

# DRAMATURGY OF THE REAL ON THE WORLD STAGE



Edited by Carol Martin

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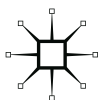
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# **Dramaturgy of the Real on the World Stage**

*Edited by*

Carol Martin

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*To the artists in this book*

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# Series Editors' Preface

In 2003, the current International Federation for Theatre Research President, Janelle Reinelt, pledged the organization to expand the outlets for scholarly publication available to the membership, and to make scholarly achievement one of the main goals and activities of the Federation under her leadership. In 2004, joined by Vice-President for Research and Publications Brian Singleton, they signed a contract with Palgrave Macmillan for a new book series, "Studies in International Performance."

Since the inauguration of the series, it has become increasingly urgent for performance scholars to expand their disciplinary horizons to include the comparative study of performances across national, cultural, social and political borders. This is necessary not only in order to avoid the homogenizing tendency to limit performance paradigms to those familiar in our home countries, but also in order to be engaged in creating new performance scholarship that takes account of and embraces the complexities of transnational cultural production, the new media, and the economic and social consequences of increasingly international forms of artistic expression. Comparative studies can value both the specifically local and the broadly conceived global forms of performance practices, histories, and social formations. Comparative aesthetics can challenge the limitations of perception and current artistic knowledges. In formalizing the work of the Federation's members through rigorous and innovative scholarship, we hope to contribute to an ever-changing project of knowledge creation.



**International Federation for Theatre Research**  
**Fédération Internationale pour la Recherche Théâtrale**

# Acknowledgements

Many people have contributed to the making of this international anthology. A very generous translation grant from the Polish Cultural Institute has made possible the translation of the Polish texts. Monika Fabijanska, the Director of the Polish Cultural Institute in New York, and Agata Grenda, Deputy Director of the Polish Cultural Institute in New York, have been influential and instrumental with generous translation grants and with providing ongoing contact with artists and writers not all of whom speak or read English. What Fabijanska and Grenda are doing for the knowledge of Polish culture and theatre in the United States is truly extraordinary. The cultural tour of Poland sponsored by the Institute that I took in the winter of 2007 gave me a whirlwind introduction to contemporary Polish theatre, especially in South West Poland. This tour and the Polish theatre artists I met alerted me to the vibrant theatre culture of Poland and is the point of origin for the Polish essays and texts included here. When in Poland, I met Joanna Ostrowska, a professor at Adam Mickiewicz University, who has been instrumental in working with Teatre Osmego Dnia. Benjamin Paloff, Elżbieta Janicka, and Allisa Valles have all provided wonderful translations of the Polish texts included here. I also want to thank Sarah J. Townsend for her excellent translations of the texts from Argentina. A small portion of funding provided by The Drama Department and the Dean's Faculty development fund at Tisch School of the Arts at New York University helped with translation fees.

Tom Sellar, the staff at St Anne's Warehouse in Brooklyn, David Peimer, the staff at *TDR*, and Janelle Reinelt all helped me make contact with writers and artists. Nikki Cesare, Mariellen Sandford and Jim Ball helped with proof reading and made valuable comments. My friends and colleagues who are members of ASTR provide continuing intellectual provocation. Daniel Gerould and Frank Hentchker and their programming at the Martin E. Siegal Theatre at CUNY's Graduate Center have allowed me to meet many artists from many countries over the years. Janelle Reinelt and Brian Singleton have been gracious, supportive and instructive as have Paula Kennedy and Penny Simmons at Palgrave Macmillan.

I spent the summer of 2008 as a visiting professor at *Boğaziçi* University in Istanbul where I had an extraordinary experience that continues to inform my thinking. For this I wish to thank Serap Erincin, Cevza Sevgen, Arzu Öztürkmen, Nükhet Sirman, and Alpar Sevgen. Most memorable and important was my meeting with Genco Erkal, the famous actor and the author of the documentary play *Sivas 93*, at the Bebek Hotel bar on the Bosphorus.

Thank you to Oya BaÅŸak for hosting and arranging this meeting and for her love of Turkish culture and artists.

The students in my Honors Seminar documentary theatre course in the College of Arts and Science and the students in my documentary theatre course in the Department of Drama at Tisch School of the Arts in the fall of 2007 and 2008 were wonderful, inspiring and a great pleasure to teach. They provoked me with their questions, insights, and devotion to the subject of the real on stage.

My children Sophia and Sam and my devoted husband, Richard, are ever present in the fibers of my prose.

# Notes on Contributors

**Paweł Demirski** is a playwright and dramatist. In 2003 he received a scholarship from the Royal Court Theatre in London where he researched and wrote on the experiences of Polish immigrants. In 2003–06 he was the Literary Director of the Wybrzeże Theatre in Gdańsk. Currently he works as playwright and dramaturg, mostly cooperating with directors Monika Strzępka and Michał Zadara on productions such as *Walęsa: A Merry and Hence a Greatly Lugubrious Historie*, *Once, there was a Pole, a Pole, a Pole and the Devil*, and *Iphigenia: A New Tragedy* (inspired by Racine's *Version*).

**Hans Dowit** translated *Is-Man* into English for its performances at St Anne's Warehouse in Brooklyn, New York, 2007.

**Jessica Dubow** is a lecturer in Cultural Geography in the Department of Geography, University of Sheffield, UK. She has published widely on issues of spatial, aesthetic, and perceptual theory, especially in the context of colonial and contemporary South Africa. Her current work investigates the relation of spatial mobility and critical thought in a Jewish-European intellectual tradition. She is author of *Settling the Self: Colonial Space, Colonial Identity and the South African Landscape* (2009). Her journal publications include *Critical Inquiry*, *Journal of Visual Culture*, *Art History*, and *Interventions: The International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*.

**Ain Gordon** is a three-time Obie Award winning writer/director/actor and a Guggenheim Foundation Fellow in playwriting. Gordon's current project is rooted in the Galveston flood of 1900 for production by DiverseWorks and Stages Repertory Theatre (TX) in 2009. Gordon has been presented by Soho Rep, NYTW, DTW, PS122, the Public Theatre (NYC), The Mark Taper Forum (CA), George Street Playhouse (NJ), The Krannert Center (IL), Jacob's Pillow (MA), LexArts (KY), the Baltimore Museum of Art (MD), VSA North Fourth Arts Center (NM), ART (MA), and ACT (CA), etc. Gordon has been Co-Director of the Pick Up Performance Co(S) since 1992.

**Wendy S. Hesford** is Associate Professor of English at Ohio State University. She is the author of *Framing Identities: Autobiography and the Politics of Pedagogy* (University of Minnesota Press, 1999), co-editor, with Wendy Kozol, of *Haunting Violations: Feminist Criticism and the Crisis of the "Real"* (University of Illinois Press, 2001) and *Just Advocacy? Women's Human Rights, Transnational Feminisms, and the Politics of Representation* (Rutgers University Press, 2005), and co-author with Brenda Brueggemann of *Rhetorical Visions: Reading and*

*Writing in a Visual Culture* (Prentice Hall, 2007). Her next single-authored book *Spectacular Rhetorics: Human Right, Feminisms, and the Transnational Imaginary* is forthcoming from Duke University Press, 2010.

**Yvette Hutchison** is associate professor in the Department of Theatre & Performance Studies at the University of Warwick, UK. Her research area is most specifically Anglophone African theatre and history, and how narratives of memory inform efficacy and advocacy, both for the individual and society as a whole. She is associate editor of *South African Theatre Journal* and *African Theatre* series, and has co-edited books with Kole Omotoso and Eckhard Breitinger. She is currently working on a book entitled *Performance and the Archive of Memory*.

**Elżbieta Janicka** majored in American literature at the University of Poznań in Poland. Apart from teaching and translating, she has been involved in alternative theatre in Poznań, taking part in performances of Teatr Osmego Dnia and Porywacze Cia.

**Bill Johnston** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Comparative Literature and Second Languages Studies at Indian University, Bloomington. He is Director of the Polish Studies Center at the University.

**Elias Khoury** is a writer and academic. His novels have been staged in Lebanon and abroad. A co-organizer of the Ayloul Festival, he also served as artistic director of the Theatre of Beirut from 1992 to 1998. He is the editor of the *Mulhak*, the literary supplement of the *An-Nahar*. An author of 12 novels, he has taught Arabic and comparative literature at the Lebanese University, the American University, Columbia, and New York University.

**Florian Malzacher** studied Applied Theatre Sciences at the University of Gießen, Germany. He works as a freelance theatre journalist for main daily papers and magazines. He is a founding member of the free curatorial team Unfriendly Takeover and took part in the curating of several theatre and performance festivals as International Summer Academies. He is co-editor of *Not Even a Game Anymore – The Theatre of Forced Entertainment* (2004) and *Experts of the Everyday – The Theatre of Rimini Protokoll* (2007). He has been a member of several juries and had teaching assignments at the Universities of Vienna and Frankfurt. Since 2006 he has been the co-programmer of steirischer herbst festival in Graz, Austria.

**Carol Martin**, PhD, is currently a Senior Fulbright Specialist, and an Associate Professor of Drama at Tisch School of the Arts, New York University. Her books include: *Global Foreigners* (co-edited with Saviana Stanescu in English and Romanian), *Brecht Sourcebook* (co-edited with Henry Bial); *A Sourcebook*

of *Feminist Theatre: On and Beyond the Stage*, and *Dance Marathons: Performing American Culture of the 1920s and 1930s*. Martin is the guest editor of a issue of *TDR* devoted to the subject of documentary theatre and the General Editor of the series "In Performance" devoted to post 9/11 plays from around the world, published by Seagull Books. Awards include Fulbright, National Endowment for the Humanities, and a Visiting Professor Fellowship at Tokyo University.

**Philip Miller** is a composer who has worked with some of the most innovative South African filmmakers and artists. He has composed music for the soundtracks of many local and international film and television productions, including *Catch a Fire*, directed by the acclaimed Australian film director, Philip Noyce, and the award-winning South African television series, *Yizo Yizo*. Other recent film and television productions include: *Forgiveness*, *Max and Mona*, *The Flyer*, *Zero Tolerance*, *Zone 14*, *When we were Black*, and *Heartlines*. Miller has collaborated extensively with the internationally acclaimed video artist William Kentridge, composing soundtracks for many of his animation films, which have been exhibited all over the world, including the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim Museum, New York, and the Serpentine Gallery and Tate Modern in London. Miller's sound installation, *Special Boy*, was selected for the Spier Contemporary Exhibition 2007 and he has just released *Shona Malanga*, an album of freedom songs and hymns arranged for orchestra.

**Rabih Mroué** was born in Beirut in 1967. He is an actor, director, and playwright, and a contributing editor to *TDR*. In 1990, he began creating plays, performances, and videos that reconsider the relationship between the space and form of the performance and the ways in which the performer relates with the audience. Mroué's semi-documentary works draw much-needed attention to the little discussed broader political and economic contexts of the current political climate of Lebanon. His works include: *The Inhabitants of Images* (2008), *How Nancy Wished That Everything Was an April Fools Joke* (2007); *Make Me Stop Smoking* (2006); *Looking for a Missing Employee* (2005); *Look into the Light* (2004); *Who's Afraid of Representation?* (2003), *Biokhraphia* (2002); *Three Posters* (2000, *Extension 19* (1997), *The Lift* (2003) and others.

**Joanna Ostrowska** is an Assistant Professor at the Cultural Studies Institute, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań (Poland). Her main fields of interest are alternative theatre in Poland and abroad, and Polish theatre in public spaces. Her articles have been published in *New Theatre Quarterly*, *Pamiętnik Teatralny*, and *Kultura Współczesna* among other places. She is the co-editor of three books and author of the only Polish monograph on *The Living Theatre*. Since 2005 she has been taking part in the international "European Festival



Research Project," in 2006 and 2007 she was a member of a team preparing a report "Street Artists in Europe" for the European Parliament.

**Benjamin Paloff** is an Assistant Professor of Slavic languages and literatures and of comparative literature at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and a poetry editor for *Boston Review*. His translations from Polish include Dorota Masłowska's *Snow White and Russian Red* and Marek Bieńczyk's *Tworci*.

**Alan Pauls** (Buenos Aires, 1959) is a writer. He was a Literary Theory professor in the University of Buenos Aires and now works as a cultural journalist. He has written essays on Manuel Puig, diaries as a literary genre, the work of Jorge Luis Borges, and the cultural mythologies of the beach. He has published five novels: *El pudor del pornógrafo* (1985), *El coloquio* (1989), *Wasabi* (1994), *El pasado* (2003, Herralde Novel Award 2003, adapted to film by Héctor Babenco), and *Historia del llanto* (2007). His work has been translated into English, French, Italian, Portuguese, and Dutch.

**Janelle Reinelt** is Professor of Theatre and Performance Studies at Warwick University, UK. Previously, she was Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Professor of Drama at the University of California, Irvine. She was President of the International Federation for Theatre Research and a former editor of *Theatre Journal*. She is the author of *After Brecht* (University of Michigan Press, 1996) and co-editor of *Critical Theory and Performance* with Joseph Roach (University of Michigan Press, rev. edn 2007), *The Performance of Power* with Sue-Ellen Case (University of Iowa Press, 1991), and *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Women Playwrights* with Elaine Aston (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

**Adelheid Roosen** is a writer, director, and performer. She won the Proscenium Prize for *Tergend Langzaam Wakker Worden* (*Waking Up Painstakingly Slowly*) in 1988. She based her solo performances on novels by Clarice Lispector and Franz Xavier Kroetz along with her own text and design. Together with 13 female performers from many different countries Roosen developed Female Factory, which presented performers from all over the world. Her work *Veiled Monologues* (2003) successfully toured Holland, Belgium, Berlin, and Turkey and was televised for national broadcast and shown in the Dutch parliament during a debate about religious minorities in Holland. *Veiled monologues* and its sequel *Is. Man*, her latest text on honour killing, toured St Ann's Warehouse, Brooklyn; Yale Rep, New Haven, and ART, Harvard, in 2007. In the summer of 2009, Adelheid Roosen was presented with the Amsterdam Award for the Arts by Mayor Job Cohen, for her work at her own Female Economy Foundation and at Zina Platform, where arts and performances evoke questions on religion and culture and where voices from different cultures are being heard.

**Agnieszka Sowińska** graduated from the Theatre Studies Department at the Theatre Academy in Warsaw in 2006. She wrote her Master Thesis about documentary theatre in Russia. As a student she worked at the Theatre Academy's International Theatre Schools Festival, "'Meetings" Festival of Theatre Festivals," organized by the Dramatic Theatre in Warsaw, and at the Festival of Jewish Culture "Singer's Warsaw" in collaboration with the Warsaw Theatre Museum and the Polish Culture Society – Polish Centre of International Amateur Theatre Association.

**Paweł Sztabowski** is a theatre critic and the head of the Theatre Promotion Department in the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw. His articles can be found in Polish theater and culture magazines such as *Notatnik Teatralny*, *Dialog*, *Opcje*, *Didaskalia*, *Wprost*, and his weekly pages in [www.e-teatr.pl](http://www.e-teatr.pl), the Polish theatre portal.

**Teatre Ósmego Dnia** is one of Europe's most important experimental theatre companies. At its inception in the early 1970s, Teatr Ósmego Dnia defined itself as an artistic community concerned with human rights independent of pressure from the state. Teatr Ósmego Dnia developed its own working method based on collective improvisation. The actors are also the playwrights and the stage designers resulting in a theatrical experience rich in imagery, physical expression, voice, and music. The company's works address the problems of contemporary life and the destinies of those often forgotten in the vast "machine of the world." Since 1992, Teatr Ósmego Dnia's residence in the city of Poznań has helped make the city a center of independent culture in Poland. With more than 40 original productions the company has performed in most countries in Europe. They have received several awards including the Fringe First Award at Edinburgh Festival in 1985 and the prestigious Polish Konrad Swinarski Prize in 1994.

**Vivi Tellas** (Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1955) burst onto the Buenos Aires theatre scene in the mid-1980s with *Teatro Malo* (*Bad Theatre*), a research project based on a secret and unstageable playwright. Exploring the limits of theatre both as a practice and an institution, she staged John Cage at the Buenos Aires Opera House (*Europera V*, 1995) and together with visual artist Guillermo Kuitca proposed a new version of García Lorca's *La casa de Bernarda Alba* (2002). In 2000, the radicalization of her theatrical process led to *Proyecto Archivos*, a series of documentary theatre pieces: *Mi mamá y mi tía* (2003–04) with her actual mother and aunt; *Tres filósofos con bigotes* (2004–06), performed by three philosophy professors from Buenos Aires University; *Cozarinsky y su médico* (2005–06 with the filmmaker and writer Edgardo Cozarinsky and his physician; and, *Escuela de conducción* (2006–07) which deals with the relationship between cars and people.

**Sarah J. Townsend** is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at New York University, where she is completing a dissertation on avant-garde theater in Mexico and Brazil in the 1920s and 1930s. She is the co-editor of *Stages of Conflict: A Critical Anthology of Latin American Theater and Performance* (University of Michigan Press, 2008). Her articles have appeared in journals such as *Modernism/Modernity* and *Revista iberoamericana*, and she has translated a number of dramatic texts from Spanish and Portuguese.

**Alissa Valles** was born into a multilingual family in Amsterdam and studied at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies in London and at universities in the US, Poland, and Russia; she is now an independent writer, editor, and translator based in the Bay Area, California. Her book of poetry, *Orphan Fire* (Four Way Books), appeared in 2008. She is editor and co-translator of Zbigniew Herbert's *Collected Poems 1956–1998* (Ecco) and *Collected Prose* (forthcoming 2010) and has contributed translations to *The New Yorker*, *New York Review of Books*, *Harper's*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *Verse*, *Words Without Borders* and *The New European Poets* anthology (Graywolf 2008), for which she was also an editor.

**Robert Vorlicky** is Associate Professor of Drama, Tisch School of the Arts, New York University. Vorlicky is the author of *Act Like a Man: Challenging Masculinities in American Drama*, *Tony Kushner in Conversation*, and *From Inner Worlds to Outer Space: The Multimedia Performances of Dan Kwong*. He is the past president of the American Theatre and Drama Society and the recipient of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, Fulbright Foundation (senior professor at the University of Zagreb), Wisconsin Arts Board, and numerous grants from TSOA. He is the dramaturg of a new musical, *Con-Man*, based on Herman Melville's last novel, *The Confidence Man*. He is affiliate faculty in the Department of English, the Department of Social and Cultural Analysis, and NYU Abu Dhabi.

# Introduction: Dramaturgy of the Real

Carol Martin

*Dramaturgy of the Real on the World Stage* is a rendezvous with the ways in which the “real,” a category that is both asserted and challenged in relation to claims of verisimilitude and truth, is being theatricalized on world stages in the twenty-first century. Theatre and performance that engages the real participates in the larger cultural obsession with capturing the “real” for consumption even as what we understand as real is continually revised and reinvented. Theatre of the real, also known as documentary theatre as well as docudrama, verbatim theatre, reality-based theatre, theatre of witness, tribunal theatre, nonfiction theatre, and theatre of fact, has long been important for the subjects it presents. More recent dramaturgical innovations in the ways texts are created and productions are staged sheds light on the ways theatre can form and be formed by contemporary cultural discourses about the real both on stage and off. Today’s most provocative personal, political, historical, and virtual theatre of the real embraces the cultural and technological changes that are reforming us globally and breaks away from the conservative and conventional dramaturgy of realism that was so much a part of documentary theatre in the late twentieth century. Aesthetically conservative documentary theatre, many times infused with leftist politics, continues today. Alongside it, and to some degree overtaking it, is an emerging theatre of the real that directly addresses the global condition of troubled epistemologies about truth, authenticity and reality.

Inherent in the very idea of documentary is an anxiety about truth and authenticity. As Janelle Reinelt observes in her essay, “The Promise of Documentary,” even when something is unmistakably authentic, as in the Zapruder film of the assassination of John F. Kennedy and George Holliday’s video of Rodney King being beaten, the knowledge that is produced may still be uncertain and contested. In the case of Rodney King, the video that seemed to so clearly portray King as an innocent victim of police violence was used by the defense to reverse that view (2009: 8). Theatre of the real also has its ironies about truth and authenticity. Unlike the at-the-moment eyewitness mode of documentary film and photography, theatre of the real is mostly

the result of a rehearsal process that consists of the repetition and revision of previous rehearsals. Theatre's authenticity is produced by iterations evoking Jean Baudrillard's shattering of the real by offering endless simulacra – copies without originals. Even as documentary theatre typically tries to divide fabrication from truth by presenting enactments of actual people and events from verifiable sources it is also where the real and the simulated collide and where they depend on each other. Much of today's dramaturgy of the real uses the frame of the stage not as a separation, but as a communion of the real and simulated; not as a distancing of fiction from nonfiction, but as a melding of the two. Contemporary theatre of the real has proliferated at the same time that, for better or for worse, there is a great expansion of ideas about "reality." Restored villages, Civil War reenactments, network television, blogs, YouTube and other internet innovations, cellphones, photography, plasma boards, surveillance cameras, and mainstream film in all its modes – documentary, mockumentary, historical recreation, "nonfictional" including animation, with documentary footage – all claim to be real. With the growth of the virtual world, the real is no longer a simple assertion of presence. The mediated is commonly understood as the real especially by the generation that has grown up with computers and virtual entertainment. Within this context, theatre of the real can be comparatively straightforward. It can acknowledge blurring the real and the represented in ways that are very much unlike television's not entirely trustworthy "reenactments," "docudramas," and "reality" shows. All of this emphasis on the real is part and parcel of the mediatization of everyday life – and, in the case of some types of theatre, an attempt to reclaim a simpler cultural time when there was only the "real" and the "represented." In all this, we are left with important questions. Can we definitively determine where reality leaves off and representation begins? Or are reality and representation so inextricable that they have become indiscernible?

What is the real that needs to be staged? In each geographic location, directors and playwrights as well as theatre audiences have their own answers to this question. Industrial "accidents," the perpetuation of a culture of death, the failures of social justice, the limitation of truth's ability to generate healing and change, the rationale of murder, and what it means to be a performer are among the answers offered by the texts in this anthology. The answers are both substantive and technical: about specific subject matter and also about the ways in which theatre and performance artists and their audiences construct their subjects. Beyond subject matter, Reinelt writes that the documentary is "not in the object but in the relationship between the object, its mediators (artists, historians, authors) and its audiences" (7). The relational dynamic Reinelt points out asks us both to know things and to question how we come to know things.

Globally, theatre of the real has multiple histories, aesthetic legacies, artistic forms, and sociopolitical purposes. This diversity is in keeping with what Marianne DeKoven describes as "not a unified movement or clearly defined

set of aesthetic practices” but a phenomenon that is “diverse, heterogeneous, [and] full of internal contradiction” (2004:16). Part of DeKoven’s discussion includes the displacement and suspicion of modernism’s utopian desires by postmodern perspectives. Postmodernism rejected master narratives and universal syntheses “emphasizing the diffuse, antihierarchical, antidualistic, local, particular, partial, temporary” (ibid.). In the twenty-first century, other forces, especially globalization and rising religious fundamentalism, have challenged some of the basic tenets of postmodernism while embracing others. The numerous histories and legacies of theatre of the real in the twenty-first century share important characteristics with postmodernism, including the particularization of subjectivity, the rejection of universality, the acknowledgement of the contradictions of staging the real within the frame of the fictional, and a questioning of the relationship between facts and truth. Theatre of the real’s strategies are often postmodern, especially in asserting that truth is contextual, multiple, and subject to manipulation; that language frames perception; that art can be objective; that perspectives proliferate; that history is a network of relationships; that things occur by chance; that the performer can be a persona and not necessarily a character in the theatrical sense; that theatre includes the quotidian; that the then, now, and soon-to-be can coexist on stage. Most decisively, the playwright as a single individual is displaced or even replaced by an assemblage of selected verbatim texts that are also often collectively devised. Most importantly, creators of theatre of the real assert that meaning is within reach even while using postmodern theatrical strategies.

Constructivist postmodernism is a useful concept because it articulates a post-postmodern theoretical perspective that can serve as a point of departure for a new generation of artists. Constructivist postmodernism permits the recognition that although postmodern techniques are largely shared by many cosmopolitan places in the world, these techniques can be and are used for very different ends. As Mike Vanden Heuvel points out:

Even as globalization makes these conditions [commodity capitalism and mediatization] increasingly prevalent across the globe, the fact remains that we are *not* “all postmoderns now.” In fact, nascent social movements like antiglobalization make it clear that, for activists who still believe that critical distance (and dissidence) is possible despite the “society of the spectacle,” it is not clear that even suburban America is emptied of residual and emergent discourses that might turn against the dominant paradigm of postmodernism and its concomitant narrowing of politics to acts of “transgression.” (2006:343)

Despite the postmodern assertion that truth is not entirely verifiable, most people live guided by convictions about what they believe to be true. It’s this world – the world where truth is championed even as we experience our

failure to ever know it with absolute finality – that theatre of the real attempts to stage. Its assertion is that there is something to be known in addition to a dizzying kaleidoscopic array of competing truths. Skepticism and irony are still present but no longer center stage. A new generation of artists and scholars is committed to understanding theatre as an act of positive consequence. This anthology presents the network of their practices in many forms.

The essays and texts gathered here reflect the ways the local and the global continue in the context of one another. As part of a global network of touring productions, theatre of the real's constructivist postmodernist claims (albeit often with surtitles, but many times even without them) are comprehensible wherever it travels. Its sources and destinations are cosmopolitan. Location remains defining, although not in the sense of a nationalist politics or fixed cultural representation. Works from distinct destinations travel to different destinations to present *versions* of global cosmopolitanism. The production of place – the places presented in these texts – happens through an act of narration. In this constellation of the local in the global, the places that are enacted are no longer timeless, fixed, discrete, or stable entities. Rather, these places are in process and as such are incomplete and indefinite. *Is.Man* by Adelheid Roosen, for example, is neither solely about Holland nor Turkey. Its discourse is Dutch, but its subject includes Turkish culture. *Is.Man* is as much about Holland's attempts to address resident immigrant culture as it is about a displaced Turkish culture. On the other hand, Philip Miller's *REwind: A Cantata for Voice, Tape and Testimony*'s subject is South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, while its discourse about race reaches across many cultures. What this indicates is that our assumptions about the ways in which performance practices and productions move between destinations cannot be solely based on notions of unique bound cultures with closed systems of meaning. Touring productions as well as performance and dramatic texts in translation result from the recontextualization and marketing of the local. Taken a step further, the global itself can be a kind of cultural destination that reaffirms cosmopolitanism and its movement of people mapped onto specific places.

The places, persons, and events represented by the texts and essays included here are both distinct and fluid in relationship with each other. Their presence in this anthology indicates the extent of global touring, of cultural as well as textual translation, and of the circulation of artists and scholars between different sites. The tension between the specific geographic locales of the individual texts and the porous borders of the places the texts represent draws our attention to the diverse purposes of theatre of the real. Teatr Ósmego Dnia's (Theatre of the Eighth Day) *The Files* from Poland, for example, converts the years of Communist rule into a painful situation comedy by quoting from and parodying the files the secret police kept on the theatre company. *REwind: Cantata* reanimates the testimony of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission by transforming select portions of it into an opera accompanied by images and dance. *Is.Man* stages Turkish honor killing

in Holland as a conflict of immigration and generational changes, transforming this conflict into a story told with narration, music, video, and a Sufi dance of healing. *Three Posters* by Rabih Mroué and Elias Khoury examines the culture of death in Lebanon and the “public relations” of Lebanese Islamic fundamentalists during the Israeli occupation by staging real and simulated martyr tapes. Paweł Demirski’s *Don’t Be Surprised When They Come to Burn Your House Down* explores the continuation of the Communist-era exploitation of the worker in Poland. The plays of Argentinean Vivi Tellas examine theatricality outside the theatre by looking at the ways in which individuals are living archives of text, performance behavior, and experience. And, *Art, Life & Show-Biz* by Ain Gordon dramatizes the backstage stories of American theatre in the context of presenting the contingencies of getting those stories and the decision-making process of organizing them into theatre. Included here are also theoretical essays about theatre of the real. My essay, “Bodies of Evidence,” explores the promises, contradictions and possibilities of this form of theatre; “Towards a Poetics of Theatre and Public Events” by Janelle Reinelt considers the ways in which documentary theatre participates in the dramatization of public events; “Staging Terror” by Wendy Hesford, examines the relationship between spectacles of war and theatre of the real; “Post-1990s Verbatim Theatre in South Africa: Exploring an African Concept of ‘Truth’” by Yvette Hutchison looks at how truth is historically constructed and situated; “Reality From the Bottom Up: Documentary Theatre in Poland” by Agnieszka Sowińska provides an overview of the way documentary theatre in Poland emerged and developed locally; and “The Scripted Realities of Rimini Protokoll” by Florian Malzacher examines what happens to the quotidian when placed within a theatrical frame.

### ***REwind: A Cantata for Voice, Tape and Testimony* by Philip Miller**

*REwind: A Cantata*, an opera composed by Philip Miller, premiered in South Africa on 16 December 2006, a new holiday called the National Holiday of Reconciliation. The opera uses a combination of stringed instruments, song, voice, narrative, dance, and visual images to recount South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that began in 1996 and concluded in 2003. The TRC was created as an intervention in cycles of vengeance by providing a public forum for confession and forgiveness. Perpetrators of murder and/or torture (the Death Squads, police, and army units) who told the truth about what they did to their victims and their families were given amnesty. The victims and their families traded justice and revenge for truth. “Thousands of peoples’ experiences were told in dusty halls all over the country and shown on TV most days. Often, the perpetrators had to also physically act out their methods of torture in front of their victims and the Commissioners



in these halls. The country held its collective breath to see if truth (and forgiveness) could triumph over vengeance and denial" (Peimer 2009:2). Miller's opera, created from testimonies of the TRC, emphasizes the aural domain of documentary. In her review of *REwind: A Cantata*, Catherine Cole describes Miller's use of the voice as going beyond a musical medium to the voice as the means of the embodiment of experience:

Through the hearings people "could for the first time use their voices again," says Miller, "and what we hear are people telling their stories – terrible, horrific; sometimes depraved, sometimes perpetrators with their own devastating evil." While much has been said about the "truth narratives" of the TRC and the importance of storytelling to the human rights agenda, Miller's work highlights something beyond narrative: the aural qualities of testimonies, the texture of sound, the grain in the voice.

(Cole 2009:87)

The sighs, breath-pauses, and catches-in-the-throat in *REwind* were aural enunciations of physical realities overburdened with painful memories. When I saw *REwind* on a beautiful summer night in July 2006 in Brooklyn, New York, as part of the Celebrate Brooklyn programming in Prospect Park, the effort of speaking and the burden of hearing were inextricable. By the end of the performance, the many rhythms of sung and spoken words, the portions of images projected on the huge screen, and the fragments of narratives from the archival audio recordings culminated in an irrepressible toyi-toyi dance that was full of a bewildering confusion of sorrow, determination, and triumph at having told the story again. The overwhelming sense was of both tragedy and triumph in the performance of poetry created from pain.

### *Is.Man* by Adelheid Roosen

Adelheid Roosen's interest in Turkish culture is within the context of immigrant culture in her country. *Is.Man* was created to help generate an understanding of Turkish men living in Holland who are convicted and imprisoned for the crime of "honor killing." Frustrated by the way that Dutch media portrayed Turkish men by repeatedly reporting a clash of cultures, Roosen decided to interview Turkish men imprisoned for honor killing in Holland with the hope of moving beyond the stereotype of unlearned people from a backward country. In fact, Turkey's modernization, largely formulated under the authoritarian rule of the progressive Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, was built on secularization and certain delimited notions of the emancipation of women. Head scarves, for example, often interpreted as a sign of obedience to oppressive Islam, are banned in Turkish schools and universities.<sup>1</sup>

*Is.Man* is about three generations of Turkish men and the kinship pressures they experience that reproduce their violence against women. *Is.Man* is also

about two opposing systems of law; tribal law and the institutional laws of Holland.

In Turkey honor killing is a contested notion. No one claims that killing does not occur, but should this killing be called "honor killing"? What are the intentions of this nomenclature? In Turkey, "honor killing" ("honor murder" is the literal translation of *namus cinayet*) is used to denote Kurdish otherness in a way that is analogous to how the West uses "honor killing" to depict third world backwardness. Turkish feminists prefer to say murders committed under the pretext of honor, because there are often other reasons for these crimes.

In the West, the phrase "honor killing" connotes a backward (Islamic) Middle East.<sup>2</sup> From a Turkish perspective, the phrase "honor killing" can be understood as reproducing postcolonial relations to the degree that it privileges a Western perspective. Although Turkey was never colonized, its social practices, especially concerning women, are understood by the world at large in relation to the West. What might a Turkish perspective be? There are many. In Turkey there are numerous nuanced legal, feminist, and political discourses about women. There are arguments for honor crimes as a category of criminal behavior that infringes on the rights of more than women. While women are first and foremost the targets of honor killing, there are other forms of honor and even honor killing. The Turkish anthropologist Nühket Sirman notes that honor concerns sexual behavior, femininity and masculinity, a sense of self, social standing, and operates in relation to both men and women, although in different ways (2004:44).

The difference in what honor entails for men and for women is the difference in gender. Thus in Turkey, a dishonorable man is one who is not trustworthy, and therefore unable to undertake his social responsibilities or to control his own sexuality and that of the women he is responsible for. A woman's honor, by contrast, is linked only to her sexuality.

(ibid.:45)

In Turkey, women die at the hands of their husbands, brothers, and sons. In the United States, women die at the hands of their husbands and less often at the hands of their brothers and sons. What do we call this? In the West, we tend to understand honor killing as collective tribal behavior as if the individual has nothing to do with it, and domestic violence as an abnormal individual behavior as if the society has nothing to do with it. The difference in understanding is enormous. The phrase "domestic violence," often misunderstood as occurring in one, lower, class of people, comes with alarming statistics but is arguably not understood by other cultures as an indication that the entire United States is a backward society.

*Is.Man* often tours with Roosen's *The Veiled Monologues*, a theatre work that is a corollary for Islamic women to *The Vagina Monologues* by Eve Ensler. Both

works are about Turkish culture as it is understood and misunderstood in the context of other host cultures.

### ***Three Posters* by Rabih Mroué and Elias Khoury**

Rabih Mroué and Elias Khoury developed *Three Posters* after the discovery by a friend of three uncut video “takes” of Jamal Sati’s 1985 “martyr tapes” in the offices of the Lebanese Communist Party. For Mroué and Khoury, seeing the three versions of a final farewell made clear that the martyr is a human being with human doubts, perhaps even doubts about his own martyrdom, leading the collaborators to create a three-part performance in which they first simulated a martyr tape. The simulation presents itself as real and, as such, unsettles the expectations of both theatrical fiction and reality. When a door below the monitor on which the audience has just witnessed a martyr video opens, we see Mroué and the camera videotaping him in his performance as a martyr named Khaled Rahhal. We don’t know whether or not Khaled Rahhal is a real person or a fictional invention. But we do know very clearly that Mroué is not Khaled Rahhal, but an actor. The moment the charade of Mroué as the martyr Khaled Rahhal is exposed, we learn that the “martyr” is alive: he is an actor and a creator of the performance we are watching, shattering the presumption that all martyrs are dead and exposing martyr tapes as a genre that can be both reproduced and simulated, multiplying the possibility of real enactment and ersatz reality.

Martyr tapes are videos shot shortly before a jihadist kills himself and others in an act of suicidal martyrdom for a specific cause. They are used both to memorialize martyrs for ideological purposes and as propaganda for political resistance. A typical citizen only sees what is determined to be the best take. Finding three takes of a martyr’s farewell was revelatory in that what was supposed to be an unequivocal act could now be understood as an act also containing ambiguity. And the three takes were, of course, each a rehearsal with the intention of creating a final video performance of the martyr convincing enough to assure the martyr that his act will take place and his eventual television spectators that his act has taken place, indicating that the future creates the past.

The present for Mroué and Khoury is a mixed blessing. Lebanon with its café life, theatre, and art scene used to be a cultural capitol of the Middle East. Many wars, both civil and foreign, changed all that. But, since 1990, a group of artists, writers, and filmmakers working on the fringes of society has been making art rife with political insight while trying to stay under the radar of a divided government (Wilson-Goldie 2007). Mroué and another frequent collaborator, Lina Saneh, are integral and important members of this generation of Lebanese artists who have avoided censors by largely ignoring them and by performing work for only a few nights.<sup>(3)</sup> In Beirut, Mroué is known for helping sustain Lebanese theatre by incorporating performance

art and performing in alternative spaces such as Art Lounge, a gallery, bar, and boutique in the Karantina industrial district (ibid.). Writing in the *New York Times*, Kaelen Wilson-Goldie describes Mroué and Saneh and their work: "With a string of formally inventive astringent performance pieces to their credit, they are to Beirut what the Wooster Group is to New York: a blend of avant-garde innovation, conceptual complexity and political urgency, all grounded in earthy humor" (ibid.).

*Three Posters* has toured Europe, India, and other Middle Eastern countries. At times, the foreign press could not distinguish between the Lebanese-centric dialect of Arabic used by Mroué and the classical Arabic used by Jamal Sati and other martyrs, which led to a misunderstanding of Lebanese resistance as being the same as the Palestinian Intifada (see Martin 2009).

### ***The Files* (2007) by Teatr Ósmego Dnia**

*The Files* by Teatr Ósmego Dnia is based on the secret police files that were kept on Teatr Ósmego Dnia (Theatre of the Eighth Day) from 1975 to 1983 and private letters written by the performers and company members during this period. The performance of these documents by Ewa Wójciak, Adam Borowski, Tadeusz Janiszewski, and Marcin Kęszycki is accompanied by grainy black-and-white films and photographs of early performances, making *The Files* a history of the company's work in the context of the tragicomedy of Poland under Communist rule. The company developed from a student theatre group in 1964 and rapidly became known as a dissident theatre group that was part of an alternative-theatre movement (influenced by Jerzy Grotowski, among others). They performed collectively devised work, using visual metaphors and physical acting that challenged Communist restrictions on freedom of action and thought. The response of the government was to deny company members jobs and passports and to plant the secret police in company meetings and rehearsals until in the 1980s, under martial law, the government openly banned their performances. Like other alternative theatres, Teatr Ósmego Dnia survived by performing in churches and continuing to cultivate an "inner freedom" of both consciousness and dissidence. In Poland, Teatr Ósmego Dnia is legendary for not being afraid and not yielding to the claustrophobic and paranoid mind set of Communism. As one Polish spectator said during a talkback after their performance at the theatre 59E59 in New York, "Because you were not afraid, you made us unafraid."

In 1989 Teatr Ósmego Dnia returned to Poland at the invitation of their home city of Poznań and was given government funding. The world had changed and many were unsure if this company could continue to make theatre in a post-Communist era as their earlier work was largely a form of political resistance. As it happened, the open-air spectacles that the company made after their return to Poland played an important part in the cultural life of the country after 1989. In the newly democratic society, freely presenting

and seeing theatre in the streets (a local form of participatory democracy free of government censorship) came to be a highly prized and appreciated endeavor that enabled alternative theatre to continue to play an important role in Poland (Cioffi 2005:73).

*The Files* is an avant-garde docudrama which uses the Communist-era secret police files kept on Teatr Ósmego Dnia to reveal the extent of government surveillance and the absurd performance intrigues the secret police created for themselves to play. At times it seems like what the secret police really wanted was to perform their own form of undercover street theatre. Communist "Secret Associates" identified in the police files by code names infiltrated the company by introduction to its members via other agents who were not supposed to reveal themselves. They carried out their surveillance activities and wrote their reports by performing forged identities in the world in which they moved, making *The Files* a tragicomedy about spying in the name of the government. Whereas typically the archive is an authenticator of truth, in *The Files* the archive of the secret police functions as the institutionalization of lies. The story of *The Files* is the story of Teatr Ósmego Dnia's refusal to participate in the terrible fiction created by Communism and its official archive. For a Polish audience, the performance was also a performance of memory, of what it was like under Communist rule.

The company had decided not to request access to their files and so was surprised when they arrived in one big package at their door. As they read, they recognized in the poorly written bureaucratic language and preposterous scenarios of spying what they had survived. "From the beginning, we laughed when we read our files. We knew how the system functioned, we had no illusions," said Janiszewski (Martin 2008). All of their work during the Communist era was a resistance against what the files represent – the triumph of a corrupt government over the minds and hearts of its people. *The Files* is a cautionary tale against the loss of passion for freedom of thought and speech and the danger of the loss of inspiration from art and literature. At the end of the performance, Wójciak sings only part of a song she sung so many years ago. When I asked her about this partial song, she said, "It was part of her experience but things are different now" (Martin 2008). Cutting off the song makes the performance stop short of nostalgia for the good old bad days.

### ***Don't Be Surprised When They Come to Burn Your House Down* by Paweł Demirski**

Paweł Demirski, known for his capitalist-realistic approach to drama, writes about a real event in the new political and economic order of Post-Communist Poland (Tysza 1996:71). *Don't Be Surprised When They Come to Burn Your House Down* was written after Demirski participated in a workshop on verbatim theatre in the United Kingdom, where he learned how to use factual sources to interrogate and comment on the remnants of Communism

and new forms of oppression. Being an inheritor of both the directness and intimacy of Polish alternative theatre and his exposure to British verbatim theatre and Teatr.doc from Russia situates Demirski as a player in the global contact and circulation of theatre forms. His subject, however, is one taken from an event in Poland following his interest in the ways social, political, and economic realities act on people. The people in *Don't Be Surprised When They Come to Burn Your House Down* are named by their profession or gender or family relationship: Lawyer, Cleaner, Worker, Manager, She, and Sister. With the exception of She and Sister, the relationships are formed by human hierarchies and the manipulation of power in the service of self-interest. She is trying to undercover the truth about the industrial accident that killed her husband. Yet the truth She seeks is blocked by the psychological, monetary, and political ambitions of others, creating for She a dystopic confusion and alienation.

The methods of production of Polish theatre have continuity with work before 1989, especially in script development and the audience and actor relationship (Tyszkla 1996:76). Immediately after the fall of Communism, it was no longer necessary to convict the totalitarian government of its wrongdoings. What first emerged was a theatre that was able to participate freely in social and artistic expression. Cultural forms grew and quickly became institutionalized with local, state, and Western European support and *raca u podstaw* (public service for the enlightenment of society) became a primary concern of theatre (ibid.:77). Demirski's *Don't Be Surprised When They Come to Burn Your House Down* continues this stream of theatre in Poland by incriminating the deferral of liability of the entrepreneurial manager class in Polish industry. Demirski's plays have been typically produced in official drama-repertory theatres up till now.

### Excerpts from the Plays of Vivi Tellas

Vivi Tellas's work is unlike other work in Argentina. She has more in common with Rimini Protokoll in Germany and with the reality-based work of Richard Maxwell in the United States. As Tellas is interested in the threshold between the real and the theatrical, she stages both the quotidian and the extraordinary of daily life. In careful compositions, people united by family, by profession, and by employment are brought to stage as themselves. Tellas is not focused on whether or not being on stage as one's self is even possible but on the whole process of bringing those she invites to the stage. Regular people *and* the real worlds to which they belong are her subject. These worlds are for Tellas living archives articulated in daily rituals, images, ways of being, habits of interacting, experience, knowledge, and texts. These living archives housed in individuals use theatrical elements such as repetition, the construction and use of space, scenes, storytelling, spectators, and entrances and exits in ways that verge on the theatrical. Rehearsal is a process of observing how

selected performers present themselves, what they bring to rehearsal in the form of letters, photographs, images, and knowledge of film, theatre, art, and music. All this is formed by a largely intuitive inquiry into the nature of stories about individual lives. The result is somewhere between autobiography, biography, and documentary. The fascination of this work is its articulation of how the ordinary is extraordinary and how the extraordinary is, in fact, often part of the ordinary. For Tellas, the worlds that individuals hold within themselves are like a world of ready-mades: of found objects or, more accurately, selected objects. These worlds are not random but selected for their inherent theatricality. This theatricality is not cleaned up for presentation but presented “as is,” as incongruous at that might be. As Tellas brought these worlds into being, she sees her pedestrian performers lapsing into a kind of nostalgia for the worlds in which their lives have been lived. This leads Tellas to the poetry of extinction to which all living archives pass.

### *Art, Life & Show-Biz* by Ain Gordon

*Art, Life & Show-Biz* is a homage to theatre and to life, to life as theatre, and theatre as life. All the contingencies and decisions of staging a play come together in the zooming forward, screeching, and turning sideways and then back again structure of *Art, Life & Show-Biz*. Ain Gordon continually points out how our attention is focused by writing and directing decisions. “What comes next is a flashback, a sidebar, a subheading, and **the point**,” we are warned early on. It’s one of several autobiographical moments in the service of telling us that the director in this work is telling his own story by suppressing it. *Art, Life & Show-Biz* is both theatre (art) and life but on two different “sides.” Theatre is Gordon’s life and that of his protagonists. “Life” is “Art” because, well, a life in the theatre is a life in art.

*Art, Life & Show-Biz* is a backstage-onstage event about living the life of a performer and performing; a tears-through-the-greasepaint story without the hegemony of character. Cramming life into “theatrical Art-size sound bites,” up, down, underneath, accidents of trust, differences of memories, framing, posing, key words, psychology, loss, love, tears, triumphs, art and soup cans, dresses that are costumes and dresses that are not costumes, asides, auditions, stage business, the history of theatre, breaking into the profession, chemistry between performers, delicious nasty gossip about famous choreographers and ballet teachers, scams, phrasing, what makes or breaks a performer, timing, and some kind of indeterminacy about being offered coffee (except by Valda) make up the offstage life offered here. It’s all in the tone of triumph and tragedy and the homely, but pleasant hours spent between the two.

As the final piece in this anthology, *Art, Life & Show-Biz* is a reminder of everything that goes into the creation of theatre, of the ways in which both fictional and nonfictional theatre is constructed at every moment. Gordon’s presence in the work and on stage – as an author making decisions about

the structure of scenes, as an interviewer trying to get the story, as a director taking control of the presence of three strong women and making them fit into his idea for this work, and as a decider of order even when that order simulates a bit of chaos – lets us in on theatre's logic, predeterminations, and contingencies. Like the dresses that Gordon observes are “both from the 20s – both now in the 70s – one a costume onstage – one an outfit offstage – ” art and life are both real but when they meet in show biz they are both also costumes. This doubleness of the real and the fictional, of on stage and off, of ordinary and extraordinary lurks in all forms of theatre of the real.

In addition to my introduction, each text in this anthology is preceded by a contextual essay. The style of these essays is diverse. Some are poetic, some are historical, some take the form of an interview, and some are explanations. I have purposefully sought this diversity of form to underscore the diversity of inquiry and location represented in these pages.

## Notes

1. Recently, the prohibition on head scarves is being challenged in Turkey by young women who want to be able to make the personal choice of wearing a head scarf. At the same time, Turkey is currently led by a party of observant Muslims who, many people fear, may try to undermine the secular laws of the state. The agonized debate in Turkey is about whether or not there can be a moderate Islam, and, if so, how it might work in an open society. There have been protests both against what some see as a growing religiosity in Turkey and against what others see as an authoritarian secularism. Any stereotype a Westerner might form in her mind does not conform to the diversity of what one experiences in Turkey.
2. When I was a visiting professor at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul in the summer of 2008, mentioning any interest in “honor killing” was greeted with suspicion, if not hostility. Some colleagues sought affirmation that “honor killing” was not my subject, to which I responded that my task was this very writing in service of *Is.Man*, which I saw twice at St Ann's Warehouse in Brooklyn in the fall of 2007.
3. The work *Who's Afraid of Representation* did not escape the censors and was banned on 14 August 2007. This work included the true story of a civil servant who killed some of his colleagues after he was fired from his job (see Wilson-Goldie 2007).

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# **Part 1**

## **Essays**

# 1

## Bodies of Evidence

*Carol Martin*

Contemporary documentary theatre represents a struggle to shape and remember the most transitory history – the complex ways in which men and women think about the events that shape the landscapes of their lives. Much post-9/11 documentary theatre is etched with the urgency of the struggle over the future of the past.

Those who make documentary theatre interrogate specific events, systems of belief, and political affiliations precisely through the creation of their own versions of events, beliefs, and politics by exploiting technology that enables replication; video, film, tape recorders, radio, copy machines, and computers are the sometimes visible, sometimes invisible, technological means of documentary theatre. While documentary theatre remains in the realm of handcraft – people assemble to create it, meet to write it, gather to see it – it is a form of theatre in which technology is a primary factor in the transmission of knowledge.

Here the technological post-postmodern meets oral theatre culture. The most advanced means of replication and simulation are used to capture and reproduce “what really happened” for presentation in the live space of the theatre. Technology is often the initial generating component of the tripartite structure of contemporary documentary theatre: technology, text, and body. The bodies of the performers as well as the bodies of those being represented in documentary theatre are decisive in ways that overlap but are also different from fictive theatre. In documentary theatre, the performers are sometimes those whose stories are being told. But more often than not documentary theatre is where “real people” are absent – unavailable, dead, disappeared – yet reenacted. They are represented through various means, including stage acting, film clips, photographs, and other “documents” that attest to the veracity of both the story and the people being enacted.<sup>1</sup>

How events are remembered, written, archived, staged, and performed helps determine the history they become. More than enacting history, although it certainly does that, documentary theatre also has the capacity to stage historiography. At its best, it offers us a way to think about disturbing

contexts and complicated subject matter while revealing the virtues and flaws of its sources. "History is hysterical: it is constituted only if we consider it, only if we look at it – and in order to look at it, we must be excluded from it," writes Roland Barthes (1981:65). Yet as Freddie Rokem points out: "The theatre 'performing history' seeks to overcome both the separation and the exclusion from the past, striving to create a community where the events from this past will matter again" (2000:xii). Yet the idea of making events from the past matter again can be misleading in so much as it is always also the present that we want to make matter. In practice, much of contemporary documentary theatre is written contemporaneously with the events that are its subject matter. Documentary theatre can directly intervene in the creation of history by unsettling the present by staging a disquieting past.

In the interest of differentiating documentary theatre from other forms of theatre, especially historical fiction, it is useful to understand it as created from a specific body of archived material: interviews, documents, hearings, records, video, film, photographs, and the like. Most contemporary documentary theatre makes the claim that everything presented is part of the archive. But equally important is the fact that not everything in the archive is part of the documentary. This begs the crucial question: What is the basis for the selection, order, and manner of presentation of materials from the archive? The process of selection, editing, organization, and presentation is where the creative work of documentary theatre gets done. Creating performances from edited archival material can both foreground and problematize the nonfictional even as it uses actors, memorized dialogue, condensed time, precise staging, stage sets, lighting, costumes, and the overall aesthetic structuring of theatrical performance. The process is not always transparent. Documentary theatre creates its own aesthetic imaginaries while claiming a special factual legitimacy.

Documentary theatre takes the archive and turns it into repertory, following a sequence from behavior to archived records of behavior to the restoration of behavior as public performance. At each phase, a complex set of transformations, interpretations, and inevitable distortions occur. In one sense, there is no recoverable "original event" because the archive is already an operation of power (who decides what is archived, and how?) as well as sometimes a questionable arbiter of truth. (Documents can be distorted, falsified and misrepresentative.) The interpolation of a document between what is behaved and what is performed underscores Richard Schechner's theory of "restored" or "twice-behaved behavior." The three core ideas of Schechner's theory are that the future creates the past, that all behavior is twice-behaved, and that public performance is of the "not" and the "not-not" (1985). The future creates the past by constructing a past specifically designed to make a particular future more likely to occur. All social behavior is actually the performance of "strips of behavior" that have already been behaved and are, therefore, "twice-behaved." Apparent originality occurs at the level of

arrangement and context. The “not” and the “not not” are inherent in role-playing. The roles one plays in social life as well as in the theatre are not one’s self but are not one’s self. As staged politics, specific instances of documentary theatre construct the past in service of a future the authors would like to create. As twice-behaved behavior, documentary theatre self-consciously blends into and usurps other forms of cultural expression such as political speeches, courts of law, forms of political protest, and performance in everyday life. As a condition of performance, the actors on documentary stages perform both as themselves and as the actual personages they represent. The absent, unavailable, dead, and disappeared make an appearance by means of surrogation. What makes documentary theatre provocative is the way in which it strategically deploys the appearance of truth while inventing its own particular truth through elaborate aesthetic devices, a strategy that is integral to the restoration of behavior.

