of naturalness, and for the sense of an inevitable unfolding, that stories oftentimes do, information, while seemingly more transparent, objective, and concrete, has the potential to just as readily betray its ideological inflections, especially when combined and confronted with other information—particularly the kind that may not be found, or may require diligent searching to uncover, within the mainstream media monopoly. Collage was not a primarily 20th-century invention for no reason.[2]

In *Where We Come From* (all works 2002-2003), a solo show at the gallery Debs & Co., in New York City during April and May of 2003, Palestinian born and US-based visual artist Emily Jacir exhibited documents from a year-long project in which she asked Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza, and around the world: "If I could do something for you, anywhere in Palestine, what would it be?" Restricted physically, and in some cases psychically, by the ongoing conflict between Israelis and Palestinians over territorial and political self-determination,

the Palestinians participating in Jacir's project entrusted her to fulfill a wide range of wishes. Some of these requests were of the quotidian sort; others were deeply personal and rooted in decades of familial struggle over housing and land. All were the product of restrictions on movement that Jacir, with her US passport, was mostly, though not entirely, able to circumvent.

Jacir's presentation of materials took the form of a text in English and Arabic mounted on the wall next to a photograph of her executing an individual's request (sometimes there was more than one photograph, and one piece incorporated a looped video on a portable DVD player screen instead of a photograph). The texts consisted of three separate entries printed in progressively smaller fonts: the first described the request; the second outlined why the person was unable to carry out the request herself or himself (the reason often given was that the Israeli government refused to grant the permission needed to move between towns and territories); the third, and in the smallest font, presented information about the person: first name, where born and now living, which passport and/or identification papers the person carried, and where in Palestine that person's mother and father were from (frequently with the additional information in parentheses that the parents were exiled from these locations in 1948 when the British mandate in Palestine ended and the state of Israel was established, with the widespread dispossession of people and property this entailed).

On a handful of pieces, a fourth text entry appended by Jacir in an even smaller font explained why she wasn't able to fulfill a request (typically because of restrictions on movement) or what followed upon her attempt (a historical wound reopened when an Israeli was found living in what was once a Palestinian's house, or a familial gulf partially bridged by the reestablishment of contact between separated family members via Jacir). For example, a Palestinian student studying at Birzeit University in the West Bank asked Jacir to visit his family in Gaza, whom he had been denied permission to see. Jacir included four photographs of his family working their farm, along with a note that said she took some of the fruit from the farm back to the student. Or a young Palestinian woman living in New York City asked Jacir to: "Do something on a normal day in Haifa, something I might do if I was living there now." The woman had never been to Haifa, but with her US passport could probably do so if, as she declares in the wall text, she wasn't afraid of the gap between expectation and reality (her biographical materials state that her parents were exiled from Haifa in 1948). In her note to the piece, Jacir tells how she fulfilled the request by hanging out all night talking with a group of young women in their apartment.

Jacir's *Where We Come From* deftly combines story, information, and image to elucidate current political situations and, in the best Conceptual art practice, to comment on the artmaking process by making her combination of materials a subject of the project. And while story, information, and image are given equal weight in each piece, there's a tilt toward personal narration, albeit one broken like history itself. The story of a desire to visit Haifa and Jacir's

accomplishment of that desire is arrested by the brute facticity of exile in 1948. The same text also pauses beside a photograph of a young woman's legs and black shoes next to a coffee table covered with empty cups and a full ashtray in an apartment in Haifa—an image that relies on the text for clarification, just as the text depends on the image for illustration. Nevertheless, each piece revolves around the performance of different narratives, which is why the more specific the information, the smaller the font in which it's rendered. Similarly, biographical and historical information is presented in fragments, as opposed to the full paragraphs detailing the wish and the reasons for its denial.

One of the goals of Conceptual art is not to tell, but to enact. In its formalist strand, this can mean foregrounding in the work of art the processes used to produce it or spotlighting the materiality of these processes and the work itself (at the same time that a strong crosscutting influence moves in the direction of what Lucy Lippard famously termed "the dematerialization of the art object"). In its performance strand, this can mean an attempt to eradicate the distinctions between art and life. In Jacir's *Where We Come From*, or in works by Rirkrit Tiravanija that consist of eating a meal with the artist or living in a space he's created, this assimilation of art into life is an aesthetic as well as political strategy. But it can also result from conditions within culture and society at large. If commodities have conquered almost the entirety of the cultural realm, then art might get bumped into the social—that is, when it hasn't become completely absorbed into a commercialized art market (and even when it has). Whether this slide into the social is deemed an ethnographic trend in art or signals a final collapse of any lingering distinctions between "high" and "low," art's movement into the social can be as much a conscious choice on the part of cultural workers as the inevitable byproduct of a mass media-driven consumer culture.

Along with its indebtedness to Conceptual art, *Where We Come From* mixes in a long tradition of political art as functional, especially in its photographic component, which serves as literal documentation of Jacir's fulfillment of a particular request: please visit my mother's grave shows a picture of the mother's grave, please bring back a bottle of Arak shows a bottle of Arak, please pay my phone bill at the post office shows a line of people at the post office. . . . Neither the representational, nor the intentional, capacities of the photographs are called into question.[3] This literality is very similar to Sontag's theory of photography, which in *Regarding the Pain of Others* at least, isn't really much of a theory at all: "The images [of atrocity] say: This is what human beings are capable of doing—may volunteer to do, enthusiastically, self-righteously. Don't forget" (115). In other words, images are literal, and their author's intentions transparent. In this approach, because of an inherent neutrality built into its technology, photography can be political while still being pre-ideological. If this is a theory of photography, it's a 19th-century one.

In a video piece entitled *Crossing Surda (A Record of Going to and from Work)*, Jacir surreptitiously recorded her daily walk from Ramallah to Birzeit

University after initially being confronted and detained by Israeli soldiers while trying to videotape the trek openly. The resulting video serves as a functional piece that transmits the experience of passing bombed out buildings, military equipment, bustling taxi stands, and fellow Palestinians walking to and from school and jobs—or the lack thereof. Jacir relies on the novelty of these images, particularly in the West, to relay her message with very little commentary or context. Here, the narrative is in real time and the onlooker's absorption into the piece is palpable. Yet *Crossing Surda* isn't nearly as effective (and probably wasn't meant to be, or was meant to be in a different way) as Jacir's integration of story, information, and image in the rest of the works in the show. The latters' interruptive personal, collective, and national histories invite more than simply empathy or curiosity. And in their documentation of a complex articulation of personal and political desire, they ask their viewers to remember the future as much as the past.

(Footnotes)

[1] Similar to the intellectual trajectory of Jean-Luc Godard (cf., his 2001 film *In Praise of Love*), who, like Sontag, was once such a sophisticated observer and appropriator of mainstream and popular culture, Sontag's near snobbish scorn toward these same materials occasionally gives her arguments a reactionary tinge.

[2] Making audiences more self-conscious about both narrative and information is certainly what Benjamin's artistic exemplar Bertolt Brecht was attempting to do.

[3] Similarly, for how politically fraught it is, Jacir's own identity remains unproblematized throughout the documentation of her project, partly because she assumes a cohesive and unified collective Palestinian identity.

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