With the use of technology, embodied practice does not necessarily proceed body to body. Nor is the move from repertory to archive a one-way move. Diana Taylor asserts that the repertoire is distinct from the archive in that it requires presence (2003:20). With documentary theatre the repertoire still requires presence but it also often requires technology as an integral part of the means to embodied memory and as necessary for the verification of the factual accuracy of both the text and the performance. Performance knowledge becomes reproducible, even embodied, via an archive at least partly created from film, video, audio recordings, and digital manipulations. Taylor observes that history and memory exist on two parallel but not identical lines: the archive (documents) and the repertoire (embodied memory, oral tradition). With documentary theatre, the domains of the archive and the repertoire are interwoven reminding us that new media creates radically different ways of understanding and experiencing embodiment. Theatre director Chris Mirto commented that performing documentary theatre was “like lip-synching, a frozen thing – but the body still moves. The voice and body are together and separate at the same time,” reminding us that new media creates new ways of understanding and experiencing embodiment.<sup>2</sup> The very “originals” that documentarians draw on are increasingly virtual archives, which confer legitimacy and give a strong feeling of “being there,” of the “real thing.” Adherence to an archive makes documentary theatre appear closer to actuality than fiction. The archive is concrete, historically situated, and relatively permanent; it is material and lasting while theatrical representation is intangible and ephemeral. We know, also, that filming and recording change what is documented; the instruments of preservation affect what’s preserved.

Documentary theatre emphasizes certain kinds of memory and buries others. What is outside the archive – glances, gestures, body language, the felt experience of space, and the proximity of bodies – is created by actors and directors according to their own rules of admissibility. The hidden seams

of documentary theatre raise questions about the continuum between documentation and simulation. Extratextual and subtextual “languages” are what we normally think of as theatre. It is precisely the way interpretation is built from what is *not part of the archive* that brings “real life” and believability to documentary theatre. The testimony of the actors gives the evidence of the playwright factual verisimilitude. Ironically, then, it is precisely what is not in the archive, what is added by making the archive into repertory, that infuses documentary theatre with its particular theatrical viability.

Evidence and testimony are used in ways not unlike a court of law. The path of evidence can be forensically constructed from the archive, as a good prosecutor reconstructs a crime. In both the theatre and the courtroom, the evidence serves as a pretext for the testimony of actors, of witnesses and lawyers.

Evidence is typically impersonal – material objects, laboratory reports, bank records, et cetera – while testimony involves the narration of memory and experience. The drama of a trial, at least US trials, depends on presenting evidence in the form of conflicting testimony. Documentary theatre draws on this courtroom tradition of conflicting narration. Its practitioners use the archive as evidence to create a performance of testimony; audiences understand what they see and hear as nonfiction; the actors ostensibly perform “verbatim.” This allows an audience to forget that creating any work out of edited archival materials relies on the formal qualities of fiction as much as on archival evidence. The real-life drama of the courtroom is no different, finally. In court, as in documentary theatre, the forensic evidence stored in the archive is as much constructed as it is found. Not only do the police frequently fabricate evidence, but also both the prosecution and the defense do everything they can to credit/discredit evidence that might support/destroy their case.

Herein lay the problem. Is documentary theatre just another form of propaganda, its own system of constructed half-truths for the sake of specific arguments? Typically its texts and performances are presented not just as *a* version of what happened, but *the* version of what happened. The intention is to persuade spectators to understand specific events in particular ways. Even when the text is indefinite in its conclusions, audience response may not be. The occasion of documentary theatre can be seen as a political affiliation in and of itself. The outrage at New York Theatre Workshop’s decision to postpone a production of *My Name is Rachel Corrie*, the story of the 23-year-old pro-Palestinian American activist who was crushed to death by an Israeli bulldozer while trying to protect a Palestinian home, is a case in point. James Nicola, the artistic director of New York Theatre Workshop, made the decision to postpone the play after canvassing unidentified Jewish friends and advisors. “The uniform answer we got was that the fantasy that we could present the work of this writer simply as a work of art without appearing to take a position was just that, a fantasy,” Nicola commented (in McKinley

2006:2). The play aside, after her death Rachel Corrie became a polarizing figure. Yasser Arafat lionized her as a martyr, aligning her memory with that of suicide bombers (Segal 2006:1). Nicola expressed concern that the January 2006 Palestinian election of Hamas, bent on the destruction of Israel, would overly determine the reception of the play in the United States.

Rachel Corrie was unequivocally on the side of the Palestinians. Toward the end of the play, she answers her mother's suggestion that Palestinian violence against Israel may justify Israel's actions by defending Palestinian action as resistance to occupation. Corrie accuses the Israeli government of defying the fourth Geneva Convention "which prohibits collective punishment, prohibits the transfer of an occupying country's population into an occupied area, prohibits the expropriation of water resources and the destruction of civilian infrastructure such as farms [...]" (Rickman and Viner 2005:48). Corrie's story as represented in the editing of her emails, letters, and diary entries presents her desire to end the suffering of Palestinians even at the cost of her own life.

The play does not mention the tunnels from Egypt into Gaza used for transporting rocket launchers, guns, and explosives (Rothstein 2006:1). Nor is there any discussion of the countless and continuing attacks on Israeli civilians intended not only to kill with explosives but also to maim with packed nails and traumatize the memory of Jewish festivals. (The 1996 Purim massacre at Dizengoff Center, including the murder of children dressed up in costumes for the holiday, and the 2002 Passover massacre at the Park Hotel in Netanya where many of the celebrants were Holocaust survivors, for which Hamas claimed responsibility, are only two examples.) On both sides, the lists are long. And on both sides there are many, Jews and Muslims, Israelis and Arabs, who work for peace every day of their lives.

*My Name is Rachel Corrie* is a disturbing and moving play. Corrie was so young and yet had been an activist for so long when she died. Rothstein is correct when he points out, "Corrie's is an unusual voice, engrossing in its imaginative power, hinting at adolescent transformation and radicalization" (2006:1). The play is equivocal about its real subject as at its end it presents a video about Rachel Corrie, not the Israeli Palestinian conflict. The last scene of the play is a video recording of Rachel Corrie at her Fifth Grade "Press Conference" on World Hunger:

My dream is to stop hunger by the year 2000. My dream is to give the poor a chance. My dream is to save the forty thousand people who die each day. My dream can and will come true if we all look into the future and see the light that shines there. If we ignore hunger, the light will go out. If we all help and work together, it will grow and burn free with the potential of tomorrow.

(Rickman and Viner 2005:52)

Rachel's light did go out while enacting her political conviction. We need to know this. We need to weep over our collective failure to make the world the place it could be. We need to see *My Name is Rachel Corrie*, and react according to our own convictions.

Asking spectators to examine the ways in which documentary functions is very much a part of some forms of documentary theatre. Artists such as the Lebanese Walid Raad and the German director Hans-Werner Kroesinger create work that subverts ordinary documentary theatre by complicating and interrogating archival truth. The result is a genre that can invite contemplation of the ways in which stories are told – a form of Brechtian distancing that asks spectators to simultaneously understand the theatrical, the real, and the simulated, each as its own form of truth.

One might ask what documentary theatre does, what are its functions? These include:

1. *To reopen trials* in order to critique justice, as in *The Trial of the Refusniks* by Igal Ezraty (2004); *Gross Indecency* (1997) by Moisés Kaufman; and the trial plays of Emily Mann, *Execution of Justice* (1983) and *Greensboro (A Requiem)* (1996).
2. *To create additional historical accounts*, as do *I Am My Own Wife* (2003) by Doug Wright; *Talking to Terrorists* (2005) by Robin Soans; *Guantánamo: "Honor Bound to Defend Freedom"* (2004) by Victoria Brittain and Gillian Slovo; *The Colour of Justice* (1998) by Nicolas Kent and Richard Norton-Taylor; *The Files* by Teatr Ósmego Dnia; and, *Is.Man* by Adelheid Roosen.<sup>3</sup>
3. *To reconstruct an event*, as in *Three Posters: A Performance/Video* (2000) by Elias Khoury and Rabihi Mroué, and even a total environment such as Plimoth Plantation.<sup>4</sup>
4. *To intermingle autobiography with history*, as in Ron Vawter's part-documentary *Roy Cohn/Jack Smith* (1994), in which Vawter sutures the lives of three very different gay men: Roy Cohn, Jack Smith, and himself; Leeny Sack's *The Survivor and the Translator* (1980), built around an interview she did with her maternal grandmother, Rachela Rachman, a Holocaust survivor; Emily Mann's *Annulla: An Autobiography* (1988), the story of a Holocaust survivor and her interviewer; and Ain Gordon's *Art, Life & Show-Biz*, which mingles the stories of three famous female performers (who perform themselves) with Gordon's own autobiography.
5. *To critique the operations of both documentary and fiction*, as does Walid Raad's Atlas Group, in which the archives are real, simulated, and invented; *The Files* by Teatr Ósmego Dnia, in which the archive as a source of information is revealed as its own tragicomedy; and, *Don't Be Surprised When They Come to Burn Your House Down* by Paweł Demirski, in which the protagonist rejects the fiction in which she is being asked to believe.
6. *To elaborate the oral culture of theatre and the theatricality of daily life* in which gestures, mannerisms, and attitudes are passed and replicated via



technology, as does Anna Deavere Smith's process in which she uses tape recordings of her interviewees to both become possessed by them and to allow a separation between the actor's self and the other; and, Vivi Tellas in her staging of quotidian events, props, and ideas (see Martin 1996:192).

The paradox of a theatre of facts that uses representation to enact a relationship to the real should not be lost in the enthusiasm for a politically viable theatre. Documentary theatre's blurring of the real and the represented is just as problematic as television's ambiguous "reenactments," "docudramas," and "reality" shows. It is part and parcel of the mediatisation of everyday life. Where does one type of performance leave off and another begin? No doubt the phrase "documentary theatre" fails us. It is inadequate. Yet at present it is the best phrase available. In the United Kingdom, documentary theatre is known as "verbatim theatre" because of its penchant for direct quotation. However, verbatim theatre does not necessarily display its quotation marks, its exact sources. "Verbatim" can also be an unfortunately accurate description of documentary theatre as it infers great authority to moments of utterance unmitigated by an *ex post facto* mode of maturing memory. Its duplicitous nature is akin to the double-dealing of television docudramas.

Because so much documentary theatre has been made in order to "set the record straight" or to bring materials otherwise ignored to the public's attention, we ought not ignore its moral and ethical claims to truth. It is no accident that this kind of theatre has reemerged during a period of international crises of war, religion, government, truth, and information. Governments "spin" the facts in order to tell stories. Theatre spins them right back in order to tell different stories. Poststructuralist thought has correctly insisted that social reality – including reporting on social reality – is constructed. There is no "really real" anywhere in the world of representation. Depending on who you are, what your politics are, documentary theatre will seem to be "getting at the truth" or "telling another set of lies." Representation creates multiple truths for its own survival: oral, textual, and performed stories invite repetition, revision, and reconfiguration.

Theatre, after all, combines the emotional weight of storytelling with truth-telling and a sense of experiencing something happening right in front of our eyes. At the same time, theatre is miragelike. It disappears as you get closer to it, and as you submit it to rigorous examination. Documentary theatre's seemingly stable telling and retelling in the context of the ephemeral medium of theatre points to how quickly the past can be broken and reassembled. Official memory laws announce both the importance and political liability of memory in determining historical truth.<sup>5</sup> Even when the laws are apparently objective and accurate, legislating historical truth raises suspicion because it dictates opinion and forecloses freedom of speech. Nonlegislative memory regulation – such as some forms of documentary theatre – is ostensibly designed to offer the opportunity to reexamine and reconsider evidence and

opinion and exercise freedom of speech. In practice, documentary theatre can be as prescriptive as it is provocative in the way it functions as its own domain of memory.<sup>6</sup>

Late-twentieth-century documentary theatre tended to privilege local and national narratives.<sup>7</sup> Things changed after 9/11. With the US government using its enormous military and covert power in many parts of the world and shrouding its operations at home (the Patriot Act, Homeland Security), an increasing number of documentary theatre works began to address global crises across national borders. How should we look at and what can we really know about the murder of Stephen Lawrence, the abuses at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo, Lebanese car bombings, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the problems and possibilities of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Turkish honor killings in Holland, and the sexual abuse scandals in the Roman Catholic Church? How can we regard all this as theatre? As I write, the styles of documentary theatre continue to morph.

Clearly there is no single ideology or style of presentation that best responds to these questions or typifies documentary theatre. Theatre is a place where words are an indication of content, not content itself; they are part of a whole, not the whole in its entirety. A good actor "does" the words as gestures and the gestures as if they were words. Productions of plays place actions and words in a dynamic flux at particular moments in history for specific audiences. Every production creates specific meanings, confluences, ideas, and feelings. In other words, every production is an adaptation.

Finally, what is real and what is true are not necessarily the same. A text can be fictional yet true. A text can be nonfictional yet untrue. Documentary theatre is an imperfect answer that needs our obsessive analytical attention especially since, in ways unlike any other form of theatre, it claims to have bodies of evidence.

## Notes

1. Moisés Kaufman's *The Laramie Project* (2000) is interesting as it employs different kinds of acting. The style of acting varies depending upon the actor involved. According to dramaturge Steve Wangh, Andy Paris was more interested than the other actors in gestural veracity, performing in the style of Anna Devereaux Smith. Other actors adhered to conventional acting, using their research to "build characters." In an email Wangh wrote: "Amanda Gronich was always a natural 'character' actor, doing vocal imitations, while Greg Pierotti made only slight personal adjustments in the direction of character" (2002). According to Wangh, Kaufman insisted on actors maintaining a Brechtian distance between themselves and their characters, as he did not want the actors' personae to entirely disappear. In fact, the boundaries between different approaches to documentary acting are very fluid.
2. Chris Mirto and I had this conversation on 21 January after I saw his staged reading of *Dionysus in 69* at the Jefferson Market Library. Mirto had seen Brian De Palma's

film of The Performance Group's 1968 production, which leaves out major portions of the play. The film, the original performance text, production photographs, and Max Waldman's studio photographs of the birth and death rituals were the documents Mirto used to mount his staged reading.

3. At present this is the largest category of documentary theatre. Post-2001 plays include *The Exonerated* (2004) by Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen; *My Name is Rachel Corrie* (2005) edited by Alan Rickman and Katharine Viner; *Stuff Happens* (2004) and *The Permanent Way* (2003) by David Hare; *The Arab-Israeli Cookbook* (2003) by Robin Soans; and *Justifying War* (2003) edited by Richard Norton-Taylor, among many others.
4. What makes restored villages such as Plimoth Plantation in Plymouth, Massachusetts, and museums such as the Tenement Museum in New York different from other kinds of documentary theatre is that the actors interact with the audience. Their dialogue is scripted, planned to be historically accurate, but not texted, so that they can answer questions and have conversations with the audience as long as the frame of reference is their time period and/or event.
5. France's 1990 Gayssot law made denying the Holocaust a crime. Many countries, including Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Belgium, and Poland, followed suit with similar memory laws.
6. In "Another Kind of Metamorphosis" I wrote about contested memory: "Memory, when given its time and space, is often anguishing. So distressing are parts of Poland's social and religious memory that a team of historians at the Institute of National Remembrance has to help determine what national memory might be. Right now Radzilow of sixty years ago bleeds in the brains of its citizens, as it should. Taunted, beaten, tormented, stabbed, and burned alive were the Jewish women, children, and men. Yet the monument commemorating the massacre is wrong: the wrong date, the wrong perpetrators. Bishop Stanislaw Stefanek of Lomza says the people of the region were innocent. In a compelling performative act, Reverend Henryk Jankowski, agreeing with Stefanek, made a model of the charred barn where 500 Jewish people were burned alive and placed it in his church to remind congregants of the false accusations against them. A model of a charred barn where 500 were murdered as a reminder of innocence? Why would anyone want to disguise a symbol of murder as a symbol of innocence? This must be what the Catholic Church means by the 'mystery of God'" (2001:288–91; published in Polish).
7. In 1992 Anna Deavere Smith performed *Fires in the Mirror* at the Public Theatre in New York. In the play, Smith told the stories of the Crown Heights riots after an accident involving a rebbi whose car struck and killed Gavin Cato, a black child, which was followed by a retaliation murder of a young Jewish scholar, Yankel Rosenbaum. *Fires in the Mirror* shifted our understanding of the ways in which social justice can be theatrically conceptualized and staged. Predating Smith's work is that of Emily Mann who also addresses social justice. To date, Mann's documentary plays are: *Annulla Allen: The Autobiography of a Survivor* (1977; Theatre Communications Group, 1985), *Still Life* (1980; Dramatists Play Service, 1982); *Execution of Justice* (1984; American Theatre Magazine, 1985), *Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters' First 100 Years* (1995; Theatre Communications Group, 1996), *Greensboro (A Requiem)* (1996; Theatre Communications Group, 1997). *Annulla* and *Still Life* were created from interviews. With *Execution of Justice* and *Greensboro (A Requiem)*, Mann expanded her documentary technique by adding letters, recordings, films, videos, court records, historical records, interviews, and newspaper accounts to her interviews.

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## 2

# Toward a Poetics of Theatre and Public Events: In the Case of Stephen Lawrence

Janelle Reinelt

The day after the second London bombing episode (8 July 2005), I walked across town from Fleet Street to Sloane Square's Royal Court Theatre to see *Talking to Terrorists*, a play by Robin Soans based on interviews with people who have been involved with or directly affected by terrorism. The play – directed by Max Stafford-Clark as a joint production between his company, Out of Joint, and the Royal Court Theatre – is only one of a number of recent British plays that have come to be called “Verbatim Theatre” because they use people's actual words.

At the Tricycle Theatre, one in a series of “Tribunal Plays” staged the David Kelly Inquiry even before the actual Inquiry's final report had been released.<sup>1</sup> Starting in 1994, the Tricycle's Artistic Director, Nicolas Kent, has collaborated with *Guardian* reporter Richard Norton-Taylor to produce plays based on courtroom or inquiry transcripts. The most successful of these was *The Colour of Justice* (1999), the play based on the Macpherson Inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence. This play is, in part, the main subject of this essay, but the events in London at the time of its writing spurred me to discuss it in the context of two issues: Why is it that documentary theatre pieces – whether “verbatim,” or “tribunal,” or some other more hybrid form – have grown in number and popularity in Britain in the last few years? What is the relationship between the contemporaneity of the events they portray and the success of the performances?

Everybody recognizes that we live in theatricalized times. The contemporary world, with the United States at the forefront, dramatizes its exploits and its romances, its wars and its diplomacy, its major crimes and misdemeanors, its sports and entertainment – these latter two, performances by definition.

As Jon McKenzie writes in *Perform or Else*, “Performance is a stratum of power/knowledge that emerge[d] in the United States after the Second World War [...] Something along the lines of a generalized performance is, shall we say, hardwired to our future” (2001:19–20). McKenzie has helped us see how our present situation is the outgrowth of cultural, organizational, and technical changes converging through a postwar period of economic, political,

and scientific transformation. Digital and media technologies, microchips and massive computational power, transnational economics and the Genome Project have brought forward our own forms of theatricalization, specific to this new epoch. Reality TV's emergence as a reflexive form of mimesis, a *mise en abyme* of performance, seems merely the most banal evidence of a society that understands itself through dramaturgical structures. The 9/11 attacks seemed, as Tony Kubiak has noted, "designed especially for us [...] its scale, the choice of targets, the sheer spectacular impact of the images seemed [...] constructed with a distinctly American theatricality in mind" (2002:2).

Great Britain is similarly in the grip of such theatrics: In the summer of 2003, actors playing "real" politicians reenacted nightly, just after the evening news, the appearances their characters had made that day at the judicial inquiry into the suicide of David Kelly, the arms expert who dared to suggest that the Blair government had over-hyped (theatricalized?) its evidence of weapons of mass destruction. Tony Blair, castigated as a master of "spin," has emerged untarnished after the disastrous debut of Gordon Brown who has his own spin problems. And certainly, British audiences have been as enthralled with reality TV as their American counterparts. Scholarly as well as popular analyses of the demise of Princess Diana have appeared in both the United States and the United Kingdom utilizing the explicit methods of performance studies (Taylor 2003; Kear and Steinberg 1999). Public life's theatricalization is no longer a contested issue.

Some theatre scholars, however, have been troubled by the ubiquitous use of the language of performance in connection with public life, an objection to what might be called the promiscuity of the theatrical. In their study of *Theatricality*, Tracy Davis and Tom Postlewait worry about this tendency to apply the language of theatre and performance beyond its disciplinary boundaries. They charge that, "the desire to characterize performance as a comprehensive idea, even a system, has often been done not only in ignorance of the complicated history of the concept but also in disregard for its capacity to be rather imprecise" (2003:34). While agreeing with the notion that the over-application of the theatrical to forms of cultural practice not specifically having to do with traditional meanings of theatre can dilute the power of the term to mean specifically and technically, I want to argue that the present historical moment is in fact specifically and technically theatrical and performative. It is not only a conception of theatre as the unreal or merely artificial that is useful for understanding contemporary public life, but on the contrary, theatre's capacity for creating a new real, making manifest the real, embodying the real within the realm of images and sensations as well as the realm of discursivity.

This efficacious aspect of theatre and performance is replete with performativity, the process through which a (speech) act becomes a doing, although this idea was originally conceived by J. L. Austin to exclude theatre.<sup>2</sup> He considered theatrical utterances "parasitic" on normal usages, but sometimes

theatre utterances “do” something more completely, more effectively than mere personal speech acts. The “poetics of theatre and public events” names the special cases when public life and performance share some central features that result in a unique, aesthetic mode of knowledge. Many aspects of what we may have considered extra-theatrical experience can be grasped in terms of, understood by reference to, made intelligible through, performance paradigms. Theatre and performance scholars have something concrete to contribute to civic life: the tools of our trade can be useful in the broader arenas of public discourse when the highly theatricalized nature of contemporary existence is examined through methodologies developed by our field for analysis of a more restricted set of objects (traditional theatre performances and other performing arts). In this essay, I want to look first at public events as performance – specifically the case of Stephen Lawrence – and then turn to the art objects made out of the events – the documentary play, *The Colour of Justice*, and the television drama documentary, *The Murder of Stephen Lawrence*. These seem exemplary of the interpenetration of performances codes and practices with what is considered “real life,” and demonstrate the potential explanatory power of performance to shape ideas, question truth claims, sway public opinion, and construct an aesthetics that sometimes functions as an epistemology.

### **The Stephen Lawrence case and the performance of race<sup>3</sup>**

Immigration to the United Kingdom from its former colonies following their independence has provided it with a different history of racism than the slavery-bound history of race relations in the United States. As India and the Caribbean gained their independence alongside the decolonization of Africa, Britain experienced a wave of immigrants from Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean hoping for economic opportunities. These new arrivals came in ever-increasing numbers in the late 1940s and 1950s, and by 1960 the government began a process of regulating and limiting immigration that continued into the 1970s. Not surprisingly, by 1976, a racist ideology emerged in public discourse, which linked the dangers of unchecked immigration with threats of overcrowding, disease, and rising birthrates among settlers, as well as domestic unemployment. On 20 April 1968, white racist Enoch Powell made his famous “river of blood” speech, which consolidated many of the issues that still mark racial struggle in Great Britain.<sup>4</sup> In it, he identified the numbers of settlers as a major problem, calling for their “re-immigration,” and talked about the threat to legal institutions in Britain brought about by the new race relations laws protecting immigrants from proven discrimination. Paul Gilroy has argued that the emphasis on black criminality comes into prominence at this time linked to the issues of legality. He points out a shift from the concerns of the first period after immigration, dominated by questions of citizenship, to a second period, consolidated in Powell’s speech, in which

the alleged harmful effects of black culture on the civil and legal institutions of Britain comes to the forefront, he writes:

The moment at which crime and legality begin to dominate discussions of the “race” problem is thus also the moment when “black youth” become a new problem category, conceived in the combination of youth and “race” [...] Legality is the pre-eminent symbol of national culture and it is the capacity of black settlement to transform it which alarms Powell.

(1987:86–7)

Perhaps some of this background explains why the events surrounding Stephen Lawrence’s death at the hands of white racist youth became emblematic of the unaddressed problems of race within the United Kingdom. It brought to widespread public attention a state of affairs that had implications for national institutions and social service sectors as well as ordinary citizens, and it addressed people through the images and rhetoric of family, of middle-class values, and of historic crusades against injustice.

### **An outline of events<sup>5</sup>**

Stephen Lawrence was an 18-year-old black teenager who did well in school, never got into any trouble, and wanted to be an architect. He came from a middle-class household with two parents and three children. One night in April 1993, while waiting for a bus with his friend Duwayne Brooks, he was attacked and stabbed by five white youths shouting racial epithets. He collapsed and bled to death on the pavement. The police who came to investigate did not give him first aid before the ambulance arrived. The initial phases of the police investigation were later revealed to be so incompetent and ineffective that opportunities to follow up on leads including names and descriptions of the perpetrators, possible evidence such as clothes and weapons used in the attack, and even adequate records and information simply fell away, disappeared, slipped into oblivion. As a result, initial efforts on behalf of the Lawrences to obtain justice for their son’s murder resulted in no prosecution. Eventually in 1995, the family brought civil charges against the likely perpetrators, but these were not successful due to a perceived lack of evidence.

Finally, four years after the murder, in 1997, an inquest found what the police had denied, that this was a racist killing “by five white youths” and that the police investigation was seriously flawed. Coinciding with the national political victory for the Labour Party later that year, the inquest led, in turn, to a formal complaint by the Lawrences about the behavior of the officers involved, prompting the new Home Secretary Jack Straw to appoint a respected judge, Sir William Macpherson, to chair a judicial public inquiry into the case.



The results of the inquiry, in February of 1999, confirmed the Lawrences' allegation about the police and the likely guilt of the suspects, who, nevertheless, cannot be tried for the crime since the civil case failed. The various police officers named in the complaint also escaped official censure or punishment, due to the fact that they have all retired; the last one to do so, Detective Inspector Ben Bullock, the only one who might have been held accountable, left the police force in July of 1999. The painful irony of this narrative is that the truth was finally exposed, but no direct redress has been possible. The Macpherson Report, however, was a powerful document, carrying with it not only the indisputable findings of institutional racism and mismanagement in the Lawrence Case, but in a second part of the inquiry, extending its gaze to the wider issues of the investigation and prosecution of racially motivated crimes within the nation as a whole. A series of recommendations for changes inside the police system itself as well as in the government and legal system were widely discussed and commented on, and some of the specific recommendations were adopted. The media coverage about this case was extremely widespread by the time it climaxed in 1999. Since then, books have been written by journalists and scholars about the case, and the theatricalized case became theatre itself as a highly successful documentary play and a television dramadoc,<sup>6</sup> seen by thousands of viewers.

How was it that this particular case managed to capture the attention of the general public so forcefully? Why did it become emblematic of race relations in Britain? What did "theatre" have to do with it?

### **Aristotle rears his head**

In order for a public occurrence in everyday life to become theatricalized as anesthetic and social inquiry, there are a number of identifiable elements that must be present. First, the event must be of significant gravity to the well-being of the nation or a segment of the society that constitutes the audience; second, the event must attract a critical mass of public attention; third, the event must take a recognizable form, either as ceremony, game, or ritual, or else have unfolded in a form of narrative that can be apprehended in terms of protagonists and plot – in short, an old-fashioned but well-known Aristotelianism; and fourth, the event must have been perceived by the public as the symbolic staging of other, recognizable, features of their national or local lives – to embody a certain kind of analogical critique of their ways of living. Events that fit this description are candidates for being treated by spectators as performances of national as well as individual identity and can function through their theatrical structures to provoke the critical and ethical imagination of the society in question. The Stephen Lawrence case possesses all these fundamentals.

To begin with character, the "players" were unambiguously defined. Stephen was a gentle, attractive young man of high potential, cut down

in the prime of his life; he was a clear victim from the beginning, in spite of initial police assumptions about what might have been a “fight” rather than an “attack.”<sup>7</sup> Neville and Doreen Lawrence, Stephen’s parents, easily became the heroes of the drama. Dignified, soft-spoken, yet determined and unrelenting, the family of Stephen Lawrence went about pursuing every conceivable avenue available to them in seeking justice. They made effective and heart-wrenching spokespersons, and received a lot of media attention, especially from the time of the inquest on (1997). Journalists often used their first names in place of “Mr And Mrs” –giving them at once a respect and a familiarity with the public. The Lawrence family acted as a family and not as part of any organized political party or group, although of course various organized sectors of the black and human rights communities rallied behind their cause. Thus they qualified as model individual protagonists, and the newspapers repeatedly portrayed them as such, both in the iconography of photos and in interviews. Their faces became familiar to households all over Britain during the two years leading up to the final report.

The five white young men who were accused of the murder made exemplary villains. With links to the racist BNP (British National Party), and also to convicted thugs, these young men were videotaped engaging in a barrage of racial abuse. For example, Neil Acort, one of the five, watching a football match on television, says, “every nigger should have their arms and legs chopped up, mate, and they should be left with fucking stumps.”<sup>8</sup> In their public appearances before the inquiry, they denied all wrongdoing, and behaved with insolence and arrogance, prompting Macpherson to remind them repeatedly that they could be prosecuted if they told lies. They acted out what R. W. Connell in his research on masculinities has identified as “protest masculinity”: unemployed or underemployed youth with no economic prospects who develop identity through violence, crime, and a strong collective practice that frequently includes an exaggerated claim to the potency of European culture: “Among these young men [...] there is a response to powerlessness, a claim to the gendered position of power, and a pressured exaggeration [...] of masculine conventions” (1995:111).

There were supporting roles of consequence as well: Duwayne Brooks, Stephen’s childhood friend, whose testimony would not be believed and whose life was forever changed by the events;<sup>9</sup> Clifford Norris, father of one of the accused, a known criminal with a history of intimidating witnesses, charged by the Lawrence lawyers with a corrupt link to the police; the “Good Samaritan” passersby, Conor and Louise Taffe, on their way home from a prayer meeting when they came across Stephen and who held his head and told him “he was loved” before he died; and in addition, the highly respected (and high-profile) Judge Macpherson and the Lawrences’ flamboyant counsel, Michael Mansfield. These “characters” all had enough dramatic development in the unfolding events to be of interest to the public and to establish powerful foci for identification or disidentification. Nelson Mandela

met with the family in May of 1993, and this widely reported meeting linked the particular case of Stephen Lawrence to the international struggle for racial justice through Mandela's celebrity presence.

Moving to the issues of narrative and plot, the attention of the public and the public coverage of the events never completely drifted away during the years following the murder. However, the reopening of the inquest in 1997, following the failure of the private prosecution, marked the turning point after which attention accelerated toward the Macpherson Inquiry and ultimately the Report. The day the results of the Inquiry were made known, 25 February 1999, most London papers devoted not just their front pages but most of their first sections to the story. (The *Independent*, for example, ran 12 pages of news and analysis, and the *Guardian*, the *Times*, and the *Independent* all published near-identical photos on their front pages, showing an iconic Stephen in the background and Neville and Doreen in the foreground.) This story had unfolded as an Ibsensian structure of events in which a narrative past puts pressure on a present, revealing a series of "secrets." The temporal flux seemed to contract in 1997, so that the dramatic scenario was set in motion by the findings of the inquest which became public in February, followed by the spring Labour Party electoral victory and the July appointment of Macpherson to chair the public inquiry.

The inquest triggered this final "dramatic build" for several reasons. It produced the first unambiguous pronouncement on the racist character of the killing "in a completely unprovoked racist attack by five white youths."<sup>10</sup> In effect, the jury pronounced the racial motive the police had resisted acknowledging, and accused the five white suspects that had so far been acquitted. One of the conservative tabloids went further (more powerful precisely because it was in fact conservative rather than liberal): on 14 February 1997, after checking with their legal department to make sure they would not be open to contempt charges, the *Daily Mail* ran a front page headline: "Murderers," and underneath, "The Mail accuses these men of killing. If we are wrong, let them sue us," along with photographs of the five suspects.<sup>11</sup>

During the MacPherson Inquiry, various "secrets" began to be revealed as if in a well-made play. Sometimes they appeared as part of the evidence: for example, trash bags looking suspiciously like they might have held bloody clothes were seen being removed from a suspect's premises, but no order to search was given. Sometimes the "secret" was in the testimony of a police officer who made a telling slip of the tongue – such as Assistant Commissioner Ian Johnston stating that districts with high crime rates were populated by "coloured people."<sup>12</sup> A huge "secret" came in the introduction of the videotaped surveillance of the five suspects, not allowed as evidence in their criminal prosecution but now available to be quoted in the public record in all its graphically violent detail. During the inquiry, the Lawrences made statements as did Duwayne Brooks, and the five defendants were questioned; the media photographed and published a great number of their photos. The

story achieved almost total saturation at this point; it was unlikely than any "person-on-the-street" did not know the case in detail.

The publication of the official report from the Macpherson Inquiry on 25 February 1999 formed the actual climax to the dramatic narrative. By that time, the authority invested in the report finally gave legitimation to the facts that had been revealed. It made for a formal ending. The Macpherson Report was also important because the specific recommendations for reform and change within the police department, the judicial system, and the other sectors of public service were the only effective redress possible for the Lawrences. Thus it formed a dramaturgical ending that included the personal drama as well as the national one.

I am talking about an artificial dramaturgy through which these events could be grasped as theatrical. The publication of the Macpherson Report by no means provided an actual "ending," either for the personal story or the national narrative. The struggles of the family to come to terms with the events and the nation's efforts to respond to these recommendations are ongoing. As a personal example, the Lawrences' marriage did not withstand the strain of these years, and they were divorced in May 1999 after 28 years of marriage. As a public example, in December of 1999 the home secretary, Jack Straw, introduced a bill to amend the Race Relations Act of 1976 so that claims of discrimination in fields like education and employment will be extended to all public bodies not covered in the original act, which includes the police. This bill was controversial but eventually passed and took effect in April 2001.<sup>13</sup>

### **Race and ideology through the Lawrence case**

The emphasis I have placed on this description of the dramatic narrative and its characters hints at, but does not explain how it is that the public came to see in the Lawrence case the kind of symbolic ethical and political critique that makes it a model of theatricalized public events. First, the Lawrence case consolidated and embodied a particular set of ideological signs of British racial politics. Eltham, although primarily white, is not a prosperous community, located between the middle-class white suburb of Kent and more racially mixed areas of inner London. One mile away in Welling, the British National Party (racist, neo-Nazi, hyper-nationalist) has a headquarters and bookshop. Prior to 1989 when the BNP arrived, there had been fewer than 100 recorded racist attacks in the area. In the year beginning May 1991, there were 240 attacks.<sup>14</sup>

The arrival of the BNP and the rise in racist attacks comes at the end of a period in which there had been a shift in racist perceptions of "the problem" of black youth. Paul Gilroy has explained the links between the ideologies of nationalism and the politics of race in the Thatcher and post-Thatcher period: Where the old racism was based on arguments about biology, the new racism

is based on arguments about culture. In areas of crime and education, blacks are constructed as culturally unable to adapt to "British ways." He writes:

Law-breaking was believed to take culturally specific forms: in particular, street crime. Robbery and rioting were the crimes associated with "Afro-Caribbeans," while illegal immigration and culturally sanctioned forms of gang activity played the same role for "Asians." [...] Though still in evidence, the law-and-order theme has recently given way to education as the main theme in the populist politics of race. Youth is the link between them. The version of this argument that was centered on law said that crime shows that blacks cannot learn the standards required of authentic English civilization because their cultural equipment is wrong. The newer permutation of this argument, centered on education, says that blacks do not want to learn the ways of the real English.

(1993:59)<sup>15</sup>

I have quoted Gilroy at length here, but the critical sentence is "Youth is the link between them." The Stephen Lawrence case involved a community where the youth of a white underclass with criminal propensities attacked the youth of a black middle class with educational, economic, and social potentialities not perceived to be available to his attackers. The metropolitan police reacted by treating the incident as if it fit the mold of racial stereotypes instead of its reverse. The public saw the contradictions of racial politics played out on the bodies of its youth – black and white.<sup>16</sup> This symbolism was only too clear in the juxtaposition of Stephen and his attackers. Stephen's aspirations to become an architect were a repeated refrain in press descriptions of him. As for the five white youth accused of killing him, they were repeatedly characterized as "swaggering," and one detail that appeared in multiple press reports depicts them as near-illiterate by pointing out the misspellings in a handwritten note of sympathy they wrote to the Lawrences during the inquiry.<sup>17</sup> Considered under the dramatic rubric of "characterization," the schematics of a racial role reversal were clearly inscribed in this "text."

The articulation of class and race in this narrative also embodies some of the most stubborn antagonisms of racist ideology, particularly the double-bind alluded to above: to the extent that black people are an underclass, they are perceived as suspicious and guilty by those in authority; while to the extent that they are middle class, they are perceived to threaten the jobs, property, and prosperity of the "natives." The case caught the social contradictions of the moment and brought them to the public in an embodied and paradigmatic spectacle.

For a long time, there was no authoritative version of the events of the night of Stephen's murder and no established criticism of the police before the inquest. Because of the Lawrences' persistence, the police conducted two internal reviews of their own investigation, both of which found that the

police had acted correctly and without fault.<sup>18</sup> The Crown Prosecution Service refused to prosecute the suspects on the grounds of insufficient evidence, and the civil prosecution that the Lawrences brought against three of the suspects resulted in their acquittal.<sup>19</sup> Throughout 1998 and 1999, I read Letters to the Editor in many different newspapers (e.g., *Guardian*, *Independent*, *Telegraph*, *Evening Standard*) as the climatic events unfolded. Public opinion was split. For example, on 3 July 1998, during the Macpherson Inquiry period, four Letters to the Editor were published in the *Independent*, two of which might be characterized as sympathetic to the Lawrences' position and two which were not. All four letters are linked to ideological issues. The defense of the five white youths is linked to British traditionalism: "No matter how much your sensitivities may be offended by the way the five youths look, think and talk, it is not evidence of guilt, and to continue to hound them on this basis is vindictive, hateful and entirely alien to the British moral and legal tradition." The crime statistics for black people is the subject of the second such letter: "Police will only stop the subset of the population who may have committed a crime of which they are likely to find evidence. A possible example of a class of persons in this group might be young men on the streets late at night. The statistic you should quote is the proportion of people who meet these criteria who are from ethnic minorities." Of the two letters sympathetic to the Lawrences's position, one letter reiterates the failure of the legal system to achieve justice and the second generalizes from the Lawrences' case to state that "the majority of Black people already know [...] that if a Black person is murdered their death is seen as less serious or important than the death of a white person" (*Independent* 1998).

In other words, one of the reasons why this case elicited such a strong response was because of the democratic process of struggle surrounding its issues. That in the end the Lawrences were vindicated was critical, but perhaps part of the reason why the case proved so powerful in the public imagination was that people took up a variety of positions and sympathies in the course of the events. To return to the dramaturgical, a successful drama should have a convincing conflict – the outcome cannot be obvious and the stakes must be high; similarly, it is characteristic of both an ethical theatre and an active democracy that full participation and debate take place. In the events of the Stephen Lawrence case, there was both tragedy and, finally, perhaps, "truth."

## The role of documentary art

The Macpherson Report was made public in mid-February 1999. Almost a month earlier, the Tricycle Theatre opened *The Colour of Justice*, a documentary play based on the transcripts of the inquiry hearings. Richard Norton-Taylor, the editor and shaper of this piece, is a *Guardian* reporter who had previously worked with director Nicolas Kent to develop what have come to be called "Tribunal Plays" (Shallice 1999).

I had been following the Lawrence case in the news since 1994, and had determined to write about it as an important instance of public events becoming performance/performative. In January 1999, when the theatricality of these events turned literal, I flew over from California to see *The Colour of Justice*, mistakenly thinking that the play would be performed for only a brief time and disappear without a trace.

The play seemed rather dull dramatically speaking, old-fashioned in its dramaturgical techniques: a meticulous recreation of surface realism, it staged a simulation of the Macpherson Inquiry, even to the layout of the hearing room with its computer monitors on desks flashing images of the official documents. The dialogue was based strictly on the transcripts, and the acting was representational and understated in style and function. Part of the nondramatic quality came from an insistence on reproducing some of the verbatim ticks and details of the original transcript, even though a great deal of editing, shaping, and cutting also accompanied the composition of the script. The producing team clearly did not want to sensationalize or overstate the already melodramatic situation.

I was, of course, entirely wrong in my estimate of its reception: extremely successful with critics and the public, it was subsequently televised for the BBC in February, transferred to the West End in March, went on tour in the fall supported by the Royal National Theatre and the *Guardian* newspaper. In the spring of 1999, ITV also aired a four-part drama documentary about the case that included a hypothetical reconstruction of the actual murder. *The Murder of Stephen Lawrence* dramadoc was highly acclaimed and viewed widely by UK citizens.

Why were these performances so highly successful? Part of the answer lies within the parameters of the Lawrence case: it had already achieved national prominence, and people did in fact already care deeply about the protagonists and the issues involved. Coming shortly before the dramatic conclusions of the Macpherson Report, the initial performances repeated and rehearsed the facts, reclaimed their undeniability at a time when the public was wanting "closure" – to be comforted even, by this reassertion of the "truth" – especially in light of the fact that there were no successful criminal prosecutions, nor likely to be any.<sup>20</sup> To this extent, the impact of the drama hinges on the moment in which it was produced and depends upon its relationship to events that surround it. Following Diana Taylor's discussion of Princess Diana's funeral, we can also look at the social drama of the Lawrence case as recapitulated tragedy when the audience witnessed the mimetic repetition. At least this theatrical public could experience a certain catharsis from the performance, if not from the actual workings of justice. It might be that witnessing the inquiry together, in the edited shape of the play, "precipitated a process of transformation and resolution on multiple levels" (Taylor 2003:149).<sup>21</sup> While Taylor uses the ritual model of social drama (Schechner and Turner) to discuss the events associated with Princess Diana's death, the



Aristotelian model I am using for the Lawrence case is quite compatible with that analysis as well: both events were staged in terms of sacrifice, featured an iconic figure, came to stand for a huge symbolic network of meanings within their British context, and exhibited a classical dramaturgy through which contemporaneity and the fluid interrelationship between actuality and performance converged to achieve what Jane Gaines has called “political mimesis” (1999:91–3).<sup>22</sup>

However, part of the answer also has to do with a new role for documentary drama at the turn of the twenty-first century. Derek Paget has argued that a tradition of radical, reportorial documentary drama was strongly established in Britain with Joan Littlewood’s 1963 musical *Oh What a Lovely War* at the Theatre Workshop. Writing in 1990 at a time of malaise among political theatre people, he wrote, “The radical tradition’s continuity may have been interrupted, it may be compromised, but it has never been completely occluded; it is as present, and as important, as we care to make it” (1990:59). That its role has increased in the United Kingdom is widely acknowledged, and this increase is part of a general resurgence of political theatre – some say in the wake of 9/11, but I might suggest that its actual beginnings can be traced to the success of *The Colour of Justice*. David Hare has called the play a “rebuke to the British theatre for its drift towards less and less important subject matter” (2005:77).

The increase in documentary plays has been gradual but substantive. Several high-profile plays such as David Hare’s *Via Dolorosa* (1998), *The Permanent Way* (2003), and *Stuff Happens* (2004) come to mind, but equally important has been the work of writers such as Robin Soans, who before writing *Talking to Terrorists* had already written a verbatim play based on interviews called *A State Affair* (2000). Other notable plays in this period include Alecky Blythe’s *Come Out Eli* (2002) and *Cruising* (2003). By 2003, *Guardian* critic Michael Billington was proclaiming a sea change in which British theatre was again reconnecting “with the wider world” (2003). This was the year the Tricycle Theatre produced *Justifying War: Scenes from the Hutton Inquiry* on the David Kelly suicide. Carrying forward their Tribunal Plays, in 2004 Tricycle produced *Guantánamo: Honor Bound to Defend Freedom* by Victoria Brittain and Gillian Slovo. Since 2006, Gregory Burke’s drama based on interviews with Scottish soldiers returning from Iraq, *Black Watch*, has toured the United Kingdom (and the United States) to high acclaim.

In accounting for the appearance and success of these plays, the critical relationship to the contemporary events that sparked them is almost always central. When theatre can put forth a unique, aesthetic means of understanding or interpreting the world, it takes its place with other forms of public discourse as actively “making” culture. While theatre can seldom effect social change by itself, it contributes its special métier as part of democratic processes that are already or simultaneously put in train by other means. Describing Norton-Taylor’s work on *The Colour of Justice* and how unfair it was



that Norton-Taylor had been passed over for the award of Best Play of 1999, David Hare wrote: "Norton-Taylor had done no more than to choose those incidents or testimonies which most interested or alarmed him. But in the act of editing, he laid before a live audience all the subtleties and intricacies of British racism, all its forms and gradations, with a clarity which I had never seen emulated by television, documentary, or newspaper" (2005:76–7.) Documentary artwork contributes to a search for knowledge and understanding while making an aesthetic form and experience out of its materials. Connected to immediate and vital national, global, or even personal (if shared) issues, documentary drama can offer both utilitarian and aesthetic values.

There are always important public events that could be dramatized, but as Paget's comments imply, we have to care to make it important using documentary. The hypertheatricalization of contemporary culture can itself lead toward a valorization and desire for "facts," for the materiality of events, for a brute display of evidence as a reaction against the fear of total fiction when all else fails. When historical archives are doubted, (e.g., the Holocaust deniers), there is not much to do besides point to the bodies of evidence and demand they not be discounted. In the Stephen Lawrence case, the inability of the police to build a case that would result in a successful prosecution of the suspects was for many people tantamount to that kind of denial of obvious fact. Living in a world of simulation, where everything is understood to be only a copy of a copy, and nothing is for sure, public rehearsal of the "facts" becomes one way of holding onto the very notion of facts and of building a meaningful narrative around them. The ability to intellectually entertain the seeming denial of the brutal self-evident incompetence and racism upset many people, and resulted in a counter-pressure to find ways to display the truth, to reaffirm history – perhaps, one might say following Sartre, the "facticity" of the events in question. It is as if people were saying, "I don't give a damn for all the nuanced arguments about the manipulation of facts and evidence, this thing, this horrible thing, DID HAPPEN, and it must be enough to clearly, persuasively, SAY SO."

In the Stephen Lawrence case, there was a certain kind of relief in the testimony and conclusions of the Macpherson hearings – the "truth" was finally indisputably recognized, based on repetition of, dare I say it, the "facts." The appeal of the old-fashioned documentary may be that it meets a deep collective urge for the link between knowledge and truth, an urge that might be characterized by Slavoj Žižek as willfully ideological; that is, "They know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it"! (Žižek 1989:29). In this case, audiences know that documents, facts, and evidence are always mediated when they are received; they know there is no raw truth apart from interpretation, but still, they want to experience the assertion of the materiality of events, of the indisputable character of the facts – one reason why trials and hearings, given force of law, still have so much resonance. Unlike Žižek, who describes this phenomenon as a cynical posture, I see the potential

for this gesture as an ethico-political revolt, as a demonstration of caring, engagement, and commitment (as Jean Paul Sartre, Emmanuel Levinas, or even Martin Buber define them). I am intrigued with the possibility of a tiny tip of an iceberg of historical change showing through the positive public responses to *The Colour of Justice*, and through other public demonstrations of insistence on even a limited facticity.

For our versions of facticity are indeed limited, and documentary does not escape this epistemological inadequacy. As Philip Rosen argues, in the documentary tradition there is “rarely, if ever, unvarnished faith in the possibility or, more tellingly, the utility of a complete record of the surface of reality” (1993:64). In his contribution to a useful book, *Theorizing Documentary*, Rosen is at pains to show the connection between issues of documentary representation and historiography that lies in “the indexical traces of the presence of a real past” in documentary, in news reporting, and in historiography (ibid.:64–5). These indexical traces can be presented only in combinations of sequences, arrangements, creative shapings.

The notion that narrative and “facts” are inseparably bound together in documentary form does not, however, discount the authority of the appeal to documentary evidence inherent in the form. Although at different moments in history skepticism about the status of these indexical traces may outweigh their authority (as in the post-positivist critique), the presence of a truth claim based on the incorporation of documents into narrative remains the unique claim of documentary form, as opposed to other forms of narrative fiction such as the novel. And although it might seem that postmodernism would gradually empty documentary of its authority if not its appeal, that is not what has happened, at least so far. The indexical traces of the past are either located at the level of the official document, as in the use of inquiry transcripts to shape dialogue in *The Colour of Justice*, or in conventions linking the performance to such traces, such as screen captions or theatre program statements that make truth claims based on previous documents or the public record. (Increasingly, in fact, these take the form of disclaimers written by the legal departments of the producing agency.) Another form of indexical trace can be found in the representational economy of the actors who play “real people,” known to the public. Still another form lies in what David Edgar calls “adjacency,” which occurs when spectators use their knowledge of current affairs to shore up the strength of incomplete documentation.<sup>23</sup> Projections of photographs or film footage have been popular scenic elements used in embedding the indexical traces of the past in the present. All of these devices are intended to make claims for the authority of the performance due to its reliance on documents, on evidence, on pre-filmic or pre-stage “established fact.” So even if viewers of documentary performances know, along with Hayden White, that “all discourse constitutes the objects which it pretends only to describe realistically and to analyze objectively,” the appeal of the documentary trace is still not rejected, and the link to the truth claim

still functions as at least partially persuasive in performances that evoke the documentary discourse – persuasive of the link to facticity through the trace, if not of the total truth of the account (White 1978:2).

To return to the argument I offered at the beginning of this essay, theatrical tropes and dramaturgical structures help organize and clarify reality; performance analysis tools can help unlock the complexities of certain public events, such as the Stephen Lawrence case. On the other hand, artistic performances can remake and shape the raw materials of public events to imagine something new and at the same time to anchor the new vision in concrete material reality. Theatrical tools can be useful for decoding social reality, and evidence and documents can enrich the ties between our fictions and our contemporary experiences. The relationship is reciprocal, and useful in our time. In conclusion, I quote from cultural studies scholar Phil Cohen on the positive outcomes of the Lawrence case:

The Stephen Lawrence campaign has amongst its many achievements, opened up a new style of engagement with the dominant discourses about racism [...] For the first time, an official government report brought the different sides of the story together, connecting the structural and cultural aspects of racism, the violence of racial hatreds acted out on the street and the subtle indifference that characterized the official response [...] Finally, as a result of the campaign, debates that had long been confined to race professionals and academics entered widely into popular consciousness. (1999:9–10)

That this is so reflects, at least in part, the theatricalization of the events and the documentation of the drama.

## Notes

1. The play, *Justifying War: Scenes from the Hutton Inquiry*, opened 30 October 2003 while the formal Hutton Inquiry Report was issued 28 January 2004. David Kelly, government expert on chemical and biological weapons, committed suicide after being “outed” as the source of a BBC report charging that Tony Blair had exaggerated evidence of WMD in an important government dossier in September 2002 (see Hutton Inquiry 2004).
2. Austin’s concepts have been significantly mined by theatre scholars. For my own reading, see Reinelt (2002).
3. Some of the material in this part of the essay appeared in a German publication resulting from a series of lectures I gave in Mainz during 2001 (see Gahn 2005).
4. The text of the speech is widely available, most prominently on the extreme right-wing National Front web site at: <[www.natfront.com/powell.html](http://www.natfront.com/powell.html)> (Powell 1968).
5. The major official website offering key documents in the Lawrence case and the entire Macpherson Report can be found at <[www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm42/4262/4262.htm](http://www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm42/4262/4262.htm)>. I have relied on it for my account of the proceedings. (Stephen Lawrence Inquiry 1999.)

6. I take my terminology from Derek Paget, who explains that “dramadoc” is a British term that “uses the sequence of events from a real historical occurrence or situation and the identities of the protagonists to underpin a film script intended to provoke debate about the significance of the events/occurrences.” Paget identifies as American the term “docudrama,” which “uses an invented sequence of events and fictional protagonists to illustrate the salient features of real historical occurrences or situations” (1998:82–3).
7. Police considered that rather than a racial attack, Stephen and Duwayne might have been involved in a neighborhood fight, and resisted identifying or dealing with the attack as racially motivated. This is well documented (see, for example, Cathcart 1999).
8. These tapes were shown at the inquiry, and were also available at the time of the private prosecution. The police had not deemed them material to the case earlier. For the best description of the police work, the tapes themselves, and their uses, see Cathcart (1999).
9. In April 2006 Brooks was awarded a \$100,000 settlement in a suit he filed against Scotland Yard for mistreatment and its post-traumatic stress consequences (see Bennetto 2006).
10. This was widely reported in the news, see for example the *Guardian* 15 February (Daniels 1997).
11. “It’s either a sincere conversion or a cynical stunt,” read the *Guardian* lead editorial in response to the *Mail* headline (1997).
12. In a Metropolitan Police Service Handbook from 1992, the word “coloured” is described as “at best patronizing and at worst racist” (printed in the program for *The Colour of Justice*, Shallice 1999).
13. This bill was characterized in the press as a direct follow-up to the Lawrence case – for example, accompanied by photographs of the Lawrences (see, for example, White 1999; for coverage on its effect, see Woolf 2001).
14. Figures from the Greenwich Commission for Racial Equality (Shallice 1999).
15. In a more recent book, Gilroy offers some explicit comments about the Lawrence case (Gilroy 2000).
16. My reading of the neighborhood and the youth situation is informed by Back and Keith (1999).
17. See, for example, *Guardian* (1998); Salman and Holliday (1998); and Judd (2002).
18. The Barker Report in 1993 found “the investigation had progressed satisfactorily and all lines of inquiry and been correctly pursued.” The Police Complaints Authority in 1999 (before the Macpherson Inquiry findings were published) cleared all officers involved in the case of racism (Cathcart 1999:190, 342–4, 291–310).
19. A policeman, later accused by the defense of collusion, discredited Duwayne Brooks’s identification evidence (Cathcart 1999:380).
20. Granada television (who made *The Murder of Stephen Lawrence*) announced in August 2005 that they were going to make a new drama documentary about the Moors murderer, Myra Hindley, 40 years after the events. It is debatable – and material for another essay – whether the long time-gap between highly charged events and documentary plays inevitably weakens the performance’s impact (Carter 2005).
21. Of course Taylor is writing an ironic and critical version of Diana’s story – the chapter is called “False Identifications” – but I find her description of theatrical processes has relevance for the less ironic situation of spectators using *The Colour*

- of Justice for wish fulfillment as well as rehearsal of "facts." For another view of the Lawrence case, inflected by a psychoanalytic slant, see Kear (2001).
22. Gaines argues that "the documentary film that uses realism for political ends has a special power over the world of which it is a copy because it *derives its power from that same world*. (The copy derives its power from the original)" (1999:97). Although Gaines is a film theorist, this comment is equally apt for theatre.
  23. Playwright David Edgar hosted a conference at Birmingham University in 1996 on "Reality Time: A Conference about Factual Drama on Stage and Screen," where he coined this term to mean "the interface between representative lives and public events" (Edgar 1996:7).

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# 3

## Staging Terror

Wendy S. Hesford

Terrorism is now called “theatre” while we try to convince ourselves that what happens on stage can have anything to do with the real terrorisms of ruptured bodies and wounded minds.

Anthony Kubiak 1991:4

Alongside a major highway in the capital city of Tehran, an Iranian couple walks past painted murals depicting the torture of Iraqi detainees at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. The murals, created by an unidentified artist, are based on the widely circulated photographs of an American soldier holding an abused prisoner by a leash, and a hooded Iraqi detainee forced to stand on a box, with what appear to be electrodes attached to his fingers. The Farsi writing on the mural on the right reads: “Iraq Today.”

The photographs of the abuse at Abu Ghraib, taken by US soldiers, were first revealed on the American television network CBS’s magazine program, *60 Minutes II* (28 April 2004). They were then published in the 10 May 2004 issue of *The New Yorker* with an article by Seymour M. Hersch, which quoted from a secret report by Major General Antonio M. Taguba that detailed “sadistic, blatant, and wanton criminal abuse” at Abu Ghraib between October and December 2003. The photographs quickly multiplied on internet sites and newspapers throughout the world. As visual evidence of the prisoner abuse emerged, the links between the violence of representation and the violence of war became even more apparent.

The visual repetition of the 2001 burning, collapse, and ruin of the World Trade Center on 9/11 on television screens across the world had codified perceptions of the terrorist threat and US vulnerability. The Abu Ghraib photographs reclaimed dominance by transferring that visibility, fear, and terror onto the geopolitical body of “unlawful combatants,” who, within the visual imaginary of the photographs, “exist not geographically within national, social, cultural, or economic boundaries but only within the spatial terrain of the Occupation itself” (Kozol 2005). Moreover, the Abu Ghraib snapshots, particularly those that celebrate the sexual humiliation of Iraqi men, imply

audience identification with the perpetrators, namely American soldiers, thereby incorporating viewers as participants in a neocolonial narrative about the inadequacy of Arab “others” and the inevitability of Western intervention. Like other iconic spectacles of torture (hangings, floggings, executions), the Abu Ghraib photographs are more about dominance established through the staging of trauma than the extraction of truth – though clearly, as the testimonies of accused soldiers have revealed, these were acts of both spectacle and surveillance. In this sense, the Abu Ghraib photographs are comparable to photographs of black lynching victims, taken between the 1880s and 1930s, which show white American bystanders watching – complicit, willing participants in the lynching.

The mass circulation of the torture photographs undercut the Bush administration’s highly controlled visual strategies, which were used to sell the Iraq war to the American people as an act that would liberate and “civilize” the Iraqi people. But the Abu Ghraib torture images have not functioned solely to counter the highly controlled and antiseptic “Shock and Awe” military campaign, which visually displaced human suffering in its televised reports. In reaching beyond their target audience, the torture photographs have also become objects of political contest on which opposing groups have projected geopolitical identifications, victimization narratives, and justifications for or against the war.<sup>1</sup> For instance, the Bush administration has refused to call what has taken place in prisons in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guantánamo, torture. Instead, the administration, particularly in its early responses, construed the acts depicted in the Abu Ghraib portraits as exceptional acts of rogue soldiers – a “few bad apples.” Such claims allow the United States critical and moral distance. For if the images were to be seen for their ordinariness, as Susan Sontag provocatively suggested, they become us (2004:26). Moreover, the administration’s depiction of the 9/11 attacks as an assault on Western civilization enabled characterizations of Arab detainees under US jurisdiction as “uncivilized,” “barbarian,” and unlike “us.” Such representations have a long history in international law and the colonial project more generally (Mutua 2001:1–2).<sup>2</sup>

Unlike the Abu Ghraib torture images and US denial of any institutionalized wrongdoing, Arab citizens’ use of public art and image-icons as a form of social commentary – and the strategic appropriation of the Abu Ghraib photographs at public protests in the United States and abroad – have *not* been widely circulated in the Western media.<sup>3</sup> However, the photograph of two people in Tehran walking past the murals was included as part of a larger exhibit entitled *Inconvenient Evidence: Iraqi Prison Photographs from Abu Ghraib*, which ran at the International Center for Photography (ICP) in New York in the autumn of 2004.<sup>4</sup> In addition to 16 unframed prints of the torture photographs, hung with push pins (perhaps to emulate their amateur status and to generate an anti-aesthetic of witnessing), the exhibit included four framed images of citizens in the Middle East reacting to the Abu Ghraib



photographs. These four images appear to provide a counter-discourse to the dominance and voyeurism of both the American media and the soldiers taking the photographs.

At the *Inconvenient Evidence* exhibit, visitors were directed through a claustrophobic gray gallery and past 16 of the infamous Abu Ghraib torture photographs before reaching the four critical images. The exhibit offered little guidance about how to read these four images or the contexts in which they originally appeared. For example, in the context of Tehran's urban landscape, the photograph by Behrouz Mehri that leads off this article recalls the typology of mural propaganda and martyrdom cultivated in the Iran–Iraq war (Gigor 2002:37). Because the mural appears along a public highway and is accessible at eye level, it might also suggest a public reclamation of rhetorical space, rather than a message delivered from on high. The inscription “Iraq today” offers a commentary on changing relations between Iran and Iraq. The mural can be read as fostering empathy between Iran and Iraq along with a unified gaze against the United States. On the other hand, the mural might reinforce differences between Iraq and Iran, depicting Iraq as the “weaker” of the two nations. In the context of *Inconvenient Evidence*, these distinctions and regional ideological struggles were elided.

*Inconvenient Evidence* sets the four critical images apart from the mass-produced and widely circulated torture prints. In contrast to the torture prints, hung with push pins, the act of framing the four critical images privileges them as *art* rather than as documentary *evidence*. The exhibit therefore sets up a contrast between *spectacle* (original prints) and *critique* (the mural), between *unethical* and *ethical* representational practices, between the use of the camera as an *instrument of dominance* and the use of the camera as *moral witness*. But, we must ask, does the placement of the mural and other critical images as “moral art” distance American viewers from recognizing their own relationship to the trauma depicted? Or does the exhibit situate viewers as participants in a critical interaction with the photos themselves? How are viewers asked to respond?

My concern is not to generate definitive interpretations of these images, or to reinforce the spectacle/critique binary, but rather to recognize the multiple meanings and the identifications that these images have enabled – including stereotypes of Muslim homophobia and essentialist understandings of “Islam” (Kozol 2005:8) – and the demands that confronting torture make on the formal limits of representation. It is precisely this multiplicity of meanings and identifications that have been censored in US public discourse since 9/11. Therefore, I have two aims: both to review two recent works related to the representation of trauma and terror – the *Inconvenient Evidence* exhibit and the documentary play, *Guantánamo: “Honor Bound to Defend Freedom”* – and to critically apply and develop the scholarship on traumatic realism and witnessing, as it pertains to recent cultural representations of torture and human rights violations in the US War on Terror. What

might at first appear as two disparate performance spaces – a gallery and a theatre – are actually complementary aspects of the traumatic real. Moreover, the juxtaposition of *Inconvenient Evidence* and *Guantánamo* suggests a correspondence between the documentary spectacles of war and theatre.

### Traumatic realism and cultures of trauma

The mural photo visually renders the treacherous terrain – the gray zone between spectacle and critique, art and evidence, voyeurism and critical witnessing, and the ordinary and the extraordinary.<sup>5</sup> We might think of this gray zone (as Primo Levi put it in another context [1961]) as the threshold of traumatic experience, as the traumatic real. I use the term “traumatic real” to articulate trauma’s resistance to transparent symbolism, and also the cultural fascination with and historical demands for its documentation. A hallmark of Holocaust studies, traumatic realism refers to “the activation of traumatic repetition” (Feldman 2005:215), which “produces a second order of trauma [...] at the level of technique” (Foster in *ibid.*:212). Michael Rothberg (2000) employs the concept of traumatic realism to mediate between antirealist and realist approaches in representations of the Holocaust and genocide.<sup>6</sup> Rothberg suggests that the categories (realist/antirealist) reflect an epistemological point of view more than they do conventions of genre. He usefully shifts the terrain of the debate beyond the prescriptive categories of realism and antirealism, and proposes the concept of traumatic realism as a way to move beyond the “conflicting impulses for and against representation ‘after Auschwitz’” (2000:188). Traumatic realism, he argues, “has a double relation to the real” – representation is neither “purely referential or purely simulacral” (*ibid.*:276).

Both the torture photographs and the mural draw attention to the theatricality of war. The repetition of the images of torture depicted in the mural and the decorative frames, however, rupture the traumatic repetition by highlighting the cultural framing of visual evidence. In contrast, the torture portraits, particularly the trophy shots, make a spectacle of violence and the process of dehumanization, and exalt the technical instrumentality of staging terror. The mural alongside the highway in Tehran likewise presents the traumatic event through pictorial repetition. Yet the presence of the couple walking past the mural, captured in the photograph – like the decorative frames – interrupts the mimetic consumption of violence by staging the integration of the ordinary and the extreme, and drawing attention to representations of difference.

The robed and veiled Muslim woman walking in front of the mural might be seen by some as a shadow figure of the hooded detainee. In fact, the Bush administration justified the US invasion of Afghanistan, in part, as an act that would liberate Muslim women from control by their religion and their men. The torture images reaffirm that identification through the dehumanization

and feminization of Iraqi male detainees. The Abu Ghraib torture rituals and photographs attempt to expunge all traces of US vulnerability, loss, and trauma, and to reassert dominance; but, as Allan Feldman puts it, the “perpetrators reacquire, if only in an allegorical idiom, their former sense of mastery and command in a situation that is rapidly lurching beyond their grasp” (2004:5). The torture images place not only the victim and perpetrator, but also the victim and witness (viewer), in a hierarchical relation. *Inconvenient Evidence* does not hail spectators as citizens, as much as it seems to address its audience as media consumers. Had the exhibit included more than four counter-images, it might have provided a more politically powerful model of traumatic realism and witnessing based in critical citizenship rather than consumption and voyeurism.<sup>7</sup>

*Inconvenient Evidence* exposes the risks of traumatic repetition. But instead of taking these risks as a cause for reflection on the limits and possibilities of representation, the curator overwrites them in the exhibition’s accompanying text. Brian Wallis, director of ICP and curator of the show, indicates that one of the exhibit’s goals is to remember Abu Ghraib in order to counter the US administration’s efforts to suppress this “inconvenient evidence and to disguise its original motives” (2004:4). Wallis characterizes the torture photographs as “monstrous propaganda photographs, intended to assert cultural dominance locally and to restore racial and political hierarchies globally” (ibid.:4). Yes, in part, the images *have* functioned as propaganda; however, their circulation also suggests the diminishing power of deliberative oratory in national politics and the “faith we put in the informative power of images” (Rodowick 2002:22).<sup>8</sup> Before the release of the Abu Ghraib photographs, various reports – some published by the US military itself – indicated that there was systematic abuse of prisoners at Iraq and in Afghanistan.<sup>9</sup> Yet these reports did not capture the attention of the national US media or public until the release of the photographs. The wide circulation of the torture portraits not only exposed the violations but triggered investigations and, in October 2005, Senator John McCain’s amendment to the Department of Defense Appropriations bill establishing standards for interrogation. This response suggests that the images countered, at least to some degree, the political paralysis that is often managed by the visual. But in order to resist violence, must we give it violent expression? How can we minimize the risks of re-traumatizing victims in the process of capturing their trauma and injustice?

Scholars in trauma studies have raised ethical questions about the representation of suffering, and whether certain rhetorical conventions enable a critical process of *working through* trauma rather than repetitively *acting out* trauma at cultural, national, and international levels (LaCapra 2001:153). “Empathetic unsettlement,” Dominick LaCapra proposes, is one way in which we can enable a democratic politics that “acts as a countervailing force to the endless repetition of the past or being compulsively implicated

in trauma" (ibid.:153). LaCapra importantly distinguishes between *empathy* and *identification*, in order to recognize the difference of putting "oneself in the other's position" and "taking the other's place" (ibid.:78).

The *Inconvenient Evidence* exhibit suggests a homeopathic response to the tragedy and trauma of the past. As LaCapra puts it in another context, "You take the 'illness' [the excess] and you counteract it through proper dosage of the illness [excess] itself" (2001:154). He concedes that in an age of extremity, such as our own, such tactics "may be necessary" (ibid.:154), but he also warns not to "overdose on the antidote" (ibid.:155). If the Abu Ghraib torture photographs exemplify traumatic realism as an order of dominance, which I believe they do, then how are we to read the exhibition of dominance?

The *Inconvenient Evidence* exhibit represents an "overdose on the antidote" to the extent that it reproduces the moral distancing that the spectacle enables, and simulates the obsessive attraction to dominance and the temptation of excess in popular and military cultures. Like the four critical images mentioned above, the hooded figure, a reminder of US domination, has been appropriated by artists and protestors for antiwar demonstrations around the world: An Iraqi artist painted a mural on a street in Baghdad based on the US Statue of Liberty and the photograph of the hooded detainee, highlighting the conjoining of executioner and victim. In Barcelona, on the eve of the first anniversary of the publication of the Abu Ghraib torture photographs, members of Amnesty International dressed in hoods and shackles and staged a protest against the mistreatment of Abu Ghraib prisoners by the US military. Outside the Supreme Court in Washington, DC, an activist dressed as the hooded Iraqi detainee protested the appointment of the new US Attorney General Alberto Gonzales. A photograph depicting the abuse of an Iraqi prisoner in the Abu Ghraib prison was attached to a gravestone at the Commonwealth military cemetery on 10 May 2004 in Gaza City, Gaza, where vandals with axes and shovels desecrated 32 graves of soldiers killed in World War I, including those from Britain and India. Critical repetitions of iconic torture images such as these illustrate the contrasting hegemonic and counter-hegemonic functions of traumatic realism. Such repetitions, like the *Inconvenient Evidence* exhibit, propose the interdependence between shock experiences and accumulated knowledge (Benjamin's terms [1968], suggesting that we can't have critique without spectacle.)

## Post-9/11 documentary theatre and testimony

*Guantánamo: "Honor Bound to Defend Freedom"* is a documentary play written by Victoria Brittain and Gillian Slovo, and directed by Nicolas Kent and Sacha Wares, that foregrounds the violation of prisoners' human rights at Guantánamo Bay naval base in Cuba, under the Bush administration's post-9/11 policies.<sup>10</sup> *Guantánamo* was first staged in June 2004 at the Tricycle Theatre

in London and was then restaged at the Culture Project in New York City in October 2004, just prior to the US presidential election.<sup>11</sup> *Guantánamo* is based on written correspondence and testimony collected from released detainees and their family members, lawyers, and human rights workers, as well as information from news conferences, lectures, and publications. Most of the play is presented as a direct address to the audience. The staging is sparse, with detainees in orange jumpsuits in mesh prison cages or on narrow cots, some reading from the Qur'an.

*Guantánamo's* straightforward exposition is a departure from the reproduction of spectacular victim narratives that dominate popular discourse. In the play, relationships between characters are not developed; instead, the characters' stories are presented to the audience in long, isolated stretches of verbatim readings from testimonies and letters. Although there is no direct action and character development is sparse, the individual testimonial letters accumulate and begin to create a polyphonic subjectivity, which seeks to cultivate within audiences a critical subjectivity and a sense of collective rhetorical witnessing, without a public photographic record of abuse. The play therefore corresponds to Emily Mann's notion of the "theatre of testimony," in that it moves away from the creation of a single protagonist and toward the creation of a communal voice that counters "official" truths (1997:34).<sup>12</sup>

*Guantánamo* garnered excellent reviews and sell-out crowds in London; its popularity has been described, in part, as a "measure of the British public's strong opposition to the way London had supported Washington's war on terror," drawing on a strong tradition of London political theatre (Riding 2004:E3). Staging *Guantánamo* in the United States, however, posed several challenges. In a political climate framed by resurgent nationalism and moral dualities ("you are either with us or against us"), and in which preemptive war is conflated with liberation, *Inconvenient Evidence* and *Guantánamo* both risk the label "unpatriotic." If *Inconvenient Evidence* reproduces US dominance through spectacle – an overdose of the antidote – *Guantánamo* seeks to counter the spectacle and to humanize the detainees by providing a documentary stage for their stories. *Guantánamo* removes the spectacular hood and attempts to contrast the construction of detainees as pathological. Although the play is structured by humanitarian appeals, it is not premised on the savage-victim-savior metaphor as it applies to the "other." Rather, one might argue that in *Guantánamo*, the US administration and coalition forces are construed as savages, and international human rights law as the savior.

*Guantánamo* focuses on the detention of four men: Jamal al-Harith, Moazzam Begg, and brothers Wahab and Bisher al-Rawi – all British citizens who were picked up in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Gambia as "enemy combatants" and detained as terrorist suspects. At one point in the play, we also meet Ruhel Ahmed, one of three UK detainees known as the "Tipton Three," through his letters and his father's testimony.<sup>13</sup> Wahab was released after

nearly a month of detention and interrogation, while the others ended up at Guantánamo Bay. After approximately two and a half years in detention without legal representation – and without disclosure of why they were being held – two of the detainees, Jamal al-Harith and Ruhel Ahmed, were released and returned home in March 2004. Moazaam Begg, Bisher al-Rawi, and two others we learn about at the end of the play, remained at Guantánamo Bay.<sup>14</sup> Moazaam Begg was finally released in January 2005.

*Guantánamo* is framed by human rights arguments and humanitarian appeals, and is oriented toward a juridical resolution informed by international humanitarian law. The play opens with a lecture given by the UK's Lord Justice Steyn on 23 November 2003, in which he decries the United States for overextending its reach and adopting "measures infringing human rights in ways that are wholly disproportionate to the crisis." The play seeks audience identification through rational and ethical appeals to the juridical process, legal and moral principles, and the burden of history. *Guantánamo* frames the detainees' oral accounts and written correspondences as evidence of the denial of due process. These accounts, along with those of lawyers and human rights workers, are an indictment of the Bush administration's handling of the so-called War on Terror and the ethical implications of designating the detainees as "enemy combatants," instead of as prisoners of war protected by international laws governing their treatment.<sup>15</sup> This is not to say, however, that the testimonies do not also have an emotional appeal. The play mobilizes empathy but not voyeurism through the mechanism of the testimonial letter (see Berlant 2001:2), namely the letters between detainees and their family members. In contrast to the display of torture photographs in the *Inconvenient Evidence* exhibit, which erase the detainees' subjectivities, the written correspondence humanizes the detainees by establishing their individual subjectivities and "ordinary" lives prior to their detention.

The testimonial letters implicate audiences by expanding the imagined rhetorical space of reception and situating listeners as eavesdroppers on private conversations. From his cell, Moazzam reads aloud a letter addressed to his dad:

I received your message and am glad to hear all is well with you and the family. It is nearing a complete year since I have been in custody and I believe [...] that there has been a gross violation of my human rights, particularly to that right of freedom and innocence until proven guilty. After all this time I still don't know what crime I am supposed to have committed for which not only I, but my wife and children, should continually suffer as a result. I am in a state of desperation and am beginning to lose the fight against depression and hopelessness. Whilst I do not at all complain about my personal treatments, conditions are such that I have not seen the sun, sky, moon [...] for nearly a year!

(Brittain and Slovo 2004:55–6)

Corresponding to the assertion made in trauma studies that the victim identity emerges through narration, namely that trauma “must be testified to, in a struggle shared between a speaker and listener” (Felman and Laub 1992:16), audience members participate in identifying the detainees as victims of human rights abuses. In *Guantánamo*, this relationship is further complicated by the fact that many of the “private” correspondences were never received by the addressees or were censored. Making these more or less private correspondences public personalizes nonparticularized and anonymous audiences as belated witnesses, implicating audiences in the action. The performance of the testimonial letters might be considered a technique of traumatic realism. But the play attempts to create an imaginative zone in which the humanitarian appeal can be made without reproducing the spectacle: we’re witnesses to the inner lives of some of the prisoners, rather than witnesses to their physical sufferings.

Within trauma theory, oral testimony is given the value of accumulated knowledge when it positions the listener as enabling the victim to *work through* trauma (Felman and Laub 1992:58). However, *Guantánamo* is not so much about individual detainees *working through* trauma (though certainly that is one element) as it is about the audience empathizing with them, and about documenting injustices. The testimonial letters serve as counterpoints to the physical and rhetorical dehumanization of detainees at Guantánamo by guards and by political figures such as US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld – who is in fact featured in the play. Rumsfeld claims:

Anybody who has looked at the training manuals for the al-Qaeda [...] and how they were trained to kill civilians – and anybody who saw what happened to the Afghani soldiers who were guarding the al-Qaeda in Pakistan when a number were killed by al-Qaeda using their bare hands – has to recognize that these are among the most dangerous, best-trained vicious killers on the face of the earth [...] and that means that the people taking care of the detainees and managing their transfer have to be just exceedingly careful for two reasons. One, for their own protection, but also so these people don’t get loose back out on the street and kill more people.

(Brittain and Slovo 2004:34)

The mixed humanitarian/self-defense rhetoric seen here is prevalent in the Bush administration’s discourse on Guantánamo, in their justifications for the invasions of Afghanistan and later Iraq, and, more generally, in their homeland security rhetoric.<sup>16</sup> This rhetoric and rationale represents a shift in the priorities of the administration’s human rights foreign policy from previous administrations. Julie Mertus (2003) characterizes the human rights foreign policy of the Bush administration as distinct from previous administrations, in terms of its narrow and self-serving use of the concepts

of dignity and providence in place of human rights norms, their adoption of unilateralism over multilateralism, and their embrace of American exceptionalism.

In contrast, *Guantánamo* seeks to humanize the detainees by enabling audience identification through the invocation of familial correspondence, human rights norms, and through the figure of Tom Clarke, a British citizen and reporter, not a detainee. Act Two begins with a monologue, taken from Clark's interview, about the irony of his sister's death in the terrorist attacks in New York on 9/11. He says:

[O]bviously her loss was the most sad thing, but all of the things peripheral to it, of all the injustices and wrongs [at Guantánamo Bay], the fact that she actually did care about the things that led some people to think that was a smart thing to do some sort of clever stunt...that really upset me."

(Brittain and Slovo 2004:28–9)

Clarke contemplates Guantánamo Bay, indicating that his sister "would have been incensed. But then," he notes, commenting on the symbiotic relationship between terrorism and media, she "was incinerated publicly, live on television, for an hour and forty minutes." He continues:

Let's say for the sake of argument that among those detained at Guantánamo Bay are some of the people who led to her death – who murdered her essentially – that's a little difficult for me to, you know, it's difficult for me to say it was a bad thing that they were there. [...] Part of me wants to say it's completely fine. Another part of me [wants to understand why] have they been detained so long. I mean what the hell have they been doing up there? [...] I'm furious at the length of detention of these people, furious because those who are innocent have lost three years of their life, much as I lost, as I've been living in a sort of private hell since my sister was murdered, and although at least I've been able to recover and get over it and deal with, and still sort of have my life, they've had theirs taken away. [...] They deserve all of our sympathies and all of our efforts to sort of make sure they do actually get the justice that they deserve.

(Brittain and Slovo 2004:45–6)

Tom Clarke represents someone *working through* trauma at the interpersonal, intercultural, and international level; his testimony reaches out to audiences to do the same. Although his struggle between his sister's death and Guantánamo does not necessarily humanize the detainees – his struggle primarily humanizes himself – his testimony does prompt audiences to consider themselves as actors (not simply victims) in this geopolitical drama.

Even if most play-goers share *Guantánamo's* point of view, in order for audiences to be moved to action, we need to be shaken out of complacency.



Moreover, identification, like compassion, is an unstable rhetorical stance that can function as an alibi for *lack* of action. It can be “[a] way for us to feel,” as Sontag suggests, “that we are not accomplices to what caused the suffering. Our sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence” (2003:102). The play provokes critical witnessing through its staging of intertextuality. Through the visual idiom of the stage set, alternating frontal and back lighting, and the juxtaposition of varied rhetorical acts and contexts (lecture hall, legal contexts, prison cells, press conferences), the play attempts to create a level of critical reflexivity about competing yet simultaneous discourses on the War on Terror and the treatment of detainees. Yet, in focusing on four detainees who are portrayed as innocent, and by staging less clearly innocent detainees without voice, Guantanamo forecloses dialogue among the range of positions presented.

Moreover, *Guantánamo* presumes that the testimonies of Arab detainees will be perceived as credible to Western audiences, a questionable assumption given the various national strategies of denial in the United States, including the denial of the detainees’ status as international prisoners of war, as well as a national climate of fear and a culture of incarceration. While critics, and to a certain extent the play itself, imagine audiences as a “consensual community of citizen-spectators,” such notions ignore how actual audiences negotiate and contest imagined geopolitical identifications and grapple with the complexities of spectatorship (Reinelt 1998:286).<sup>17</sup>

Guantánamo Bay represents an ambiguous geopolitical space that “conflates bay and base as though no distinction exists between Cuban geography and US military rule” (Kaplan 2004:12). As Michael Ratner of the Center for Constitutional Rights notes, “It is as if Guantánamo is on another planet, a permanent United States penal colony floating in another world” (in *ibid.*:13); or, as Amy Kaplan puts it, “an uncanny shadow of the homeland itself” (*ibid.*:13).

Throughout the performance, I imagined restaging this ambiguity by having actors emerge from and move among the audience, blurring our positions and roles. Hence, for me, the most powerful moment came at the play’s end, when the audience realized that there would not be a curtain call: that the actors would remain in their roles, on stage in their cages and on their cots. The audience hesitated, not sure of when or whether to clap, and then quietly exited the theatre. The ending therefore undercut any sense of traditional catharsis that one might expect from drama. Had *Guantánamo* created this level of discomfort and implication, this unsettling and contradictory space, at intervals throughout the play, it would have more persuasively extended the circle of recognition – recognition primed for political reflection and action – and held audiences morally culpable for a lack of attention.

Documentary theatre, like documentary exhibitions, can provide cultural spaces in which to contemplate the ethical and moral questions raised by the repetition of trauma and the violation of human rights. In the context of an

ongoing historical drama without resolution, *Guantánamo* raises the possibility of the *failure* of testimony to travel beyond its target audience – as in the failure of detainees' letters to reach addressees – and to mobilize progressive political action. Finally, *Guantánamo*, like *Inconvenient Evidence*, articulates the traumatic through its repetition. *Inconvenient Evidence* draws attention to, and, to a certain degree, reproduces, a *crisis of reference* – the trauma of repetition – even as it demonstrates critical uses of traumatic realism.

In contrast, *Guantánamo* responds to a *crisis of truth*, by giving voice to alternative “truths” that otherwise may not have been heard. The repetition of testimonial letters might be seen as uncritical. But *Guantánamo* places audiences in dialogue with a range of conflicting voices and viewpoints, and in this way offers audiences a more democratic conception of the power of discourse than the monolithic “us/them” rhetoric and dehumanization of the Arab “other” that characterizes the US War on Terror. *Guantánamo* asks in particular that, as global citizens, we do more than project “ourselves into the scene of trauma” (Baer 2002:182).

Are we “wrong to believe,” as Ariel Dorfman expressed in his “Love Letter to America,” published in *The Nation* in September 2002, “that [this] country [...] will be able to look at itself in the cracked mirror of history and join the rest of humanity, not as a city on a separate hill, but as one more city in the shining valleys of sorrow and uncertainty and hope where we all dwell?” (14). *Guantánamo* and *Inconvenient Evidence* may not achieve the level of “empathetic unsettlement” that current times demand – and perhaps no single cultural work can – but they do importantly redirect public discourse on torture in ways that compel us to question our nation’s culpability in cultivating acts of torture and the degrading treatment of prisoners of war. Perhaps most importantly, the play and the exhibit ask us to contemplate the dire consequences of inaction – including the passive consumption of suffering and, as Dorfman puts it, “interrogating the compassionate imagination for answers both aesthetic and political” (ibid.:xv).<sup>18</sup>

## Notes

1. US President Bush issued a memo on 7 February 2002, in which he justified the classification of al-Qaeda and Taliban detainees as “unlawful combatants, enemy combatants” and determined that the Geneva Conventions did not apply to the US “War on Terror” (Strasser 2004:87). But even the independent panel and Pentagon report on prisoner abuse in Iraq, “The Abu Ghraib Investigations,” notes that adherence to Geneva Conventions requires the delineation of rights for and humane treatment of all persons (in ibid.:88). The panel noted that “no person is ‘outlaw,’ that is, outside the laws of some legal entity” (ibid.:88). Similarly, human rights groups have used the Abu Ghraib images as evidence of US violations of international and military law.
2. Mutua argues that: “The savior is ultimately a set of culturally based norms and practices that inhere in liberal thought and philosophy” (2001:2), including the

human rights movement. Mutua highlights the “bundle of contradictions” that is the human rights movement. The savage-victim-savior metaphor, Mutua claims, is “laced with the pathology of self-redemption” (ibid.:3); “Eurocentricity and Christianity’s missionary zeal” (ibid.:13) drive the human rights movement in ways that severely limit its progressive and universalist potential. He calls for a multicultural and inclusive human rights movement, which holds the basic assumption about the “moral equivalency of all cultures,” and seeks “deliberative intra-cultural dialogue and introspection” (ibid.:3).

3. There are available extensive editorials and critical analyses of the Abu Ghraib photographs. For general discussions of Abu Ghraib torture photography see: Roma (1997), Boxer (2004), Brison (2004), Danner (2004), Feldman (2004), Žižek (2004), and Willis (2005). For reviews of the “*Inconvenient Evidence*” public exhibits, see Awad (2004), Shapiro (2004), and Strauss (2004).
4. The exhibition ran from 17 September through 28 November 2004, concurrently with the exhibition at the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, which ran from 11 September through 28 November 2004. In addition to selected amateur photographs circulating on the internet, the exhibit featured four framed photographs depicting reactions to the Abu Ghraib torture images; three of these were taken by Behrouz Mehri, Roberto Schmidt, and Mian Khursheed, respectively, along with a fourth photo from Getty Images.
5. My emphasis on the rhetorical relationships mediated by images of suffering and torture builds on Guy Debord’s notion of the spectacle. “The spectacle,” Debord notes, “is not a collection of images; rather it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images” (1994:Sect. 4).
6. Antirealist approaches envision an unbridgeable rupture between the ordinary and extraordinary and consider mass atrocity unknowable and untranslatable into traditional representational modes. Antirealist approaches call for new forms to more adequately represent atrocity, and claim that the Holocaust is unapproachable, beyond discourse.
7. See Rentschler (2004) for an extended discussion of witnessing and critical citizenship.
8. In Aristotelian terms, deliberative oratory refers to the future and what is possible (expedient or inexpedient) in political contexts. For Aristotle, the emphasis is on the skill of the deliberative speaker and the necessary knowledge of past wars, as well as the relative strength and weakness of one city to another. It is precisely Aristotle’s focus on the orator’s observance of law that I invoke here.
9. In November of 2003, Major General Donald J. Ryder filed a report which concluded that there were potential systematic human rights abuses at Abu Ghraib. Two months later, Major General Antonio M. Taguba’s report (though not meant for public release) found numerous instances of “sadistic, blatant, and wanton criminal abuses” there. See Hersch (2004) and Danner (2004) for more on the debates over interrogation, and Danner for reproductions of government memos and other key investigative reports, including the Taguba report.
10. The subtitle of the play, “Honor Bound to Defend Freedom,” ironically refers to a sign in the prison camp.
11. *Guantánamo* was produced in San Francisco at the Brava Theater Center, 23 March to 17 April 2005; in Washington, DC, at the Studio Theatre, 2 November to 11 December 2005; and in Chicago at the Timeline Theatre Company, 11 February to 26 March 2005.

12. According to Gary Fisher Dawson, documentary theatre dates back to 1835, with Georg Buchner's play *Danton's Death* (1999:1). Many scholars, however, locate the roots of contemporary documentary theatre in the 1920s work of Bertolt Brecht and Erwin Piscator, who used a wide range of techniques to persuade audiences toward social action, including harnessing the immediacy of current events by splicing in news coverage.
13. Interrogators claimed that the Tipton Three – Ruhel Ahmed, Asif Iqbal, and Shafiq Rasul – were present at a training camp with Osama bin Laden, and that they had a video as proof. The three men denied involvement, later confessed, then were found to be in the United Kingdom when the video was made.
14. In *Rasul v. Bush*, the Center for Constitutional Rights challenged the Bush administration policy of indefinitely holding detainees at Guantánamo Bay without judicial review. On 28 June 2004, the US Supreme Court ruled that prisoners at Guantánamo Bay are entitled to military trials or to hearings to determine the validity of the charges against them. Bisher is the only one of the play's characters who is still at Guantánamo.
15. Definitions of torture are contained in numerous human rights conventions, including four Geneva conventions of 1949.
16. 23 June 2005, Vice President Dick Cheney (who is not a character in the play) declared that detainees at Guantánamo Bay were well treated. "They're living in the tropics," he said. "They've got everything they could possibly want. There isn't any other nation in the world that would treat people who were determined to kill Americans the way we're treating these people" (Agence France-Presse 2005:A16).
17. For instance, there were numerous opportunities for political acts suggested in the lobby of the production of *Guantánamo* at the Culture Project. Among those present were representatives of the Center for Constitutional Rights, the Guantánamo Human Rights Commission, and the Guantánamo Reading Project.
18. Some of the ideas for this essay were developed from the 2005 National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminar, "Human Rights in an Era of Globalization," at Columbia University.

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# 4

## Post-1990s Verbatim Theatre in South Africa: Exploring an African Concept of “Truth”

*Yvette Hutchison*

Michael Ignatieff claims that “human rights has become the dominant moral vocabulary in foreign affairs” during the twentieth century (2002:A29). The proliferation of personal narratives in the media and print journalism suggests an overwhelming interest in people’s personal stories. Much has been surmised about the problems with and reasons for this fascination with personal narratives (Martin 2006:9–15). Stephen Bottom suggests that “a compulsion to reportage on current events has displaced the 1990s vogue for ‘in your face’ plays of Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill, et al” (2006:56); others suggest that it is a response to a perceived failure in journalism. Carol Martin extends this argument to suggest that “as staged politics, specific instances of documentary theatre construct the past in service of a future the authors would like to create.” This argument proposes a fascinating relationship between traumatic lived experience and the fictional space of theatre that can offer an alternative reality in a safe space (Martin 2006:10). Within the context of these debates about the uses of personal narratives in particular social and political contexts, I want to explore the unique circumstances of documentary theatre in post-apartheid South Africa to elucidate the role of authenticity and truth in theatre that presents itself as somehow countering dominant [state] narratives. In order to do this, I must begin by exploring the notion of “truth” and the place of theatre in the South African context.

Theatre in South Africa has been simultaneously entertaining and didactic, as well as at times, profoundly metaphysical. Foregrounding verbatim theatre practice in the contemporary northern hemisphere, where the complex and threatening issues of terrorism, human rights violations, and the ubiquitous fear following 9/11 dominate public discourse, suggests that theatre provides a significant space in which an audience can attempt to make sense of massive social injustice and upheaval. However, an important distinction between the perception of theatre in the African context and that of the Western world lies in a perceived relationship between the fictional and real worlds.

Kole Omotoso, a Nigerian writer, formulates the complex relationship between the world of art and the everyday world in Yoruba culture. He says that art cannot replicate or represent life because: first, it “does not operate in the same parameters, with the same value systems”; second, performers are not understood to play roles, rather they consciously *play with* them, in the sense of experiment with them; and finally, the audience understands that performance is a celebration to be enjoyed collaboratively, “a unified encounter of participants” (Omotoso 2004:9). Omotoso’s view of theatre is key to understanding how documentary theatre in South Africa departs from documentary theatre elsewhere in the world.

Neither “verbatim” nor “documentary” theatre are common terms for describing theatre in South Africa. One exception is Junction Avenue Theatre Company’s *Born in the RSA* (1986), which was subtitled “a docu-drama.” Yet many post-1960 writers and theatre practitioners have seen their central role as being to “bear witness” to the silenced truths under the oppressions of Apartheid.<sup>1</sup> The answer to this apparent paradox lies in the relationship between the “real” and “fictional” in the South African theatrical context, where the concepts blur for two reasons: the first and most obvious reason is to ensure the safety of both the sources and the performers of narratives that challenge the state. The second reason concerns an African philosophical approach to truth that is not predicated on a binary approach and thus does not place a high value on empirical proof to validate an inquiry or conceptual position. In the African context the story is itself important as a mode through which we can know ourselves and explore our history, identity, and collective value systems. A story is no less true for being fictional or constructed. “Actual” words, “verbatim” in a Western sense, are less important than whether a recognizable, lived truth is presented. A story’s truthfulness is evidenced in the audience’s reaction, insofar as it recognizes itself in the story and its telling. One of the key functions of theatre in Africa is to provoke debate on issues in spaces that facilitate discussion, often during the performance. Theatre in this context is highly interactive, and thus the “real” and the “fictional” constantly intersect and inform one another. (Schipper 1982:8). For example, in an African context an audience may interject commentary during the performance which the actors would be expected to acknowledge as they continue performing.

Another example of how this intersection works is evidenced in the collaborative work of Fugard, John Kani, and Winston Ntshona. As a white South African, Fugard suggested that his “life’s work was possibly just to witness as truthfully as I could, the nameless and destitute (desperate) of this one little corner of the world” (1983:172). This witnessing was not necessarily one of his own lived experience but that of those whose experiences had been silenced or marginalized. In the South African theatrical context, however, being a witness means standing between an actual experience and a constructed synthesis of reality, as exemplified in Fugard’s *The Island* (1972)



where John Kani and Winston Ntshona narrate through improvisation the lived experience of family and friends imprisoned on Robben Island while using their own names. Through this fiction, the lived reality of millions was verified, as can be attested by verbal responses during the play. The public performances were also in ironic defiance of the State's official position, and thus challenged its projected "truths."<sup>2</sup>

As South Africa changed, Apartheid's demise raised new issues regarding the interaction between theatre and South Africa's emergent political agendas. In 1988 Albie Sachs threw down an ideological gauntlet to South Africa's cultural activists when he challenged the political agendas of anti-apartheid activists who had insisted that "culture is a weapon of the struggle." He argued that while this view had been necessary, it had skewed the imagination and creativity of its people, resulting in "the multiple ghettos of the apartheid imagination" (Sachs [1988] 1991:187). He thus insisted that artists expand their approach, moving from viewing culture as something "purely instrumental and nondialectical", to something more open, an imaginative way to "remake ourselves" (ibid.:189). The new challenge, he argued, was to find a new aesthetic that both has the "capacity to expose contradictions and reveal hidden tensions" (ibid.:188) and finds a way of expressing a new sense of cultural diversity and political pluralism (ibid.:190–3). Sachs wanted imagination to unlock a new way of thinking about both cultural production and the way South Africans saw themselves and their world.

The use of cultural productions profoundly influenced the way the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was conceptualized. Its aims and objectives included: giving a complete picture of the gross violations of human rights which took place and which came from the conflicts of the past; to consider granting amnesty to those "perpetrators" who carried out the abuses for political reasons, and who gave full details of their actions to the commission; and, to restore victims their human and civil dignity by letting them tell their stories and recommending how they can be assisted (The Committee on Human Rights Violations 1995). As a departure from previous Commissions, the TRC envisioned the stories and active participation of survivors as a cornerstone of the process. Archbishop Tutu's foreword to the TRC report suggests that it offers "a road map to those who wish to travel into our past. It is not and cannot be the whole story; but it provides a perspective on the truth about a past that is more extensive and more complex than any one commission could, in two and a half years, have hoped to capture" (Tutu [1998] 2007:85).

But, as the so-called TRC plays demonstrate, this was not enough. These plays include Paul Herzberg's *The Dead Wait* (1997), Jane Taylor and the Handspring Puppet Company's *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1998), the Kuhlmani Support group's *The Story I Am About to Tell* (1998), and John Kani's *Nothing But the Truth* (2002). These plays suggest how and why people's stories and relationships needed to be told in ways that not only considered

the implications of the past, but also the implications of this process for the future.

*The Story I Am About to Tell* is verbatim theatre in the most literal sense. Three survivors who testified at the TRC narrate their own stories, alongside actors who question various aspects of the hearings, and offer fictional arguments, like the imagined plea for understanding by an ex-SA Defense Force soldier. As they travel in a minibus to the hearings, the status of white applicants, the evaluation criteria and compensation for amnesty hearings, and ultimately the problems of reconciliation and justice are all discussed. The complexities of documentary theatre are highlighted in this play by actual persons; Catherine Mlangeni, Thandi Shezi, and Duma Khumalo, telling their own stories in the fictional frame of the staged taxi journey to the hearings. At one level, the fictional frame of the play makes the shocking story bearable insofar as the frame distances the audience from the actual event. It is the fictional status of the theatrical space that allows audiences to engage with the narratives differently than if they were hearing them in a judicial or community hall setting. The same is true for the actual staging of the play: while the spatial arrangement replicated the TRC, having the witness tell his/her story alone downstage center made the audience intensely aware of their isolation and vulnerability, with the Commissioner translating into English from Sesotho or Zulu. This juxtaposition of stage and TRC contexts and conventions highlights aspects of manipulation and performance, as well as the potential damage such reiteration of narratives of victimhood may do to the narrator, who is not an actor.<sup>3</sup> This was addressed by those narrating their experience, "learning" the lines of their narrative and in the process distancing them from themselves. This is true too of the gestures that became emblematic of the strong emotions: Duma Khumalo wrung his hands as he narrated his experience on death row, hearing the daily marches to the scaffold and the sound of chains; Catherine Mlangeni rocked back and forth as she told of how her son was blown apart by a mail bomb in the next room; and Thandi Shezi covered her face with her hands as she remembered the shame of her rape.

In the formal discussion after the play at the Tricycle Theatre, London (1998), Thandi Shezi discussed her reservations about the TRC hearings, how the play has helped her heal the intense feelings resulting from repeated police rape in prison. Later in the women's toilet, though, she spoke of other responses that she had been unable to discuss in public. Although still speaking to a segment of the same audience, this latter space was closed, gendered, and thus facilitated different truths. The audience in London also struggled to ask questions in the open session. This was markedly different from the audience at the Market Theatre, Johannesburg (1997), where many of those in the audience were from the townships where they had experienced similar violence, and thus felt more able to engage the harsh sociopolitical realities being presented.

However, the frame of theatre may also ironically facilitate the audience's perception of the narratives as not real, and thus not necessarily worthy of serious attention or investigation of the status of the narrative truth beyond the performance. This challenge to those performing their own narratives was mitigated by the play's exploration of the perpetrator's experience and perspective. The ex-Defense Force soldier's story is fictional, performed by an actor. However, it is a personal story of how he was forced into the army. The soldier narrates how he struggles with both his past and present, and argues that to some extent he too was a victim. This narrative is highly provocative and a contested position in South Africa because it refuses to allow binary divisions along race lines on the issues of victimhood and culpability. Nevertheless, the play allows for South Africans to imagine reconciliation, asking what it means to accept stories that are verified by structures like the TRC as true, as opposed to those told by individuals excluded from these forums.

In contrast, *Ubu and the Truth Commission* by the Handspring Puppet Company is documentary theatre insofar as it incorporates verbatim narratives from the TRC, accompanied by documentary film footage of police violence and mass protest against apartheid, alongside very overt fictional devices such as framing the play with Jarry's *Ubu Roi* (1896) and the use of puppets. Before discussing how these devices worked in relation to the verbatim text, it is worth exploring the reasons for this complex layering of truth and fiction in the context of the TRC.

Mark Sanders has written about how the law was used to both "shape transition but also make for a transition of its own anticipated ends" (Sanders 2007:1), resulting in the "producing and promulgating of a new *official* history" (McEachern 2002:21). Thus, the use of verbatim narrative was profoundly linked to an archiving process. It was in the government's political interest to define and control documents of the past.<sup>4</sup> Brent Harris, for example, claims the TRC was in opposition to the Derridean notion of the archive as a place of "commencement" (2002:162), and suggests that there are numerous references to closure, "shutting the book on the country's past," to exhume in order to rebury more effectively (ibid.:162). The consequence of this is that the work of the TRC was self-referential:

It archived the evidence it required to support the history it produced and, by archiving its evidence, it guaranteed the veracity of the history it produced. (Harris 2002:163)

This process is profoundly linked to the primary objective of nation-building through reconciliation (Posel 2002:151–2).<sup>5</sup>

*Ubu and the Truth Commission* asks questions that were omitted in the hearings, questions such as "why do we betray or abuse each other" (Taylor 1998:iii). The play exposes the weaknesses of the evidence used in the new master narrative, and suggests possible implications of this process that was

facilitated primarily by the dissemination, transcription, and selection of verbal narratives via telecommunication technologies. The play thus appropriately juxtaposes verbal narrative with images to layer and critique the state supported truth. Pa Ubu washes off the evidence of the atrocities he had committed, the bones and blood, in the same shower booth that serves as the translation box in the hearings. To what extent does the TRC allow us to wash away our guilt? As Pa Ubu confesses enough to get amnesty and sings "the blood of the lamb sets me free," we see documentary evidence of the violence that is being excused. What is the real cost of forgiveness and *ubuntu*?<sup>6</sup> The final image of Pa and Ma Ubu sailing off into a golden sunset is ambiguous and uncomfortable, leaving the audience to make sense of this process of "truth and reconciliation."

The only narratives not challenged by back projection are the testimonies themselves. They are spoken by puppets with their two manipulators clearly visible. Again this allows the audience sufficient distance to hear the unspeakable yet deeply moving stories, while simultaneously suggesting how these narratives may have been manipulated in their translation and summation. The same puppeteers animate both aggressors (dog or crocodile) and the victims. However, they remain neutral, never commenting on or responding to the events they enact, despite animating and speaking for the puppets without any attempt to synchronize their speech with the mouths of the puppets. As Yvette Coetzee suggests, this choice forces the audience "to acknowledge that the puppeteer is speaking," allowing audiences to consider the possibility of "the different realities that are constantly played off one against each other comment[ing] on the situation in South Africa, where there are so many opposing truths existing alongside each other" (1998:41–42). The blurring of the fictional and the real in *Ubu and the Truth Commission* and *The Story I Am About to Tell* suggests that truth is beyond a compilation of lived experiences.

South African author and playwright André Brink goes even further and argues that the role of fiction should not aim to reproduce or represent reality, but to imagine something new and different through a process of memory image-making. This involves:

A recognition of Baudelairean "correspondences" between otherwise disparate objects or events, while simultaneously "making them strange" in the Russian-Formalist meaning of the phrase, infusing the ordinary with a sense of the extraordinary, the everyday with the fantastic, producing a result in which the whole is decidedly more than the sum of its parts.

(Brink 1998:31)

The need to challenge a quickly formulated official narrative resulted in the development of community forms of documentary theatre. Perhaps this is an indication of the desire to hold a forum for memory and discussion open. Theatre and dance groups working in the context of community initiatives

that focus on identity and community reconstruction have emerged, using archive and verbatim texts as the basis for new work.

Many significant projects that exemplify how theatre may be used to explore memory more creatively have emerged from the work of The District Six Museum's cultural program, which focuses on performative modes of individual and historic memory reconstruction. The District Six Museum is a "living museum," for ongoing verbatim performance established in the Methodist Church in Buitenkant Street as a project in 1989 to commemorate the area as a site of forced removals in Cape Town in the 1960s. The first exhibition entitled *Streets – Retracing the Past* (1994), set the agenda of the museum:

This exhibition is part of the project "District Six and Beyond" in which former residents from displaced communities in the Peninsula are invited to fill gaps in the story told in the District Six Museum by bringing their memories, stories, photographs and memorabilia and marking relevant spots in the museum spaces.

(District Six Museum 1994)

The logic for this is given in the quotation from Achmat Dangor's novel *Kafka's Curse* (1997) displayed on a plaque in the museum:

It struck me that our history is contained in the homes we live in, that we are shaped by the ability of these simple structures to resist being defiled.

This was the first of many exhibitions and the start of a growing archive, including a sound archive, which has become a complex narrative of South African Colored identity. The current permanent exhibition is called "Digging Deeper," named after the museum's continuing attempts to:

"dig deeper" into the museum's collections, processes, and meanings. Digging Deeper engages with the multiple ways in which the collections, resources and spaces of the museum are used, and expresses the central intention of the museum to enquire into the pasts of South African society and the workings of memory. The documentary material, oral histories and themes of the exhibition emerge from the collections of the museum.

(District Six Museum 2000)

Theatre companies like Magnet Theatre and Jazzart have used the resources of the District Six Museum in their own creative processes, particularly to explore the complex Cape Colored identity. For example, the more recent production *Onnest'bo* (Afrikaans for "upside-down"; performed in 2002, 2003, and 2005) looks at forced removals and fragmented memory. The Public Education Programme *Re-imagining Carnival* (2003) collaborated with the

museum to look at the so-called Cape Colored Coon Carnival and its exploration of the all but forgotten Cape slave narratives in a minstrel tradition, and how it impacts on contemporary Cape Colored identity.<sup>7</sup>

Magnet Theatre's collaborative creations *Onnest'bo* (2002) and *Cargo* (2007) were designed to tour using iconic set pieces of boxes as central images of removal, dislocation, and restitution. Both productions used the sound and visual archive of the District Six Museum, and in *Cargo* they also used records of slavery in the Cape from 1652–1838 as a means to navigate performance and historiography, and present an abiding and growing interest in excavation and archaeology (Pearson and Shanks 2001:55). The trigger for *Cargo* was the 2003 multi-million rand real estate development project began on an historical burial site in Cape Town. The project stopped when over a thousand bodies were recovered, igniting a fierce debate between archaeologists, business and cultural activists about the appropriate way to resolve the crisis regarding where and how the bodies of marginal and disenfranchised people should best be interred and honored.

Other companies, such as Brett Bailey and the Third World Bunfight Company, challenge the division between the real and fictional in ritual plays like *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997), *Ipi Zombie?* (1998), and *The Prophet* (1999).<sup>8</sup> These plays take actual experiences, social in the case of *Ipi Zombie?* and historic for the other plays, to explore current culpability for violence, dispossession, and social incoherence. The company uses an eclectic mix of spiritual forms: trance dance, African *sangomas* (diviners/ shamans), consciously combining the form of *intlombe*, a play within a ritual that uses European burlesque (Bailey 1998:193).

Theatre in South Africa continues to be the forum used to challenge dominant narratives of coherence and consensus. It asks not what happened, but what are the causes and implications of the happenings. Contemporary playwrights continue earlier approaches to exploring social taboos in theatre. For example, Mike Van Graan's *Green Man Flashing* (2004) engages the new challenges of post-Apartheid South Africa. Its plot involves a white activist lawyer who is raped by her boss, the incoming President, and is strongly urged to forfeit her right to justice for the greater good of the country. The significance of this situation is heightened when one realizes that South Africa has the highest per capita rape in the world, with 1.5 million rapes reported in 2005 (MacGregor 2006) and when one considers the social taboos surrounding rape<sup>9</sup> and South Africa's commitment to Moral Regeneration and Women's Rights as outlined in the constitution. The play also asks to what extent the TRC set a precedent as a "deal," that sacrifices the individual for the "greater good" (Van Graan 2006:201).

The context of the theatrical event defines to what extent the whole may be more real than its parts, and that asks us to hear, to place ourselves in the arena of the individual stories, and see the implications of such diversity and complexity for ourselves. It is significant that emergent theatre companies

in South Africa, like Magnet Theatre and Third World Bunfight, have moved away from realism towards a complex, overt performativity that signals itself, and thus alerts its audience to the constructedness of interpreted memory and experience, as well as suggesting the powerful role imagination may play in these processes. In this way theatre in South Africa uses embodied verbatim testimony to negotiate not a singular truth, but many truths allowing for a more contradictory exploration of the past, and hopefully offers a vision of a more tolerant future.

## Notes

1. See Walder (1992), Hauptfleisch (1997:115–56) on the implications of this in Fugard's plays. Nadine Gordimer on what this concept has meant in her own and other South African prose fiction (2002). The list of examples is potentially endless.
2. For more detail of examples of this relationship between fiction and reality in SA theatre during Apartheid, see Hutchison (2009).
3. See Butler on the power to injure through reiteration of violent narratives (1997); Ross (2003); and Schaffer and Smith (2004).
4. See Mbembe (2002) on the relationship between the archive and the state, and Martin (2006:9–15), on the complexities of selecting, editing, and organizing the material.
5. See Hutchison (2005) on an analysis of this process in relation to theatre.
6. *Ubuntu* is a concept founded on the notion of communalism: *motho ke motho ka batho* (I am because we are). It is driven by values related to truth, justice, and compassion (Motsei 2007:10).
7. To speak of race is to acknowledge that the terms are a pseudo-scientific construction of the nineteenth century, and very real signifiers for identities which, in South Africa, are in constant flux and instability. 'Colored' is particularly fraught, but generally refers to an acknowledged group of people in South Africa who are of mixed racial background, and generally speak Afrikaans as their mother tongue (see Erasmus 2001).
8. For images see Za@Play (1999).
9. See Ross (2003) for an analysis of this in women's narratives at the TRC.

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# 5

## Reality From the Bottom Up: Documentary Theatre in Poland

Agnieszka Sowińska

Translated by Benjamin Paloff

In contemporary Polish theatre, there are two currents that enjoy a great deal of discussion. The first is the serious reinterpretation of the classics, as in the theatre of Maja Kleczewska, Jan Klata, Monika Pęcikiewicz, and Michał Zadara. The second includes documentary or, more precisely, “paradocumentary” theatre. Paradocumentary theatre uses interviews, facts, and newspaper reports as its point of departure, with the factual sources serving to inform and inspire the creation of the text. This differs from the *verbatim* method prevalent in documentary theatre in the United Kingdom and United States, which exists only in isolated productions in the Polish theatre of today.<sup>1</sup> In both paradocumentary theatre and orthodox verbatim theatre, such as Moscow’s Theatre.doc, the production serves as a medium of history rather than as an individual authorial voice. Paradocumentary theatre includes the productions of the High-Speed Urban Theatre (Szybki Teatr Miejski), the works of Paweł Demirski, Cezary Harasimowicz’s play *10 Stories* (*10 piętér*, 2000), Marek Pruchniewski’s *Lucia and Her Children* (*Łucja i jej dzieci*, 2003), and Andrzej Stasiuk’s *Night* (*Noc*, 2005). Noteworthy productions based strictly on the verbatim method include *Transfer!* (2003), directed by Jan Klata at the Współczesny Theatre of Wrocław, and the performance piece *An Evening of Doc.* (*Noc z doc.*, 2006), by Wrocław’s Theatre Ad Spectatores. Both pieces arose out of collaborative workshops between the theatre’s actors and Alexander Radionov, the director and creative force behind Theatre.doc.

Jan Klata’s production of *Transfer!*, about the resettlement of Poles and Germans after World War II, employs both professional actors as well as the elderly people who experienced that great transfer of populations. The elderly performers, Germans expelled from the western provinces and Poles resettled from the eastern borderlands, speak about the loss of their homeland while the professional actors perform the participants of the Yalta Conference. Under the director’s guidance, the project’s Polish-German team of producers spent a year collecting the testimony of witnesses, ten of whom they gathered together to tell their stories in the performance. Their histories collide with the image of the Yalta Conference, where Stalin, Churchill, and

Roosevelt determined the postwar division of Europe, employing a map cut from *Life* magazine and three matches used to demarcate the new borders and zones of influence.

*An Evening with Doc.* is a performance about Poles and Russian immigrants living in Wrocław. A group of Russian and Polish actors from Theatre.doc and Theatre Ad Spectatores, respectively, spent a week with tape recorders and cameras, meeting with immigrants and recording their interviews. The actors found, among others, a female Russian director, an orchestral conductor, a prostitute, and an Orthodox priest working in a prison. These were Poland's first documentary theatre workshops based on the *verbatim* method. The actors became the voices of the people who had entrusted them with their stories.

Theatre Ad Spectatores also performed the documentary text *A Great Gluttony* (*Wielkie żarcie* in Russian, *Bol'shaia zhrachka*) by Alexander Vartanov, adapted from a performance by Theatre.doc in Moscow. Ad Spectatores adopted the finished composition, without directly engaging in the process of its creation. *A Great Gluttony's* believability derives from its having been created by the people who gathered the material and conducted the interviews. The authors of the work are the researchers/actors rather than an individual playwright; the dramaturge is responsible for the final arrangement of the gathered material.

## From history

The roots of Polish documentary theatre date back to the 1920s. Following the October Revolution in Russia, there were living newspapers and the Deep-Blue Blouse theatre company.<sup>2</sup> In Poland, the first person to use the concept of stage reportage and fact-montage was Leon Schiller, who in 1930 assumed the directorship of the Theatre in Lwów, which was then still part of Poland.<sup>3</sup>

In his fact-montage theatre, Schiller juxtaposed fragments of actual scenes witnessed on the street, in a café, and in meetings, of documents, facts, and statistics, of documentary films. The director's perspective was suggested solely by the arrangement of the scenes and by the order of images on the stage. Complementing the traditional repertoire with fact-montages and stage reportage arose in Schiller's work together with the concept of proletarian theatre, which was closely connected to Marxist ideology. Theatre played a role in the battle for a new social order established by the October Revolution. It was the voice of the working class and, above all else, it performed a propaganda function. Fact-montages and stage reportage based on documents and actual events were ideal instruments for this purpose. In Schiller's work, this period came to be known as *Zeittheatre*, or "theatre of its time," as it took up current, burning social issues. Schiller responded to the events of his day, shaping his prose around this goal and staging contemporary plays (for example, Stefan Żeromski's *The Rose*, Friedrich Wolf's *Cyankali*, and

Sergei Tretiakov's *Roar China!*). Staging social issues led to conflict with the authorities, among them the Minister of the Interior, who declared: "We'll teach Schiller not to stage social dramas."<sup>4</sup> Important as it was, the only time Schiller's fact-montage *The Social Politics of the Polish Republic* (*Polityka społeczna RP*) was staged in Poland during this period was in 1929 at the All-State Exhibition, in the pavilion of the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare. He put it together with Aleksander Wat, the Leftist avant-garde poet.<sup>5</sup> This is Schiller's only fact-montage to have been realized and recorded. According to researchers, as late as the 1930s Schiller still thought of documentary-based performances as the best realization of his theatrical vision, of a theatre that was socially engaged with its time. He also commissioned two plays that were to depict the history of Polish democracy, but nothing ever came of them.<sup>6</sup>

Since the 1960s, Polish theatre theorists have observed the phenomenon called *the theatre of fact*. Initially, this description applied only to theatre that served a propagandistic function. Documentary was used with the goal of creating or affirming that which was politically expedient. By frequently reproducing certain events and passing over others in silence, the Communist authorities skillfully shaped the social consciousness of the greater part of society. Documentarians (among them the film director Krzysztof Kieślowski) looked beyond the statistics, production quotas, and workloads dictated by the Communist authorities in order to take the human being who produced this work as their subject. Meanwhile, the signature feature of the school of reportage initiated by the influential author Ryszard Kapuściński is the attempt to speak from the perspective of what is spoken. Unfortunately, many documentary performances became a tool for anti-German, pro-Russian, pro-Soviet propaganda, in total agreement with the official worldview of the Polish People's Republic. But there is another theatre of fact from that time that calls for further attention.

The most interesting phenomenon in this period was the televised theatre of fact staged in the experimental Studio 63, at Polish Television (Telewizja Polska).<sup>7</sup> The most popular form to develop in the 1960s and 1970s at the Television Theatre was a series based on adaptations of court transcripts. The popularity of this formula drew on the structure of courtroom argument, which reflected classical, Aristotelian dramatic form, consisting of a protagonist, an antagonist, a conflict, a climax, and a dénouement. In 1969, Jerzy Antczak's production of *Nuremberg Epilogue* (*Epilog norymberski*) was the television theatre's first great staging of an actual court trial. It addressed the court arguments of Nazi war criminals before the international tribunal at Nuremberg in 1949, which resulted in the hanging of 11 of the accused. Another renowned performance from this period is *Trial at Liège* (*Proces w Liege*, 1963), directed by Mariusz Marzyński, which presented the prosecution of the makers of thalidomide.<sup>8</sup> The attempt to recreate historical events was the principal subject of televised theatre of fact until the 1980s. Riding

a wave of growing interest in television documentary, a new television production, *The Theatre of Fact and Sensation*, got underway in 1980, but it did not repeat the success the staging of court trials had enjoyed in the 1960s.

One of the most notable performances based on documentary material was *Accused: June 1956* (*Oskarżony: Czerwiec '56*), directed by Izabella Cywińska and staged among the audience at the Nowy Theatre in Poznań in 1981.<sup>9</sup> The production reconstructed the tragic events that took place in Poznań in 1956, when massive protests by workers against the communist government were met with violent repression, combining the testimony of witnesses with the speeches of politicians.

In the mid-1960s, the journalist and playwright Józef Kuśmierek started creating plays under the rubric of *stage reportage* (*sceniczny reportaż*).<sup>10</sup> Paradoxically, these plays, written 20 or 30 years ago, are closer to the *verbatim* method than to contemporary paradocumentary theatre. The play *And It's Always Raining* (*A deszcz ciągle pada*) ends with the words: "The events related here are based on three documented cases I encountered between 1974 and 1977. This project came out as a half-documentary radio play that won the Polish Radio competition in 1975 but was never performed. The next version in the spring of 1977 was a screenplay that was slated for production but also never produced."<sup>11</sup> The subject is a power plant that requires immediate repair; the condition of its infrastructure threatens the workers with serious injury or death. The action plays out over a single night. This play testifies to Kuśmierek's exceptional abilities, his talent for observation, which allows the audience to hear and observe each and every character. Kuśmierek, like a great many contemporary documentarians, inscribes the creative process into the play itself, without creating the appearance of a world shaped through fiction. The authorial commentary that closes the play is supposed to be performed on the stage. It forms an integral part of the story being dramatized.

The program *Natural Theatre* (*Teatr Naturalny*) took to the airwaves on Polish Radio in the late 1970s. Andrzej Bartosz and Wiesław Janicki, radio journalists from Białystok, created a radio play based on reportage. Their work differed from that of theatrical documentarians in its departure from real time and place: the events they portrayed "took place" in the fictitious community of Toplice, on the outskirts of Białystok. The actors of the *Natural Theatre* represented an employee of the House of Culture in the town of Goniądz, a man who guards the beavers in the Biebrza National Park, a watchmaker, a bus driver, a pensioner, a police officer, and a librarian. *Natural Theatre* was a lasting program on Polish Radio until the end of the 1980s, and it was enormously popular.

The 1990s were a period of intense political changes. Polish theatre suddenly lost its exceptional position. After many years of interference from the censorship, a free media gained the right to comment on political events. Poles became engaged in an immediate form of political observation, and the

theatre suddenly became one of many entertainments on the market. Only after ten years of capitalist governance would the time come to comment on the new political realities.

## The High-Speed Urban Theatre

The High-Speed Urban Theatre (Szybki Teatr Miejski) came into being in early 2004, just two months after the Wybrzeże Theatre organized its Festival of Russian Theatre, the *Saison Russe*. The festival's guest of honor was Moscow's Theatre.doc, a documentary theatre company that relies on the *verbatim* method for the majority of its performances. The name High-Speed Urban Theatre alludes to the High-Speed Urban Transport, the system of public transport in the Gdańsk tri-city area.<sup>12</sup> Paweł Demirski, assuming a leadership role in the project, already had plenty of literary-theatrical experience with the notion of documentary theatre. A former student of journalism, he had spent a year in theatre workshops at London's Royal Court Theatre.

As part of the project, plays were composed and staged about the Polish abortion underground,<sup>13</sup> neo-Nazism,<sup>14</sup> prostitutes from the East,<sup>15</sup> and the wives of Polish soldiers in Iraq.<sup>16</sup> The High-Speed Urban Theatre portrayed those who had been forgotten in the official version of the world. In each instance, the plays were written through research and conversations with people, using documents – newspapers, stories, and reports – to dig deeper into the subject matter. The playwright then transformed the collected material. He would not quote his heroes word-for-word, but the true story, the narrative, and fact became the point of departure for the author's composition.

All of the High-Speed Urban Theatre's performances took place in private apartments, before audiences who were bussed in. This coziness brought the audiences closer to the problems under discussion and forced its viewers to imagine what lay behind the closed doors of their friends and neighbors. One of the theatre's productions, *Memoir of a Decade of Homelessness* (*Pamiętnik z dekady bezdomności*, 2005), was staged in a homeless shelter in the Brother Albert Hostel, in the New Port section of Gdańsk. Members of the audience sat on beds used daily by the shelter's clientele. In Paweł Demirski's adaptation, *Memoir of a Decade of Homelessness* is the reminiscence of Anna Łojewska, homeless for ten years. She was portrayed by Tomira Kowalik, an actress from the Wybrzeże Theatre, accompanied on stage by a trio of nonprofessional actors, themselves homeless, who appeared in the production under their actual names: Tomasz Otto, Sławomir Rychliński, and Rafał Rankau. At a certain point, the homeless interrupt the actress and take over the performance. One says: "Now everybody's putting on a little play about something, and you're putting on a little play about us, pretending to be homeless. What for? Don't I know how bad I have it?"<sup>17</sup> In other High-Speed Urban Theatre productions, the figures perform sometimes under their own names, sometimes

under a pseudonym or by profession, by the functions they play in society or on the stage. There is no uniform rule to which all these compositions are subject.

The High-Speed Urban Theatre closed its doors in 2005 with the departure of the Wyrbrzeże Theatre's artistic director, Maciej Nowak, and with him the theatre's playwright, Paweł Demirski.

### **Paweł Demirski: stage reportage**

In his own work, Paweł Demirski relies on conversations with witnesses and on unmediated accounts. Unique among Polish dramatists, he admits to using reportage in the construction of his productions. This is not pure transcription, however, but literary transposition.

One of the heroes of his play *From Poland with Love* is a street. She is represented by figures labeled "1→" and "2→," who, according to the author, "may be played by different actors." The text is written in the style of an overheard conversation, and one catches disconnected words and incomplete sentences, which seem to cast the listener momentarily into someone else's life. The characters have no name. They function as "He" and "She," as social functions, like police officer, whore, or – as in the play *Waleśa: A Happy Story, Though Unusually Sad* (*Wałęsa: Historia wesola, a niezwykle przez to smutna*) – as the first letter of someone's actual name. Besides Lech Wałęsa, the eponymous hero, the play includes other heroes of that era, such as Andrzej Gwiazda, Anna Walentynowicz, and Danuta Wałęsa. The action is set in the years 1980 to 1989, from the call to strike at the Gdańsk Shipyards to the Polish Round Table Talks.<sup>18</sup> Because he deliberately dispenses with full names, Demirski humanizes figures who, for Poles, have become public icons.

The inspiration for the play *Don't Be Surprised When They Come to Burn Your House Down*<sup>19</sup> was the death of an employee of a Łódź refrigerator factory belonging to the Italian Indesit Company. A press had crushed the head of a 21-year-old worker. Inspectors from the State Occupational Safety Administration determined that the machine was being used without proper safety measures. The text of the play was based on nearly 20 hours of tape-recorded conversations with workers, which Paweł Demirski and Paulina Murawska had conducted and collected over the course of several months. The production's main hero was the worker's widow, who wanted to find out the truth for herself. In disguise, she got a job at the Indesit factory, in the very same area where her husband had died. She managed to take several pictures, but she was found out and expelled.

### **In conclusion**

In the mid-1960s, Jerzy Koenig, a famous Polish theatre critic, was asked to explain the roots of Polish theatre based on actual events. "The theatre of

fact,” he remarked, “was born not so much from a fascination with fact, documentary, and the official record, as from the author’s helplessness in the face of a given problem. How can one write about dropping an atomic bomb on Hiroshima? How can one present the drama of a scientist whose discovery is used to murderous ends, and who is himself persecuted by the security forces? About the Pope’s conduct during the Second World War? About the crimes of Eichmann? Auschwitz? Majdanek? The drama of Rosa Luxemburg, of a social activist who also wants to be a woman?”<sup>20</sup>

Let us hope that this helplessness in the face of reality might become the vehicle for its transformation.

## Notes

1. *Verbatim* (from Latin, “literally” or “word for word”): A group of “doc.artists” (actors, a director, a playwright) conducts interviews with a social group that represents a particular subject or issue. The recorded material is written down, and the playwright uses it as the basis for his “doc.play.” In orthodox *verbatim*, the playwright is not allowed to add a word of his own. Selection and editing, however, are always subjective interpretation.
2. The Living Newspaper (Zhivaiia gazeta) appeared in Russia after the October Revolution. An entirely new form of theatre, it developed out of the so-called “oral newspaper.” Productions were based on newspaper reports and on facts about everyday life. The Deep-Blue Blouse (Siniaia bluza) was a kind of propaganda street theatre. These groups were dissolved in the early 1930s.
3. Edward Csátó, *Leon Schiller* (Warsaw: PIW, 1968), 391. Leon Schiller (1887–1954): A director and theoretician of the theatre. His most important productions were: *A Stall with Songs* (*Kram z piosenkami*), *Forefather’s Eve* (*Dziady*, 1934), *The Un-Divine Comedy* (*Nieboska komedia*, 1938), and *Roar China!* (*Krzyczcie Chiny*, 1932). His essays on theatre were collected as *An Enormous Theatre* (*Teatr ogromny*) and *On the Verge of a New Theatre* (*U progu nowego teatru*).
4. Csátó 1968: 374.
5. Aleksander Wat (1900–1967): A Polish poet, the co-founder of Polish Futurism.
6. Csátó 1968: 394.
7. The Television Theatre: An institution that operates under the auspices of state public television, producing and broadcasting theatrical performances. The first performance was broadcast in 1953, and since then TV Theatre has produced over 4000. TV Theatre maintains the structure of a repertory theatre, with a creative director and consultants. It puts together a repertoire, hires actors and directors, and premieres its work on Polish Television 1 and 2.
8. Thalidomide: A sedative first made available in Europe in 1957 and banned in 1961. Recommended to pregnant women as a “sleep aid,” it caused birth defects in over 10,000 children, primarily malformation of limbs, deafness, blindness, and cleft palate.
9. *June 1956*: Street protests against the totalitarian government in Poznań in June 1956; the demonstrations were violently suppressed by the police and the army. This was the first general strike in the Polish People’s Republic. Fifty-eight people died.



10. Józef Kuśmierek (1927–1992): A reporter known for his extreme sensitivity to the human condition. Until the end of his life, he collected material using only a microphone. Polish Radio has recognized him as one of the “fathers of reportage.” They have also established the “Józef Kuśmierek Microphone Award” for current investigative reporting. His most important plays were *Lost Vacations* (*Stracone wakacje*, 1966), 1979 (*Rok 1979*, 1989), and *And It's Always Raining* (*A deszcz ciągle pada*, 1975).
11. Józef Kuśmierek, *A deszcz ciągle pada*, in *Dialog* 12 (1980).
12. The tri-city area, Trójmiasto, encompasses the cities of Gdańsk, Gdynia, and Sopot, situated on the northern coast of Poland.
13. *Carbon Copy* (*Przebitka*), researched and written by Izabela Wasińska, directed by Agnieszka Olsten. Premiered on 15 March 2004.
14. *Ours* (*Nasi*), written by Joanna Sztukator, concept by Paweł Demirski, directed by Anna Trojanowska. Premiered on 19 February 2004. Based on an extensive interview with Gepard, the leader of the Polish skinhead group *Blood and Honour*, based in the Gdańsk tri-city area.
15. *Women from the East* (*Kobiety z Wschodniej*), documentary and film materials by Marcin Koszałka, written and directed by Magdalena Ostrokólska. Premiered on 15 March 2004.
16. *Fall Down* (*Padnij*), written by Paweł Demirski, documentation by Andrzej Mańkowski, directed by Piotr Waligórski. Premiered on 19 February 2004. Based on conversations with the wives and mothers of soldiers in Iraq.
17. Roman Pawłowski, “Felieton teatralny – pierwszy teatr dokumentalny w Polsce,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 19 February 2004.
18. In August 1980 a strike in the Gdańsk Shipyards sparked the creation of the national Solidarity labor union, which served until 1989 as a mass opposition movement against the Communist authorities in the Polish People's Republic. Solidarity led to the Round Table Talks, with participation by representatives of the Communist government, the opposition, and the Church. This initiated the shift from the People's Republic to democratic rule.
19. Wybrzeże Theatre in Gdańsk, directed by Romuald Wicza-Pokojski. Premiered on 10 June 2006.
20. Jerzy Koenig, “Polityka – dokument – teatr,” *Miesięcznik Literacki* 1 (1966).

# 6

## The Scripted Realities of Rimini Protokoll

Florian Malzacher

Four women in their eighties, with their old voices and old bodies, pose as race car drivers with signal flags, a stair lift, and Zimmer frames for orientation. Speed, the proximity of death, and the merging of bodies and technology are important themes in homes for the elderly as well as in Rimini Protokoll's *Kreuzworträtsel Boxenstopp* (*Crossword Pit Stop*; 2000) with its fictional staging of a Formula One race that results in astonishingly perceptive narratives about life at the end of life.

Rimini Protokoll is, in varying configurations, a company of three freelance directors – Helgard Haug, Stefan Kaegi, and Daniel Wetzel – who, without using actors or preexisting texts, produce work on major stages in important cities such as Hamburg, Vienna, Düsseldorf, and Zurich. Since *Kreuzworträtsel Boxenstopp*, the work of Haug, Kaegi, and Wetzel has become surprisingly successful for a theatre group that does not work with actors, does not stage dramatic texts, and does not meet the requirements of the kind of repertory theatre that dominates German and most European stages. The members of Rimini Protokoll have been invited twice to the Berliner Theatertreffen (where theatre not created from dramatic texts is rarely represented) and recently were awarded the Mülheimer Dramatikerpreis and the Europe Prize for New Theatrical Realities. Tours of their new productions typically take place throughout Europe as well as in South America and India.

Rimini Protokoll's success is due to its presentation of a complex world in which the individual is fundamental and the truth is always the form of a narrative. The company has hit a nerve among, somewhat exceptionally, theatre practitioners, critics, and audiences alike with theatre that is documentary in the sense that it relates directly to the world as we experience it, an experience that often goes unacknowledged or unappreciated. War, the global market economy, capitalism, unemployment, old age, dying, and death, all are Rimini Protokoll's themes. They stake a claim for the particular, concrete person and against the politically generalized. Their version of a documentary is one in which the conventional notion of objective documentary is juxtaposed with very subjective experiences, in which the individual and

the social are brought together in a way that expands both objective and subjective perception. While unequivocal theses, messages, and opinions are avoided, Haug, Kaegi, and Wetzel make, to loosely quote Godard, theatre political rather than political theatre.

*Kreuzworträtsel Boxenstopp* was the first collaborative work by Haug, Kaegi, and Wetzel, three former students of the Institute of Applied Theatre Studies in Gießen, Germany. The premiere in November 2000 (before the group took the name Rimini Protokoll) exhibited almost all of the characteristics that have so unmistakably informed all their subsequent work. These persistent production values include the use of nonprofessional performers as “experts” of both their own lives and of the everyday; the examination of the actual performance space and its surroundings (in the case of *Kreuzworträtsel Boxenstopp*, an old people’s home next door to the theatre); a text that is simultaneously documentary and literary, blending disparate research materials (e.g., blending research on old age into the staging of a fiction such as the Formula One race) and bears clear traces of its own production; and, a dramaturgy that, like the text, developed from the material as it was discovered; and that always simultaneously protects and challenges the performers. *Kreuzworträtsel Boxenstopp* was in many respects not only the prototype for a number of major stage productions that followed, but also the starting point for site-specific projects, radio plays, audio installations, short film documentaries, and short profiles.

Early on, Rimini Protokoll coined the term “experts” for their performers: experts on particular experiences, fields of knowledge, and skills. “Experts” consciously opposes the idea of amateur theatre: those onstage should not be judged by what they can’t do (i.e., act), but rather by the special abilities and capabilities that justify their presence on stage. The direction a given performance might take – its themes, characters, locales, and text – is up to the experts. This renders conventional methods of critical evaluation irrelevant. Technical ability, shading, and depth of character are not useful measures of the theatrical worth of Rimini Protokoll. Charisma? Presence? Tricky concepts in any case and not adequate for assessing the abilities of Rimini’s performers. It is not even necessarily important that the performers have experienced the great stories they bring to the stage. Often it is a relatively unspectacular bit of biographical or professional knowledge, the expert’s social function, or a particular relationship he or she has had that makes a performer valuable to a project.

At first, the directors of Rimini found people interesting primarily because of their specific physicality. For example, Kaegi, who spent a year working as a journalist on the local news for Solothurn in Switzerland, found what he calls the “multicoded” voices of the elderly women of *Kreuzworträtsel Boxenstopp* – their slowness, their palpable fragility – theatrically compelling. The pubescent boys in *Shooting Bourbaki* (2002) were restless, full of energy, and overly eager. *Deadline* (2003), a work about dealing with

death; *Sabenation, go home and follow the news* (2004), about the bankruptcy of the Belgian national airline; *Schwarzenbergplatz* (2004), about diplomacy; and the model-railway world of *Mnemopark* (2005) – all four productions brought diverse types of labor, varied personal interests, and a range of bodies created by these specific forms of activity to the stage. Rimini Protokoll uses theatre as a medium to bring ordinary people to the stage, people who would otherwise be audience members but more likely left out of the theatre altogether. The work is more about being captivated by the connecting threads between stories resulting in an overarching and coherent narrative.

Some projects consciously set the threshold for choosing the experts as low as possible: *Deutschland 2* (2002) looked for people to represent each member of the German parliament. In total 237 experts were engaged; everybody who understood the idea was accepted. Likewise *100% Berlin* (2008), which comprised a demographic cross-section of Berlin, brought onstage 100 experts who had no particular connections or relationships. Other projects such as *Wallenstein. Eine dokumentarische Inszenierung* (*Wallenstein. A Documentary Staging*; 2005) and *Karl Marx. Das Kapital. Erster Band* (*Karl Marx. Capital. First Volume*; 2007) required complex casting considerations: respectively, Schiller's thematic motifs and characters, and the different effects of economic theory and philosophy on private lives had to be represented through experts in a rather abstract way. People were cast both to represent specific motifs and characters. To portray an aspect of *Wallenstein*, for example, a performer would represent being a politician who had been betrayed by other party members. And, in terms of private lives, they were cast as people having to make decisions that would affect their friends. Despite the freedom of interpretation with which Rimini Protokoll approaches documentary materials, their theatre requires extensive research as well as lengthy discussions with experts (much of which does not end up on stage). Sometimes the material results of the research go directly into the performance as video clips or as quotations in the text; sometimes they serve to give the directors a sense of how a particular theme might be developed. Documentary technique in this way of thinking is not so much about telling a story that is factually true, but about telling a story in a theatrical setting in which the truth often lies in small details, not in the big or factual picture. Rimini Protokoll's research may take a form similar to journalism, but it has an entirely different goal. "In the end we really are not interested in whether someone is telling the truth, but rather in how he presents himself and what role he is playing" (Wetzel 2007).

For Rimini Protokoll, facts cannot be separated from fiction. "Our research is often more about atmospheres. Or else maybe we will remember the poster hanging behind an expert's desk, and this sparks something. It is often the small things that become important" (Haug 2007). Significant details become the focus of the performances, on the one hand underpinning the documentary nature of the work, on the other hand destabilizing it, since the authenticity of the detail is always uncertain. In *Das Kapital*, the Marx expert

Thomas Kuczynski contributed the one and a half meters of rare editions of *Das Kapital* that were on his desk at the first meeting with Rimini Protokoll. Once the insurance details had been finalized, he rolled his two suitcases of books to each rehearsal and each performance. Eventually, however, the prop makers replicated most of the books: it was the feeling of the perception of authenticity that was important.

Viewing Rimini Protokoll's work is viewing the perceived authenticity of the experts and the characters – and they *are* characters – the experts create through their own physical conditions and appearances. But the experience of viewing is also the result of a carefully devised dramaturgy, production, and text created by the directors. Reality has to be scripted. Rimini Protokoll, as the name suggests, primarily uses journal (*Protokoll*) techniques and diary writing and the logic of the journal informs all of their texts. In *Kreuzworträtsel Boxenstopp*, for example, Frau Falke sits on a raised chair and unwinds her text from a large scroll that contains the story of the fictional Formula One race, a chronicle of her experience of rehearsals, and the stories of all the women who are performing in the piece. In short, her script is a narrative of the path to the premiere of the performance she is performing.

Questions about how it is still possible to speak on stage, whose voice is heard when a performer speaks, and what form, apart from the pervasive field of narrative, psychological, dialogue-based drama, this speech can take have been central to experimental and anti-representational theatre since the 1980s. Rimini Protokoll has found its own answers to these questions. The journal format is playfully accompanied by references to an avant-garde theatre tradition of formalized or ritualized language (e.g., lists, question and answer games, or abstract descriptions and theses) that organizes the most varied narrative layers in an invented or real chronology. The actual rehearsal process, the biographical material of the participants, and the overarching fictional and/or factual narrative are intertwined. This creates a micro-macro structure that fluidly switches between close-up, detailed anecdotes, and wide-shot big-picture contexts: in *Boxenstopp* the slowness of old age contrasts the speed of motor-racing; *Shooting Bourbaki* connects kids' violent computer games to real shootings; *Mnemopark* links model railway fans' passion for collecting and building to questions of memory; *Blaiberg* juxtaposes a successful heart transplant with a romance to pair very different matters of the heart; and *Wallenstein* categorized ex-politicians, Vietnam veterans, astrologers, and marriage brokers according to Schiller's themes. Such extreme contrasts offer the audience the possibility of making entirely new associations.

Similar to Brecht's *Lehrstücke* (learning plays), the experts face us and skillfully avoid the representational problems of role-playing in which dialogue is obviously performed to simulate conversations, to fake spontaneity, and to create psychological empathy. Yet Rimini's use of direct address suggests a conversation between real partners – but which is actually one-sided. The very fact that their words do not appear spontaneous, but rather as somewhat

uncertain presentations by speakers who are not especially well-trained in theatre acting, paradoxically increases the appearance of honesty. Brecht's alienation effect, designed to prevent an audience from over-identifying itself with stage content, has long been seen as a supposed guarantee of authenticity. With Rimini Protokoll, the unactorly speech of the performers is automatically attributed to the real, "real people."

Rimini's texts result from a process of questioning and listening. The resulting material has to be reconciled again and again with the performer's reality. What does it sound like and how does it feel when the experts speak texts that begin as their own, but have been taken away from them, refined, and given back? The text is reconciled with what they are both willing and able to say. What sort of phrasing are they resistant to? Which grammatical structures don't ring true? Which bits of content do they insistently modify? The experts tend to learn the rules of this process fairly rapidly, realizing that what they have said goes into the text and is transformed. The creation of the performance text is often a process of negotiation that can have significant repercussions. An expert may, like the Marx expert Thomas Kuczynski in *Kapital*, exchange the correct word, against his better judgment (in this case "use-value") for a more casual but essentially wrong one (namely, "value") in order to assert his independence from the production and to distinguish between himself and his role.

A Rimini Protokoll performance is never perfect, nor should it be. At the point where the performers become practiced enough to feel secure and begin to build their roles and to act, the piece loses more than just its charm. Insecurity and fragility are the defining characteristics of what is understood by many to be authenticity on stage. Yet such moments when timing, tension, empathy, and presence disappear due to "authentic" inexperience can also be agonizing. Some excruciating moments include when the retired construction boss Johannes Baur briefly lost his way in the premiere of *Uraufführung*, when the roughly 80-year-old Frau Düring had to trawl her memory for her next sentence in *Kreuzworträtsel Boxenstopp*, and when the performers in *Sabonation* whispered text to one another intending for the audience not to hear. The audience might suffer for a moment, sharing the performers' embarrassment, yet they are also touched by the efforts of those who cannot protect themselves with acquired techniques. Such moments in Rimini's productions do not cruelly objectify performers, nor do they leave the impression that the performers have been exposed in situations for which they are not a match – as much as they convey a detectable sense of mutual responsibility. Allowances for such gaffs are built into the dramatic structure of the pieces themselves, and other performers spring to the rescue when needed. This is Rimini Protokoll's dramaturgy of care.

In *Kreuzworträtsel Boxenstopp* Haug, Kaegi, and Wetzel were first and foremost confronted with the need to help their aged experts through the evening without sacrificing artistic considerations. Because of the unstable physical conditions of the performers and the effect their living circumstances had

on them, *Boxenstopp* showed more clearly than other pieces what lay at the heart of all the works. During the production process, Rimini found a logic that enabled their experts to act with self-confidence in the performance and to assert themselves as a legitimate part of the theatrical process. Flag signals given from the prompt box by Haug, for instance, were both an element of the piece's Forumla One narrative and a clear on-stage signal for what happens next. The reports read by Frau Falke were quite clearly the log of a race in which the elderly women (for reasons that were not entirely clear, having something to do with curious scientific research) had taken part. The small stair-lift used in the performance was a playful allusion to motorized technology as well as to an actual movement aid for the performers. Necessity dictated stage events and elements as well as drove the narrative and its meaning. The logic of the dramaturgy of care is an analogue to that of the plot. "The racing drivers only survive by receiving external signals. Otherwise they would simply end up driving into a wall" (Wetzel 2007). These aids (sometimes obvious, sometimes discreet but never hidden) have since found their way into almost all the pieces, serving supportive and narrative functions at the same time.

The dramaturgy of care doesn't just apply to cues during performance, but also to the texts. These must remain both independent and supportive. The fact that some characters in *Der Besuch der Alten Dame: Uraufführung* (*The Visit: World Premiere*; 2007) speak Swiss German and others do not has its origin in this approach – allowing experts to speak in the language they are most comfortable with – as does the use of crib sheets and instruction boards, and dialogue that has obviously been learned by rote. It is not just the feelings of the performers themselves that play a part in this. Sometimes the performers need to be protected from themselves, from being exposed to an unknown situation, which involves Rimini Protokoll watching carefully to see "when something disconcerting develops, in some way a piece goes in the wrong direction and you decide, no, you don't want to sit across from these people and listen to them like this. In this way they don't communicate what you want to show of them, about them or from them" (Haug 2007).

In the moments when reality breaks through, we are thrown back to a banal fundamental principle of theatre: we are sitting in a room together with other real people, facing the possibility of mistakes, breakdowns, and failures (even the possible death of a performer or a neighbor, as Heiner Müller would emphasize). Theatre is always flirting with the idea of being ephemeral and elusive, and claims these transitory moments, this non-repeatability, as its essence, that which differentiates it from all other arts, while at the same time placing primary value reproducibility that is as exact as possible. This paradox stimulates many leading contemporary theatre practitioners, including the members of Rimini Protokoll:

The work really starts from detachment, from an interest in strangers: doing something with a conservative politician or a policeman. During

the production comes a moment of complicity, which is very important. This complicity is possible because you can clearly tell people that the reason they are here is their otherness. They simultaneously search to legitimize themselves onstage, and it lies within the fact that they can maintain this otherness and not make everything right.

(Haug 2007)

Rimini Protokoll approach their themes and protagonists through empathy, listening – not only showing and telling – and never denouncing. Rimini's experts stare back into the audience from within their roles, but directly, nonetheless. This affront is by no means harmless or trivial. In Stefan Kaegi's *Chácara Paraíso* (2007; created together with Argentinean director and author Lola Arias) the Brazilian police force is criticized for its Mafia-style structure, for corruption, and for human rights abuses. "We wanted to break through the way that subjects like Iraq, Israel, or the Brazilian police are reported with just one particular message. Instead of this, we wanted to represent the everyday rather than the scandals" (Kaegi 2007). The small stories not the big system. Rimini trusted the public to think through the facts of the events. How much of the truth lies in what is said; is there more in what the character keeps to himself? The improvised firing range as well as the use of screens to prevent the performers from being seen directly and the use of stage names were evidence that there was more at stake than the purely biographical or simply anecdotal. These life stories were also political stories that in the telling brought with them a very real danger. Each person had to decide in a split second if he would take aim in self-defense or accidentally shoot an innocent person.

Works like *Chácara Paraíso* make clear the barriers Rimini's theatre pushes against. Display rather than judge, but only display what people are willing to show onstage. Contradictory ideas can be juxtaposed (as in *Wallenstein* or *Kapital*), and imperfections made visible. But even when distancing techniques are brought into play, they are only possible with the consent of the participants: "It is never the intention with any of our works to provoke disapproval, as when a child comes out of the theatre and sees the actor on the street and says, 'You're bad'" (Kaegi 2007). The aim is to encourage audience members to be diplomatic, to point a finger not at the actor but at the issue. The question is, to what degree is it possible to create the necessary conditions for diplomacy?

Rimini Protokoll's work focuses on the present. It is a theatre of the instant. It brings characters together from our time and for a time, arranging them sometimes by fields of knowledge, sometimes by occupation, by age, by destiny – and then disperses them again. Rimini Protokoll's theatre is dependent neither on a reservoir of existing or newly written dramatic characters, nor on the same age-group performers upon which other independent theatre practitioners rely. It shows people rarely or never seen on the theatrical



stage. It shows them as calm and centered, not, as with reality TV and talk shows, in states of crises, either real or artificial. It does not try to hide the fact that on stage their authenticity is simply a role. Even if it is the role of their life...

## **References**

- Haug, Helgard 2007 Unpublished interview with author. Zurich, 10 June.  
Kaegi, Stefan 2007. Unpublished interview with author. Zurich, 10 June.  
Wetzel, Daniel 2007. Unpublished interview with author. Zurich, 10 June.

## **Part 2**

### **Texts**

# 1

## *REwind: A Cantata*

### INTRODUCTION TO *REWIND: A CANTATA FOR VOICE, TAPE AND TESTIMONY*

*Jessica Dubow*

A “re” in the title. Re-wind. To reverse, to move backwards; but also to repeat where the idea of what is past is also present, or to return where the going back is a doubling back. To rewind: a spool of film, a thread of tape, a sound of a story. But we can’t say where what is seen, or heard, or happened starts or finishes, or when. “It has already begun and so already finished beginning”;<sup>1</sup> it is always ‘already there’ and always ‘not yet’.<sup>2</sup>

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Rewind: With neither beginning nor end, there is only the property of a present, its presence – opened up, ramified, expanded, looped. Not driven by simple succession, it is time as a breach, as impasse, as something impassable. Not measured by continuity, it is time as the *here and now*, the immediate, the instant – swollen, stretched-out, abiding. Rewind: the presence of an atemporal dimension in time, or a time that has to “break with continuity before it can continue”.<sup>3</sup>

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There is no overture to Philip Miller’s *REwind: A Cantata*; there is no preparatory point – a beat, a rhythm, a notation – that holds within it the terms of development. For the first few minutes, no music can be heard. Or perhaps what is there is the very presence of the inaudible: not silence, but the open space, the taking-place, of a *sounding*. Against waves of discordance – strings tuning up, the irritant of microphone feedback, the whine of tape rewound – we hear something, we hear nothing, we can’t say one way or another:

*“[...] let him be sworn in. Are you Afrikaans speaking? He can’t hear. Yes, you’ve got the earphones all right? [...] You swear that the evidence you’re about to give in this application will be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth? Raise*

*your right hand and say 'so help me God'. [...] The speakers mike is not on! [...] He can't hear the translations from the booth. [...] could you repeat that please? [...] Mr. Hlope, can you hear me now? Can you hear me now? Can you hear me now? [...] I can't remember the exact day. [...] Do you remember or did you ever know the names of the policemen who beat you?"*<sup>4</sup>

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First conceived in 2006, Miller's *Cantata* coincided with the tenth anniversary of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the key transitional statutory body created to provide "as complete a picture as possible of the nature, causes, and extent of gross human rights violations committed between 1 March 1960 and 5 December 1993."<sup>5</sup> Over a five year period, the Commission was to provide a public forum for the victims of the apartheid state to confront their perpetrators and to have the brutality of crimes, authorized and committed, publically exposed and admitted to. It was on this basis that post-apartheid South Africa was to stake its claim to an inclusive notion of participatory citizenship and a redefined ethical conception of the nation. It was on this basis, too, that a therapeutic language of retrieved personal trauma would be linked to the ideal of a collectively healed body-politic.<sup>6</sup>

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The opening moments of Miller's *Cantata* halt all such assurances. Indeed, if the transmission of events, their transmissibility, is that which commonly orders our national narratives, disciplines our histories, and shapes memory into the aesthetics of memorialization, then *REWind* poses a radical alternative. Voice, tone, pitch, and cadence fold in on each other and fade out as a passing, a surpassing, of the linear and relational. Between sound and sense, speaker and hearer, there is caesura, lapse, and loss. But there is nothing politically passive or quiescent about this. *Cantata* is not simply the analogy of a failed national imaginary or of the limits to any personal and collective reckoning. Miller's acoustic is about the condition of testimony: the underside of what can be said and heard, the ordeal of agreeing and of trying to speak. Mostly, it is the understanding that what must be transmitted is precisely the *impossibility* of transmission, and the listening, the witnessing, of this impossibility as a responsibility. If this troubles the confident incantation of new nationhood or reverses the redemptive chronology of trauma, through retrieval, to repair, it also articulates that inarticulable condition: the condition of survival, infinitely present, incessantly 'taking-place'; of living-on, living-after, in that time-collision in which truth and history, an original event and its belated expression, are always *presently* at stake. Thus:

*My son was eleven. He came home during school break at ten o'clock. I was sitting. Sitting in that very chair. He walked in dressed in his school uniform.*

*Went to the cupboard over there. Cut himself a slice of bread. He's doing all this in a rush. He's like that when he comes home during break. He spreads the peanut butter and then puts the rest of the bread back, leaving the crumbs all over the cupboard, and the knife, still smudged with peanut butter...He ran out. He's still chewing his bread and holding it in his hand. It wasn't long – I heard the shots outside.*<sup>7</sup>

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On stage, a transparent gauze screen; in front stand a quartet of soloists – mezzo, soprano, bass, tenor, and a string octet; in back – half-seen, half-sensed, ghosted, as if ancestral – are the 65 members of The Gauteng Choristers.<sup>8</sup> And so, three densities of sound: the taped testimonies of victims and perpetrators; a massed chorus of traditional African hymns, protest chants, religious and profane; solo voices picking up, reforming and deforming, the skein of a song, a scrap of material evidence, an unutterable cry. And three penetrations of witnessing: individual testifier, witness to the self; chorus and soloist, witness to the memory of others; testifier, chorus, soloist and audience witnesses to the process of witnessing itself.

On screen<sup>9</sup>: a videoed photographic sequence of text and image, metonym and fragment: a chair, a bed, a loaf of bread, a glass of milk, a house, a scrap of libretto transcribed over the oversized and singular, at once commonplace but insufficient, Gerhard Marx's visual language mimics the work of referencing but exceeds all explanatory frames. Like the content of a traumatic dream, the literalness of his photographic images, their nonsymbolic insistence (the image of a piece of crushed cloth waving gently as if in a breeze which accompanies the testimony of wet-bag torture, the dead bird, beak opened, feet stiffened, which collides into a mother's memory of a dead son) don't so much align the visual sign to a traumatic event, but question the nature of what this (curative) alignment might be. Indeed, like Miller's acoustic, coming and displacing, advancing and returning, Marx's images speed up, slow down, and refuse to settle, as if to speak of the incompleteness of history, to the collapse of its boundaries, its beginnings and ends.

The effect of the whole is not the accumulation, much less the integration, of sound, image, eye, and ear, but an internal torsion, a synaesthetic twist – the very kind, perhaps, from which memory is made up, through which it presents itself.

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*"I feel that what has brought my sight back, my eye sight back, is to come back here and tell this story. I feel what has been making me sick is the fact that I couldn't tell my story. But now it feels like I have got my sight back. I have got my eyesight back."*<sup>10</sup>

*"I also want to see it with my own eyes what he did to me."*<sup>11</sup>

"Yes, I am ready to tell you, I'd like to tell you what happened."<sup>12</sup>

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*REwind* in 2008: Not a matter, then, of past and future, of punctual endings and portentous beginnings. There is only this speaking, this listening, this *seeing* through a transparent screen, whose weave we cannot discern, but between which fragment and structure, image and after-image, the nominally dead and the nominally living, can passage and accidentally – impossibly – address one another.

## Notes

1. Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Title's a Blank," in *The Multiple Arts: The Muses II*, ed. Simon Sparks (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 181
2. See *ibid.*:211
3. *Ibid.*:183
4. Philip Miller, libretto of *Rewind: A Cantata for Voice, Tape and Testimony*
5. *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, vol. 1, Cape Town, October 1998: 55.
6. For an extended analysis of artistic responses to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, see Jessica Dubow and Ruth Rosengarten, "History as the Main Complaint: William Kentridge and the Making of Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Art History* 27:4 (2004): 671–91.
7. Ethel Nobatu Plaatjies, mother of Luthando, killed in 1986.
8. In previous productions the choir featured the voices of the Williams College Choir of Williams College, (MasMoca) and the Emmanuel Baptist Church of Brooklyn (Prospect Park, Brooklyn), both conducted by Brad Wells.
9. Johannesburg-based artist Gerhard Marx is director and designer of the video projection. Maja Marx co-directed and co-designed all the video work.
10. Testimony of Lucas Baba Sikwapere, a blind man, tortured in police detention 1985–87
11. Testimony of Tony Yengeni, political activist, tortured by Jeffrey Benzien in police detention.
12. Mr Walter Mkquila.

# *REWIND: A CANTATA FOR VOICE, TAPE AND TESTIMONY*

*An Opera by Philip Miller*

## **Introduction**

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was a court-like body assembled in South Africa after the end of Apartheid. Anybody who felt they had been victims of violence could come forward and be heard by the TRC. Perpetrators of violence could also give testimony and request amnesty from prosecution. The hearings made international news and many sessions were broadcast on national television. The TRC was a crucial component of the transition to full and free democracy in South Africa and, despite some flaws, is generally – though not universally – regarded as successful. The “rewind” testimony included in this opera is the actual testimony of those who testified before the TRC. These voices are played on audiotape during the performance. Translation of African languages is in italics.

## **The oath**

Note: the oath is stated first in English and then in many South African languages as indicated in the parentheses.

### **The oath**

I solemnly swear  
To speak the truth  
And nothing but the truth  
So help me God

(XHOZA)  
Mina ngiyafunga  
Ukukhuluma inyaniso yodwa  
Lutho olunye ngaphandle kweqiniso

(SOTHO)  
Nna ke a ikana  
Hobua nnete fela hahona seseng  
Kantle hannete ke a ikana

(ZULU)  
Mna ndiyafunga

Ukuthetha inyaniso yodwa  
Nkosi ndincede  
Ndithethe inyaniso

(AFRIKAANS)  
Hiermee sweer ek plegtig  
Die hele waarheid te vertel  
En niks anders as die waarheid nie  
So help me God

(VENDA)  
Nkosi ngisize  
Nne ndido amba vhutanz ngoho  
Husina fhedzi ngoho  
Ndi do anda ngoho  
Mudzimu nthuse  
So help me God

(SHANGAAN)  
Mina,  
Ndza hlambanya leswaku  
Ndzi ta vula vula.  
Ntiyiso, ntiyiso ntsena  
Xikwembu ndzi pfune  
Nkosi ndincede

(SIYAYA)  
Awuzwe! Awuzwe! Awuzwe!  
(*An exhortation used in a Toyi-Toyi chant during protest marches*)<sup>1</sup>

Awuzwe! Awuzwe! Awuzwe!  
Awuzwe! Awuzwe! Awuzwe!  
Awuzwe! Awuzwe! Awuzwe!

Siyaya Epitoli (We are marching to Pretoria)  
Siyaya Epitoli

## Rewind

**Testimony of Eunice Miya, given in Cape Town on April 23, 1996**

Her son Jabulani was shot dead on 3 March 1986 as one of the Guguletu Seven.<sup>2</sup>



And one of the children was shown on TV who had a gun on his chest. Only to find out it's my son Jabulani. I prayed I said oh no Lord! I wish this news could just rewind.

What makes me cry now is that these policemen, they were treating people like animals, which makes me cry right now. But even a dog, you don't kill it, like that. But even a dog, you don't kill it like that. You even think that the owner of this dog loves it. Even an ant, a small ant, you think you have feelings even for an ant. But now our own children, they were not even taken as ants. If I say they were treated like dogs, that's not how it happened, I am actually honoring them. They were treated like ants.

## Edward Juqu

### Translation of testimony of Edward Juqu in Cape Town on 23 April 1996

Yes sir, I was called at Wynberg, but I can't remember whether I was called by a letter or anything but I went to Wynberg. When I got there I can't remember whether it was a Magistrate or anyone, I don't know who usually sits in Court, I don't know the proceedings in Courts. I don't know who those people are.

They asked me is this your son, I said yes he is, he said ja he is dead. So I said so what should I do. He said oh! We very sorry, so I said what are you sorry about. At that time I was already confused but I told myself no, let me just stand here and listen and this Magistrate said okay, there is nothing we can do. So I just turned around and I left. I didn't give a damn what he was thinking about me and I simply left.

No they just told me that they are sorry that my son has been shot, there is nothing then they can do. I said oh! is that what you say, they said yes that's what we say, so I just turned around and left.

They asked me: "Is this your son?"  
I said: "Yes he is."

Is this your son?  
I said: "Ja."

Eyakho, eyakho (*He is your son, your son*)

He's dead.

So what  
We are very sorry.  
I said: "What are you sorry about?"

Uxolo (*I'm Sorry*)  
I said: "Ja."  
There is nothing we can do

We are very sorry  
I said: "What are you sorry about?"

Eyakho, eyakho (*He is your son, your son*)  
kile (*He's dead*)

We're very sorry  
Siceluxolo uxolo (*Forgive me*)  
Uxolo (*Sorry*)

We're very sorry  
What is he sorry about?  
Owakho uswelekile (*Your son, he's dead*)

Uxolo uxolo (*Sorry*)  
Uxolo (*Sorry*)

Sorry

What are you sorry about?

## **Interlude: the goat**

### **Testimony of Elsie Konile, mother of Zabonke killed in the Guguletu Seven Massacre in 1986**

I said I had a very, very scary period.

There was this goat looking up. This one next to me, having a dream like that with a goat looking up is a very bad dream.

When we saw on TV, uh-uh, I'm sorry- Peza came in,  
I was very scared when I saw Peza and I said "Peza what is it that you have to tell me?"

Say it to me now, say it - say it now so Peza said...

## Hamba kahle: the bag

**Testimony of security policeman Jeffrey Benzien, former member of the SA police anti-terrorist unit granted amnesty for the killing of the popular ANC Cape Town activist, Ashley Kriel and the torture of other activists.**

Benzién was also granted amnesty for the use of his “favorite” torture method, known as the “Wet Bag Method,” during the torture and interrogation of a number of political activists, including a leading ANC MP, Tony Yengeni.

And I placed the wet bag over your head  
Commissioners, it was a cloth bag  
And then the way I applied it was I'd get the person  
To lie down on the ground, on his stomach normally,  
With that person's hand handcuffed behind his back. Then I would  
Take up a position in the small of the person's back, put my feet  
Through, between his arms and then pull the bag over the person's  
Head and twist it closed round the neck, in that way cutting off the  
air-supply.

### *Chorus*

Hamba kahle mkhonto  
Wem khonto wesizwe (*Go well, Go well spear Spear of the nation*)

## Interlude: the bed

**Testimony of Mrs Nomonde Calata, wife of Fort Calata**

Dan sal hy kak! (*He will shit off!*)  
The day that we find him, he going to be in very big trouble.

I was worried and I was scared.  
And at the same time, I was brave. I kept quiet.  
I looked at him.  
Jy sit op my bed, Staán op!”

He stood up and he said” What is this bed after all”  
After that they left my house.

**Testimony of Jann Turner, daughter of the slain activist Rick Turner**

The bullet apparently came from a 9 mm pistol.  
He was standing holding the curtain and the bullet would have come  
through here.  
Through the top of his arm, through both lungs  
And out underneath this arm.

It pierced both his lungs, passed straight through his body and retained enough velocity to hit the wall several meters behind him and then to ricochet across the room before landing on my bed.

### **Offering of the birds**

Leviticus 5:

"If one's means do not suffice for a sheep  
That person shall bring to the Eternal  
As the penalty for that of which one is guilty,  
Two turtledoves or two pigeons"

### **Testimony of security policeman, Paul Van**

The white chalky road that I remember  
The guinea fowl...the gate...this I remember  
But the worse deeds...the killing. ...those I do not remember

### **Testimony of Ennie Silinga, mother of Frank, who was burned to death in 1986 in Nelspruit**

He only opened his burnt mouth like a bird and closed his mouth again  
and his eyes were changing color

Two turtledoves or two pigeons

### **Rewind: St James**

#### **Testimony of Bishop Frank Retief about the St James Church Massacre on the 25 January 1993**

I could not actually believe what I was hearing.  
Uhm, I just got of an aeroplane.  
The news was brought to my home,  
that an attack had been made on the church  
Flashing lights of the police cars  
I had a sinking feeling in my stomach, because...  
There is no way that we can describe it, and nor would I wish to impose my views on anyone else...  
I simply want to state to commission that everything we've ever believed about Jesus Christ turned out to be true, in a moment of crises. We discovered that He was real, that the Great Shepherd put His crook over His flock, in a way that I can never, ever put into words. It was a very real experience for all of us.

## **No greater than**

### **Bishop Frank Retief**

But we recognized that our sorrow and tragedy was no greater than anyone else's and so we felt a special empathy with the many-many people who had suffered so horribly during those years of violence in our land.

Stories have unfolded that this Commission, which by comparison make what we experienced pale into insignificance. We had a one-off experience but the stories that have unfolded here are stories of years and years of being victimized by violence. So we recognize that there's nothing special or exceptional about what we went through at that time.

## **Interlude: memorial**

### **Testimony of Eunice Miya, mother of her young son Jabulani, one of the Guguletu Seven**

That was the first time I saw him. It was on TV. Nobody told me anything I saw it myself on TV during the news.

How they can be remembered is...  
there were no memorial services done for them in Guguletu  
That is something that we still feel that it should have been done.

We feel that they were not important in the nation at all.  
What I would ask is something – a memory that could be held for them, even if it is a crèche or a building or a school that could be named after our children.

## **Mrs Plaatjies**

### **Testimony of Mrs Plaatjies<sup>3</sup>**

My son was eleven. He came home during school break at ten o'clock. I was sitting, just sitting exactly where you are sitting in that chair.

He walked in dressed in his school uniform. Went to the cupboard over there.

Cut himself a slice of bread.

He's doing all this in a rush.

He's like that when he comes home during break.

He spread peanut butter on it and then put the rest of the bread back, leaving the crumbs all over the cupboard, and the knife, still smudged with peanut butter.

He ran out. He's still chewing his bread and holding it in his hand.

It wasn't long – I heard shots outside.  
Some commotion and shouts.  
Then I'm hearing, 'Luthando, Luthando,  
Ma ka Luthando, bamdubule!

and then someone calling out for me:  
"ma ka Luthando"  
"ma ka Luthando!"

I went flying out of this house.  
Now I am dazed. I ran, not thinking.  
My eyes are on the crowd that has gathered.

Here is my son, my only child.  
I felt his last breath leave him.  
He was my only child.

## **Who's laughing**

**Interview with former President of South Africa, P. W. Botha at his home in Wilderness in June 1998**

*Chorus (Toyi-toyi chant and dance)*

u left, u right  
nyamazane  
Come guerrilla, guerrilla  
incane lenyamazane  
incane.  
kodw'ihambi ilwel'inkululeko  
incane...  
Come guerrilla, guerrilla

## **P. W. Botha**

Ek is 'n gelowige mens (*I am a believer*)  
En ek is 'n gebenedigde mens (*And I am blessed by my creator*)  
I am a believer  
And I am bless'd by my creator

*Chorus*

Ek is 'n gelowige mens  
You are a believer  
Ek is 'n gelowige mens  
You are a believer

Ek is 'n gebenadigde mens  
Blessed by your creator

**P. W. Botha**

Apartheid is an Afrikaans word  
That can be easily replaced  
by a proper, positive term,  
good neighborliness,  
Who's laughing?

*Chorus*

You are a believer  
Bless'd by your creator

**P. W. Botha**

Apartheid is an Afrikaans word  
that can be easily replaced  
by a proper, positive term,  
good neighborliness  
who's laughing ?  
I not here to apologize.  
That is my point to the...the  
Truth and...er...  
Reconciliation Commission  
They want me to apologize  
I am not prepared to apologize  
Why do you want me to go  
and apologize to Bishop Tutu?  
For what?  
For what?  
P.W. Botha  
Who's laughing?

**Journalist**

Are you going to apologize  
to the people who died in jail,  
who died in the...?

**P. W. Botha:**

No, I am praying for them  
No, I am praying for them  
u left, u right

nyamazana(e) (*Young buck*)  
 u left, u right  
 nyamazana(e)....  
 incane lenyamazana(e) (*A young guerrilla*)  
 incane  
 kodw'ihambi ilwel'inkululeko (*But he is fighting for freedom*)  
 Come guerrilla, guerrilla  
 Come guerrilla, guerrilla

## **Liza lis'idinga lakho**

*(Confession of our sins makes us whole)*

-1-

(Soloists on their own)  
 Bona izwe lakwethu  
 Uxolel' izono zalo  
 Ungathob'ingqumbo yakho  
 Luzeluf'usapho lwalo  
*(See our nation and forgive its sins.  
 Do not bring down your wrath to destroy our nation.  
 Advise us. Do not let us perish  
 You have given us light)*

-2-

(full choir)  
 Lizalis'idinga lakho  
 Thixo, Nkosi yenyanyiso  
 Zonk'iintlanga zalo mhlaba  
 Mazizuze usindiso  
*(Fulfill your mission truthful God  
 All nations of this world must receive redemption)*

-3-

(full choir) Amadolo, kweli lizwe  
 Makagobe phambi kwakho Zide zithi zonk'iilwimi  
 Zilucel' udumo lwakho  
*(All the people must kneel before you  
 So that all nations will testify to  
 Your greatness and power)*

-4-

(Sopranos and Altos first followed by Baritones and Tenors  
 on Ngeziphithi)  
 Lawula, lawula, Yesu Nkosi



Koza ugawe ukonwaba  
 Ngeziphithi – phithi zethu  
 Yonakele imihlaba  
*(Rule, rule oh great God  
 Happiness will come through you  
 Through our commotion the world is ruined)*

-5-

(Soloists and choir)  
 Yala singatshabalali  
 Usiphile ukhanyiso  
 Bawo, ungasibulali  
 Ngokudela inyaniso  
*(Lord please bless your teachings  
 Revive us so that we can receive your grace)*

-6-

Nkosi khawusikelele  
 Iimfundiso zezwe lethu  
 Uze usivuselele  
 Siphuthume ukulunga.  
*(Look at our nations and forgive our sins  
 Do not neglect us.)*

## Liza lis'idinga lakho: trio

**Testimony of Father Michael Lapsley Anti-apartheid activist, injured in a letter bomb in 1990 in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe (Extracts from the previous hymn are fragmented by this testimony.)**

I came upon this manila envelope that had been among the accumulated mail. I opened it and it was addressed to me and inside where two religious magazines and they – the magazines were – were wrapped in plastic – sealed in plastic. So I ripped open the plastic. I took out the magazines....

And I opened er – the English magazine and the act of opening the magazine was the detonating device for a bomb...uhm

The ceiling of three rooms blew out and there was a hole in the floor and I can still remember what happened – er – the actual explosion it still - it's still – it's still something with me.

Uhm, I remember pain of a scale that I didn't think a human being could ever uhm...experience. I remember going into darkness - being thrown backwards by the force of the bomb, uhm. The exact angle saved my life

that I opened it – I opened it on a – a small coffee table.

If I'd opened it on a – something like this – a table like this it would have killed me because it would have knocked out the – the heart or knocked off the head.

But because I was opening it on – down on a lower angle, uhm, it blew off my hands – I lost an eye, my eardrums where shattered.

Uhm, in my mind there was somebody obviously who typed my name on an envelope – a woman or a man who typed that bomb, also somebody who made it, who created it. And I have often asked the question about the person who made it – the person who typed my name. What did they tell their children that night that they did that day, how did they describe when they said how was your day today. What were they saying that they actually did on that day?

One of the things I've been thinking even this morning uhm...do I want to meet the person who made the bomb? The answer is it depends.

I don't know if I could cope with somebody who doesn't care, I don't know if I could cope with somebody for whom there is no issue – who is perhaps so dehumanized that it doesn't matter that you make letter bombs. But if there is somebody who is trapped by what they have done – what they've been part to do perhaps to me and perhaps to many others, then I'd love to meet them.

I think we could have a very interesting conversation where we could begin to discover each other's common humanity and of course – you know if somebody said, I was sorry, but I would want to ask them what they do for a living now, if they still make letter bombs. I'm not sure what that would mean but again if that person – if there is sorrow and they 're living their life in a new way, I'd love to be able to say to them of course – of course I forgive you in that context, thank you very much.

## **Tshwarelo**

### **Testimony of Winnie Mandela, struggle hero, implicated in the death of Stompie Moeketsi**

I am saying it is true. Things went horribly wrong, I fully agree with that.

And for that part of those painful years when things went horribly wrong, and we were aware of the fact that there were factors that lead to that – for that – I am deeply sorry.

**The words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Chair of the Truth  
Reconciliation Commission**

We have been moved to tears. We have loved. We have been silent and we have stared the beast of our dark past in the eye and we have survived the ordeal.

**Testimony of Andrew van Wyk, survivor of a bomb blast,  
Queenstown, 1992**

To all the people who were injured that night to come forward and say, we are sorry. And I think that up until such time that this happens, I would simply not be able to forgive those people. I am not able to forgive a faceless person.

To forgive, tshwarela  
Utshwarele (TSHWARELA)

Aretobeng mathata (*Let's face the bad times*)  
Kamahlong (*And look it in the eye*)

rephumule meogo retshwarele (*Let's wipe the tears away and forgive*)  
emparesele bale (*But let us not forget*)

Having looked the beast of the past in the eyes.  
Inehle kapedelo yohle  
We forgive retshwaretse  
retshwarele emparesele bale  
utshwarele

Give for  
Shut the door on the past.  
Let it not imprison us.  
Kutlwelano bohloko  
Let us be more gentle  
give for...forgive  
Walk towards a glorious future.  
Where each person counts.  
To forgive  
retshwarele  
tshwarela  
forgive

**The cry of Mrs Nomonde Calata**

**The voice of Mrs Nomonde Calata, widow of Fort Calata**  
(The sound of a howling cry)

**Testimony of Tony Yengeni, a political activist tortured by Jeffrey Benzien while in detention**

COMMISSIONER: Yes, Mr Yengeni, when you say “demonstration” has he not discussed it satisfactorily to you?

YENGENI: I also want to see it with my own eyes what he did to me.

**Testimony of Heila Van Wyk, wife of Andrew van Wyk, survivor of a bomb blast at their restaurant in Queenstown, in 1992**

Somebody that looked me straight in the eyes.

Apartheid, I don’t even want to see it anywhere I go.

When I close my eyes

**Testimony of Lucas Baba Sikwapere tortured in detention from 1985–1987**

I feel that what has brought my sight back,  
my eye sight back is to come back here and tell this story

I feel what has been making me sick all the time is the fact that I couldn’t tell my story

But now it feels like I have got my sight back

I have got my eyesight back

TONY YENGENI: I also want to see it with my own eyes what he did to me.

**Testimony of Mlandeli Walter Mquikela, who was beaten and tortured by police when he was a 19-year-old student in Crossroads in 1985**

COMMISSIONER: Mr. Mquikela,

MR MQUIKELA: Yes, I am ready to tell you, I ‘d like to tell you what happened

**Notes**

1. Toyi-toyi is a South African dance, often performed with chants, that after apartheid became associated with protest.
2. The Guguletu Seven were seven men who died in a shoot out with police on 3 March 1986. During a TRC hearing, evidence was uncovered that the seven might have been lured into an encounter with police.
3. Text extract with permission of Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela from her book *A Human Being Died That Night* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2004).

# 2

## *Is.Man*

### HONOR KILLING AND THE SENSATION OF GRACE

Hans Dowit

*[...] most people have turned their solutions toward what is easy [...] and toward the easiest side of the easy; but it is clear that we must trust in what is difficult [...]*

*[...] everything in Nature is spontaneously itself, tries to be itself at all costs and against all opposition.*

Rainer Maria Rilke, 1875–1926

*Is.Man* is an open letter to society, a stream of words, music, dance, and film, a theatre production about honor killing and its perpetrators. Undoubtedly *Is.Man* is a story on a social theme, but it is not the result of a mere addition of facts and figures updated daily by the media. *Honor killing*, a form of collectively condoned violence, became the focal point of *Is.Man* while Adelheid Roosen was meeting a convicted killer, whose real identity is not given in the play. Murdering a (usually) female relative is meant to cleanse the tarnished honor of the family, the *namus*. It is the woman who carries the burden of *namus*, it is the man who defends it; by killing the woman, if need be.

Honor killing is not a just punishment for a crime. The *namus* can be considered tarnished by a number of things: a man making a pass at a married woman; a man approaching another man's sister, a husband or his family suspecting a man of being interested in the husband's wife. Suspected illicit interest can be enough for the *namus* to be considered harmed, which may lead to honor killing.

Although seemingly an archaic custom, honor killing is still regularly committed in a number of Mediterranean mountain regions, Turkey among them. The patriarch and the family collectively decide when the *namus* must be restored and who must kill in order to restore it, creating enormous pressure in, for example, a Turkish man assigned to cleanse his family's honor. The collective morale of the community weighs on the assigned killer to such an

extent that his individual awareness, his "I," drowns in submission to the collective morale. During the conversations Roosen conducted with imprisoned Muslim men convicted of honor killing, she was struck by the complete disturbance in their equilibrium, in their personal harmony. Their "I" had vanished almost entirely and the answers they gave to her questions ("How and why did you become a killer? What is revenge? What is honor? What is this contract to kill that your community gave you?") confronted her with yet another question: "Under similar pressure, with a similar dislocation from our own culture, wouldn't we explode, like them?" This severe system of collective moral control has come to "the West" with the immigrants. In the West it might be adhered to more vigorously because of the unconventional relationships in the new environment. Some immigrant communities have given up the practice of it, but certainly not all.

Politics and media portray immigrants from other cultures as successfully adjusting to their new environment. But in preparing of *Is.Man* Roosen found the immigrants behind the façade of well-being, the ones who had become both the killers and the victims of the family system. Roosen doesn't aim to justify or defend honor killing; all the men with whom she spoke were already punished by being imprisoned. Her intention is to grant these convicts their language and their intelligence, neither of which is allowed or recognized. Roosen is looking for a way for these men so answer this question: "How did I arrive at this act and how, in order to survive, have I always denied it?"

Roosen's work contains Portia's position on moral justification: the need for grace pervades her theatre. Roosen's dream for our time is that the spectator of *Is.Man* will experience the performance with an increasing sensation of grace. She doesn't want us to sit in judgment, as the killer has already been convicted. She wants us to understand something we have not previously understood. She wants to create, on behalf of those who killed and were killed, the poetry that sings of the suffering of both victim *and* the perpetrator: "A cry, a musical score, the prose of violent stammering, the representation of a wound, and an act, all in a theatrical context." For Roosen, the spoken word cannot adequately express what the performance must narrate. Monologue and exchange can confess, debate, accuse, and console. But for the pain that cannot be described, the shame that can hardly be whispered and the silence that begs for harmony, only the poetry of image, sound, and body will suffice.

The development of *Is.Man* has not only been determined by artistic choices. Because of judicial institutions' protectiveness of the police and convicts, the main source of the text and of the production – the personal narration by the perpetrators of honor killing – remained out of reach for a long time. Despite aid from family members, sisters, daughters, spouses, and from professional researchers; despite a grant from the Dutch government and the essential background information from various Turkish and Kurdish government agencies, it took a chance meeting with a police officer in the

audience of *Veiled Monologues* (2003) to help open the gates to direct contact with ten convicts. Their stories supplied Adelheid Roosen with the basic material from which *Is.Man* has been developed. Transcriptions of these conversations are braided into the text that Roosen developed during rehearsals and from improvisations with the cast.

*Is.Man* is the younger brother of *Veiled Monologues*, Roosen's production about Muslim female sexuality and virginity featuring four Muslim women. The encounters Adelheid then had with Muslim women, for example at site-specific performances and at public meetings after shows at community centers and at a mosque, brought her in contact with the other *stranger*: the Dutch Muslim man, and with the honor killing convict in particular. The passionate reaction to and identification with *Veiled Monologues* strengthened Roosen's confidence that a new theatrical representation of her research in Islamic culture in the Netherlands would be an important contribution to our knowledge of that culture and to contemporary international theatre. Subsequently, *Is.Man* became an equally strong and successful production touring the Netherlands and Belgium, St Anne's Warehouse in Brooklyn, New York and, in the spring of 2008, played together with *Veiled Monologues* in Amman, Jordan.

*Is.Man* is developed from the necessity to counteract the mutual isolation of cultures. The social confusion and the identity crisis Roosen perceived from as early as the 1998 tour of her production, *Five on Your Eyes* (about Moroccan Women), is, for her, a source of inspiration. In Roosen's words it was, "an opportunity, the ultimate chance to lose one's old skin, like a snake, to grow new cells to invigorate one." Roosen is still at the vanguard of the confrontation with the "alien" other that has entered our sphere.

# Is.MAN

Adelheid Roosen

*Kadının elinde tuttuğu şey ne taşı ne de çalı, ormanın,  
dünyanın, yaşamın kocaman yaralı bir yüreğiydi*

*(What she held in her hands, was not a stone or a shrub:  
It was the immense wounded heart of woods, world and life)*

Aslı Erdoğan

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Premiere 6 January 2007 at Theater Frascati, Amsterdam

This play is written for four men with a Muslim background: Two actors, one musician, and a Dervish dancer.

The characters represent three generations:

The Grandfather, played by the musician, is the father of Cabbar and the grandfather of The Son

The Father, Cabbar, is the father of Furkan and is held in a prison in Vught, a maximum security prison, for an honor killing

The Son, Furkan

The Dervish dancer portraying mercy

The text is more or less a monologue.

The Father writes his story.

The Son tells his father's story.



This play is written for a Western/Dutch public. When the actor says “you,” he is addressing people in the Netherlands, where the story mainly takes place. And, by extension, the actor is addressing people in the West.

**Video.** A video projected on the whole set shows an anonymous lost girl, a symbol for death by honor killing. Sometimes she whirls like a Dervish dancer. In another video, a girl rolls with a horse.

**Audio.** An audio recording of “the girl sound” is heard in short fragments throughout the performance. Likewise the “writing sound” produced by the father’s pencil, while writing his history in prison, is heard, as is “the ritual music” of the Dervish dancer.

The set consist of nine dresses, each ten meters long, hanging from the fly space above the stage. They are the mourning ribbons for the victims of honor killings.

For *Is.Man* I divided the traditional Dervish dance ritual into three parts: walking in circles; crossing the arms with the hands over the heart and bowing; and, whirling and gradually opening the arms parallel to the ground, with the palm of the right hand open to the heavens to receive Allah’s blessing and the left palm turned down to transmit the blessing to the earth.

The Father speaks Turkish. The Grandfather speaks Kurdish. This choice was a deliberate one, as the actor personifying The Father is a Turkish migrant and the actor playing The Grandfather is a Kurdish refugee. The other reason to use both languages in the text came from my interviews with Turkish and Kurdish prisoners held in the Netherlands for honor killings. My choice to use these two languages is therefore an accurate representation of the various people I interviewed in jail.

## Glossary

**Baba** Dad, Daddy (Turkish).

**baklava** a kind of Turkish pastry (Turkish).

**def** a large tambourine with cymbals (Turkish).

**evet** yes (Turkish).

**Gesammt Kunstwerk** a concept coined by the composer Richard Wagner with regard to his operas. His idea was that an opera is not merely a text set to notes and put on the stage, not just music theatricalized, but one cohesive piece of art, expressed simultaneously and in the same degree through a variety of artistic disciplines. The idea of “Gesammt Kunstwerk” has been embraced by artists of subsequent eras.

**Green Eye** name of the dead sister/daughter.

**Hatun** name of the dead mother/wife.

**hayır** no (Turkish).

**namus** honor (Turkish). Honor is a moral concept with two faces. It is a man's honored moral position in the community and a woman's responsibility to confirm that position by her moral behavior. A woman's supposed immoral behavior (flirtation and/or sex outside of the context of marriage as well as the gossip it generates) causes a man's morals to be called into question. The woman must atone for the man's tarnished reputation by being made to suffer. The proverb "one lives for one's *namus*, one dies for one's *namus*" is about the community as a whole. If the community's morals are questioned, the community must answer for it. In reality this often means: the man lives for his *namus*, the woman dies for his *namus*.

**oğlum** Son (Turkish).

**saz** stringed instrument, somewhat resembles a lute (Turkish). This traditional instrument is very important because of its diversity in use and meaning. It was used by ancient troubadours, played at celebrations, and used in some religions during prayer as well. Because it is part of Turkish and Kurdish history, many families have a *saz* in their homes.

**tamam** all right (Turkish).

**vur** hit *or* shoot (Turkish).

## Music

***Helbestên min*** a Kurdish song that is medicine for the wounds of the mountain and the broken soul, composed by Brader Musiki.

***Evdal*** a traditional Kurdish song with imagery of a goose's wing being broken and my eyes being blind.

**girl sound** a small section of the melody of a traditional Kurdish folksong for a young girl that is about being sweet and lovely as a flower. She is the one all the boys love.

***kaside*** a poem that praises or expresses admiration for chiefs, leaders, religious personalities, etc.

***Mîryem*** a traditional Kurdish song that is an expression of love for a woman, asking her to escape into the mountains. In this play the woman is Nur.

***Şivano*** a traditional Kurdish song revised by Brader Musiki to be about Nur and Hatun.

***Were Lolo*** a traditional Kurdish song about being a tough male who can both love and kill.

**Praying singing** a traditional way of praying while singing.

***Dilo ez bimrim*** a traditional Kurdish nostalgic song about wishing to be buried in one's homeland and washed with the tears of one's beloved.

***Kinê*** a traditional Kurdish love song.

***Gitti canmûn cananî*** a traditional Turkish folksong that is a farewell to a loved one.

**Flute music** improvised.

**Evdalî** a Kurdish song about how all the people of the world are fascinated by having things, by materialism, except for the man singing the song, who wants only to be kissed by the woman he desires.

**De Lorî** a traditional Kurdish mourning song of consolation that a mother sings to her child when there is a death in the family.

*(Lights dim. The video of the anonymous lost girl is projected both on the wall and on the floor, and onto the hanging dresses.)*

*(The Father is writing at a desk with his back to the audience.*

*The Grandfather sits on his platform which is his island surrounded by his instruments and water pipe. He sings "Helbestên min" as the audience settles into their seats.*

*The Dervish dancer sits on a chair upstage.*

*The Son stands upstage.*

*The actor who plays The Son walks downstage and introduces the performers, using their real names and personal information.)*

THE SON: Yaşar Üstüner

Born: Turkey. Sivas

Mothertongue: Turkish

In Holland since 1976

Job: Trainer. Counselor on Cultural diversity

Yaşar is playing the part of The Father

Brader Musiki

Born: South-East of Turkey. Mardin

Mothertongue: Kurdish

In 1987 fled to Holland

Job: World star in Iraq and surrounding areas. Musician

Brader is playing the part of The Grandfather

Oruç Sürücü

Born: Turkey. Aksaray

Mothertongue: Dutch

Came to Holland at age three

Job: Instructor, Information Technology

The practice of his religion in the Sufi way within Islam:

The Mercy Dance of the Heavens.

Youssef Sjoerd Idilbi

Born: Holland

Mothertongue: Half Dutch, half Palestinian

Me: Actor. I play the part of The Son, Furkan

*(As The Grandfather sings "Evdal," The Father sits in his cell writing. During the song the audience hears the recording of the girl sound played three times.)*

THE FATHER: *(Screams)* Hayır...

THE FATHER: *(Screams)* Hayır...

THE FATHER: *(Screams)* Hayır...

*(The Son visits The Father in prison. As The Father continues writing, The Son takes a sheet from his father's desk and reads.)*

THE SON: "Title page.

*(The Son "steals" another page to see what is being written.)*

THE SON: "For my son Furkan." That's me...

"For my friend Imro in maximum security prison  
and for Nur, the 14th of the month."

*(The Father gives the next sheet of paper to his son.  
The Father reads in Turkish and The Son translates.)*

THE FATHER: Önsöz.

THE SON: *(Reading from the sheet of paper)*

THE FATHER: Kendimi anlatmak istiyorum

kendimi anlatmak istiyorum

kaybolup gitmeden önce.

THE SON: I want to explain, me

I want to explain, me

before I go under.

THE FATHER: Anlatmak istiyorum kendimi çünkü tarihinizin bir parçasıyım

buradayım ve anlatabilirim

Bir azınlığın bireyi olarak büyük toplumunuzun içinde

kaybolacağımı da kabul ediyorum

beni görmenizi istiyorum.

THE SON: I want to explain me, for I am part of your history.

I'm here and I can tell you.

Me, small tribe from mountains.

Swallowed by your large tribe of society. I want to accept.

But I want to make it seen.

THE FATHER: Beni görün ki ne yediğinizi bilin.

THE SON: So you may see and know what you eat.

THE FATHER: Bilin ki geri tükürmeyin

ben sizin içinizde siz benim içimde yaşıyacağız

kanlarımız birbirine karışacak

geri dönüşü yok

anlatmak istiyorum kendimi oğlum için kızım için çocuklarınız

çocuklarımız için

lütfen benimle birlikte söyler misiniz

çocuklarımız

oğlum Furkan hapishaneye son ziyaretime geldiğinde

hikayemi verdim  
birinci sayfadan sonra okumayı bıraktı.

THE SON: Therefore you must better know what you eat.  
So you digest me well and your stomach does not spit me out.  
'Cause I shall live in you  
and you in me.  
Our blood will blend together.  
It will. There is no way back.  
I want to tell, for my son, for my daughter.  
My children, your children, our children...  
I want to ask you, please say with me: our children.

Last time my son Furkan came to jail to see me  
I showed him my story.  
After one page, he stopped reading.  
"Baba," he said, "If you want tell people  
your story...tell in Holland language.  
Mistakes. Don't matter. Make them new language.  
Give them your language.  
Otherwise they cannot understand you."

THE FATHER: Tamam...

THE SON: Okay.

*(The Grandfather sings "Kaside" and plays the def.)*

THE FATHER: Ben öldürdüm  
ikinci kez öldürdüm  
Başka ölümlere teşvik ettim  
Öldürmek için en uygun kişi bendim.

THE SON: I have killed.  
I have killed second time.  
I have incited more killings.  
I was person best suited for killing.

THE FATHER: Bir Türk namusu için yaşar

THE GRANDFATHER: *(Beating the def)* Tirkek bo namûsa xwe dijît.

THE SON: A Turkish man lives for his honor, lives for his namus.

THE FATHER: Namus için yaşanır, namus için ölünür.

THE GRANDFATHER: *(While continuing to beat the def)* Erê Erê.

THE SON: One lives for one's namus, one dies for one's namus.

This is way I was raised.  
Honor is division of labor between men and women.

THE FATHER: *(Interrupting)* Onur

THE SON: Woman carries it, man defends it.  
Person best suited for killing is chosen.  
There is meeting. All men of family who live Holland,  
Who must clean honor.

THE FATHER: (*Interrupting as if explaining*) Onur. Namus.

THE SON: There was vote. I had most. I chosen.

Ma'm, can I ask a question? Do you have any children?

While you do time, in my country, for children family will care.

I did time. Did whole time. Released. Cleaned next family case.

I washed blood with blood.

Gained position and respect.

Sometimes, got short leave.

One time during end of Ramadan.

THE FATHER: Şeker bayramı

THE SON: (*Taking over the story more and more as if he is The Father.*)

One time for burial of relative whose death I had arranged from prison.

Family talk at you, comes aggression,

Family talk at you more, comes violent urge.

A lame animal you kill.

Is why I butchered my daughter.

For me, defending namus, honor, was way of cleaning all in my head.

Back up, to moment when I met Nur.

THE FATHER: (*Remembering*) Nur...Nur

THE SON: I saw her at gate of the plant. I, 18-years-old-and-a-half year living in Holland.

Nur...The 14th of the month, I called her,

this you call woman you love,

for that's when moon is round.

I was in love with girl from migrant workers' town.

We write notes.

I learn correspondence.

Turkish girl Nur; not our tribe.

In my village, story of me in love, already known.

I did not know there is blueprint for my life.

I did okay, okay in Holland.

With men do own cooking, own washing, Sunday...

THE FATHER: Tavla.

THE SON: Yes, backgammon.

Sure, miss family, but my heart happy,  
with Nur...

THE FATHER: Nur.

THE SON: Was my third summer in the migrant district.

My father phoned with request: Come home, come get me, I also want to look Holland.

I kissing Nur for goodbye, she not scared kissing.

We agree: Write, letters. I plan to tell my parents:  
We get married.

Fetching my father from Turkey not reason he called me home.  
Whole summer I stayed with family in village. I wrote Nur,  
"You, love that I love."  
No answer.

One day a letter, addressed to family  
My brother calling me,  
everybody family calling me:

THE FATHER: Mektup.

THE GRANDFATHER: Name.

THE SON: Letter! My brother reading out loud:

Dear parents of Cabbar, dear brothers, dear sister of Cabbar.  
Everybody look me. First I do not understand.  
Letter to me or about me?  
From parents Nur, turns out: Nur engaged with other man.  
Otherwise short letter. Nix more. Thanks and goodbye.  
My heart could not believe about Nur.

THE FATHER: Nur.

THE SON: When I sat in teahouse, my father sent me off to the field, like old days, to collect the cattle.

My leaving for Holland put off, put off again.

THE FATHER: İhtiyacın olan herkes burda.

THE GRANDFATHER: Olacağı burada.

THE SON: "Everyone you need is here," he cried.

This way I felt even deeper longing, Nur...

THE FATHER: Nur.

THE SON: Though I knew: have to forget her.

I lost track, in myself.  
Started sobbing at bizarre moments, everybody laughing...  
One morning friends of my parents in room  
With their daughter Hatun.

THE FATHER: Hatun.

THE SON: (*Speaking as himself*) Yes...Mama.

(*Now speaking as his father again.*) My parents all begging me, on floor at my feet.

THE FATHER: Allah hayırlı etsin...

THE SON: And I said: Yes.

THE FATHER: Evet.

THE SON: I was married off to this woman in that summer of '69.

Married her in tears, in our village.  
And took off. Straight away. Did not stop. Carried on till I was in Holland.  
My wife was to stay in village till there were children.

Is custom.

By the road outside my village, a black raven, my grandmother,  
lamenting, wailing:

Love you cannot create by forced hand.

THE FATHER: Zorla güzellik olmaz.

*(The Grandfather sings the beginning of "Miryam.")*

THE SON: Though it did not make sense, on my way, I bought bangles for  
Nur...

THE FATHER: Nur.

THE SON: They broke.

THE FATHER: Broke.

THE SON: 'Cause I fell.

THE FATHER: Fell.

THE SON: At the gas station.

THE FATHER: Gas station.

THE SON: Dead tired.

THE FATHER: Tired...tired.

THE SON: On top of the bangles.

THE FATHER: Crack.

THE SON: Back in Holland, I heard from Ahmet, my roommate, that Nur  
had been so laughed at by her brothers when news came I was married,  
that he asked, why I had done that this way.

I had no words. He made me tea...

THE FATHER: Çay demledi.

THE SON: Nur did write.

THE FATHER: Nur.

THE SON: My family had taken her letters away.

She not engaged; her honor injured.

I phoned my brother. That letter he had read: had been made  
up by my mother.

She is not our tribe, he said, and hung up.

I sat in my kitchen in that glorified chicken coop, where the  
six of us lived.

Thousands of miles away from my village and nowhere to go.

However far away, I was the tribe.

Nur never wanted to see me again...

THE FATHER: Nur.

THE SON: My marriage was not as it should be.

Not happy.

My thoughts kept straying to Nur.

My wife turned out pregnant, right  
after wedding night.

My daughter was born in June 1970.

August I went to visit.



In October she pregnant with our second child...

My son Furkan born in May '71.

Families insisted I take wife to Holland.

I did not. I could not.

Did go look at my son, that summer.

Following year, July '72, I traveled to my village to get them.

THE FATHER: Belvedere.

THE SON: In old '55 Plymouth Belvedere.

I had then lived six years alone in Holland.

My wife and children got in car.

I did not get out;

I kept engine running.

Handed my father through car window  
the money I had made.

Just outside the village I saw my grandma.

Her silvery scarf, heavy round her head. The rest black.

A black raven.

THE FATHER: Kara şahin.

*(Grandfather sings the rest of "Miryem.")*

THE SON: A black raven, my Dutch neighbor said, when she saw a picture of  
my family.

In it, my grandma sat up on the roof.

*(Grandfather starts playing the saz during the following text.)*

I was suffocating in the car  
with her, with them.

Putting so much responsibility on me.

I did not want to stand for an income,

Stand for honor,

Responsible for body.

Did not want to.

Did not want to.

When man at gas station looks at her body

She should answer herself, should tell him:

THE FATHER: Önüne bak.

THE SON: Keep eyes to yourself

Not put her panic on me.

She was already strange.

Touching you this, touching you that

Giving you kisses

Asking you attention all the time.

One time you can, not ten times

She traditional.

Talked into it by her mother.

"You touch him this, touch him that."

My mother-in-law herself was married off,  
Had to accept all, from her husband.  
Do not understand she wanted this for her daughter.

My father phoned,  
when I turned key in lock and let wife into Holland house.

THE FATHER: Karına göz kulak ol.

THE SON: Keep eye on wife

Why? Why do people around start this...  
This do-not-trust.  
In Holland wife Hatun took job,  
at Bussink.

THE FATHER: (*Insisting on his own mispronunciation.*)

Boeschienck

THE SON: Okay, Boeschienck, cookie-packing-plant.

My eldest, my daughter by then was two years old.  
Had her first fair hair and eyes turned out green.  
Had to look at her, looked at her often; never touched her.  
She kept looking at me, I went furious.

I started asking my wife question.  
How she has fair hair?

THE FATHER: Bu kızın saçları neden sarı?

THE SON: "She would not feed as a baby, she was nursed by other mother."

I probed: She has lighter skin than mine.

THE FATHER: Ten rengi de benimkinden açık.

THE SON: "She much rubbed with leaf this and herb that, because she would not feed"

We fight, every day again.  
This is not my daughter.  
Every day again, I said: She not my child.  
You are lying.

THE FATHER: Bu çocuk benden değil. Yalan söylüyorsun.

THE SON: I picked up my daughter;

THE FATHER: Bu ne?

THE SON: What is this?

Pointed two fingers at her two eyes

THE FATHER: Basbayağı yeşil gözlü bu.

THE SON: Is just green eye.

THE FATHER: Açık tenli.

THE SON: Is too fair skin.

THE FATHER: Bu benim kızım değil.

THE SON: Is not my daughter!

THE FATHER: Benden değil.

THE SON: Is not mine!

And threw her down.

Grabbed my second child, my son and said:

THE FATHER: Bu benim.

THE SON: This is me!

THE FATHER: Bu benim çocuğum.

THE SON: This is my child.

One night I phoned my father.

Hour later my wife is phoned by her father.

Three men,

Three times, same rage.

THE FATHER: Şansın yok. Yaşama şansın yok.

THE SON: You stand no chance. No chance at life.

Her father's screaming was death sentence.

THE FATHER: Kızını zehirleyeceksin. Hemen. Şimdi.

THE SON: You shall give daughter poison. Now.

THE FATHER: Hayır.

THE SON: Nooooooooo.

She all in a sweat.

Spits her words in mouthpiece of phone.

THE FATHER: Onun çocuğu. Çocuk onun.

THE SON: His child. Is his child, was all she said.

The connection broke.

There was no sound from the city. All was still.

*(The Grandfather plays the saz during the following.)*

My daughter's eyes followed me,

Looked at me. Did not blink.

Never again met anyone, with eyes like that.

The sight of them was unbearable.

Looking back at her was no longer up to me.

I was observed by a stranger.

One night I went into her bedroom to see her eyes when closed.

On hands and knees, crouched by her bed

My face slowly toward hers.

Two pale eyelids looked at me.

Just as piercing and without blinking.

Slowly a light lit up behind her eyelids;

pale blue was glowing, into bright green.

This light sent me off.

I dared not turn round.

Quitted the room backwards down the hall, down the stairs.

Opened the front door behind me, to disappear  
Did not know into what.  
In crossing the doorstep backwards my foot caught.  
My hands gripped the door posts;  
I was stuck. Caught by a doorstep.  
My back turned at the eyes of the world and my face toward no history.  
This house not my house.  
This wife not my wife.  
This child is not my child.

THE FATHER: Bakıyorum.

THE SON: I look

THE FATHER: Görecek ne var.

THE SON: What's there to be seen.

THE FATHER: Bakıyorum

THE SON: I look

THE FATHER: Ve bak evim.

THE SON: and look, my house.

THE FATHER: Bakıyorum

THE SON: I look

THE FATHER: Ve bak işim.

THE SON: and look, my job.

THE FATHER: Bakıyorum

THE SON: I look

THE FATHER: Bak pantolonum gömleğim.

THE SON: Look, my pants, my shirt.

THE FATHER: Bakıyorum

THE SON: I look

THE FATHER: Ve bak param.

THE SON: and look, my money.

THE FATHER: Bakıyorum

THE SON: I look.

THE FATHER: Bak karım.

THE SON: And look, my wife.

THE FATHER: Bakıyorum

THE SON: I look

THE FATHER: Bak çocuğum.

THE SON: and look, my child.

THE FATHER: Benim çocuğum. Benim çocuğum mu...?

THE SON: My child. My child...?

THE FATHER: Bakıyorum

THE SON: I look

THE FATHER: Ve gördüğüm Nur.

THE SON: And see Nur.

Nuurrrrr...

*(The Grandfather plays the def and vehemently sings “Şivano” to force The Father into the following dance.*

*The Father responds by dancing and shouting words associated with honor to work himself into a state to be able to kill the daughter. He shouts words such as: namus [honor], gurur [pride], onur [a loan word from Italian], iffet [loan word from Arabic, synonym for namus], sililik [synonym for namus], haysiyet [a loan word from Arabic], seref [personal honor], izzet [a loan word from Arabic; synonym for seref].*

*The Dervish rises from this chair and walks up to the father who is finishing his dance. He bows to The Father, The Son, and The Grandfather and then begins walking in the circles of the first part of the Sufi ritual dance. This Dervish dance is done with the energy of love and mercy. The recorded music for the Dervish dancer plays.*

*At the same time, The Son goes to The Father's desk and finds the play Orestes, which he “steals.”)*

THE SON: (Still speaking as The Father.) In jail,

I study your history.

Your Greek drama.

Orestes kill mother,

'cause mother, she kill father.

Orestes seek revenge.

You go to theatre.

You hear whole story.

You start talking:

Beautiful lighting. . .

Take sip of your wine.

Beautiful actress

With special wig; very big, you start laughing, wig so huge, is  
like burka...haha.

You do not say:

Ah, Orestes get order from his God for seeking revenge

Apollo, Zeus or what's his name...is weird God.

Somewhere outside you hear: Oh, immigrant killed wife in name of Allah. You hear Allah...and think: Allah is not yours...is strange word.

Allah should go. Here no place for Allah.

Zeus, Apollo, sure...You buy picture or souvenir,

You say: Oh, ah...Greek drama,

I will keep...is my kulchr (*culture*); is my civilization.

Give nice place on shelf. Dust well every day.

Allah? Crack, we break like firewood on knee.

Why one revenge is understood and not the other?

We, our tradition, done like Orestes:

– huge pressure from family on us, HUGE

– with knife cut throat: have to, is more personal.  
 – really kill, not half-assed.  
 – put knife down and wait for police.  
 – gave myself up and said: yes, I did.  
 – no remorse.  
 – did own defense in court. Yes, Orestes and me, we did same.  
 Only, Orestes, judge listened,  
 Said: it was ordered by Gods...  
 My case, judge did not say: was ordered by mountain culture...  
 Orestes: free, free, FREE.....MAN  
 Yes, you hear me FREE.  
 Me: Twelve years! Twelve years.

Sort of weird, I think.

Where is your old stories?  
 Of your own life, your own tragedy, your grandma or brother...  
 I want to hear old story. From you...  
 You get up...Now...  
 You nervous in your head...  
 You do not have...old story to give to your wife, give to your child.  
 No one in your family remembers: old beautiful story.

No, you go to theatre,  
 You go buy story. But you do not go to theatre like your grandma's  
 mother's mother used to.  
 She went to Greek tragedy to weep for Hero.  
 For relief of own fears, pains, own rage...She to theatre for cleansing  
 spirit.  
 To cheer for Orestes.  
 You do not go to theatre to own up to your problem...  
 You cannot...you do not risk...  
 You go to Medea for posh night-out...  
 Where is your Medea?  
 I know a Medea...Was sister of my roommate.  
 Here...Modern Medea...file: February 2004. Woman killed children.  
 Because husband was marrying new Holland wife, for more future.  
 Immigrant men here, same as man in tragedy.

I have fine stories for you.  
 Every honor killing case in Holland.  
 I read for you.  
 Is your new, modern Greek tragedy, in the West  
 Is new textbook case.  
 Is good quality.

*(The Grandfather softly sings "Were Lolo" during the following.)*

In enormous stillness of the city,  
After my wife hung up from her father  
phone it rang again.  
My father.  
I should lock her up. Now. He was sure, the women knew.  
She knew, her mother knew, my mother knew:  
Is not my daughter.  
Out there, he would call meeting with in-laws:  
They be dead.

THE FATHER: Nasıl? Ölecek mi?

THE SON: How they dead?

THE FATHER: Ben çocuğu öldüreceğim. Ben kızı öldüreceğim.

THE SON: I kill child! I kill her.

THE FATHER: Onu öldüreceğim...Ben öldüreceğim... Nasıl öldüreceğim.

THE SON: I Kill? Kill how?

THE FATHER: Karımı eve kapat Yeşil Gözlüyle beraber, hemen.

THE SON: Now! Lock her up with Green Eye.

THE FATHER: O gelecekti.

THE SON: He would come over.

THE FATHER: Ben öldüreceğim, o öldürecek.

THE SON: I kill, he kill.

Someone in family will kill.

THE FATHER: Akrabalardan biri öldürecek

*(The Grandfather sings "Were Lolo" aloud.)*

THE SON: Slowly I turned to face my wife who sat on the stool.

Stool empty.

Crossed room, into kitchen.

All doors open.

Ran through kitchen, down hall, upstairs.

Bedroom: gone.

Children: gone

Cannot be, so fast.

Ran out into street.

Gone. Empty city.

Sometimes I reflect,  
Had I not to Turkey to pick up my family  
Had my father not come to live Holland.  
I would with Nur...

THE FATHER: Nur

THE SON: I sing Nur...

THE FATHER: Nur

THE SON: But

I went.

My father came, sang:

Rain, rain, rain. Weeks on end...

THE FATHER: Yağmur, Yağmur

THE GRANDFATHER: Baran têt, baran têt.

THE SON: Like rain, family came.

*(The Grandfather praying and singing.)*

For father, you shall care.

For mother, you shall care.

For brother, you shall care.

For brother-in-law

grandpa, grandma, you shall care.

For family, you shall care.

For mosque, you shall care.

For sister, you watch. Sister you will watch...

I had good time in Holland, alone, but good.

This feel-at-home, now, was gone.

Everything taken over by my father and family.

He came to live my street. Is custom.

Everything, like he lived in village. Is custom too.

THE FATHER: Karının karnından sıpayı, sırtından sopayı eksik etmeyeceksin

THE GRANDFATHER: Karının sırtından sopayı, karnından sıpayı eksik etmeyeceksin

Aferin babaya, çekmiş.

THE SON: Wife needs kids in her belly, whip marks cross her back.

My father came to restore honor of his name and mine.

But here, revenge turned out to be a full time job.

When wife runs off,

You go put on Sunday suit, necktie.

You go ask at Social Authorities.

You go tell: excuse.

Wife has got me all wrong.

They offer "have-a-seat," serve coffee and open: File.

I met with Dutch man. Was my good luck.

I think with Dutch woman, she would have sent me packing.

Now I negotiate

I good haggler.

You often mistaken, by appearances.

You underestimate our people and its strategy.

When you live as nomads and do not walk paved roads, does not mean you do not understand bureaucracy. Contrary.

Is my instinct. Turkey huge bureaucracy...

I sat down and had already won.

Is a game.



Social worker had the will to respect me but not the heart.  
This way he had disadvantage.  
Had his heart addressed me,  
had he looked me in the eye  
I would have seen him as...

THE FATHER: Abi

THE SON: Big Brother.

Now, he sat across from me...

I say; "Read the file,  
What...my wife has said."

I knew, this, my wife had not made up.  
She too was married off, to me, but reason why she was married off,  
I never heard from my wife, but from Social Authorities.  
Her father was a left-wing revolutionary...

THE FATHER: Gizli bildiri.

THE SON: Print secret pamphlet.

Turkish police raids the place, plain clothes.  
Hatun home alone.  
Men came in. Looked for papers, cassette tapes,  
Took her to police station.  
Put in cell.  
Blindfolded:  
"You...No look."  
Put down on table  
Raped, twice  
Thrown from the car  
Washed her blood from legs, in stream.  
At home told mother; scared she pregnant.  
Her mother made plan:  
Father would kill her on the spot,  
Just like that...come along...in car...  
outside village...  
up mountain...  
poof...done.  
Like that.  
This not about her.  
He, man. Responsible for her to be clean.  
Woman...dirty.  
Done...gone.

Her mother plan?  
or her and my mother plan?  
Could be.  
They both problems with child.

I: in love Nur, not of same clan.  
 She: raped.  
 I think, this they have arranged together.

One detail that Dutch man read from file touched my heart:  
 My wife had told him:  
 Me in car, blindfolded, but I good nose.  
 Smell of sea.  
 Car rode, sloping street, downhill,  
 Is my city, is Mersin.

*(The Grandfather plays "Dilo ez bimrim" on saz while The Father remains seated at his desk and dances with only his arms.)*

THE FATHER: Ah, Mersin.

THE SON: This detail touched my heart much.

I know Mersin,  
 I saw Mersin.  
 I smelled the road to the sea.  
 In my heart a memory opened up:  
 That road.  
 That smell.  
 That old soil. After years my memory winds its way through my heart,  
 from the new to the old familiar soil.  
 I stood tall. My heart dancing.

"Thank you mister and say hello to my wife"  
 Social worker thought: Good, he does not want to find her.  
 I thought: I find her anyhow.  
 But do I want to?  
 My father wanted and would find her.

On my way home I saw the green eyes of my daughter.  
 Just you wait.  
 Now I know who you are. Now I know.  
 She had been a thin and sickly baby for my wife could not nurse her.  
 She too had looked into those eyes.  
 One day she too would disown this child.  
 Now she was still on the run.  
 Go on, run.  
 But one day you'll come home to roost. You will bear child.  
 She had to.  
 In her file it turned out, my wife was  
 pregnant with her third, my second child.  
 I will give that child a name:

THE FATHER: Şeref.

THE SON: Honor.

My wife had gone to live in battered shelter.  
Pregnant, with Green Eye and son.  
Where wife is, which town, which house, no problem, found in no time.  
Unemployment, welfare: good system.  
We lots of time.  
Hatun, my wife, moved four times, across country.  
No problem. In 24 hours you know, where she is.  
Clan big,  
Every one watches, every one phones.

I found her between school and store.  
Her face startled.  
Green Eye, on her arm, watched me without blinking, and my son looked down.  
I cornered my wife, but did not touch them.  
Why I looked for her?

I did want to say why I had come.  
In the morning even, all clear in my head.  
I did see possibility, that she goes back, leaves my son here.  
I give her tickets for Turkey with Green Eye  
They take off before my father gets here.  
Out of my life. Away from clan.  
I would let her.  
I did not say so. It never left my mouth.

They stood together. I saw "together."  
We are all same like animals, nuzzling for fur.  
I stood here. Alone.  
They looked at me.  
I saw "monster" in their eyes.  
My body went to tears, but not me.  
I swore.  
My blood, my life, where is my life?

THE FATHER: Lanet olası dünya

THE GRANDFATHER: Erê wella.

THE SON: Let the world be damned!

Dutch woman walked by with children.  
Stood, reached out hand to me, that I did not take.  
I felt blood burn in my throat.  
Rapid glances at me.  
Then they were many and all movement.  
Green Eye passed to Dutch woman.

Hurried cookie bag from her purse, groping little hands.  
All Holland words,  
My wife spoke new Holland words.  
Knows new Holland people.

Sharp knife within my head cut tickets to Turkey to shreds.  
Dutch woman took my family.  
My wife was pregnant, six months or so.  
I did not see child in belly go across the road,  
I did see my property walk off:  
"Mine!" I cried.

THE FATHER: Yavrum, Yavrum

THE SON: My newly born, yavrum...

THE FATHER: Yavrum.

*(The Grandfather softly sings "Kinê" during the following text.)*

THE SON: But then, at least my son...

My mouth cried his name, Furkan...

THE FATHER: Furkan...

THE SON: He did not turn around, he did raise his hand, that the Dutch woman caught in midair and took into hers.

I wanted that hand in my hand.

*(The Grandfather cries out the last part of "Kinê."*

*The Father sings "Gitti canimin canani" during the following text.)*

As a child, I lived with my grandparents, from hand to mouth: food came from the soil, into the pot, into my mouth.

Nothing in between. It was great.

My clothes were just what fitted my skin.

They clung, they draped, they flowed and faded and that too was comfortable.

The house was for getting up in and returning to at dusk.

It did not shine because it was filled with stuff, but it shone. We acknowledged it like the animals, when at night I slowly drove the cattle home.

Your eye turns to the horizon,

In the distance the roof top brightens.

There is no light but you see a mattress, your corner of the room, peace.

Wind through the window, right over your head when night falls.

The stumbling of the beasts in the stables and my grandma in the kitchen are like a bedtime story to fall asleep to.

My grandma, the black raven, looked at me, her eye was sap, sweet sap. In her glance, I was.

That embrace was my freedom.

I came to Holland, when grandpa died.

He taught me life with his cane, beat me hard and often.

THE FATHER: Eti senin, kemiği benim.

THE GRANDFATHER: Erê wella. Rahmetullahi aleyh.

THE SON: The flesh is yours but the bones are mine.

*(The Grandfather improvises on the flute during the following text.)*

Mother teaches child everything.

Mother teaches son everything.

Threatening you with father:

You, watch out you, your father will come home...

Okay, men come home...fathers do come in...

What we do?

Everyone, whole family, all eyes look at us,

What? Yes? What? Okay!

Man beats. Father beats. I beat.

There, all quiet. Done.

At night, wife complains:

Everybody's talking 'bout us.

I say: What? What? You talk yourself, always!

About sister, about cousin.

Wife stands in front of mirror,

Wife will look at herself, say to herself:

You are good, for you know, woman next door is bad.

Therefore you are good. Gossip is self-cleansing instrument.

Next day, wife goes look neighbor woman...

Wife sends text message: neigh...bor...look...for...boyfriend...on...internet...

Text message is greatest provider of honor killing poison –

Because, is nothing there.

Not even: is smoke, is fire.

No. No smoke, but will be fire.

If here judgment over me, when judgment over gossip by those women?

I have dented doors with heads of women in my family,

Pulled hair out of skulls.

If women would not this gossip, then their story would not reach teahouse, then men could concentrate on their cards, and need not do all that killing.

You too: gossip and make mind sick.

Only you put in better format.

Molded into magazine and talkshow

Also sort of weird, I think.

*(Facing upstage, The Father defends his actions to the court, from his memory in a voice that is soft-spoken but full of conviction.)*

THE FATHER: Hollanda hakiminin karşısına çıkarsın karını öldürmeye teşebbüs etmekten 4 yıl ceza alırsın.

THE SON: You come before Dutch judge and you are given four years for attempted killing wife.

THE FATHER: Cezanı çeker çıkarsın, serbestsin...Ama bizim için değilsin.

THE SON: You serve sentence. Afterward, when you are free...you are outlaw to us.

THE FATHER: Bizim için değilsin, karını öldüremediğin için aile senin peşini bırakmaz.

THE SON: Family will get you, for not finishing off that woman.

THE FATHER: Seni bekler 4 yıl, 10 yıl, hiç sorun değil.

THE SON: We will wait for you...four years, ten years...is no problem.

*(The Dervish rises from his chair during the last line. He bows to The Grandfather, The Father, and then The Son. He walks downstage to The Father in his cell and bows deeply to him. While remaining bent over, he beckons The Father to follow him. The Dervish walks to center stage where he shows The Father the ritual preparation for the dance, three Dervish circles. The Father half-heartedly tries to follow. The Dervish returns to his seat and The Father to his desk. Feeling that his attempt to learn the dance was not adequate, The Father goes to the Dervish and bows to him. The recorded music for the Dervish dance plays.*

*The son takes another page from the Father's story.)*

THE GRANDFATHER: Ezê ji we re çîroka hîrçê bêjim!

Hîrç dikeve zeviyên mêrik, mêrik bi pey dikeve.

Çaketê xwe li ba dike, gomlekê xwe li ba dike.

Li beroşê dide, li tenekê dide...ting ring, ting ring...

Hîrç direve hîrç direve mêrik li pey...

Carekê dinêre ku hîrça mê derket. Ya Staaaaaaar!

Hîrça mê taluke ye. Wê çaxê mêrik direve.

Û hîrça mê wî zeft dike û dibêje peleeeee! Tepekê li mêrik dixê û mêrik kerr dibe.

Erê hîrça li meriv dixê, meriv kerr dike. Ya Staaaaaar!

Himm hîrça kafir e...

Bavê min dîgot...

THE SON: *(Reading from the page)* First time that my son, Furkan, demanded to hear the story of his mother's and Green Eye's death, he did not ask me but his grandfather...

*(The Son walks up to The Father and demands to tell his version of the story.)*

THE SON: *(Speaking as himself)* Baba...When you put me in your story, I understand...but that part, I rather tell myself.

THE FATHER: Ama bu benim hikayem.

THE SON: I was 12...I had a question, you have not answered to this very day...

Baba, you have to tell why you killed Green Eye...write that.

*(The Son stops reading The Father's prose and now for the first time begins to tell his own story from his own memory about what happened.)*

The first time that I, his son Furkan, demanded to hear the story of my mother and Green Eye's death, I did not ask my father but my grandfather.

My father then worked for the local bicycle tire plant. I was 12.

My grandfather said nothing but sang in metaphors...sea, wind, birds, or in this case: male bears.

The message always was: women are dangerous.

When the farmer chases the male bear off his land with screams, and waving his shirt, that pays off.

Then the she-bear shows up attacks him and devours him...

Yes. Gramps...women are gruesome?

Well, grandpa, I never saw a bear in our back yard.

GRANDFATHER: Hatun, Hatun, hırça hizîmet...Erê erê.

THE SON: Grandpa, you are talking about my mother...

I, Furkan his son, was 17 when I was closed in by three mopeds at a gas station.

My grandfather had 3 mopeds, 3 nephews, go for me and threaten me over my youngest sister Şeref's conduct.

So because my father was in prison, Şeref and I were living with my grandparents.

The family had resented Şeref's behavior for years.

And I had to step in.

I was the only and oldest son and had to act the head of the family for my father.

Is custom.

Grandpa, I do not want, I cannot, cannot think this way,

"You are a child of this blood and your bones, they are mine."

I had come home from school, and found my kid sister stressed out.

Her classmate whiter than a sheet.

They'd been doing their homework, it was hot, classmate had taken off his t-shirt.

My grandfather came in.

Looked and went off in a way the boy didn't grasp.

My sister did.

I chased the boy away.

Had my sister lock herself in her bedroom:

Never open up. I'll go get police, be right back.

Because of my mother's past, our position in the family was weak.

My father was tolerated because he had stuck to the Code of Honor. Now I realized, Şeref and I were always at risk.

His task: to cleanse the family, even of us.  
 I would be made the exception,  
 If...I would step into his shoes.  
 I, who'd kept on trying to cut all family ties,  
 Had refused to be the new family capo,  
 I was in the thick of it.  
 And the stakes were: my kid sister.

I got back to the apartment...too late.  
 An explosion on the ninth floor.  
 I saw this thing fly out the window, like a smoldering rag-doll drooping  
 off the balcony.  
 It was my sister.  
 The man next door, his windows all blown out, pulled her up by her  
 ragged edges.  
 My sister was taken to the heavy-burns-clinic. I drove to the prison and  
 waited till visiting hour arrived.

My father sat across from me.  
 I had three things to point out.  
 I didn't look in his face.  
 Fury found its way to my Dutch tongue:  
 My sister: a virgin. Her classmate: homework.  
 Honor killing: an uncontrolled...ejaculation.  
 My sister was never asked a thing.  
 People around her were: "Are you sure she slept around?"  
 "That's how they speak of her. Yes, I am sure."

At breakfast grandpa uttered lines like:

THE FATHER: Demek sen hala burdasın. Sana uygun bir yer arıyorum.

THE SON: So, you're still here...I'm looking for a suitable plot for you.

My sister had wept all over the house for weeks.

I had felt the threat. Yes

But this, this I couldn't have imagined.

I reassured her.

You hear me? I reassured her!

(And) I insist:

That, I couldn't have forecasted, that killing her had long been intended.

That for me, I couldn't get it.

That grandpa was a player, a çapkın.

THE FATHER: Çapkın. Hovarda.

THE SON: Player he was.

THE FATHER: Gözü dışarda.

THE SON: Yes, he had a roving eye.

...was a flirt and slept with Dutch women.



I had mistaken the threats. Also mistaken my fucking aunt Eylem, grandpa's darling daughter who, from out on the landing, blew up my kid sister's room.

*(The Grandfather starts praying on his prayer beads.)*

And now, now that I had seen my sister draped in threads, I decided, yes, to step into your shoes. Yes...Yes.

This is my first announcement:

I will step into your shoes.

I will go to Turkey.

Attend the meeting.

Meet both the families, yours and my mother's.

And she, my sister, your daughter, shall live.

Live.

If she, in this, kept herself alive,

She is meant to stay alive.

Not, after all, to fulfill honor killing in or around the heavy-burns-clinic.

That is two. No more killing.

I will step into your shoes.

And this will be my pledge: to crack the Code of Honor.

I looked into my father's face.

He was ready for the first change. My grandfather wasn't.

My father phoned my grandpa that night and followed the rules of their game, with one change:

He said: The Son will do it, he's taking my place.

But he didn't say: how.

I got up and left.

At the door I turned around:

Have no illusions,

Baba, I'll be a teacher. A teacher, Baba.

And that was three.

In Turkey, at the home of the eldest family members the meeting took place. The atmosphere was tense.

There were 23 men, 15 from the mountains, five from Holland, two from Germany, and the village Imam who started off with advice, how to hold the talks:

When you pluck your eyebrow with your tweezers; do not stab your eye.

THE FATHER: Kaş yapayım derken göz çıkarma.

THE SON: Men talked, one by one. Everyone listened.

I had been given a place and sat down, nervous.

Then I recognized my mother's older brother, all the way over from Berlin.

I requested a seat change.  
I chose next to Uncle Berlin.

I had the floor.  
Silence descended.  
My voice gave out. I was 17.  
Uncle Berlin gave me a rap, I rose and began.  
About my mother, whose death...  
about Green Eye, whose death...  
My uncle slapped me.  
And I started on the gossip and my mother's innocence,  
That I wanted to injure no one.  
But what my understanding of honor was, that I thought, that they,  
tradition, saw it the same way.  
There were questions, details, long questions, that I found no answer for.  
Particularly coming from my father's family.  
I kept on going, that things had been said, that weren't in fact right.  
I started harping on the facts.  
Berlin uncle came to my aid. A few men from the village trickled over  
to my side. Yet, my mother's guilt was upheld, for the pregnancy before  
the marriage.  
I wanted to stand,  
Berlin uncle held me down, spoke himself: We do not agree.  
Enough killings on our side.  
The Imam thought this a good conclusion.  
Next day continued.  
For that I didn't join them.  
Uncle Berlin warned me.  
The meeting would release my sister, she had had her punishment.  
But they...would keep me here.  
No studies. Keep me here and reeducate.  
That very night, my uncle put me on the bus to Ankara, where I took  
the plane to Amsterdam.  
No worry boy, will be okay.  
For the loss of face my father's family would suffer, for agreeing to end the  
honor killing. Uncle Berlin knew how to tickle their entrepreneurial  
instinct and threw business their way.

Two weeks later.  
I sat across from my father again.  
Again with three things to point out:  
One: baklava from your native village.  
Two: where my kid sister was staying I would not reveal.  
Three: In fact I had found the clan meeting of superior quality.

This I hadn't expected. Of mountain people.

The primary school, where I was an intern, truly could have taken mountain people for a model. Truly.

*(The Grandfather sings "Miryem," beginning in the middle of the song. The Son takes another sheet of paper from his father's desk and continues telling his Father's story in his Father's words.)*

For me, mastering your language,  
is for you like Turkish dancing from your pelvis.

Your non-comfort

Fumbling all your limbs.

Me: tongue tied...turned into a listless bulk

You did not encounter grace in meeting me,  
that I read in your eyes.

Whereas I wanted to carry you off in my dance,  
to every square, every sidewalk your country boasts  
embrace you in my arms

abduct you

set you back on your legs

but you did not let me reach you, touch you  
did not let me carry you.

To find speech for the killing of my daughter is like clashing with an angel.

I killed her by falling.

That's what I told the police: "I fell because of her, I clashed with her green eyes."

Again, when the police asked me about the puddle of blood, I saw no more.

I killed without my eyes.

It came back to me as in a dream.

*(The Father gives The Son a page of this writing as he turns away weeping.)*

THE FATHER: Oğlum.

THE SON: I dreamed...that my son burst into the room...

Green Eye returns home. Green Eye returns home.

Go and meet her.

I looked out the window and saw her coming down the mountain.

She moved as if her bones were loose in the bag of her skin,  
as if her body hung from strings, that a hand high up there guided.

I slowed down towards her.

She looked, but not outward.

Her eyes sat large and green and open in her head.

When I approached her and tried to engage her look, I saw  
that her eyes too were propelled by strings.

So much amiss in so slim a body.

At my feet, she fell  
 straight down, flat on her face  
 as if all strings had snapped.  
 I picked her up.  
 Her body broke off at the knees.  
 The shock pulled her free.  
 Again she fell flat at my feet,  
 her hands broke off at the wrists like bangles.  
 I had to gather her...  
 grabbed her torso,  
 turned it on its back,  
 gathered her two legs, laid them upon her chest,  
 her two hands with wrists  
 I crammed between her lower legs and lifted her up.  
 I stood straight when her face took leave of her head  
 and crashed on the ground like an earthenware jug.  
 I laid the parcel that she had become  
 back on the ground and collected the pieces of her face.  
 One eye I could not find.  
 I carried her down the mountain and stepped on it

*(After a long silence)*

Baba, I need a smoke.

*(The Son walks upstage and smokes as his father weeps and draws on the floor with his finger as if he is writing in the sand. He softly calls out his son's name, Furkan, a number of times. Furkan stamps out his cigarette.)*

THE SON: I find hard, explaining to my son,

THE FATHER: *(Whispering)* Furkan.

THE SON: I find hard, explaining why his mother died

THE FATHER: *(Again whispering)* Furkan.

THE SON: When I tell this story is for me, yeah...

but wife, Hatun, is mother of my son.

Therefore, I thought, I let her go.

Is for me, is much a shame.

She...

THE FATHER: Hatun

THE SON: Was quiet character with fierce emotions.

One evening, after dinner, at home, my son,

we watch television, children on floor play with loose change.

Was nickel in his mouth, stuck in that throat. No more breathing.

Blue all over. I try with finger, no luck. All panic.

Not my wife. Not his mother.

My wife grabs him, by feet, and up.

She did so, very strong. Nickel out.

Therefore, I thought, I let her go

Same summer of '73  
 when news came, Black Raven, grandma dead.  
 We to funeral, we to Turkey.  
 My father said: Kidnap Hatun and Green Eye off street,  
 leave Furkan in battered shelter,  
 put her with daughter in car with safety lock,  
 she cannot run.  
 And force her to write letter to Social Authorities:  
 "once more she would try live with you."

I driving to Turkey  
 Long trip...She crying in backseat...crying, crying  
 Sometimes, I wanted closer to her.  
 Wanted make plan, for her.  
 She out of the way. Away from clan. Solved.  
 But nobody around should know.  
 Should not. Cannot.  
 I was never alone with her.  
 She with Green Eye, locked in room at family house.  
 I thought, maybe one last chance...  
 I take wife to village square.  
 Middle of square, I start beating her.  
 Everyone watch. No one does nothing.  
 Is okay. Man beat wife is okay.

I did beat, so hard, beat  
 I beat into her,  
 call out, you will, you will, you will die.

THE FATHER: Seni döver öldürüm, seni döver öldürüm, seni döver öldürüm.

THE SON: I beat you. Dead. I beat you. Dead. I beat you. Dead.

To her, I wanted to say: Please, vanish in tree, I let you go.

To village: Look, I do my duty.

To family: Look I defend honor.

I am Man. See me. See Man.

I beat her up, not dead,

beat up her bones, not dead.

THE FATHER: *(Beating the table)* Vur. Vur. Vur. Vur. Vur. Vur. Vur. Vur. Vur.  
*(The Grandfather sings "Evdalı.")*

THE SON: Someone from village took her home.

I hoped this was enough.

Knew, was not enough.

A week after she could walk.

Village around her already decided.

She sensed it.  
 Morning five o'clock, still dark, she walked off.  
 My father knew already.  
 Was third night that he waited  
 He let her walk, walk, walk  
 Then she just over mountain, bang, bang. Twice in her face.  
 Dead.  
 No more.  
 At home my mother dancing. My father go teahouse.  
 Green Eye he set on my bed: For you. Your job!  
 He was proud. This is code.  
 He father, I follow.

In Holland, I to police give myself up.  
 Was escape. To Prison,  
 empty head, I thought.  
 No one can get to me.

I told police, daughter dead.  
 "Wife...?" I told nothing. Don't know.  
 She gone. She left child.  
 "How child dead?"  
 Accident. I fell on her.  
 Not interest me. They believe or not.  
 How many years? I did not care.  
 I sit in empty room. Clean.

My father never been captured. Nobody ever betrayed.  
 Some Dutch people missed her, sure, but you say: she is in Turkey. Is all.

THE FATHER: *(Speaking to the judge in his imagination)*

Üç yaşında bir çocuğu öldürmek kolay mı?  
 Onun acısıyla her gün yatıp kalkmak kolay mı.  
 Çocuk öldürmekle, kadın öldürmekle namusunuz mu temizleniyor? Bu  
 ne biçim namus anlayışıdır? Daha kaç kadın, kaç çocuk ölecek, kaç erkek  
 hapislerde çürüyecek? Başlarım böyle namus anlayışına.

*(The Father smashes his books in the corner.)*

THE SON: In cell, in empty room happening strange things in my head.

Things, I never knew, but still was.  
 For it was intimate  
 It happened in my head.

As if a pencil was drawing me  
 Mornings when I woke up.  
 I could find myself nowhere.  
 Each day again I was being drawn by the pencil.

I didn't even put on my own pants myself.  
 Sometimes, in dream, I fell into myself, into a cave, among the cattle.  
 Something pressed my eyes open and I was back in a cell,  
 an angular figure pulling at the legs of his trousers.  
 Forced my feet into leather and laces, crammed glasses onto the nose.  
 Something dragged a comb through my hair.  
 From the corner of my eye, I see myself standing at the door, waiting for  
 breakfast.

I saw the Dutchman, whose hand dished out my breakfast...

Thought he was like me, like Man.

Other country but Is Man.

Was not so...

The men I got to know, the neighbor, the manager,  
 the director, the Social Authorities, the board of appeals, the language  
 teacher, the prison guard, the psychiatrist  
 were vastly different.

In one thing they are similar.

Understand me, they don't.

Not even the ones who claim to be  
 social workers and psychiatrists.

Killing the child is hidden territory for them.

*(The Dervish rises from this chair during the last line. He bows to The Grandfather,  
 The Father, and then to The Son. He walks center stage and begins whirling with  
 his arms closed. The recorded music for the Dervish dance is played.)*

I did not know either how to behave  
 in my treatment.

Did not know what expected of me. Insecure,  
 what answer gives best result.

Started looking desirable answer.

Learned to eat food from your Dutch hand.

When was visiting hour for lawyer,  
 learned to iron shirt, for looking neat,  
 to get chips and coke from cafeteria machine,  
 to use tray to serve it on.

Smiling gave me cramps.

Deep in me remained a resistance,  
 a rage that accused.

An unwillingness, to subject to an  
 observation of me, an eye on me.

The talking was not with me.

So, give me an Imam

The psychiatrist started questioning me, about my parents, my

father.

About men, your men. I could not. No answers.  
I could not say who and what had pressed its way  
into my head,  
had lodged itself in a corner of head.  
And then to be told that that is me, myself,  
what I had done  
I could not, could not say...

Like the sap in the eyes of my grandma,  
the sap in my eyes when I looked at the animals.  
That way I could look no longer.  
Psychiatrist came more often.  
"You become logical human. Is progress, is growth."  
Was not like that, to me.

I became rotting beast.  
I became alone.  
Psychiatrist says: "You individual. Do yourself."  
Never "we."  
No "together."

I went with my Turkish lawyer to courtroom.  
Judge tell me: You live in a Dutch town.  
But not really in Holland.  
My brother calling out:

THE FATHER: Kanunu da karını da sikerim. Tövbe tövbe

THE GRANDFATHER: Qesmer terbiyesiz.

THE SON: (*Translating*) "I fuck your wife, I fuck your penal code."

Judge ask to lawyer: "What is he yelling?"

"Is hard to translate, Judge, Sir, is emotional outburst from different culture."

Last time, I spoke lawyer, he said:

"Your life is a Gesamt Kunstwerk," and closed my file.

*(The Dervish now opens his arms as he whirls. The Father and The Grandfather curse each other. The Son walks a huge circle around the whole stage looking at his family. With a tissue he dabs his Father's head and gives his Grandfather a tissue. The Grandfather throws it away.)*

*The video of the anonymous lost girl is again projected both on the wall, on the floor, and onto the hanging dresses. The music builds and the lights get very bright as the cursing between The Father and The Grandfather gets louder and louder. Then, everything breaks up leaving only the unamplified quiet singing of the whirling Dervish dancer. The image of the anonymous girl is projected on his white Dervish skirt. The son walks back on stage. The dancer continues whirling behind him.)*

Got such a deep longing, to be there, in your eye.



A hunger to catch your eye, that catches me too.  
You man, man here, the Western-blood-man  
goes around in his suit,  
a tie, a bag,  
jumps on the bus.  
He like butterfly, blue butterfly,  
Brother...

THE FATHER: Kardeş.

THE SON: Big brother...

THE FATHER: Abi.

THE SON: I look him again and see his eye,  
Is empty, for me  
His eye look away  
is not sap in this eye  
Is not sweet.

Now I exist in eyes of guards, all men.  
We forced relationship.  
He has to see me  
when I leave cell.  
Has to see me,  
when I take shower.  
Guard me with those eyes.

Me, mistakes, big mistake.  
So much destroyed.  
Men are angular figures, sad souls.  
Men together is disaster...Real disaster.

We have to make new eye, new looking.  
*(The Son walks into the audience to look at his father when The Father starts trying to speak in English.)*

THE FATHER: (Now speaking in English.)

I want to explain me, tell me  
Before I go under.  
I am here and I can tell you. About my children.  
Our blood will blend together.  
You shall live in me and I will live in you.  
What about my children...  
your children, our children.  
Why do I say, my children  
Why do you?  
Why not: our children. Our future.  
I want to ask you, ask men here,

ask Western-blood-men,  
 Please say with me  
 our children...Our children...  
 Senin, benim, onun değil  
 çocuklarımız, bizim çocuklarımız  
 bir kez olsun benimle birlikte söyleyin  
 Open arms, open chest,  
 Say please: "Our children," not: "your children," "her children," "my  
 children," but: "Our children...Our children."  
 How can we be father of our children?

THE SON: (*Speaking as himself.*) Baba, sit down, just sit down Baba  
 (*To the audience*)

Maybe, you are straying from his story...from shame...  
 perhaps you cannot say,  
 is not your culture to say aloud...  
 Is okay, is okay.

(*The Grandfather sings "De Lorî". The Father sighs.*  
*The Son returns to narrating his father's story.*)

Very rarely, suddenly wise man...  
 Imro, Morrocan man in cell next door, said:  
 You go decide, you not think: do ten more years, ten more.  
 You go write. You go remember past for son.  
 You go write future for Nur.  
 I did, for two years. She must know story of truth. She too betrayed.  
 I see Nur.  
 I dream Nur. Still.  
 I think Nur lives in big city now.  
 My son thinks not. My son thinks: also dead.  
 I tell him: Is Julio and Romiet, no? Is Turkish Kurdish Shakespeare.

Imro read my story.  
 He says: read your story over and count the words:  
 Father and Destroyed.  
 Is very often.  
 Is very sad.  
 I should not have listened my father.  
 Should not have listened my father.

(*The Father hands The Son and The Grandfather another page of his writing.*  
*The Grandfather immediately throws the page away.*)

THE SON: (*Reading from the page of writing The Father has handed him and  
 speaking as himself.*)

Baba...I have read it all.

THE FATHER: (*Reading from his completed manuscript.*)

He has read it all. Autopsy report, detectives' reports, psychiatrist's report, lawyer's file.

THE SON: *(Reading)* They write, they have agreed on one professional conclusion: You take no responsibility for your actions.

THE FATHER: *(Reading)*

Then he asked. My son asked for the umpteenth time, asked me about the death of his older sister, Green Eye.

Yes, I said.

Go have a look...

Go have a look in my head.

*(He turns and bends toward the audience and knocks on his head.)*

Go have a look...

Go have a look in my head.

THE SON: *(Speaking as himself.)*

Baba...This is not enough...

This is not how...

This is not how she died...

The Grandfather: *(Calling out to his grandson.)*

No, this is not how.

Come, come, over here Furkan...

You want to know how?

With knife and blood?

Take this story, my son,  
take the story your father wrote.

You want to sleep, every night, for the rest of your life,  
you want to sleep.

Take this story. Take all of it.

*(The video of a girl rolling with the horse is projected. The longer version of the girl sound is heard.)*

THE SON: Baba, did you bury Green Eye...

THE FATHER: Hayır...no.

THE SON: Maybe it would be good if I...If we, made something up for her...  
to bury that honor, to bury that killing, that history.

THE FATHER: *(Nodding and talking to himself.)*

Tamam.

THE SON: Baba...Baba...?

*(The Father, still talking to himself, does not react.)*

THE SON: See you next Sunday Dad.

THE FATHER: Tamam...

*(The video of a girl rolling with the horse stops. The shorter version of the girl sound is heard. Blackout. Applause. Actors bow. A final image of the dead girl lying under a horse is projected while the audience leaves the theatre.)*

END

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# 3

## *Three Posters*

### INTRODUCTION

*Rabih Mroué*

#### **Reflections on *Three Posters***

In 1985, Jamal El Sati, a combatant for the National Resistance Front in Lebanon, the military wing of the pro-Moscow Lebanese Communist Party (LCP), recorded a videotape testimony a few hours before carrying out a suicide operation against the Israeli Army occupying southern Lebanon. He wore the clothes of a local sheikh and led a donkey loaded with 400 kilograms of TNT up to the headquarters of the Israeli military governor in Hasbayya. After passing three barricades controlled by the South Lebanon Army, he reached his target, detonated the bomb, and exploded himself and the donkey along with it.

Videotaping resistance fighters testifying before executing their suicide missions was a common event of the time.<sup>1</sup> The “final cut” of Jamal El Sati’s videotape was first seen on Tele-Liban, the Lebanese public television channel. It was by chance that a friend of ours fell upon the “uncut rushes” of his testimony, 14 years later in the offices belonging to the Lebanese Communist Party. In the tape, Jamal El Sati repeats his testimony three times before deciding on the best version to be presented to the public. The difference between the three is minimal, even unimportant. The public was supposed to see only one of these versions – an incontestable, unequivocal presentation.

In Arab countries, political powers and parties, religious organizations, and various official institutions continue to celebrate and praise martyrdom and collective death. This is done in the name of “the homeland,” “the soil,” “liberation,” “Arab blood,” “Islam,” and other such ideas and slogans. Yet these same societies fast forget their individual heroes, relegating them to a lengthening list of names of martyrs. Until Jamal El Sati’s video, all we had ever seen were the “final cuts” – clear statements made without any hesitation, errors, or stuttering. This video revealed the moment of hesitation. The instant we saw the “stuttering” of the martyr, we realized something

simple, so simple that it was obvious – the martyr is not a hero but a human being.

The video demanded that we consider the limits of truth and its representations, and also consider the traces a martyr leaves after his death, after the suicide “mission.” Is it what his mission cost the enemy or is it the video he leaves behind? It is as if – and this is a personal interpretation – Jamal El Sati realized that the video was of more importance than his actual mission. The act of martyrdom begins the moment he faces the camera because it appears that *in his mind*, when he achieves the “final take,” he becomes the martyr. But, in fact, for us, this threw radically into question the status of the video as a record, a representation, a documentation of death.

### The genesis

The video was the catalyst for creating *Three Posters*.<sup>2</sup> We fell under the spell of Jamal El Sati’s repetitions and decided to present these repetitions to the public by making them the subject of a theatrical performance. The decision to present the video “as is” did not come easily. Should we allow a public foreign to the party and the family to witness a martyr’s emotions before his death? Could we present a tape that did not belong to us? Would he have wanted *this* video to be seen? Were we exploiting this tape to make an “artwork” from which we would draw both moral and financial profit? Were we, in a sense, violating the sacred space of the martyr in order to critique the concept of martyrdom and, by extension, the powers that nourish and encourage such ideologies, official or otherwise?

The more we debated these questions, the more we became convinced that the issue was not an ethical one, but rather an accumulating series of questions of profound depth. How did the secular resistance against the Israeli Occupation end up becoming a fundamentalist Islamic movement under the aegis of the Hezbollah? Why did the secular resistance of the Left fail? What is the use of media in politics and its relationship to, or correlation with, death? How does video relate to an action that is going to happen, particularly when we are accustomed to thinking of video as the recording of something that has already happened?

These questions permitted us to make the decision to present the video “as is,” completely unedited, and assume responsibility for it.

In the beginning, our idea was simply to show the videotape. But we finally decided to work within a simple framework – three figures, three possibilities for perceiving death: an actor, the resistance fighter Jamal El Sati, and a politician.

### The truth of fabrication: the actor

The actor resembled Jamal El Sati in that he too was about to martyr himself and make a last video. I read my name, date of birth, and a few other details of my “personal life” from a piece of paper in much the same manner as

the martyr. At this moment in the performance, fiction intermingled with reality; from this moment on, the audience was led to question everything that followed.

The role I acted out was not a “moment in the past,” but was played “live” behind a door, as I faced a camera and was viewed by the audience through the mediation of a video monitor. The deception was immediately exposed at the moment I opened the door and the audience saw me. At that instant, the fabrication of the false moment was made apparent; it was as if the martyr had come to life before them.

Over the course of the performance, we hoped to convince an audience that recognized the “actor” through the use of repetition – especially of the sentence “I am the martyr” – that the performer could eventually be the martyr. Because we have been conditioned to believe that a video is a recording of a moment in the past, a dead moment, the medium represents the recovery of such moments – moments that by definition have already passed. This is exactly what used to happen: one day, suddenly, we would see the poster of a friend hung on the walls of Beirut, or a photograph or video on the TV announcing his or her death. The redundancy, created in the performance, helped the audience accept this idea.

### **The fabrication of truth: the martyr**

One might say Jamal El Sati attempted to create the most ideal image of himself before his death. But this conclusion – that the martyr, like the actor, is searching for the “best take” – is belied by the fact that the difference between each take is very slight. Rather, the video portrays Jamal El Sati’s desire both to defer death and to withdraw from life in a depressing land, where the desire to live is considered a shameful betrayal of the State, the Nation, and the Homeland. Jamal’s repetitions humble us in our own artistic enterprise: they ask how an artwork can be critical of the notion of “truth,” while claiming to convey “truth,” at the same time being a “fabrication of truth.”

### **Other truths: the politician**

We decided to interview Elias Attallah, the person responsible for Jamal El Sati’s operation and the Communist Party’s leading figure, to bring to light the political circumstances and practices that surrounded this mission and to prompt a reevaluation of the strategies and political activities of the Left during the 1975–90 Lebanese civil war. Attallah agreed to be videotaped any way we wished. During the 20-minute interview, we outlined his frame so that he appeared as an underexposed silhouette, and lit his face, only for an instant, just as he finished speaking. We wanted to burn out his image with light, metaphorically killing him with the camera. To this day, I don’t know why he agreed or why he watched what we did to his image without any objections.



### Travel and translatability

In the performance, the first martyr (the actor) used the Lebanese dialect of Arabic with a few sentences in classical Arabic, while the real martyr, Jamal El Sati, spoke only in formal, classical Arabic. When a martyr uses classical Arabic, he or she effaces his or her personal history for sainthood and for Pan-Arabism, which is quite the opposite of a Lebanese centric discourse.

Unfortunately, the foreign press eventually and inevitably linked the performance to current events. It was a challenge to insist on a Lebanese context for *Three Posters*, even though the premiere performance was in the year 2000, before 9/11, and before suicide missions became a symbol of the Palestinian *Intifada*. Jamal El Sati was secular and was an active member of the Lebanese Communist Party. *Three Posters* is not related to the acts committed by Islamic fundamentalists, for whom there is clarity in the motivation behind such missions and little if any room for debate. However, as a secular and “left-wing” act, the notion of a suicide mission enacted by a communist is open to interpretation, challenge, and debate. In this sense, *Three Posters* attempts to reevaluate the politics and role of the Lebanese Left during the civil war. It makes a critical and autocritical assessment of the Left’s absence today in the Lebanese political arena – and in a way, declares our defeat.

*Three Posters*, by Elias Khoury and Rabih Mroué, was first performed at the Ayloul Festival in Beirut in September 2000. Subsequently, it has been performed at many festivals in Europe including the Vienna Festival (2001), Welt in Basel (2001), KunstenFESTIVAL des Arts in Brussels (2002), In Transit in Berlin (2002), Fundació Antoni Tàpies in Barcelona (2002), Theater der Welt in Bonn (2002), and Witte de With in Rotterdam (2002).

### Notes

1. Usually, the video recordings were made a day before the martyrs executed their missions. Immediately after the mission, the tapes were sent to Tele-Liban (Lebanese Television), which aired them during the 8:00 p.m. news broadcast. At that time, Tele-Liban, which was government-owned, was the only working TV station in Lebanon. Therefore, back then, the majority of the Lebanese population viewed these videos, which is why they are a singular element in the memory of every Lebanese person. The broadcast depended neither on the success or failure of the mission nor on the significance of the target; all that was necessary was that the mission operative be dead.
2. The text of the performance was first published in *Tamáss: Contemporary Arab Representations* (2002, Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies)

## THREE POSTERS: A PERFORMANCE/VIDEO

Elias Khoury and Rabih Mroué

Translated Mona Abou Rayyan

### Production credits

Written, directed, and designed by Elias Khoury and Rabih Mroué

Actor #1: Rabih Mroué

Actor #2: Elias Khoury

*(Dark auditorium. On a dark stage, the only visible thing is a monitor. ACTOR #1 appears on the monitor wearing a military shirt, a beret with a five-pointed red star, and a red ribbon on his left arm. Behind him there is a poster made up of portraits of martyrs, in addition to a Lebanese communist flag.)*



Figure 1 Actor #1 (Rabih Mroué) appearing with images of martyrs behind him in *Three Posters*, conceptualized and performed by Elias Khoury and Rabih Mroué. First staged at the Ayloul Festival, Beirut, September 2000. (Courtesy of Rabih Mroué)

## Take 1

*(Looking into the camera preparing himself.)*

ACTOR #1: I am the martyr comrade Khaled Rahhal. I was born in 1964 into a hardworking family that taught me the principles of freedom and justice. I enrolled in the Communist Party in 1982 and joined the heroes of the National Resistance Front, who sacrifice their blood to free our occupied lands in the South and the West Bekaa.

My name is Ahmad Rahhal, and I am now here to declare my last call before committing, tomorrow morning, a suicide mission on which the Front Command has agreed.

I have a few words that I want to state before I depart, words that summarize my personal beliefs. I am from Beirut. My father works in a publishing house. I did my studies at the Raml El-Zarif High School and obtained a high school degree in experimental sciences. Since our financial situation did not allow me to study either at the American University of Beirut or at Saint Joseph University, my father hoped I would obtain a grant to study medicine in the Soviet Union. I honestly would have liked to study medicine; however, one incident changed my life: In 1982, right after we took the official exams, I saw Hani Saad's picture in the newspaper and learned that he martyred himself in a suicide operation against the occupation in the South. Mr Saad was my chemistry teacher in high school. Everybody liked him because he was a humble and nice person, always ready to help out students. I went to his house to offer my condolences, and there I met all of his friends and went with them to paste his pictures on the walls of the city. It was at this moment that I became aware that my own values should become concrete. I found my way to both the Communist Party and the National Resistance Front. My father did not object to my enrollment in the Party, supposing that it was a good way to receive a grant to study in Moscow. On my return home after a three-day absence during which I was participating in an operation in Tyr, my father told me that he was willing to borrow two thousand dollars to buy me a study grant from the Progressive Socialist Party if I failed to receive one from my party. I tried to explain to him that I was not interested...

*(The monitor goes black.)*

## Take 2

*(The monitor comes back on. ACTOR #1 is looking to the left and then turns his head to face the camera.)*

ACTOR #1: I am the martyr comrade Khaled Rahhal. I was born in 1964 into a hardworking family that taught me the principles of freedom and justice. I enrolled in the Communist Party in 1982 and joined the heroes of the

National Resistance Front who sacrifice their blood to free our occupied lands in the South and the West Bekaa.

I... On the evening of my departure to commit a suicide operation on which the Front's leadership has agreed...

I honestly would like to state a couple of things before my departure. I am from Beirut. My name is Khaled Ahmad Rahhal. My father used to work at the Khalifeh publishing house in the Khandak El-Ghamik area. I did my studies at the Raml El-Zarif High School and obtained a high school degree in experimental sciences. Based on the fact that I was a good student and believing that good students should study medicine, I was convinced that I should pursue my studies in this field. But Mr Hani Saad's martyrdom changed my life. When I opened the newspaper and saw his picture and knew that he martyred himself in an operation against the Israeli troops in South Lebanon, my decision was taken. Mr Saad, our chemistry teacher, was an ordinary person who never showed any signs of becoming a martyr and a hero. This is how I got enrolled in the Communist Party and the National Resistance Front, where I gave up my bourgeois dreams of studying medicine. I was thrilled when I read the biography of the martyr Che Guevara, who also gave up on medicine for the Revolution's sake.

A year later, and more specifically in the beginnings of 1984, the civil war broke out again. The demarcation lines between West and East Beirut were set again and I became aware of the horridness of the war. My father was unable to go to the publishing house in Khandak El-Ghamik, and he soon lost his job and started working here and there. At this time, I was convinced that I should fight Israel and I decided to die in the South, and not in some marginal wars in Tripoli, Beirut, or the mountains...

*(The image goes dark, leaving just the actor's voice.)*

Please don't get me wrong...

### Take 3

*(The monitor comes back on. ACTOR #1 is looking to the left and then turns his head to face the camera.)*

ACTOR #1: I am Khaled Ahmad Rahhal. I enrolled in the Communist Party and the National Resistance Front in 1982. What motivated me to follow this path is the exemplary struggle that was created by National Resistance Front's martyrs. I want to salute Mr Hani Saad, who was a very special person to me, my chemistry teacher at the Raml el-Zarif High School. Mr Saad was a very humble and noble person but we never expected that he would become a hero. Mr Hani's martyrdom was what inspired me to enroll in the Front and give up on my plan to study medicine in the Soviet Union.

I come from a hardworking family and live in El-Zaydaniah area in Beirut. To be able to contribute to the liberation of our land, I enrolled in the National Resistance Front. My parents did not object to my decision. My father was an activist in the Labor Union. All parents prefer that their sons grow up to be doctors, and become well-established socially and financially, but I personally consider the matter meaningless when my country is under occupation.

Like many of my comrades, I participated in numerous operations against the Israeli troops in the South. At the present moment, I am preparing myself to commit a suicide operation that I am sure will cause the Israeli troops to suffer great losses. I would like to send a letter to my friends and to all the Lebanese people and tell them that the Resistance is the only way to have a united, independent, and free country, and that the war worth dying for is the one against the Occupation. This is the only way to take Lebanon out of the destructive and filthy civil war.

I am just an ordinary resister, and there are thousands of fighters like me, and my decision to commit a suicide operation doesn't mean that I chose death; no, I chose life. We die defending life, to give people hope of victory and freedom.

I know that my parents might not understand all of these statements. They have my apologies. I know that they will forgive me, and later on they might even understand and be proud of me. But I am sure that Lamia, my comrade in the Party, will understand. I want to tell her that I love her. *(He stops, hesitates, looks to the left, and then turns his head to face the camera.)*

I know that my parents might not understand all of these statements. They have my apologies. Sorry mom, sorry dad. I know that they will forgive me, and later on they might even understand and be proud of me. But I am sure that Lamia, my comrade in the Party, will understand. I ask her to go on with her life and stay on the front lines of the struggle.

Finally, I want to greet all the martyrs of the Party and the Resistance, and send a special greeting to the great leader Farajallah El Helou.

I was asked to greet President Hafez El Assad of Syria, so I greet the President...

*(The image goes dark.)*

*(He shouts)* Turn it on. Turn it on.

*(The monitor comes back on.)*

*(In a loud voice)* I want to greet all the martyrs of the Party and the Resistance and send a special greeting to the great leader Farajallah El-Helou.

And I greet the President, the fighter, Hafez el Assad. I salute Syria, its army and its people.

*(ACTOR #1 stands up, takes off his military T-shirt, his beret. Now he is wearing only a regular T-shirt.)*

*(On the stage: Under the monitor there is a door. It opens and ACTOR #2 appears onstage, crosses the stage, and takes a seat.*

*Through the open door, the room that is seen on the monitor is visible along with ACTOR #1 and the camera that is videotaping him. ACTOR #1 takes a piece of paper out of his trousers' pocket and reads the following:)*

ACTOR #1: My name is Rabih Mroué, born in 1966, Beirut, became a member of the Lebanese Communist Party in 1983.

Participated in the operations of the Lebanese National Resistance Front 1987 in Hasbayya, Blat, and other towns.

In an operation in Hasbayya, our group fell into an ambush arranged by our "brothers" in the Amal Movement, and thus we had canceled the operation against the Israeli Occupation.

That was the last operation I participated in.

I greet with respect the martyr comrade Khaled Rahhal, who fell in the clashes of West Beirut in 1987, which ended with the coming of the Syrian Arab Army once again.

Khaled's dream was to die a martyr in South Lebanon in protest against the Israeli Occupation.

Now, as the liberation of South Lebanon has been achieved, I cannot find anything worthwhile to offer to the memory of all the martyrs of the Lebanese National Resistance Front, other than the following show.

At the beginning we will see a tape recorded by the martyr Jamal El Sati, a few hours before his martyrdom in a suicide operation against the General Military Commander Headquarters in Hassbayya: Tallet-Zaghli on Tuesday, 6 August 1985.

This is to the memory of Jamal Satti, Housain Mroueh, Hassan Hamdan. Ahmad al-mir al-ayoubi, Salim Yamout...and Farajalla El-Helou.

Thank you.

*(ACTOR #1 leaves the room, enters the stage, crosses it, and takes a seat next to ACTOR #2. He places a videocassette into the tape player. The two actors watch the monitor.)*

## Take 1

*(On the monitor)*

JAMAL SATTI: I am the martyr comrade Jamal Satti, from the village Kamed El-lawz; I enrolled as a member of the Lebanese Communist Party in 1978.

I witnessed the civil war of '75 to '76 and saw how principles and morals fell apart: how someone might martyrize for the sake of these principles, morals, and ideas.

I witnessed the occupation of South Lebanon in 1982 by Israeli Armed Forces...

I saw how our enemies, the Zionists, destroyed our villages and towns; they humiliated us, forced our people not to leave their houses and villages...

As a communist, I decided to regain my national pride and dignity, and so I became a member of the Lebanese National Resistance Front – the Front that enlightened the way to freedom and national dignity for millions of people.

With pride and modesty, I participated in several operations against Israeli Occupation forces in my village and other neighboring villages, which resulted in enormous casualties among the Israeli soldiers and officers.

These operations obliged the Israeli forces to withdraw from the mountains of the Chouf district, and upper Western Bekaa; my happiness and excitement were very strong.

I was even happier when my party commanded me to continue participating in the resistance operations with my comrades in the Front. My happiness was supreme when I was informed that I was to fulfill a suicide operation. I send my heartfelt greetings to the martyrs who were killed in this holy resistance, sacrificing their noble blood to enlighten us on our path toward freedom and dignity, such as Yasar Mroueh, Bilal Fahs, Wajdi Sayegh, Sanaa' Mohaidly, Lola Abboud, Wafaa' Noureddeen, Muhamad Younis, Mohamad Mahmoud, and others...

My best and sincerest greeting to the guerilla fighters behind their barricades, battling to stop the Falangists projects. I greet, as well, the Syrian Arab Republic, its people and armed forces, under the leadership of President Hafiz El-Assad, who stood strongly against the American puppets in the Arab States.

I also greet the National Palestinian Deliverance Front, which stands as a strong deterrent to the Arafati conspiracy.

May others soon follow my example in more suicide operations that will surely lead to victory.

Greetings to those who would not rest until they expel the last soldier of the Israeli Occupation forces.

## Take 2

JAMAL SATTI: I, the martyr comrade Jamal Satti, was born in 1962, in the small village of Kamed El-lawz, in Western Bekaa, into a poor hardworking family. I became a member of the Lebanese Communist Party in 1978.

During the aggressive occupation of the Israeli Armed Forces in 1982, my village, like the other villages and towns in South Lebanon and Western Bekaa and Rashayyah, suffered a great deal from the aggressive and terrifying treatment.

When that great and mighty creature named the Lebanese National Resistance Front appeared on the battlefield, the lost hope for a free land and national dignity again nourished our desperate souls. Then I found myself among the legions of this Front, for it was my sacred duty toward my party and my country to become a member of this Front.

I am not boasting when I announce that I have participated in many successful operations in my village, Kamed El-lawz, and other neighboring villages – it is my duty to say that as I am about to spiritually and bodily depart. My spirit will dwell in the souls of all honest patriotic comrades, and thus take the opportunity to...

### Take 3

JAMAL SATTI: I, the martyr comrade Jamal Satti, was born in 1962, in the small village of Kamed El-lawz, in Western Bekaa, into a poor hardworking family. I became a member of the Lebanese Communist Party in 1978.

During the aggressive occupation of the Israeli Armed Forces in 1982, my village, like the other villages and towns in South Lebanon and Western Bekaa and Rashayyah, suffered a great deal from the aggressive and terrifying treatment. When that great and mighty creature named the Lebanese National Resistance Front appeared on the battlefield, the lost hope for a free land and national dignity again nourished our desperate souls. Then I found myself among the legions of this Front, for it was my sacred duty toward my party and my country to become a member of this Front.

I am not boasting when I announce that I have participated in many successful operations in my village, Kamed El-lawz and other neighboring villages – it is my duty to say that as I am about to physically depart. My happiness was so great when the enemy Israeli forces were forced to retreat and withdraw from my district under the heavy blows of the Resistance...

But my happiness was even greater when the leadership of the Front agreed that I could continue participating in its operations...and it is much more exciting that I have to perform a suicide operation.

Following the example of the great Farajalla-el-helou and the other heroic martyrs of the party, those who chose the most noble death, the death for the sake of the survival of the nation; martyrs such as Nazeeh, Bilal, Wajdi, Sanaa', Yasar Mroueh, Ibtisam Harb, Khaled Azraq, Hisham Abbas, Lola Abboud, Wafaa' Nouredine, and others, and others...

Now, I am departing my country, my body only; I will still exist in the souls of all the honest patriots in Lebanon.

I take this opportunity to greet the National Allied Front, the new promising offspring; I am most confident that its leaders will put their duty to support this resistance first, with all available means.

I greet most respectfully all liberation movements in the Arab regions, and the leadership of the Resistance Deliverance Front.



My greetings, also, to the Syrian people and Military Forces under the leadership of President Hafiz El-Assad.

As well as greetings to all the freedom-seeking and struggling people through out the world.

As for you, the dearest and finest mother and father in existence, my beloved brothers and sisters: my wish for you is not to mourn and wail, but rejoice and dance as you would do at my wedding, for I am the proud groom of martyrdom, and that is the happiest wedding I could hope for. And as Ernesto Che Guevara said: "I don't care where, when, or how I die, but I care to keep the flame of revolution burning all over the world so that the world does not press its burden over the bodies of poor people."

*(On the stage: ACTOR #2 turns on a table lamp and reads from a paper.)*

ACTOR #2: A definitive copy of this tape was shown on Lebanese Television during the 8:00 p.m. news on Tuesday, 6 August 1985.

We came across this tape. We did not edit it but left it as is.

Jamal El Sati was martyred on the afternoon of Tuesday, 6 August 1985, after executing a suicide operation against the headquarters of the Israeli Military Governor in Hasbayya.

The martyr wore the clothes of a local sheikh and led a donkey loaded with 400 kilograms of TNT. After passing three barricades controlled by the South Lebanon Army, he reached his target, exploded the TNT and himself along with it. The operation of 6 August 1985 was his last.

*(ACTOR #1 changes the videotape for another one.)*

POLITICIAN: *(He appears as an underexposed silhouette for most of his speech)*

There was no objection to the suicide operations scheme. Undoubtedly, there was some discussion regarding this issue. Some asked questions regarding the deep meaning of the suicide operation, and about its justification and endorsement. Jamal El Sati's testimony was videotaped before the operation was carried out. Given the questions that were raised, there was an attempt, at least on my part, to dissuade him from the idea: I saw him and I tried subtly, through dialogue, to do so, especially since he was active, and had already executed several successful operations, and was a Resistance commander. I tried to make clear to him how his contribution would be more efficacious without this suicide operation. But I felt that he was adamant. *(Cut)*

We began facing difficulties by 1985 – to be more precise, by the end of 1984. That is, after the war in the mountains and the Beirut uprising, we began to come under both direct and indirect pressure, including pressure about the activity of the Resistance – through a clear message aimed at legalizing the activity of the Resistance within the framework of obtaining prior permission. *(Cut)*

This happened through actual contacts between Syrian officials and certain factions within the Communist Party, of which I was one. There ensued a refusal regarding the issue of prior permission. *(Cut)*

I can only pose precise questions regarding the direct pressure that took place through the assassinations that struck the Party in 1986...(Cut)

I am referring to Khalil Naous, Suhayl Tawila, Mouhdi Amel, Labib Abed Assamad, Michel Waked, Deeb Al-Jasir, Hussain Mroweh, and other high cadres of the Party. (Cut)

In my estimate, the Communist Party failed to realize the importance of the idea it launched, and this is more evident today.

*(On the stage: ACTOR #1 leaves the stage through the door and enters "his" room, kicking the door closed behind him.)*

*(On the monitor: the POLITICIAN continues.)*

POLITICIAN: The Party did not grasp the danger it faced, and did not take steps to address it. It may have been a little timid in its dealings with the country's political developments. It may not have been patient enough apropos the idea of investment. It did not make a decision to stop the activities of the Resistance, and, unfortunately, the cessation of the Resistance came about because of lack of perseverance in the face of both apprehension and renewed activity. (Cut)

That is...and that is my personal impression, and it's a point of contention. (Cut)

I say that the pressure and the mistakes contributed to that cessation, rendering the Party no longer able to persist in a mission of this sort. (Cut) But the main factor remains the daily and direct pressure that was put on us from those forces that did not want resistance to continue. (Cut) Here lies the responsibility of the Party, which did not find the right answers. Regarding these pressures that were being applied directly by the Syrians and sometimes through their proxies, and in relation to the vicissitudes of the confrontation with Israel...(Cut) My point of view was to form a Party – because our Party's history is public and it is a participant in the civil war; in my opinion it was necessary for the Party as an entity to lose for the benefit of the resistance, that is, that it transform itself so as to generate more resistance activity, an activity whose nature is secretive. (Cut) The outcome of this struggle, which started Communist and ended Islamic...(Cut) was proving that the failing is not the people's. Had the Party the courage to acknowledge the pressure, it would have overcome it. (Cut) Because the basic issue is speaking out. When you confront the problem, you overcome it; but when you ignore the source of the danger, and when you place the responsibility in a psychologically destructive manner and say that the problem is sometimes materialistic, etc. (Cut).

I think that the fear of speaking out about the threat to the Party is what destroyed the resistance. This is the issue. In my opinion...(Cut)...fear – because if you speak out then the actual confrontation between you and the source of the threat begins; otherwise you implicitly adapt, perhaps unintentionally, to your fear of the threatening party (Cut)...that is what destroyed it.

*(He fades out when his image is lit up. His face becomes clear for an instant before being overexposed and burned out.)*

*(On the stage: ACTOR #2 turns on a table lamp and reads from a paper.)*

ACTOR #2: This interview with Elias Atallah was videotaped in his house in Beirut on Monday, 19 June 2000.

Elias Atallah is a member of the Communist Party's National Council, a previous member of the Politburo, and one of the leaders of the Lebanese National Resistance Front.

*(On the monitor: ACTOR #1 collects his military shirt and beret, folds them carefully, then removes the poster and flag from the wall, rolls them, walks to the camera and turns it off. The monitor goes off.)*

*(On the stage: Still dark. ACTOR #1 opens the doors, comes onstage carrying his props, while ACTOR #2 turns the lights on.)*

*(The performance is over.)*

# 4

## *The Files*

### THE MAGIC YEARS OF YOUTH IN DREARY TIMES, OR THEATRE OF THE EIGHTH DAY'S VIEW OF ITSELF, AGAIN DURING DREARY TIMES<sup>1</sup>

Joanna Ostrowska

Translated Elżbieta Janicka

A very small, modest stage is almost empty except for four chairs with music stands, lit with small desk lamps, and a three-sided white linen screen towards the back of the stage. The four chairs are inscribed with the names Nana, Hercules, Adam, and Judas, which later will be crossed out with the real names of the actors: Ewa, Marcin, Adam, Tadeusz. The softly lit space feels intimate and safe and the actors are within the reach of the audience. There is no sense of peril. On the screen there appears a recording of the beginning of the 1977 performance *Przecena dla wszystkich* (*Sale for Everyone*), portraying the actors introducing themselves using their own names to an applauding audience. On stage in real time, the same thing takes place so that we see both the actors on stage and their much younger images on the screen. This manner of intermingling, recalling, and juxtaposing the “then” and the “now” is a recurring theme of the whole performance *Teczki* (*The Files*) by Teatr Ósmego Dnia.

*Teczki* (2007) is a special performance for Teatr Ósmego Dnia (Theatre of the Eighth Day) because it uses the reports the Secret Security Service (Służba Bezpieczeństwa) wrote about members of Teatr Ósmego Dnia during the period from 1975 to 1983 and juxtaposes them both with the actors' private letters at the time the reports were written and with portions of the performances to which the reports referred. This was the first time since 1982, with the performance of *Wzlot* (*Ascent*), based on the poetry of Osip Mandelstam and the book by Nadezhda Mandelstam, *Nadzieja w beznadzieności* (*The Hope in Hopelessness*), that Teatr Ósmego Dnia, had created an indoor performance based on text rather than their well-known group improvisations. All the other productions of Teatr Ósmego Dnia were created with a method of collective creation built from group acting improvisations, making it difficult to separate the spoken text of the performance from the production as a whole.

When writing about *Teczki*, it is necessary to refer to the time period from which the documentary materials originated, as well as to the context and climate of present-day Poland in which *Teczki* was created. Previous to *Teczki*, Teatr Ósmego Dnia never directly addressed the actual politics of Poland in their work, nor was the group a political theatre in the usual sense. Its performances were mostly about the problems of individual existence trapped in social and political reality, but presented in a metaphorical and poetic manner. *Teczki* focuses on important contemporary political issues in a Post-Communist era through the performance of both public and very private materials. In 2005, after the government in Poland was taken over by the right-wing party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (The Law and Justice), public debate turned to the archives of secret files collected by the Secret Security Service, which include mostly the personal files of both people kept under surveillance and of the secret collaborators who were conducting the surveillance. There are also files on the problem of vetting categories of citizens. The current government attached great importance to the activities of The Institute of National Remembrance, which although formally a research institution, is used as a tool for fighting political opponents. Prawo i Sprawiedliwość assumed that the files of the Secret Security Service contained only the truth and nothing but the truth. Therefore, they assigned former officers of the Secret Service and their secret collaborators the right to become arbiters – public prosecutors and judges of the behavior of millions of people living in communist Poland and later.

Employees of the Secret Service, who accepted jobs after the first democratic elections in 1989, also joined this group of “vetted people.” On behalf of the democratic government, they liquidated the Secret Security Service. This equalized the legal status and the moral judgment of people previously having been in opposing camps. Still, Poland was pervaded with insecurity and suspicion about particular people as well as about whole professional categories of people, such as doctors, scientists, journalists, and lawyers. Political opponents competing for professional positions slandered one another with suggestions of collaboration with the Secret Service. The climate resembled that of the period of martial law in Poland (when it was necessary to sign a “loyalty oath” stating that one would not perform any activity threatening social order and alliances), a period not unlike the time of the McCarthy hearings in the United States. This was the atmosphere when The Theatre of the Eighth Day received their files. They were recognized as “wronged by the communist regime” (an official category allowing people access to their collected files). *Teczki*, conceived as a result of reading the files, was markedly different from the media shows prepared by state officers and presented from the vantage point of destroying yet another political opponent. By means of their secret police files, the actors of Teatr Ósmego Dnia returned to who they were, to their work, performances, and friendships, of many years ago.

*Teczki* tells the story of how the Communist government in Poland in the 1970s justified its existence by creating opponents and by taking advantage of the whole state apparatus. Teatr Ósmego Dnia treat the reports of “secret collaborators” and officers of the Secret Service as an exposé of the ways in which the Communist government in Poland seemed to have an almost magical power to create reality according to its own needs. One section of *Teczki*, consisting of a report of the search of Marcin Kęszycki’s apartment, includes finding the “proclamation to peasants.” Another section includes instructions for how two “TW” (secret collaborators of the Secret Service) are supposed to make contact with one another without exposing one another. The “proclamation to peasants,” found by officers at Kęszycki’s place was actually a very private letter Kęszycki had written to his student friends. If the secret police officer had written that he had found a private letter, not a “proclamation to peasants,” it would not have been a “political matter.” The instructions for meeting portrayed a grotesque and absurd cabaret-like reality, by means of a great accumulation of details concerning a planned conversation between two strangers, during which each of them was supposed to conceal his “secret collaboration” from the other. The goal was for each secret police officer to convince the other secret police officer that he was not a secret police officer, but rather was a member of the opposition. In Poland, the audience response to this portion of the performance was typically long and almost Homeric laughter.

Most important is the way in which the artists of the Teatr Ósmego Dnia treat both their personal past and the history of Poland. Even though they were horribly persecuted by the “people’s government” and have the right (contrary to many juvenile “supporters of political vetting”) to harshly judge and stigmatize those guilty of the Communist crimes and abuses of the law, their performance is imbued neither with hatred nor revenge. Rather, Teatr Ósmego Dnia presents two coexisting, but very different ways of perceiving the world and participating in reality – two ways that are parts of opposing camps. However, the course of this reality was not as clear as it may seem from today’s perspective.<sup>2</sup> *Teczki* is most of all a brilliant, hymn of praise for a community of people without any appeal for pathos or heroism. Teatr Ósmego Dnia has protected the truth that was seriously threatened in Poland under Communism. With *Teczki*, Teatr Ósmego Dnia continues to confront Poland’s painful history and the worldview that treated that history with rueful humor.

## Notes

1. Teatr Ósmego Dnia (Theatre of the Eighth Day) was founded in 1964 as one of the most original and most significant groups of a very animated movement of student theatre from which the Polish alternative theatre arose. The group developed their own acting method and their own approach to creating performances through

group acting improvisations. Their independence and the will to speak with their own voice about the surrounding world and the individual's existence entangled in this world all led the group into trouble with the Communist state apparatus, even though it was never meant to be a political theatre of opposition. Kept under surveillance by the secret police, plagued by the official police, accused of committing common crimes, the theatre managed to create some of the most important Polish performances in the seventies, at the same time being an example of extraordinary creative vitality and firmness, both human and artistic. (These important performances are: *Jednym tchem* (*In One Breath*, 1971), *Musimy poprzestać na tym, co nazwano rajem na ziemi...?!* (*We have to Confine Ourselves to What has been Called Paradise on Earth...?!*, 1975), *Przecena dla wszystkich* (*Sale for Everyone*, 1977), and *Ach, jakże godnie żyliśmy* (*Oh, Have We Lived in Dignity*, 1979). During martial law (December 1981 and further into the eighties), the theatre was forbidden to present their performances in spaces other than churches (one of the few areas more or less independent from the state authorities, and open to various activities that were nonreligious in their form or content). In 1985 part of the group, thanks to all sorts of subterfuge (among which there were fake weddings with foreign actors), left the country. The theatre remained emigrant until 1989, when they returned to Poland invited by the first non-communist minister of culture. At present, they work in Poznań one of the most interesting and most fertile centers of alternative culture where, along with presentations of performances of their own and of other theatres, there are various projects in educational, artistic, and social fields, as well as seminars.

A complete history of the group can be found in Juliusz Tyszka's "Characters, Connections, Constructing an Action: Forty Years of Theatre of the Eighth Day." *New Theatre Quarterly* xxiii, 4 (November 2007), NTQ92: 403–26.

2. For instance, senior master sergeant of the Secret Service M. Rychter, the author and the hero of a couple of reports quoted in *Teczki*, used to be Marcin Kęszycki's friend from school. However, the former acquaintance had no influence whatsoever on their dealing during the interrogations. What's more, Rychter's professional interests last until today in a form of a peculiar 'hobby' – he still collects all sorts of information on the Teatr Ósmego Dnia, which he confessed to journalists who were eager to learn about what happened next in the lives of the one-time secret police 'care-takers' of the theatre.

# *THE FILES*<sup>1</sup>

*Teatr Ósmego Dnia*

*Translated Bill Johnston*



*Figure 2* Adam Borowski and Ewa Wójciak in *The Files* (Photo by Przemysław Graf)

EWA: Letter written to Tadeusz when I was 19. Christmas 1970:

– “I’m sick of family holidays and all this stupid sentimentality. All I want is the few of you, who I can love and share my illusions with. (All this high-flown nonsense is going to make me puke.) I really believe in you, and in the Theatre, the brotherhood, and all that quixotic errantry; outside of that there’s nothing for me. I’m incurably infected with the need for ideas and for the handful of people who have the same fixation.”

ADAM: “It would never have occurred to me to become an actor.

I’m discovering a captivating new world, half theatre, half not, a world in which by learning everything from the beginning, you gain control over yourself. [...] It’s like a drug. This Theatre [...] is quickly becoming the most important thing in my life, because working among people who



have such an exceptional way of seeing friendship, love, creative work, it's a great adventure of discovery, of creating something extraordinary."

MARCIN: "A tiny rehearsal space with a pillar in the middle and a cramped little room by the men's john in the Od Nowa club. That's where we meet. The air's always thick with smoke, emotions, raised voices. On the table there's books and often a little vodka. Words appear: freedom, truth, mission – half-sacred words uttered straightforwardly, with a sense of conviction that they mean what they say. There's talk of Dostoevsky, Brzozowski, Camus. It's like a monastic order of the initiated, a handful of friends, conspirators sort of, who think the world can still be set right by way of the Theatre. For me this is the most important thing, this handful of people, maybe more important even than the Theatre itself, because without them a Theatre like this could not even exist."

TADEUSZ: "I think there must be some overarching thing that connects a group of people who want to live their lives together. What's important is the idea of community, of building a different place, a different world, overcoming stereotypes. But what really connects us is the Theatre, our work. A Theatre that will serve its audience, not entertain, not shock. It ought to help them. Present them with new questions. And of course we're connected by love. The love between us."

ADAM: Ministry of Internal Affairs

Case: Investigative operation codename "Hercules."

- Name of target: **Marcin Kęszycki.**
- Nature of case: *Anti-state activity involving violation of civil and legal order*
- Reason for opening case: *Target possesses hostile attitude to present reality.*
- Threat (actual): *Support of individuals engaged in hostile political activity.*
- Affected area: *Academic.*
- Location: *Adam Mickiewicz University and Theatre of the Eighth Day.*
- Source: *Secret associate.*
- Individual sources of information utilized in case: *Secret Associate codename "Ojo," Secret Associate codename "Jacek," Secret Associate codename "Jan."*

EWA: Excerpt from personal file

- Name of target: **Adam Borowski.**
- Codename: "Adam."
- Nature of case: *Hostile activity as part of Theatre of the Eighth Day.*
- Category of case: *Appended to investigative operation codename "Scorpion."*
- Basis for opening case: *Field intelligence.*
- Nature of crime or suspected crime: *Illegal political propaganda.*
- Location of commission of crime: *Academic and artistic circles.*
- Sector of economy negatively affected: *Culture and the arts.*

TADEUSZ: Ministry of Internal Affairs

Investigative operation: codename "Nana."

- Name of target: **Ewa Wójciak.**

- Nature of case: *Deeply involved in hostile political activity in connection with the “Players” and work in support of the so-called “Student Solidarity Committee”; hostile activity as part of Theatre of the Eighth Day.*

MARCIN: Extract from personal file

Name of target: **Tadeusz Janiszewski.**

Vetting operation codename “Judas.”

- Nature of case: *Anti-state activity in violation of civil and legal order; hostile activity as part of Theatre of the Eighth Day.*

EWA: “I felt that I’d find kindred spirits and that with them I’d build a new order in which I’d be able to grow, think, trust, and live, and that otherwise I’d have no life at all. It wasn’t a vision of a theatre so much as a vision of a monastic brotherhood. We’re together in order to do something, and so each of us needs to work and grow, if only so as to be able to offer the same to other people.”

ADAM: Profile prepared by Regional Police Headquarters in Kraków. Marcin Kęszycki, son of Wojciech, graduated in Polish literature 1977. Currently unemployed, actor of Theatre of the Eighth Day, Category D – unfit for military service in peacetime. [...] Initiator of Student Solidarity Committee in Poznań, participant in illegal gatherings, initiator and participant of many actions (petitions, leafleting, etc.), highly aggressive towards representatives of police and security services.

MARCIN: Ewa Wójciak, daughter of Juliusz, graduated in Polish from Adam Mickiewicz University 1974. [...] One of the more negative individuals, has instigated and carried out a series of actions of an anti-socialist nature, instigator of Student Solidarity Committee in Poznań. Close associate of Jerzy Nowacki, Stanisław Barańczak, and Marcin Kęszycki. Initiator of the most provocative performances.

EWA: Adam Borowski, son of Roman, first year student at State Academy for the Fine Arts, associate of the “Players,” incited students in Poznań to take part in a mass said for Stanisław Pyjas.

ADAM: “My characters involved the exploration and exposure of various dark sides of my personality. In the theatre I’m most passionate about ‘vampirism’ all that is squalid, dirty, petty, shamefully hidden – the darkest recesses of the soul. [...] Imagine a journey from Alyosha in ‘The Brothers Karamazov’ to the ringmaster of a ‘Socrealistic Circus.’ Two extreme figures who have to fit in one person: naive decency and ruthless premeditation, honest faith and intoxication with power. I think I’m always oscillating between those two extremes. [...]”

EWA: Confidential

Marked: Important

Poznań, December 16, 1977

PLAN to introduce Secret Associate “Wojciech” into anti-socialist circle in Poznań by means of Secret Associate codename “Spider.”

Introduction of SA codename "Wojciech" to be facilitated by fact that he works in local student film club, while SA "Spider" works in student club in Szczecin. Also by fact that SA "Spider" enjoys trust of main target of our operation.

Introduction to be carried out as follows:

SA "Wojciech" will be given task of traveling to Szczecin and meeting SA "Spider" as if by chance. During this meeting, among other things he will start conversation about Polish opposition, censorship, etc. Among other things he will ask whether this kind of activity is going on in Szczecin student circles, indicating he knows little about what is going on in Poznań. He will mention he knows about Barańczak and the students in the literature departments, and that he's heard of Theatre of the Eighth Day and the Student Solidarity Committee. At the same time he will express doubts about whether their activities are as serious as rumors suggest.

During conversation he will make it clear he is on side of opposition.

It will be explained to SA "Wojciech" that SA "Spider" is suspected of opposition activity in Szczecin, with support of contacts in the Poznań opposition. His task is to determine if this is in fact the case.

In order for SA "Wojciech's" meeting with SA "Spider" to look accidental, SA "Wojciech" will be instructed to propose to his film club idea of making documentary film about student circles in Szczecin. [...]

SA "Spider" in turn will be informed that a student arts activist, i.e., SA "Wojciech" (SA "Spider" will be given his name), is coming to Szczecin to learn about student circles there. SA "Spider" will also be informed that SA "Wojciech" will probably be talking with student activists, including "Spider" himself, with the purpose of making documentary film about Szczecin students.

If the meeting comes about, "Spider" must engage "Wojciech" in conversation about political issues and make him understand he is on side of the opposition.

SA "Spider" will be told that SA "Wojciech" is suspected by Security Services in Poznań of working for the opposition and needs to be checked out thoroughly. For this reason SA "Spider" should first gain SA "Wojciech's" trust and then put him in touch with our target W. Fenrych. In this way, when SA "Wojciech" meets with Fenrych, he will simultaneously be able to monitor any activities he may be engaged in. SA "Spider" will also be able to monitor Fenrych indirectly.

For Fenrych to agree, it will be necessary to suggest to him that amongst other things SA "Wojciech" has access to a photographic workshop.

Carrying out operation in such a way will prevent the two secret associates from revealing their identities to one another and furthermore will allow us to ensure the tasks assigned to them are carried out.

Part of the present plan is the combined plans of action for SA "Wojciech" and SA "Spider."

Deputy Director, Division III  
Regional Police Headquarters in Poznań  
Major K. Górny

TADEUSZ: PROFILE

Secret Associate codename "Wojciech"  
Registration number 19883

"Wojciech," age 21, Polish nationality and citizenship, class background: intelligentsia, bachelor, non party member, third-year student in philosophy at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań; resident of Poznań.

Subject agreed voluntarily to cooperate. [...] SA was remunerated on numerous occasions. [...] Appears regularly for appointments. Carries out tasks assigned to him in satisfactory manner. Despite lack of direct contact with opposition circles, SA attempts to indirectly acquire information of interest to us.

Inspector, Section III  
Division III  
Corporal J. Janów

ADAM: Secret Associate codename "Ojo"

Secret Associate codename "Jacek"  
SA codename "Jan"  
SA codename "General"  
SA codename "Karolina"  
SA codename "J-17"  
SA codename "Kazimierz"  
SA codename "Mietek"  
SA codename "Scot"  
SA codename "Janina"  
SA codename "Janusz"  
SA codename "Kuba"

TADEUSZ: SA codename "Mirek"

SA codename "Heniek"  
SA codename "Piotr"  
SA codename "Dalia"  
SA codename "Washington Irving"  
SA codename "Rafał"  
SA codename "Ludwik"  
SA codename "Chairman"  
SA codename "Thunder"  
SA codename "Andrzej"

SA codename "Papyrus"  
SA codename "Zbrzoźło"  
EWA: SA codename "Marek"  
SA codename "Paweł"  
SA codename "Frenchman"  
SA codename "Justyna"  
SA codename "Robert"  
SA codename "Mosquito"  
A codename "Krzysztof"  
SA codename "Mietek"  
SA codename "K"  
SA codename "Cracovian"  
MARCIN: SA codename "Vega"  
SA codename "Home"  
SA codename "Biologist"  
SA codename "Detail"  
SA codename "Leon"  
SA codename "Stanisław Brzozowski"  
SA codename "Ace"  
SA codename "Hygenist"  
SA codename "Józef"  
SA codename "Z"  
SA codename "Wojciech"  
SA codename "Spider"  
EWA: General assessment of Poznań circle.

Active members of Poznań circle have low expectations of their own opportunities for action. There is a widely held belief that entire opposition in Poznań consists of Stanisław Barańczak and a handful of young writers, plus ten individuals from Theatre of the Eighth Day, plus about 20 students (mostly from the Department of Polish Literature).  
Signed, Secret Associate codename "Return"

ADAM: Confidential; marked: Important  
single copy. Official memo re: Theatre of the Eighth Day.

On November 25 of current year, at 9 p.m. in Od Nowa student club there was a performance by Theatre of the Eighth Day entitled "We Have To Confine Ourselves To What Has Been Called Paradise On Earth." About 40 individuals aged 17 to 25 gathered in one of the rooms at the club. The play began punctually at 9 with the line:

"From generation to generation the information was passed down to us from the Paris Commune about the hour that would come..."

At a later point one of the actresses read the central idea of the play:

“...freedom cannot be reconciled with earthly bread in plenty for everyone, because there is not and has never been anything so unbearable for human society as freedom...”

EWA: *Alexander Solzhenitsyn:*

*“You have to enter there without aching for the life filled with warmth that has been left outside the gate. You have to tell yourself on the threshold: my life is over. A little too soon, but later it will be even harder. I no longer have anything of my own; my loved ones are dead to me and I am dead to them. From this moment on my body is something alien and useless to me; only my spirit and my conscience are still valuable and important.”*

MARCIN: Plan to make use of Secret Associate codename “Heniek” in operation to search premises of Theatre of the Eighth Day in Od Nowa club.

Because of the position he occupies in Od Nowa student club, Secret Associate codename “Heniek” has natural access to all keys used on premises of said club. Therefore I propose arranging meeting with SA in hotel room in immediate future and giving him task of obtaining keys of Od Nowa club and making copies of said keys. I propose presenting SA with this task in written form, accompanied with caution about maintaining full secrecy in these plans and actions.

Inspector, Section III, Department III

TADEUSZ: Source: Secret Associate codename “Heniek”

Report received by: Senior Staff Sergeant Michał Rychter

Information recorded on basis of oral relation by SA

During the meeting SA informed that [...] the members and supporters of Theatre of the Eighth Day are a highly closed group of people. They do not discuss sensitive political issues with outsiders, but they behave in an arrogant way. [...]

Tasks:

- Pay attention to anything said about relationship of Theatre to “Student Solidarity Committee” and about attempts to use this organization for their own purposes.
- Monitor all cultural events at Od Nowa club and immediately pass on information about any politically harmful activities.
- Provide list of persons associated with Theatre of the Eighth Day and identify those who are given free passes to the club.

Comments:

SA is not liked by those in Theatre of the Eighth Day group because he is always scolding members of the Theatre for leaving a mess in the club. I advised SA to be very cautious in his contacts with the Theatre.

ADAM: Source: SA codename "Heniek"

Report received by: Senior Staff Sergeant Michał Rychter

Location: Outdoors

At the meeting SA delivered key to space used by Theatre of the Eighth Day in Od Nowa club.

Remarks: during delivery of key SA seemed highly nervous and frightened. Stated that key is absolutely essential for the purpose of installing listening device in theatre space. Said that he is not convinced by other reassurances, and asks for extreme discretion, because by process of elimination the Theatre may figure out he was the one who provided key. Repeated his requests several times.

SA also informed that from time to time Theatre organizes alcoholic binges, but these are result of momentary decisions and it is hard to predict when company will arrange such an event.

EWA: Coded message no. 5927.

Confidential

December 13, 1975, 4 pm

To: Director, Division III, Regional Police Headquarters in Poznań

Decoded at 5.40 p.m.

In period December 2–7, during 15th anniversary of "Kontrasty" Student Arts Center in Szczecin, there was a series of events including a performance by Theatre of the Eighth Day from Poznań of their play "We Have To Confine Ourselves To What Has Been Called Paradise On Earth." The play presented a pessimistical and existentialistic view of the restrictions on freedom of contemporary people, including in the following quotes:

"Now we have absolute freedom, each person belongs to everyone and everyone to each..."

"Now and always, nine-tenths of people are people, while one-tenth are those who have lost any sort of individuality; they need to be killed."

"Every 30 years the powers that be have a falling out so that the masses should not get bored; boredom is a sentiment of the aristocracy..."

In the course of the performance there were two instances of arson as a symbol of man being liberated from bonds that oppress him. The production ends with the line: "everyone sharpens at his own throat the razor with which he will kill himself."

We are sending this information for the sake of interest and possible exploitation.

It is worth mentioning also that the above mentioned performance was NOT reviewed by the Board of Censors in the Szczecin office of the Department for the Supervision of Press, Media, and Performances.

MARCIN: Cable

Confidential

To: Director, Division III, Regional Police Headquarters in Szczecin.

With reference to cable no. 5927 [...] it is informed that the performance by Theatre of the Eighth Day entitled "We Have To..." has been reviewed by the local Board of Censors and given permission to be presented to a student audience. According to instructions of Central Office of Department for the Supervision of Press, Media, and Performances, the regulations for student Theatre are less strict than for others; all quotations you quoted and setting on fire of denatured spirit were permitted by censor. The one exception is the line "they need to be killed," which does not refer to said nine-tenths of people and one-tenth of authorities, at least in the text passed by the censor.

TADEUSZ: *Fyodor Dostoevsky:*

*"There never was freedom or equality without despotism, but in the herd there has to be equality. My conclusion is completely at odds with the initial idea that is my starting point. I begin with unlimited freedom and end with unlimited despotism. Yet I have to stress that there is not, nor can there be, any other solution to social questions. Humanity has to be divided into two unequal parts; one-tenth is given personal freedom and unrestricted power over the remaining nine-tenths. The latter lose their individuality, they become a herd, and boundless obedience leads them by way of transformations to primal innocence, a kind of prehistoric paradise in which, nevertheless, they will be obliged to labor."*

EWA: *"So if this nine-tenths exists and no one knows what to do with them, maybe it would be better to just blow them up?"*

TADEUSZ: *"Since the idea is practically unfeasible we have to confine ourselves to what has been called paradise on earth."*

MARCIN: Confidential

Marked: important

single copy

Official memo concerning behavior and activities of Ewa Wójciak

While present at the Od Nowa student club on ten eleven of current year, Ewa Wójciak led a discussion about the group's theatrical activities. [...] Later in the evening there was consumption of large amounts of alcohol; only Adam Borowski did not drink.

After several glasses of vodka Ewa Wójciak stated that she was bored by ideological-programmatic theorists, stated that she preferred to act, and act uncompromisingly. During subsequent conversation Ewa Wójciak stated that the present curriculum in elementary and secondary schools is inadequate, and therefore she has undertaken to write a new curriculum.



Following facts concerning Ewa Wójciak's behavior are worth underlining:

- She does not actually take part in any programmatic or ideological discussions, and does not express herself on these topics. She always takes an extreme position when discussing ideas for action.
- As concerns her comments about the system, she always takes a very hostile position towards any manifestations of the life of the state and the Communist Party.
- She employs an ironic and malicious tone on the subject of state and institutional holidays, councils, plenums.
- She tries to convince junior members of the theatre of the foolishness of party members, party and state activists, and functionaries of the People's Police and the Security Services.
- She adds emphasis to all she says with extremely vulgar language. To be added to file.

Senior staff sergeant Michał Rychter

EWA: From performance notes (1977):

"There was one young kid that wanted to pour gasoline over dogs and set them alight in public places, because, as he said: 'no one's ever set fire to dogs, and people love dogs, a dog is a man's best friend. Human torches have lost their interest.' [...] All rebellion and protest, all revolutions for centuries now have been defeated, and those defeats have also lost their interest. This is a time of universal tedium and stupefaction. Rebels and revolutionaries have also lost interest in their own revolutionary aspirations. [...] Because this is a time of boredom and ridicule. Until boredom and ridicule also lose their interest. Watch out, I beg you, watch out! Silence comes so imperceptibly, and downfalls are so gentle and so convincing. And appeasing the conscience is so very easy."

ADAM: Poznań, March 3, 1977

Confidential

Marked: Important

single copy

PLAN of operational actions in the matter of operation codename "Hercules".

On March 16, 1977, a search was conducted of Kęszycki's apartment with purpose of obtaining proof of illegally acquired earnings.

Such proof was not obtained, but as a result of search the following items amongst others were confiscated:

- 34 issues of *Kultura* journal published in Paris and books of poetry by Czesław Miłosz and Jacek Bierezin published by Instytut Literacki in Paris.

[...]

Action must be undertaken to:

- expose and document his hostile activities. [...]
- isolate him from the circle in which he works, amongst other things distancing him from other members of Theatre of the Eighth Day.
- engage in harassment with the goal of changing his field of interests and discouraging him from further pursuing hostile activity.
- monitor target permanently, closely, and systematically via personal sources of information, i.e., SA “General,” SA “J-17” and SA “Karolina,” and with the aid of technical operating equipment record his speech, behaviors, interests, and contacts at the university. [...]

Director, Section III, Division III

TADEUSZ: Poznań, March 17, 1977

Senior Staff Sergeant Władysław Kriger

Inspector, Section III, Division III

Confidential

Official memo

On March 16, 1977 we conducted a search of an apartment belonging to citizen Marcin Kęszycki [...]. Upon our entry into apartment Marcin Kęszycki behaved rather aggressively towards us. Other members of the household were calm and collected. Search began in the room Marcin shares with his brother. Marcin Kęszycki kept asking what basis there was for the search. He questioned the legality of the warrant, asked which police station we were from, and then began to simulate mental illness. At one moment attempted to snatch and destroy a hand-written document. When questioned about the appeal he wrote to peasants, explained that said document was a letter to his girlfriend of an intimate nature. The above-named had to be repeatedly called to order since he kept trying to impede us in carrying out our work. Was especially upset during search of his bookcase and desk.

MARCIN: *“Whatever the family, whatever the love, the desire for ownership immediately arises. We will put an end to that desire. We will set in motion drunkenness, denunciation, slander. No distinctions. Absolute equality.”*

TADEUSZ: *“[...] As of today, the motto of the entire globe will be: what is needed is that which is essential. Yet fear is needed, and that will be taken care of by us, the authorities. Complete obedience, complete annihilation of the individual, but every thirty years fear is unloosed, and then people start to jump at each other’s throats, only to a certain point, so the crowd should not get bored.”*

EWA: *That of course is also from Fyodor Dostoevsky’s “The Possessed.”*

MARCIN: Intelligence

June 7, 1977

Classified

Tadeusz Janiszewski was found guilty in 1975 of possession of a counterfeit student ID and of attempting illegally to obtain a train ticket at the student price.

On May 19, 1977 he was given a suspended 18-month sentence, a 15,000 zloty fine, three years of supervision by the parole board, and was ordered to find permanent employment, for smuggling 350 US dollars out of the country. [...]

In addition he was found to be in possession of 8 ounces of gold products (rings, bracelets) with receipts indicating he was trading in them.

TADEUSZ: "The parole officer was an agent of the secret police, of course. He harassed the people I was renting a room from, and forced them to ask me to leave. One time he came and asked:

"Is this the residence of Tadeusz Juda Janiszewski?"

The lady whose place it was replied:

"There's no "Ju" living here!"

He kept after me about not having a job, then when I did have work he'd arrange it so I'd get fired. I took whatever the Employment Office was offering. If I hadn't, they could have put me away for avoiding work. I was a waiter, a fire stoker...

[...] One time I was working in a big café with a dance hall. I did whatever needed doing – took out the trash, stoked the heating stove, carried in tables, served the waiters' personal stash of vodka, tidied the yard. At that time there was a theatre festival where we got an award. My friends from the theatre came running to the café; they showed the waitresses my photo in the paper and asked if the guy in the picture was employed here, and the waitresses couldn't believe that someone from the front page of the newspaper was working down in the boiler room."

EWA: Intelligence

June 7, 1977

Classified

A characteristic of this theatre group is that aside from the anti-socialist activities they are engaged in, the majority of the actors have committed a series of offences of a criminal or financial nature, allegedly with the goal of funding the theatre. In reality certain of them were not employed or lived off student grants, yet they led extravagant lifestyles. They held drunken orgies in their homes to the point where neighbors had to call the police.

It can be stated unambiguously that if it were not for the involvement of actors of Theatre of the Eighth Day in anti-state activities, the poet Barańczak would be isolated and would have no support.

TADEUSZ: From notes on an improvisation session, 1978:

"Scheming, getting by, everyday cunning, sticking to one's hiding places and one's own wretched possessions. It'll be worse and worse; they'll know less and less, and they'll be less and less willing, convinced of their own miserable temporariness [...]. Ever smaller, ever more claustrophobic storehouses of apartments, bigger and bigger crowds on the buses and streetcars, everything more and more sterile, socialism victorious, more and more well-fed overbearing cops, ever more imposing police stations, party buildings, and military barracks. More falsehood, more fake smiles, everyone falling asleep in front of their television sets, no one knowing how to talk with one another any more."

ADAM: Confidential Document #274

February 9, 1979, 3 pm

Cryptogram

To: Director, Division III, Regional Police Headquarters in Łódź

I respectfully inform you that Marcin Kęszycki, target of operation code-name Hercules currently being conducted by this office, an actor in Theatre of the Eighth Day, a group that is an ongoing object of our attention, has been offered the lead role in a film entitled "Knight." The film is being directed by Nyczak or Majewski, about whom nothing else is known, at the Łódź Film Studio.

Marcin Kęszycki is one of the longest-serving actors in Theatre of the Eighth Day. [...] He has given the productions of this company a clear anti-socialist character.

It is in our interest that Marcin Kęszycki should not be given this part. I respectfully request that the local Division III be informed and carry out the task in question.

Director, Division III, Regional Police Headquarters in Poznań

Captain J. Siejek, MA

encoded: Kaczmarek, 4 p.m.

decoded: Juszcak, 5.25 p.m.

EWA: Cryptogram #1456

Confidential

To: Director, Division III, Regional Police Headquarters in Poznań

In response to your cryptogram I am informing you that in connection with the "Marcin Kęszycki film role" case, we conducted a conversation with the head of the Profil Film Company which is to make the film.

During the conversation it was agreed that Marcin Kęszycki would not be offered this part. The rejection would be conveyed without any explanation.

Director, Division III, Regional Police Headquarters in Łódź  
Lt. Colonel Czesław Chojak, MA  
encoded by: Bujala  
decoded by: Kaczmarek

TADEUSZ: Official memo based on monitoring of correspondence:

We possess information that target Marcin Kęszycki, along with Ewa Wójciak, target of operation "Nana," was recently asked by Michał Ratyński of Warsaw to act in a film to be made privately, without permission of authorities. A screenplay based on Witold Gombrowicz's book "The Possessed" (published Paris 1973) is being prepared by Jacek Zembrzuski. In all probability the film has been sold abroad even before production begins. All those involved in its making are to take a share of the profits...

Director, Division III, Regional Police Headquarters in Poznań.

EWA: *The cast of this film, ladies and gentlemen, was also to include David Bowie.*

MARCIN: Ruling issued by Student Affairs Disciplinary Committee of State Academy of Fine Arts in Poznań

The committee finds student Adam Borowski (1st year, Department of Painting, Graphic Art, and Sculpture) guilty of failing to complete compulsory work experience. Student Borowski completed part of the experience on the basis of a documented work contract. The remaining practical experience was deemed community service. In view of the failure of the accused to follow the requirements of the Academy, Adam Borowski is hereby issued a reprimand and a warning. The Committee offers him the opportunity to complete the missing work experience in the course of the current academic year and in consultation with the institutional Party Cell appoints citizen Jan Gawron as his personal political guardian.

EWA: From: Adam Borowski  
to: President, State Academy of Fine Arts in Poznań

With reference to your request for a written declaration of the reasons why I signed the petition to restore Dr Stanisław Barańczak's faculty status, I wish to state that:

- Stanisław Barańczak is an outstanding poet [...]
- he was one of the co-founders of the Theatre of the Eighth Day [...]
- he is a well-known literary critic and a valued scholar [...]
- I know him to be an honest and upright man
- I believe that signing the petition to have Dr Stanisław Barańczak's status restored is in accord with the public interest and with the laws of the People's Republic of Poland

- my signing the petition does not conflict with my obligations as a student and activist of the Socialist Union of Polish Students and above all it is required by fundamental ethical principles.

ADAM: *The Poet Stanisław Brzozowski:*

*"I dreamed this, I dreamed that a whole crowd of us were rushing through the night, the night was darker than it ever is, copper-colored. The glint of weaponry could be seen, and above all, that rush:*

*Around us were horses; the entire space was rushing forward. Then all at once I saw Him. There He was, God's anointed one! He was riding on some kind of wagon and shouting, yet it was not words but something else. [...] It was not human.*

*At the time, I understood that voice, I knew what it meant. It meant everything. When I woke up I forgot, I forgot everything.*

*At the time I knew what people had lived for and that they would be no more, what people had lived for and that they would be no more...*

*No, there is still life within me. That alone is there.*

*To seek, to inquire why people exist, why they must exist."*

MARCIN: Secretary of the Regional Committee of the United Polish Workers' Party in Poznań, Comrade Gawroński  
Memorandum re: activities of Theatre of the Eighth Day and their association with Stanisław Barańczak.

Among the 15 members of Theatre of the Eighth Day, the following are actively engaged in anti-socialist activity:

- Lech Raczak, director of the Theatre
- Maciej Rusinek [...]
- Marcin Kęszycki [...]
- Jerzy Nowacki [...]
- Lech Dymarski [...]
- Tadeusz Janiszewski [...]
- Waldemar Modestowicz [...]
- Adam Borowski [...]

Ewa Wójciak [...] despite lack of direct contact with Barańczak, is pathologically active out of hostility towards the system.

All nine actors have retyped and distributed statements from the Workers' Defense Committee KOR, false information about the internal situation, hostile lampoons, letters and petitions. [...]

TADEUSZ: Kraków

Confidential

To: Director, Division III, Regional Police Headquarters in Poznań

In response to cryptogram #50 of January 13, 1978 we wish to inform you that Theatre of the Eighth Day has come to Kraków to perform their play "Sale for Everyone" [...]

The overall idea of this play involves an attempt to juxtapose grotesque images of people thrust into a world of illusion, a state of antagonistic attitudes of decadence and contestation. The actors make use of highly specific means of expression, viz.: extremely vulgar curse words, extracts from high-flown speeches, allusions and unambiguous political slogans that are negatively aligned with Communism.

The censored version of the text differed from the text as it was performed since it omitted a crucial series of sentences that, along with the choreographic context, constituted a violent attack on the system, on socioeconomic relations, the actions of state agencies, and international relations with countries of the socialist bloc, and at the same time illuminated the central theme of the official text. To illustrate the storyline we offer the following quotations from the text as performed:

"There will eventually come such a time, a splendid ball for many of us, at the happy destination where, in a crush in the main room, there will stand the builders of the Grand Hotel..."

In the context this song must be understood as an anthem of hope for "all working people" who are building the Grand Hotel-Poland (at present accessible only to the elite and the leaders) and who will eventually assume their rightful place in it.

In one of the scenes a young student is jostled past a line of standing persons who beat him with various objects, viz: ropes, knotted neckties, shouting:

"The man who believed."

"Maintain your dignity, don't despair..."

Then there appears a character who according to the script is a surgeon, but who in reality is a man dressed in a torn tuxedo, symbolizing a representative of the security services, who orders the student to be put in a straitjacket, saying:

"Nice clean pajamas..."

"...Diagnosis? – Hysteria, neurosis, delirium..."

The other actors act out scenes of beating and physical abuse, they are pushed down some stairs. On a raised platform two women dance, draped with placards bearing the slogans: "faith, hope, charity, liberty, equality, fraternity, independence."

There are innumerable examples of this kind with negative undertones.

A particular moment that constitutes the climax of the play is a scene entitled "The Garden," which the script describes as a loose improvisation of shouted texts from classic literature, without offering any more details. In fact it is an image of Poland chained in its borders, which it is unable

to cross to get to the outside, and within which it is impossible to live, think, and work freely.

**From the scene "Nice Little Garden," in *Sale for Everyone***

TADEUSZ: They've made a nice little garden for us. They've leveled it all. Tidied it.

ADAM: A nice little garden.

MARCIN: Come on everyone, I'll make chains of borders for you.

TADEUSZ: Let them say anything they want here. Just so long as nothing gets out.

Lithuania, my homeland, you are as health to me...

ADAM: You left a great void here within my home, my dear Polish literature teacher...

MARCIN: Hurrah!

(*All singing*) Only the horses, only the horses, only the horses will I regret...

ADAM: Veto!

MARCIN: Hurrah!

ADAM: Veto!

TADEUSZ: We have to kill off all the anarchists, the terrorists, all the perverts, the mentally ill, the oversensitive, the different. We have to prepare the way for our successors, our sons – blood of our blood, bone of our bone. Peace and health must once again reign.

ADAM: Pornography and prostitution NO PASARAN! We say NO! to the dirty thoughts of political moles. Enough corruption and depravity. Our home will never be a whore house.

TADEUSZ: The nation, the magnificent nation. The nation shows its muscles: Biceps.

Abs.

Pecs.

Sphincters ready for anything...

What do we have here? ...A little idea has come along...

ADAM: The red phone! Connecting! The left-hand switch.

MARCIN: Connecting!

TADEUSZ: Totalitarianism.

ADAM: Had it already! Over.

TADEUSZ: Fascism.

ADAM: Had it already! Over.

TADEUSZ: Parliamentary democracy.

ADAM: Had it already! Over.

TADEUSZ: Pluralism.

ADAM: Ploo ploo!

(*All singing*)

All the fishes are sleeping in the lake...



The penguin has a great big bill, great big bill, great big bill...

TADEUSZ: Family, little holy family, it's snug and warm, mamma's at home, dadda's coming back soon.

ADAM: Hold me back, hold me back or I'll get the son of a bitch.

TADEUSZ: You bastard, you piece of crap, you four-eyed jerk, you.

ADAM: You're no Pole. You fucking student. C'mere and let me give it to you.

TADEUSZ: I'll give it to you, you Jew. You eternal student. Hold me back or I'll let him have it.

ADAM: You rat's dick. You're no Pole.

TADEUSZ: And now it would be best if we all held handsies together and made one big human family.

ADAM: Bring on the girls in their regional costumes!

TADEUSZ AND MARCIN: Have them bring the colach!

MARCIN: The more stupid something is, the closer it is to the heart of the matter. The more stupid it is the clearer it is. Reason hides and dodges, reason is despicable, whereas stupidity is honest and straightforward...

EWA: Continuation of reply to cryptogram #50

The first performance was greeted with complete disapproval, as shown by expressions of criticism and disappointment on the part of the audience.

There was a somewhat different reception for the second performance, which was attended by representatives of the Kraków Student Solidarity Committee, including Bogusław Sonik, Blumsztajn, Liliana Batko, and Kensy, led by Michnik and Kuroń. This group numbered about 30 persons who throughout the whole performance greeted every scene with a wave of laughter and cheering. Personal relations between members of the Student Solidarity Committee and members of the Theatre company were demonstrated by the following facts:

- correspondence before the performance by means of cards delivered by special messengers, and direct congratulations and handshakes after the performance.

An attempt to organize a discussion following the play was foiled by discreet operational action. [...]

Director, Division III, Regional Police Headquarters in Kraków  
Lt. Col. Jan Bill

MARCIN: Declaration of the Committee for Social Self-Protection (the Workers' Defense Committee or KOR):

The KOR Committee for Social Self-Protection deems it necessary to inform public opinion of the particular victimization and police and administrative harassment to which the student company Theatre of the Eighth Day has been subject since Autumn 1976.

Briefly, this consists of the following: continuous surveillance of the actors, searches of their apartments (in the course of which, in March 1977 typewriters that were the property of the company were confiscated [...]), preposterous accusations of alleged financial wrongdoings, the proliferation of false denunciations, the denial of paid employment to members and associates of the company, systematic restrictions on their creative activities. [...]

On April 26, 1978 five members of the company traveling to Lublin to take part in the Festival of Youth Theatres did not have time to buy tickets for the bus taking them from one train station in Warsaw to another. Despite the fact that they were prepared to pay the requisite fine, the ticket inspector summoned the police, who severely beat two of the actors, and subjected all of them to vulgar abuse. [...] In the courtyard of the City of Warsaw Police Headquarters on Wilcza Street all the actors were assaulted by plain-clothes police officers and were kicked, punched, and beaten with batons. All five were held for 30 hours. A few days later the Central Warsaw public prosecutor's office charged them with hooliganism and assault and battery of police functionaries (articles 234, 235, and 236 of the criminal code, with reference to article 59). Such a charge could lead to prison sentences of up to 12 years, and the link to article 59 makes a suspended sentence impossible. [...]

Warsaw, May 29, 1978

ADAM: Warsaw, September 5, 1978

Confidential

Marked: Important

Operational plan to secure the trial of five members of Theatre of the Eighth Day.

- The premises of the Central Warsaw District Courthouse will be secured by functionaries of Bureau B equipped with film and still cameras for the purpose of documenting possible hostile or provocative actions, demonstrations, etc.
- In the vicinity of the courthouse there will be two motorized patrols of uniformed officers for the purpose of interventional action in case of necessity.
- The police post inside the courthouse building will be reinforced with six additional officers.
- The participation of Polish journalists is being supervised by the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers Party and the Central Office of the Socialist Union of Polish Students.
- The participation of foreign (western) journalists is being supervised by Division VII of Department II of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

- During the process there will be 35 functionaries from the Warsaw Police and 10 persons from the Ministry of Internal Affairs present in the Courtroom.

Inspector [...], Department III, Ministry of Internal Affairs)  
Lt. K. Ziomek

TADEUSZ: Secret Associate codename "Jacek"

Meeting location: "Crossroads"

September 11, 1978

Confidential

Marked: Important

Information recorded on basis of oral account by SA – shorthand notes:

A small crowd gathered in front of the doorway to the courtroom. [...] When the doors opened everyone began to push their way in. In the end, so many people entered the courtroom that members of the public were sitting in the dock. The judge cleared the room and ordered everyone to go and obtain passes. [...] A line formed at the door of the secretary's office, but the KOR people allowed their own leaders to go first. In this way, amongst others Barańczak, Brandys, and Woroszyński were able to enter. [...]

Nervousness among the Theatre group started to make itself felt. The lads from KOR saved the situation by making jokes. At this point I had the "great undeniable honor" of exchanging a few words with Michnik, Kuroń, and Lityński. I also conversed without knowing it with Blumsztajn. The conversations were meaningless, just like the above-mentioned "words with the masters."

Apparently, that day the proceedings were recorded by the actor Maciej Rejzacher. In addition, the proceedings were also recorded by the journalist Jankowska (I think that's her name), the radio patroness of Filipek, and his girlfriend, while Alina kept running to the bathroom to change the cassette tape.

During the breaks reports came about what was going on in the courtroom. It was mostly about the "tactics of the brilliant lawyers," who were the topic of the day and heroes of the cause: Lawyers Siła-Nowicki, Olszewski, Szczuka, and Grabiński. People were telling each other the stories of these people's lives, which one is which and how long each of them had been in prison. [...]

People swapped conversational partners at frequent intervals. [...]

Towards the end of the proceedings, before the verdicts were announced a few people started to worry [...] that the secret police would round everyone up and throw them in jail. With this in mind Leon from Lublin (he's finished his doctoral thesis but he has no money to publish it) ran off to

visit all the floors and check out the “balance of forces.” After the verdicts were announced, no one was upset. The verdicts were seen as strange – six months suspended for a period of four years. The ridiculous fine of three thousand zloties to be paid to the Society for the Disabled was regarded as ambiguous.

EWA: (*singing*) Who are broken-hearted,  
 who have yielded to despair,  
 who are frozen, petrified with fear,  
 who howl in powerlessness.  
 Who have gone blind,  
 who have long lost their sense of direction,  
 who are losing, losing strength.  
 Who have gone mad,  
 who drink,  
 who have fallen,  
 who if they knew about themselves...  
 who should try, you should try.  
 Who maybe still can be filled  
 with dense, bitter love.  
 Who are broken-hearted,  
 who yielded,  
 who are mad,  
 who howl,  
 who have weakened,  
 who have gone blind,  
 who will catch fire,  
 of whom there are...

MARCIN: Zbigniew Gluza

From review in “Politechnik” magazine, no. 35, 1978  
 Wrocław.

We’re gathering outside the Polski Theatre.

Something momentous is about to happen.

All we know is that several Theatre companies are to come out into the street. Theatre of the Eighth Day, the British company Triple Action Theatre, GIT from Spain, and perhaps some solo artists.

There are several hundred people in the square; we’re waiting. [...] Suddenly, from behind the Theatre there comes a soft song in multiple voices. A moment later a sizeable group of people appears. The wordless song gathers in strength. There are banners. Placards. Torches light up the dark alleyway. *Liberté d’expression! Liberté d’expression!* Poles, Englishmen, Spaniards. And more. We join them. More and more people are singing. We chant. [...] In almost every window dark silhouettes appear; I

have the impression I can hear shouts and cheers...[...] The torches reach us. The tension heightens, emotions intensify. *Liberté d'expression! Liberté!* The singing acquires an unexpected power, fusing into one all-embracing appeal...

Someone runs alongside the procession, repeating in a strange, unnatural voice:

"Let's try in Polish, in Polish now, surely we can, let's try..."

But the word "wolność," freedom, dies away at the first attempt.

*Liberté! Liberté!*

TADEUSZ: Central Office of the Socialist Union of Polish Students – after obtaining detailed intelligence from the Ministry of Internal Affairs  
Warsaw, May 5, 1978

Given the necessity of the continued existence of this theatre company, the Arts Committee of the Central Office of the Socialist Union of Polish Students proposes among other things the following option:

[...] A gradual replacement of members of the company and the introduction of new persons. This will be difficult insofar as the company comprises a tight-knit informal group in the nature of a commune, within which infiltration and provocation are in practical terms extremely difficult. Individual new members will rapidly become corrupted under the influence of the existing group. [...] There is the possibility of further operational activity as an outcome of the court cases of individual company members. The successive suspension of members of the company, including the director, will make it possible to replace the director and lead effectively to a complete rotation of the company personnel.

MARCIN: Official memo  
Confidential

To be carried out by Division III

Deadline: June 30, 1978

To involve leadership of Division III

In relation to all targets and their sympathizers measures will be taken to obtain incriminating materials providing evidence of the commission of criminal offenses or violations of ethical and/or moral standards.

Targets Lech Raczak, Ewa Wójciak, and Adam Borowski, who regularly indulge in excesses of alcohol, will be directed by the police to a drying-out facility. [...]

**Extract from improvisation entitled "Politburo"**  
**(Oh, How We Lived In Dignity)**

*(All singing, in Russian)*

"Ekh, zagulyal, zagulyal, paren' molodoy, molodoy..."

TADEUSZ: I like it here. This is a great bunch of people.

MARCIN: Should old acquaintance be forgotten.

TADEUSZ: We're the elite.

MARCIN: The crème de la crème.

TADEUSZ: I'm the elite of the elite.

MARCIN: Aha! this looks like some kind of dictatorship.

TADEUSZ: A dictatorship, that's right.

MARCIN: Give 'em an inch and they take a mile..

TADEUSZ: Next item: Alimentation.

ADAM: A potato, a potato of superhuman proportions. Let's plant the potato along the exit routes, the King's Trail, all our tiny little sections of motorway, in two neat rows, one on each side, a potato, a potato of superhuman proportions...

TADEUSZ: Lots of starchy ones, lots of fatty ones, like before the socialist working day commences.

MARCIN: Behold the alchemy of our agrarian revolution. The transformation of starch into divine human form.

TADEUSZ: A one-sided dialogue. We have to activate, mobilize grassroots social initiatives – make them look spontaneous – and provoke, provoke. I can't stand it any more, take this burden of responsibility from my shoulders. I don't understand these plans of yours. All these balance sheets, finances, agrotechnical operations...

MARCIN: Józus, Józus, why did you go there, those are not good people, they'll hurt you.

TADEUSZ: Taking advantage of every second of my weakness, knife in the back, I know you only too well, you revisionist fantasists, you gentlemen with short names starting with c. Cliques, coteries, corporations, oppositions...

MARCIN: I wish to lodge a complaint!

TADEUSZ: Who can you complain to here?

MARCIN: "Habemus papam."

ADAM: The delegations are coming...Let's have our picture taken, come on.

TADEUSZ: At this point in time I would like to offer the warmest welcome to the schoolchildren gathered here, to my dear little scouts, my dear combatants, my dear elderly.

– Leonid!

– Nicolae!

Several fanatical opponents have sought to assume power here. But we will never agree. Behind us stands the people, the entire godfearing nation, mineral resources, coal deposits, mines, steelworks, nonferrous metals, superphosphates, superfertilizers, super super super.

And the peasant doesn't invest in cattle for slaughter...and he doesn't get feed...

(All singing)

Trabajo si! Samba no!

EWA: "There exists a boundary of despair, beyond which one does nothing but howl for redress, beyond which one kills. Every night I think about ways to get rid of a few guys from over there. What kind of goddam earth is this where young women waste their nights slitting throats. Yet those dreams enable me to live, enable me to accept each daily portion of hatred and despair."

MARCIN: Confidential

single copy

Official Memo

This is to report that on May 16, in the course of a conversation with Personal Contact "MS" I obtained the following information: Theatre of the Eighth Day participated in the Youth Theatre Festival in Lublin on May 10–13, 1979 with a new play. [...] It is entitled "Oh How We Lived In Dignity."

Both the artistic value and the performance of the play were praised by the festival jury. [...] This is not a political play like "Sale ...," or their other anti-system productions. The full script was passed by the censor. Thematically speaking the play concerns existential problems. It takes place at the borderline of delirium being suffered by a person who is seeking higher values, [...], and who is unable to exist without quote unquote "God." The questions that emerge from the play, questions about how to live, rather concern new values, and their subtext does not constitute an attack on current reality. [...]

TADEUSZ: "Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to tell you our tragic story. We are disinherited sons. I think we understand ourselves here. After all, we come from a single father. We are oppressed by the same boot, yet we have the right to speak, and you have the right to listen. We all have the right not to consent."

EWA: Letter from me to Marek Erlich

Gorzyń, August 20, 1980

"We've been here since the beginning of August, working on a new play. [...] I don't know what it's going to be about; for sure it's emerging from optimistic beliefs about the independence of the human soul. [...] Dozens of years, landscapes, people are to appear in it...And there'll be the strangest meetings, perhaps between the hanged Decembrist Sergei Muravev-Apostol with a vocational school student who slit his wrists with a piece of razor in the john. [...]

The epic of the strike is a big experience for us. I thought about going up to Gdańsk, then we found out that it's all shifting, or rather, catching on in more and more places. That awful TV news with the leader's speech! Luckily it turns out that today's communists are complete morons and they're incapable of handling things discreetly and smoothly.

Bydgoszcz, Świnoujście, Nowa Huta – this is the response to their machinations.

Though I don't know why I'm telling you all this, you know it perfectly well already."

TADEUSZ: Description of threat (actual):

The difficult political and economic situation in the country has led to an increase in hostile activities by Marcin Kęszycki, target of operation code name "Hercules."

On August 30, 1980, in the reading room of the International Press and Book Club (EMPIK), the above-mentioned individual, along with Adam Borowski (target of operation code name "Adam"), inserted leaflets containing information about the demands of the striking workers into certain magazines. Independently of this, during the strike by city transportation workers both of them put flags in the national colors at streetcar stops.

Director, Division III, Regional Police Headquarters in Poznań

ADAM: *"New Year's wishes for the streetcar driver"*

*I wish you great journeys, nightmares, and an afterworld.*

*And that you should dance in the Rio de Janeiro carnival.*

*I wish you tears, a knife, and blood.*

*And that you should tremble to see the eyes of Christ  
on the ceiling of a Venetian temple.*

*And on, and on.*

*That you should sing and conspire.*

*That God should watch over you  
and that you should not need Him.*

*That they should not hang you  
before you've had time to pack your suitcase  
my friend...*

EWA: Article I wrote for "Odmowa" magazine, issue number 1, 1980:

A journalist for the London *Observer* once asked Vladimir Bukovsky how it was that he was never broken by the KGB. "It was inner freedom," responded Bukovsky. "When a person possesses inner freedom, the source of which is being true to oneself and one's friends, no one can take it away. It's easier to take one's own life. [...] In a political system whose success



depends on the absolute terrorization of the citizens and in which all social relations are tainted with falsehood, being true to oneself, inner freedom, and human solidarity pose a terrible threat to the authorities." [...]

Inner freedom is individual freedom; its scope is acquired as a person comes to know it. My years of work in the Theatre of the Eighth Day allowed me to understand that one can free oneself from police terror, from servitude, and from an awful passivity towards these things, only through the creation of values, through increasing one's own personal inner freedom, from the practice of spirituality. When fighting against falsehood, violence, and hatred, it is so easy to be poisoned by them. [...] All the more, then, it is a cardinal discovery to realize that one is a combination of that which is collective and shared, and that which is solitary and doubting. And also, that one can yield to collective elation with a clear conscience only when at the other side we feel the solid ground of a mind capable of learning and doubting. [...]

EWA: (*singing: "Dance little girl"*)

Dance little girl  
 Weep little girl  
 Your closest friend is soon to die  
 he will not answer your most important questions  
 but the sun will arise once more and your friend  
 will be a lark a green-colored leaf  
 a silver lake  
 Dance little girl  
 weep little girl  
 those who murdered your freedom are here  
 they will grope its sunlit flesh  
 and overcome it, your eyes will fade  
 but they will open once again  
 and it will transpire that your freedom  
 can never be tarnished.  
 Dance, weep, and love  
 love us in your purity  
 you'll hear the inhuman voices of those who suffer  
 you'll see the empty eyes of those living in poverty  
 folly will begin to entice and entrap  
 from great stages  
 you'll feel you are too weak  
 but your blood will grow thicker and darker  
 it will teach you anger  
 Dance little girl  
 weep little girl  
 may your anger come of age

## Notes

1. For the New York presentation of *The Files* at theatre 59 E 59 in October and November of 2008, the following recorded text written by Bill Johnston was accompanied by black and white images of Poland under Communism at the beginning of the performance:

"The Theatre of the Eighth Day – Teatr Ósmego Dnia – was founded in the 1960s in Poznań in western Poland, as a student theatre company associated with the Adam Mickiewicz University. Its heyday, in the mid-1970s, coincided with the beginnings of a protest movement that was to lead eventually to the birth of Solidarity. In this period the communist authorities, never willing to tolerate dissent, became even more suspicious of anything that smacked of alternative ways of thinking. The members of the Theatre of the Eighth Day were constantly harassed by the SB – the Służba Bezpieczeństwa or Security Service, the secret police of the Ministry of Internal Affairs – who also attempted to control or influence the activities of the company, often through a network of so-called 'secret associates' – that is to say, informers, some of whom were close to the company members. Each 'secret associate' was given a pseudonym by their contact in the SB.

Years later, after the fall of Communism, the detailed files kept by the secret police were archived by the new Polish government. In 2005 the Theatre of the Eighth Day was presented with the files concerning the surveillance of their activities in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In the files – maintained in great detail in stilted bureaucratic language laced with Communist mumbo-jumbo – they discovered not only that the network of informers surrounding the company was much more extensive than they had realized; they also learned of attempts to infiltrate the company by secret police plants, and of numerous efforts to sabotage their work. The following play was written in response to the newly uncovered files."

# 5

## *Don't Be Surprised When They Come to Burn Your House Down*

PAWEŁ DEMIRSKI: WE'RE NOT HYENAS – AN INTERVIEW

*Paweł Sztabowski*

*Translated Alissa Valles*

PAWEŁ SZTABOWSKI: When did you first come across documentary theatre?

PAWEŁ DEMIRSKI: I was on a program at the Royal Court in London where I learned that phenomena that exist in a world and their surrounding stories are worth being told. Documentary theatre is not only a technique; it's a way of thinking and above all an instrument for acquiring knowledge about the world.

PS: What kind of concrete things did you deal with in the context of that workshop?

PD: I was supposed to deal with the milieu of Polish émigrés. To see how they lived, what their expectations were, I had to go to the Polish neighborhoods in London. And that led to the problem of how Poland compares to England, in their eyes.

PS: What were the workshop sessions like?

PD: They were normal classes taught by British authors, David Hare among others. Hare had gone to Palestine and collected materials from both sides of the conflict. He gave us the assignment to get on the Tube and go to the neighborhoods that were "ours" in the sense of emigration from the respective countries of the participants in the workshop. We were told to look around, talk to people. I went to stores and looked at the bulletin board, the so-called "wailing wall" with jobs ads and talked to people. Many of them wanted to sell me some kind of fake documents and they were surprised when they found out I wasn't looking for work. The results were short dialogues in which I was a kind of main character talking to people.

PS: Were people eager to talk about themselves?

PD: It depends. Mostly I didn't tell them what I needed the information for, I just talked to them as if I wanted to settle there and was looking for advice.

PS: Are there techniques for asking questions in a way to make people want to talk?

PD: You ask about different things, sometimes their views, other times their dreams. You ask each person in a different way. The British gave a lot of weight to spending time and looking around to get a feel for the places with which we were dealing. That helps you find out what inspires people and what they're striving for. But about techniques – let's not exaggerate. If someone really doesn't want to talk, you can't force them to tell you anything. It's not our aim to draw out intimate secrets by means of socio-techniques. We're not hyenas.

PS: It seems the question about dreams is one of the most important?

PD: It is for me. It makes people open up – you can see them very vividly – and describe their aims, or at least the limitations they're struggling with now. It's often from those questions that a good conversation begins. Often I just say openly I'm here to find out as much as I can from you.

PS: So you decided to bring the techniques you learned at the Royal Court to Poland.

PD: I was already thinking about it in England. Then the Russians from Teatr.doc came to the Teatr Wybrzeże in Gdańsk. That was inspiring; it provoked a discussion about form and ways of doing theatre. We needed documentary techniques as an instrument, but also as a two-way inspiration. That's where the idea came from for Szybki Teatr Miejski [Quick Urban Theatre], the project we did in Gdańsk with plays about the underground abortion scene, Polish neo-Nazis, and the wives of soldiers sent to the war in Iraq. All the performances took place in private homes.

PS: The Russians also learned documentary theatre at the Royal Court and then adapted the techniques they'd learned to their own needs.

PD: Just like I did. It's amazing, how the wave passed through all of Europe. It was like a flame being passed on. The Russians were very radical as far as the text was concerned – they didn't change a word in it, they didn't interfere with the narrative.

PS: Do you interfere?

PD: It depends. Sometimes documentary technique is just a two-way inspiration; sometimes you build a whole scene from one phrase. But if you're telling a story which is the source of inspiration, you don't have to add anything, because there's already some kind of natural structure. Of course in a documentary story you also have to find some dramatic points, and so you add a construction.

PS: Do the writers at the Royal Court ever add anything? Do they stick closely to the material they collect?

PD: They come from a completely different theatrical tradition. There, theatre is mainly based on the word. Some plays look like a running interview. David Hare told us the story of his play – sitting on a chair and telling us his recollections. The British allow themselves a greater measure of impressionism connected to being in a certain place. It seems to me you don't have to stick precisely to some method. Everything depends on what you want to talk about. Every play is a new challenge.

PS: Your first produced documentary play was *Padnij! [Fall!]* at the Teatr Wybrzeże. The play was based on the stories of the wives of soldiers sent to the Iraq war. What was the gathering of material for that project like?

PD: The director Piotr Waligorski and Andrzej Mankowski had conversations with several women without me present. The questions had been prepared in advance. A domestic atmosphere was created, with coffee and cake. From the entry into the private sphere came very interesting material. I watched the video types and then I asked some follow-up questions by phone. For the next documentary project I did, *Don't Be Surprised When They Burn Your House Down*, I participated in the gathering of materials. It seems to me it's always better to have immediate contact. When you meet people you can see how they live, what kind of knick-knacks they have on their TV. That works on your imagination.

PS: Documentary theatre is a kind of journalism. Some people think journalism is against the nature of theatre, and describing a play as journalistic sounds like an insult. Is that not something you're afraid of?

PD: There's nothing to be afraid of. It's all a matter of what language is used to write and talk about theatre. I'm not sure what journalism in theatre really means, when it's used as a term of abuse. What is there to be insulted by? Is it that you're talking about ordinary people, about the problems of a system that has an influence on their lives, about how people are subjected to economic pressure, to profit? I want to talk about those things and that's why I'm not scared of being accused of journalism. Anyway, newspapers deal with these things differently from theatre.

PS: What do you mean, differently? How?

PD: Newspapers and the media in general talk about numbers, percentages. People become anonymous, there's no difference between the death of ten people or 200. That's inherent in the media. Theatre, the way I try to do it, is about finding everybody who is lost in statistics – finding them and putting them on stage, seeing what's behind the figure or the percentage. Besides, papers as a source of information last two days. A play has a longer life.

PS: But a documentary play has a shorter life than a work from the classical canon.

PD: But longer than a paper. Besides, it's a different kind of life, because you have a theme. That's what draws people in and allows you to present a

problem. But if we're talking about classics, they're now a kind of bag you can throw anything into.

PS: Not long ago you wrote that [Mickiewicz's] *Dziadzy* [*Forefathers' Eve*] was the first Polish documentary play.

PD: It's about being aware of the sources of the theatre. Mickiewicz wrote Part III of *Dziady* about a decade-old reality of which he had been a witness. His writing was journalistic and immediate. From the point of view of contemporary critics he was writing about the reality around him – reality was the point of departure. Nowadays the best reference for Konrad may be history and the typical Polish longing for a miracle, for a man to appear and save us all.

PS: You wrote once that theatre changes people. Do you really believe that?

PD: Theatre is not impotent. There are different theories about how a message gets across to an audience and acts on it. The right message can at least make people look at things happening in their world from a different point of view, allow them to discover something about themselves. And even just directing their attention to some subject may be worthwhile.

PS: A documentary play avoids universality by presenting individual perspectives.

PD: I don't know what a universal perspective is – a universal perspective is a banal perspective. I'm interested in the ways social, political, and economic realities act on people. In the end, I don't know what plays really are. It seems to me a play exists when one goes to a specific performance.

PS: Do you think verbatim techniques will soon be exhausted?

PD: Everything is eventually exhausted – one day oil will be exhausted too. I think that the method will simply evolve in some direction.

PS: What direction?

PD: I don't know. Maybe the method will be treated more instrumentally, maybe only as an instrument for discovering the world, maybe it will enter into other genres. What will remain is what makes theatre become more and more modern.

PS: How do you see the verbatim technique? Why did you want to change it?

PD: I didn't really believe in a theatre that was exclusively talk-based. Maybe that will change for me, I don't know. The verbatim technique allows you to see the world is fascinating. I'm interested in people who feel the influence of some system, events. But that technique is mainly a way of knowing the world which forces you not to lie and not to come up with your own subjective vision of a situation, but to see it as it really is. My subjective description of the wives of soldiers sent to Iraq could only be a multiplication of stereotypes on the subject.

PS: But your plays aren't a faithful transposition of interviews with people. You give them a poetic form.

PD: That's my way of working. It seems to me that poetry has meaning and is often very expressive. Apart from that I like the concision of poetry.

I believe in language and in moments when the word hovers above the stage and hits home. But for that you need a powerful form.

PS: What do you want to provoke?

PD: I want to provoke thought. The world is shocking. I really like talking about some things directly. When you talk tough, the toughness always cuts through patterns of thinking about many things. And that's the way it should be.

PS: You intend to write an opera libretto. Will it be a documentary opera?

PD: There will be many documentary themes in it. I want it to be a horror story about a rebellious vampire. Peter Sellars already did an opera about Yugoslavia based on real materials.

PS: But there hasn't been anything like that in Poland yet.

PD: There's not much opera in Poland anyway. Since we have new drama, let there be new opera too.

# *DON'T BE SURPRISED WHEN THEY COME TO BURN Your HOUSE DOWN*

*Paweł Demirski in collaboration with Paulina Murawska*

## **Characters**

She  
Sister  
Lawyer  
Cleaner  
Worker  
Director  
Polish Manager  
Italian Manager

**PHRASES IN BOLD PRINT:** should be projected

*REFRAIN: should appear throughout the text, spoken by various characters, not only in the places where it is suggested*

## **1.**

POLISH MANAGER: Welcome to our training course – and please listen carefully – I'm not going to repeat anything – this is a security training course – normally you take a test – but you don't have to take it today because we don't have time – and so studies have shown unequivocally – that all accidents are caused –

*(Enter She – her hair is dyed blonde.)*

SHE: I'm sorry

POLISH MANAGER: We're never late here miss – all of us here have our watches set five minutes ahead

POLISH MANAGER: What did you say?

SHE: I said I'm sorry

POLISH MANAGER: all accidents are caused by inattention so you've got to be careful and best put yourself in the care of some saint who will watch over you – just kidding – but I have Saint Anthony with me – the patron of managers – so let's see – in a minute we will assign you jobs – right – up to this day we were proud of our accidents – that is we never had any fatal accidents – unfortunately one has now occurred – and so the award for the safest factory of the year went to that – so as I was saying – before





*Figure 3 Don't Be Surprised When They Come to Burn Your House Down. From left: Anna Kociarz, Rafal Kronenberger and Jerzy Gorzko (Photo by Wiesław Czerniawski)*

you go to work just like before you leave on a trip it's best to say your goodbyes – it might be your last trip

## **WE EMPLOY PEOPLE WITH OTHER SOURCES OF INCOME /c/**

2.

DIRECTOR: Our father who art in heaven – blessed be thy name – thy kingdom come – thy will be done – on earth as it is in heaven – on this earth – that nothing might ever happen again – that this might not happen – that we might recommend this factory – that thanks to you no security should be necessary – that machines might be safe without security – or that they might work just as fast with security as without it – that we might be happy and live normal lives – that nobody after this death here might want anything – and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us – that others might forgive us too

## **THERE ARE 30 MINUTES LEFT ON YOUR PHONECARD /c/**

3.

### **From the answering machine – or when She leaves a message**

SHE: We're not home right now – we won't be home this weekend – so please leave a message – a nice one if you can – we only want to hear nice messages – to start the week on a good note when we get back home on Sunday night –

SHE: If I don't answer that means I'm probably out shopping – shopping for myself – so don't be mad – but say something sweet – like darling – or honey – or that you'll be home earlier today

SHE: We're not home right now – better not call the cell phone – where we're going we'll be out of range – it's in the countryside – so leave us a message – or wait until we're back – until Sunday that is – we get back Sunday night and we'll be cleaning mushrooms – it seems they're there and we'll gather some

SHE: You're probably still at work anyway – I'm on my way and we'll wait for you where we always do – at the gate – and I hope this time we won't have to wait God knows how long – that you won't have to stay for an overnight shift – like the other day – and if they tell you to you can refuse right? – It's Friday and I almost used up the whole card talking and I won't be able to make any more calls –

## THERE ARE 30 MINUTES LEFT /c/

### 4.

#### Gate

*(She is on the phone.)*

SHE: I'm here – and I hope I won't have to wait God knows how long – it's Friday after all and I've almost used up the whole card talking – and I still want to call

*(Enter Polish Manager – to someone:)*

POLISH MANAGER: So what if there's a red button there – so what if there's a red button there – there's no red button there's a green button – it was like this the red button isn't a button – the red thing is something else – it's all red – the whole door on the graffiti model was supposed to be gray and sleek – I really don't know – first you hear a short sound – one that sounds as if –

SHE: Can I come in?

POLISH MANAGER: No – You can't

SHE: What do you mean I can't?

POLISH MANAGER: You can't

SHE: I could before

POLISH MANAGER: But you can't now

–  
–

SHE: but normally there's no one standing here

POLISH MANAGER: yes there is

SHE: but not normally

POLISH MANAGER: because it's not normal today – there's been an accident

SHE: what kind of accident?

POLISH MANAGER: an accident – I don't know who – I don't know how – I don't know which one and really I don't know what happened – just that it was an accident

SHE: what do you mean which one?

POLISH MANAGER: which operator

SHE: how do you know it's an operator?

POLISH MANAGER: because they told me it was an operator, OK?

SHE: He's been gone half an hour already

POLISH MANAGER: you shouldn't have come so early

SHE: he was supposed to be here already

POLISH MANAGER: everybody's so antsy today – you should relax – wait a bit go for a walk

SHE: he didn't answer the phone when I called – he always answers the phone

POLISH MANAGER: well you're just going to have to wait – it's the thing with waiting around here – a friend of mine was waiting for her husband once on the street – he was supposed to pick her up in the car, but there

were some hookers there and they go up to her and start to pick a fight saying that was their territory – and she says what's the problem I'm just waiting for my husband here – and they go – you ho' what do you think we're doing? Fuck off – that's the kind of thing that happens – it's always better to get here on time

SHE: He said he was just going to hand in his reports – he was on his way out

POLISH MANAGER: but he's not on his way out

SHE: he's not on his way out

POLISH MANAGER: I can't say anything yet – we don't know anything yet

SHE: how much can there be left to know?

POLISH MANAGER: I'm here to direct the ambulance

SHE: the ambulance?

POLISH MANAGER: I'm telling you – don't you hear what I'm saying

SHE: who can find out then?

–

–

SHE: I just want to find out what happened to my husband

POLISH MANAGER: your husband?

SHE: I just want to go away with him for the weekend

POLISH MANAGER: your husband?

SHE: but I can't because he isn't even answering his phone

POLISH MANAGER: maybe you'd like to go in – someone at the reception desk I mean the information desk will be able to tell you – the information is supposed to be there already – they say it seems it's not a pretty sight

#### *REFRAIN*

- in the end something had to happen
- why did anything have to happen?
- something had to happen
- so another thing could happen
- why didn't it happen before?
- what didn't happen before?
- first one thing happened
- did another thing happen?
- the first thing happened
- yes the first thing did
- oh yes the first thing did

#### **IT HAPPENS MORE OFTEN THAN YOU THINK /c/**

#### **5.**

#### **She/Sister**

SISTER: I never take mom and dad's key

SHE: Is it a long drive?

SISTER: He always had the key with him  
SHE: Maybe we can go over there  
SISTER: When we left he took mom and dad's key and now the key is gone  
SHE: I can't go on sitting here like this  
SISTER: I'm not in a hurry to go anywhere  
SHE: I want them to know by now  
SISTER: There's no hurry  
SHE: We were supposed to leave today – we would have been on the way by now  
SISTER: I thought you were supposed to leave yesterday  
SHE: I wish I could turn back the clock too  
SISTER: I wish I could turn the clock back too – be able to turn it back  
SHE: You would have been going with us – you would have been going and mom and dad would have been waiting for us not we for them  
SISTER: I wish I could too – turn way back  
SHE: I told him we should go yesterday  
SISTER: I told him too – but he didn't listen  
SHE: He didn't listen to me either – I was walking along today and felt something – but I didn't really look – but I could have gone back  
SISTER: I don't know how to tell mom and dad – so they won't think I'm kidding  
SHE: Now I see – I have a hole in my sleeve  
SISTER: There's no way I can't tell them this  
SHE: I can tell them  
SISTER: Better if you don't say anything  
SHE: I didn't want it to turn out this way  
SISTER: I told him didn't I and now I have to tell them – that I didn't tell him – that he didn't listen to me  
SHE: I didn't want it to turn out like this that you would think I'm kidding  
SISTER: you thought all the time that it was a joke  
SHE: I'd like to sew up this hole– I'll go – I don't know where I should really go – when are they going to get here?  
SISTER: they'll think I'm kidding right and I don't want it to be like that

**THAT MAN GETS UP TO WORK AT FOUR – IT'S NOT FAR /c/**

**6.**

### **Cleaner/Worker**

CLEANER: This is not a sewing machine  
it's a refrigerator machine  
it's impressive  
it's really impressive  
Even from a distance

it looks enormous  
 A bit of metal may be tiny  
 but enough to make it stop  
 Unless that bit of metal  
 is in the wrong place  
 Unless it's in somebody's pocket  
 Because someone was told to keep it in his pocket  
 Although a pocket is not the right place  
 it's a bad place  
 it's a very bad place  
 But it seems normal enough

WORKER: They got me out here at night for the first time today – I'd already gone to bed – when the phone rang telling me to come in

CLEANER: They called in everybody today

WORKER: I thought they wouldn't call a new guy so fast

CLEANER: Everybody's new here

WORKER: Yesterday I did four – the day before yesterday four – it looks like I'll do eight today

CLEANER: Eight isn't enough

WORKER: enough for me – I got sucked into that overtime – I'll count again

CLEANER: you'll have to learn everything from scratch – eight hours isn't enough to learn – it's a big machine

WORKER: I happen to know a lot about machines

CLEANER: it's not a sewing machine

it's a refrigerator machine

WORKER: if I count it all again it's almost 16 zlotys a day more and if it's six hours then it's 24 – 24 zlotys more

CLEANER: better not to do more

WORKER: the whole week times six is –

CLEANER: better you don't take anymore overtime – you'll get slack on security

WORKER: I won't get slack on anything

CLEANER: and you know – sometimes they don't even count all the overtime

WORKER: I heard they count everything here

CLEANER: they just don't enter it

WORKER: if I do 150 hours overtime they pretty much have to enter it

CLEANER I don't know if they have to

WORKER: I'm in debt – I have to pay it off somehow

CLEANER: you shouldn't have borrowed money

WORKER: maybe you shouldn't borrow – I have a wife – I have to get by somehow

CLEANER: how much more time? Seven minutes

WORKER: what seven minutes?

CLEANER: seven because eight already passed

WORKER: I really have to pay off my debts – once I worked in a place – where they gave the workers special credit – and when they wouldn't take us for overtime anymore – because there wasn't any demand for overtime workers – because there wasn't any work to do – It turned out suddenly you couldn't pay off your credit and people started selling the things they'd gotten on credit – but they couldn't because it was on credit – then a few guys hanged themselves – three of them I think – and the rest were even worse off – so I don't take any kind of credit

CLEANER: It's better not to borrow money in general – if you haven't got money you haven't got it – I don't do anything on credit

WORKER: I don't either – but there's that manager here – he says that it's safe with him – that supposedly we can come to an understanding – and that he's not in any rush

CLEANER: come to an understanding with him?

WORKER: what about it?

CLEANER: well you know if he's getting interest – why would he suddenly be in a rush? – he gets it in kind – not from you – you've got a wife?

WORKER: Yeah

CLEANER: well, what more do you want?

## **THE 340% QUOTA REFRIGERATOR MAN!!! /j/**

### **7.**

#### **Director/Italian Manager**

DIRECTOR: sit down or stand up

ITALIAN MANAGER: but really

DIRECTOR: who's the director here?

ITALIAN MANAGER: I thought by now we were after hours

DIRECTOR: no – better sit

ITALIAN MANAGER: –

DIRECTOR: or stand up

ITALIAN MANAGER: –

DIRECTOR: or rather sit down – if you fall down and something happens – we have to watch everything now

ITALIAN MANAGER: –

DIRECTOR: in the end something had to happen

ITALIAN MANAGER: why did anything have to happen?

DIRECTOR: we knew something had to happen and we're prepared for something happening

ITALIAN MANAGER: maybe we can take care of it over dinner – I'm not good at thinking on my feet –

DIRECTOR: this has to be done Polish-style somehow

ITALIAN MANAGER: but can't we eat something?

DIRECTOR: I'll be in here all day – that woman is standing out there by the gate and wailing and it draws attention – it's not a pretty sight

ITALIAN MANAGER: is she ugly?

DIRECTOR: no

ITALIAN MANAGER: maybe we take her to dinner with us

DIRECTOR: no

ITALIAN MANAGER: pretty?

DIRECTOR: no – I don't know – I ran away from her on the stairs

ITALIAN MANAGER: too bad

DIRECTOR: and no one can find out

ITALIAN MANAGER: so if the inspectors were to come tomorrow

DIRECTOR: and it has to be done Polish-style somehow

ITALIAN MANAGER: I don't know Polish very well

DIRECTOR: you know Polish

ITALIAN MANAGER: but what do I really know?

DIRECTOR: well right, what do you know

ITALIAN MANAGER: Hello – Goodbye – good evening – My name is and I am – I am your best investor – I am the best investor in town – I like it here very much and I like you very much – and that's my business – it's truly a good business – a big and good business – now we're in this business together – you have to work on the business – my business is in your hands – but you should learn to do it faster – and more precisely – don't come too soon and look into my eyes when I'm coming – faster – harder – now it's good – more – and the bank notes issued by the National Bank of Poland we use to pay you are legal tender in Poland but that's your problem already

DIRECTOR: Better go and get yourself some translator – I wish someone would finally clean this up for the love of God – you can't even walk around here – ah yes and remember – you don't impress me with that and it's not a problem – it's just a situation to resolve – right? – repeat

ITALIAN MANAGER: a situation to resolve

DIRECTOR: The weather is bad here – the weather makes me feel bad – I want to leave and go scuba diving – in a week's time – and I hope this can all be worked out – I love scuba diving – I'm stressed out – and under water I calm down – I look at the fish and take pictures of them – once I tried it with bait – but my heart wasn't in it

## **GOD HONOR REFRIGERATOR /j/**

### **Polish Manager/Cleaner**

POLISH MANAGER: I don't understand – how you can not understand that – how can you not buy it – it's a problem because I really don't understand



that – I don't want any trouble – you don't want any trouble – they don't either – so maybe you should learn to be a team player instead of crawling up your own ass – so – I can't afford this sort of thing – you can't afford it – they can't afford it either and really everyone should be happy – the way it's all working out – there are rules that govern this world – I had a week's training in Italy – there's just no other way

## **I DON'T WANT TO GO TO WORK /j/**

POLISH MANAGER: After all it's not such a big deal

CLEANER: No as a matter of fact it's not a big deal

POLISH MANAGER: Doesn't everybody else do the same thing anyway –

CLEANER: everybody does the same thing?

POLISH MANAGER: everybody

CLEANER: did he do the same thing?

POLISH MANAGER: everybody who wants to work here and later they don't worry about it anymore

CLEANER: they don't worry about it anymore

POLISH MANAGER: they don't – it's me who's worried  
we're behind by 134

Compared to the other line

we're behind by 134 fridges

We can't be behind

We're working and they're off

Do you want to be off from dawn to dusk

You probably don't want to be off

CLEANER: No I can't

POLISH MANAGER: I won't let myself – and maybe you'll see that neither you nor I can let ourselves – it would be a catastrophe – I won't allow – 134 fridges less – then maybe some sent back

CLEANER: when?

POLISH MANAGER: you'll know – when the unexpected inspection turns up – then I'll know – and you will too

CLEANER: and what if I don't know?

POLISH MANAGER: then you'll find out

CLEANER: did he find out too? – I shouldn't

POLISH MANAGER: There's a lot of things I shouldn't do – I shouldn't let you have five minutes more on your break – or take off early

CLEANER: and you don't let us

POLISH MANAGER: you not yet

CLEANER: Sometimes it's like a match  
it's a contest

will the thumb go up or down

will you manage to turn away

will you put your thumb on the red button  
 will you push it  
 and will you stop the machine with your thumb  
 and will the thumb be up the whole time  
 and will the stamp that could  
 smash your face in  
 stay up  
 will it turn out to be  
 one – nil  
 Cheap labor one  
 one less

## THE TASTE OF RISK /j/

### 9.

*(Polish Manager: translating from Italian/Italian Manager – in Italian/Cleaner Cursive phrases should be translated into Italian.)*

POLISH MANAGER: I saw a movie once – a guy lends another guy some money – serious money – you know the kind of money – that you can do stuff with – and he waits – he waits – and when the guy doesn't pay him back – he drives over to the guy's house – gets out in a rage goes to the house and the guy doesn't have the money but he has a wife – so – the guy screws the guy's wife and makes him watch – so you see – I go on lending them money – but they always pay me back – I'll get there in the end though

ITALIAN MANAGER: *tell him there's work for him to do*

POLISH MANAGER: hey you – new guy - there's a job for you

CLEANER: I'm not a new guy

ITALIAN MANAGER: *what's he saying?*

POLISH MANAGER: he's asking what kind of work

ITALIAN MANAGER: *ask him whether he's on the cleaning staff*

POLISH MANAGER: so look here – I know you're not a new guy – but to me you're a new guy because you look new to me – and don't look at me that way I know your papers are bad on account of your heart being weak so better watch out –

ITALIAN MANAGER: *tell him there's an oil stain to be cleaned up*

POLISH MANAGER: OK so now you're going to take a mop and a rag and get your ass where I tell you – right? – there's a hundred guys to take your place or if not a hundred then at least 30 or more – so get a move on

ITALIAN MANAGER: *tell him he should go to the refrigerator assembly line – where the doors are hammered on*

POLISH MANAGER: get over to the machine and you'll see there's been a fuck-up – there's a stain and it's not oil that made it at all, a man made it and it's really not a pretty sight

ITALIAN MANAGER: *tell him he'll get a bonus*

POLISH MANAGER: and be happy you're not on your way out

*(Exit Cleaner.)*

POLISH MANAGER: there, he'll make more of an effort now

ITALIAN MANAGER: what?

POLISH MANAGER: I said everything will be all right now

ITALIAN MANAGER: I don't understand

POLISH MANAGER: he likes his work here a lot

ITALIAN MANAGER: look here – get your dick out of your mouth when you're talking to me – and if anybody finds out you had the security cover off – I wouldn't want to be in your place

## **WE WORK YOU'RE OFF /c/**

### **10.**

#### **Cleaner**

*(Cleaning the machinery after the accident.)*

CLEANER: you can do away  
you can do away with the law  
if you know the law you can do away with anyone  
if only you're not scared  
but you don't know the law and you're scared  
you don't know anyone  
but they know you well  
but we know you well  
we see how you don't pay your rent  
or your gas bill  
and you're ashamed to go into stores you can't afford  
we see you buy green shrink-wrapped sausage  
and pink soda  
for your kids  
what will become of your kids?  
They'll graduate from a technical school  
Sick heart and head  
and no job offers  
and why are you so surprised  
you should have thought of that earlier and dealt with it  
you don't give a shit

you just want to fuck around  
 and get paid sick leave  
 fuck off for low pay  
 fuck off for free  
 for food and rent or gas  
 And you want an eight-hour day  
 and Saturdays and Sundays off  
 So did you get a degree?  
 You didn't even graduate from high school  
 and if you had  
 it wouldn't count  
 so get to work  
 and we will be nice and watch  
 even though the noise and stench  
 make your head throb

## 85% OF POLES FEAR FOR THEIR FUTURE – AND YOU? /c/

11.

### Cleaner/Director

DIRECTOR: so how was it over there today? hour of truth? Pretty tough, right? – it really hasn't been this empty in here for a long time – it's impressive – I don't think I've ever seen it this empty – sometimes when you come in during the daytime – and you see the guys working in those white suits we have – then it's really like you can't see anybody because of the overalls – you don't see anybody – really just like it is now but look here pal – I've been thinking – there's no shame in going to a manager or coming to me and telling him or even telling me – that there's a safety problem – there's really no shame in that – it could be a big help to all of us – no shame – so what about it? – are you going to help out?

## IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE WE CAN DO FOR YOU? /c/

12.

### She/Sister

SISTER: so I was thinking it's not so important anymore  
 SHE: but he really asked me – we agreed on it – if anything were to happen  
 SISTER: but that's just the kind of thing people say  
 SHE: I don't know if it was just like that – he always said that if anything were ever to happen then he wanted to be cremated and I wanted that too – because I always thought it would be me first and I would want to be cremated too

SISTER: Please

SHE: I don't know

SISTER: it's not for me

SHE: it's not easy for me

SISTER: But mom and dad said they really wanted him to have a regular burial

SHE: mom and dad?

SISTER: they asked me to tell you

SHE: but they didn't come by

SISTER: they said they somehow don't feel up to it

—

—

SHE: so the lawyer told me – me – that he never had a client like me – that he didn't ever want a client like me and not to call at least on Sundays – Sunday is his day off

SISTER: maybe if you listened to him – he would listen to you too

SHE: I'm not going to listen to him – he's the one who's supposed to listen

SISTER: you never listen

SHE: no – I don't listen

SISTER: maybe it's bad that you don't listen?

SHE: I'm not going to leave this business like this

SISTER: you're not going to leave it – now

SHE: I won't leave it now – not now or any other time will I leave it

SISTER: you should have thought of it before

SHE: When before? – I think of it all the time

SISTER: how did you two come up with it?

SHE: last night –

SISTER: they told you so many times

SHE: you know –

SISTER: only nobody wanted to listen – not you – not him

SHE: as if I had some kind of pain

SISTER: maybe if you had listened to me – he would have too

SHE: who would listen?

SISTER: I was always saying he should go back to school

SHE: He wanted to

SISTER: and now he won't go back

SHE: now he won't go back

SISTER: people say they'll go back and then they don't go back

SHE: But he got an advance – he just couldn't combine studying with – he couldn't – he was in seventh heaven – that he was so young and they valued him – that it would be worth it

SISTER: and now you see how much it was worth

SHE: Yeah I see

SISTER: It was worth it to go back to school

SHE: why?

SISTER: you don't know why? – what kind of work was that anyway – if you don't go to school you see what you're left with– and how things can turn out

SHE: can't you live and work like normal people?

SISTER: no you can't

SHE: why not – that's all we wanted – maybe he didn't want to go to school – maybe I don't want to go to school?

SISTER: he doesn't want anything anymore

SHE: I don't want anything either – I wanted a normal life

SISTER: It wasn't a normal life

SHE: OK so I wanted an abnormal life

SISTER: you should go somewhere

SHE: go where?

SISTER: do something with yourself – mom and dad say you should go somewhere – that it would do you good

SHE: not yet

SISTER: and it would do us good too

## WHAT IS YOUR EDUCATION WORTH? /c/

### 13.

#### Worker

– in a coffeehouse once – five zlotys an hour before tax – ten hours a day – just enough for breakfast the next day – to stay alive and not fucking die – they told me to learn the menu by heart – 58 items and sometimes up to 70 – and the menu changed all the time – the coffee didn't sell very well – normal people don't spend eight zlotys on a latte – they drink it at home – and once two guys came in, you know gay guys in suits – and asked me to join them for a moment – and for fuck's sake could I make it snappy – so I say no I can't – so one of them knocks a glass of water over me for a joke – very funny – it wasn't much water – you know those little glasses that go with an espresso – but I was pissed off – and threw a glass of orange juice in his face – so he says – he wants to talk to the manager – and I say fine – and so he says to the manager that I'm a terrific guy with a sense of honor and he told him to give me a raise and they would come in every day from now on – so the manager told me to sit with them and have a coffee on the house – and he slapped me on the back – and when the guys left – he called me in and said – I like that you're like that – that you did that – and generally you're a great guy – that that attitude – my attitude – that it wouldn't fit the image of the fucking café – and that I should get the fuck out of there – and he charged me for the free coffees those guys had had

## WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR GNP? /c/

### 14.

#### She/Sister

SHE: we wanted to make things work

SISTER: how did you want to make things work?

SHE: we wanted to make things work in a weird way – like you – but we didn't want to go anywhere – maybe he would have ended up going to that training course in Italy

SISTER: and what if he had gone to that course I went to Italy and I came back

SHE: you went and I was jealous of you going to Italy and all

SISTER: I told you too you should go to learn the language – I learned it – I told you to do that too

SHE: I would like to now too

SISTER: but back then you two wanted something different – I remember how he came home and locked himself in his room and listened to music and everyone was laughing at him for having his first girlfriend

SHE: because we knew from the start and we would have done anything to

SISTER: but you didn't want to go to school

SHE: I didn't – I didn't get married to take off right away

SISTER: then maybe it wouldn't have got that far if only you had waited a little bit

SHE: it would have happened – when I make up my mind I always have my way – I didn't want it to be like that – I just wanted us to live together

SISTER: what an idea – to drop out of school – you don't just drop out of school – what were you thinking

SHE: you know we were head over heels

SISTER: faking a wedding to drop out of school

SHE: otherwise they never would have let me leave school – you helped me then – you said it yourself – that you could give me the number we needed for the papers

SISTER: that was then – sure – only I got married after school I didn't drop out – I didn't think much about it – that I could have a hand in it – I wouldn't now – faking documents...– everything is fake now – see

SHE: he was supposed to go back – next year – you know he wanted to go back to school

–  
–

SISTER: today I was standing on the sidewalk with shopping bags and I wanted to cross the street and no one would stop – and the bags were heavy and I could have stood there and no one would have stopped and suddenly I saw it was like his car and I thought it was him and he would

stop and I stepped into the street and only then did I remember that it couldn't be him – and someone almost ran me over  
 SHE: I was in a store today and I didn't know what to buy – I don't buy anything anymore  
 SISTER: there I was with those bags and I dropped everything on the ground and I didn't want to go on carrying bags and standing on the intersection when no one was stopping  
 SHE: you know how it is  
 SISTER: what?  
 SHE: no one even stops anymore  
 –  
 SHE: listen there's something I want to ask you  
 SISTER: like when you got married?  
 SHE: no – help me dye my hair  
 SISTER: now?  
 SHE: it doesn't have to be now – maybe tomorrow  
 SISTER: now you want to dye your hair?  
 SHE: blonde

## THE DEVIL LURKS IN YOUR KITCHEN APPLIANCES /c/

### 15.

#### She/Lawyer

LAWYER: please accept my condolences  
 SHE: I just wanted to –  
 LAWYER: I wouldn't like to be in your place  
 SHE: I wouldn't like to be in it either  
 LAWYER: I really wouldn't want to be in your place  
 SHE: thank you  
 LAWYER: but really – not for a moment  
 SHE: do you work here miss?  
 LAWYER: maybe it would be easier if we didn't call each other "miss"  
 SHE: I don't know if it would be easier for me  
 LAWYER: I'm so sorry I don't even know how to tell you – but I have to talk to you today, miss  
 SHE: I just wanted to go get his things from his locker  
 LAWYER: I'm so sorry  
 SHE: and I had to stand in front of the gate  
 LAWYER: but it's not possible to take those things away  
 SHE: I stood at the gate before and I'd rather not do it again  
 LAWYER: unfortunately everything in there has to be kept secure – until the prosecutor's office goes in



SHE: prosecutor's office? but aren't you –

LAWYER: oh no – no – I'm really here specifically to talk to you – in these circumstances –

SHE: so you're not from the prosecutor's office

LAWYER: no – I didn't say – but it was they who said you couldn't take away those things – but I know myself – how it is with things like that – see – I had a situation once where – the things stayed in the locker for several years – no one would come and pick them up

SHE: but I wanted to

LAWYER: right – I don't know – if you've thought about if it's right this way – but again – as I said before please accept the firm's sincere expressions of sympathy

SHE: No one would talk to me

LAWYER: no one? Well here I am specially to talk to you

SHE: one of them actually ran away from me – one of the directors – on the stairs – I don't know his name – but I won't forget his face to the end of my life

LAWYER: the director – ran away from you – but he's a man in a senior position

SHE: like the security guys at the gate

LAWYER: you know how security guards are these days – if you believe what you hear they're all just thugs – they stop innocent people in stores and rip them off – really – innocent people

SHE: I'd like to find out – I would like to find the ones responsible

LAWYER: we're looking for them too

SHE: I'll do anything – maybe I can help somehow?

LAWYER: help?

SHE: find them

LAWYER: I don't think there's any need for that

SHE: but I can

LAWYER: I don't know if you can

SHE: I don't know either – but for me nothing is impossible

LAWYER: people say that

SHE: no – really – nothing

LAWYER: how old are you miss?

SHE: I talked to his friends

LAWYER: and what do his friends say?

SHE: you didn't talk to them?

LAWYER: not yet no – what did they say?

SHE: that – well in general – that these things happen there, that it's not safe there – that a few weeks a while back the stamp got stuck over his friend's head the same way –

LAWYER: got stuck a while back how

LAWYER: you know miss these accidents happen everywhere – they happen everywhere – how many people get killed in the street in accidents

SHE: this wasn't on the street – but it was an accident

LAWYER: a friend of mine in the office – a friend who's also a lawyer – worked 20 hours a day – running around all the time – stressed out – got into her car and dozed off – she fell asleep I guess and drove into a pole – one of those steel ones – or maybe it was a lantern post – it was just her being distracted – and the whole car – brand new – virtually straight out of the showroom – was crushed like an empty Sprite can

SHE: we couldn't afford a car straight from the showroom

LAWYER: but see there isn't anyone to blame in a situation like that

SHE: a situation like what?

LAWYER: an accident

SHE: but he was working here not driving a car

LAWYER: well he wasn't driving – because you yourself told me miss that you don't have a car – or rather you didn't have a car

SHE: the kind of money he got in a place like this – it's no surprise – but what did you think – don't you think we planned to have all that

LAWYER: right – and what are your plans now?

SHE: I told you I would do anything and if you don't help me – miss – I'll help myself

LAWYER: But we weren't going to call each other "miss"

SHE: weren't we?

LAWYER: you know miss some time ago there was a similar accident here – did you hear about it?

SHE: no

LAWYER: right – no one talked about it – no one wanted to do anything

SHE: but why not do anything?

LAWYER: it was someone who was painting a wall here and fell off the ladder – unfortunately the fall was fatal

SHE: I didn't hear about that

LAWYER: right – there wasn't any hullabaloo about it – the man's family – was plunged in grief – in mourning – I know because I was brought in for that case – they didn't tell anyone – they just met with the directors of the factory

SHE: no one would meet with me – they just ran away from me

LAWYER: so they met with the directors – who were very distressed – you know miss the man didn't have any insurance

SHE: but everybody has

LAWYER - well it seems not everybody – or maybe he forgot to pay the premium – so the family was offered compensation of 50 thousand

SHE: compensation?

LAWYER: perhaps that's not the best word – but something along the lines of you know – it comes down to – they could make plans for themselves

SHE: I don't understand

LAWYER: The board will be happy to meet with you as well

SHE: and when will I be able to pick up his things?

LAWYER: after the meeting probably

SHE: I've never heard of anything like this

LAWYER: no one has

SHE: I don't have to have a car

LAWYER: that of course will be up to you

SHE: I don't need one

LAWYER: of course it all really depends – I don't like them either – I'll tell you something, I prefer riding a bike

SHE: I'll learn Italian I'll even learn Italian

LAWYER: it's a beautiful language – I should too really – sometimes I'm working here

SHE: if it's going to be like that here and things like that I'll have to –

LAWYER: Excuse me?

SHE: I won't let this rest

LAWYER: I don't understand

SHE: I won't be fobbed off with 50 thousand –

LAWYER: but that was only a –

SHE: I'll move heaven and earth – so everyone will hear about it

LAWYER: hear what? and who exactly?

SHE: whoever is responsible

LAWYER: yes?

SHE: yes – what – do I look funny?

LAWYER: well you know miss – you surely don't look like a woman in mourning

SHE: what?

LAWYER: I heard – that since it happened you've been at the computer and going around town – that you go out drinking beer with people – I've been in mourning and I just can't imagine – and besides – what 50 thousand are we talking about here – it was insurance

SHE: whose insurance? your insurance?

LAWYER: yours

SHE: mine?

LAWYER: well I think it might come in handy – you have to set yourself up somehow in life – don't you have to – I know you're not employed at the moment – temporarily unemployed – well in this state for example – when I think of my child – I think of how to make sure he has everything – these days you have to make sure of everything – and the other day I was reading – that to raise a child – at a certain level of course – you need

70 thousand – that was it – and I can't allow for my child not to have everything – he'd look at other kids and say – mommy I want pants like those – mommy I want to learn English – or judo – or at least – mommy – buy me some ice cream – and I would have to tell him – mommy doesn't have any money – come on – and you're still a child yourself – and you don't have any money

SHE: no

LAWYER: well there you go

SHE: no – I'm in the sixth week myself –

LAWYER: well in any case if you need help miss – or some advice – here's my card

## HOW ABOUT ORAL SEX IN EXCHANGE FOR A JOB? AND PETTING? /c/

### 16.

#### Polish Manager/Cleaner

POLISH MANAGER: hey are you new here?

CLEANER: no

POLISH MANAGER: I know – it's a joke – right?

CLEANER: no

POLISH MANAGER: but you know me – it's a joke just for fun – we have to improve the atmosphere in the workplace

CLEANER: I don't need that

POLISH MANAGER: but I heard you wanted off after cleaning – you were all pale – as if you'd seen a ghost – so? – did you?

CLEANER: I heard you lend people money?

POLISH MANAGER: yeah I do – why?

CLEANER: I need some

POLISH MANAGER: you want to borrow a little pocket money?

CLEANER: yeah – pocket money

POLISH MANAGER: but your pocket money isn't enough – someone helps you

CLEANER: it's not enough – and I want to borrow some

POLISH MANAGER: you probably don't do overtime generally – I usually say that – to make people do it and if they don't they're out of here and I say that too that they'll be out of here – once when I needed a guy I tried to get him in here on his wedding day – but he wouldn't come in – and you don't do overtime

CLEANER: I can't

POLISH MANAGER: but maybe you'll have to?

CLEANER: I can't – I have health problems

POLISH MANAGER: I know – I just don't know if we can employ sick people here – so you want a loan?

CLEANER: yeah I do

POLISH MANAGER: what do you need it for?

CLEANER: you'll see

POLISH MANAGER: got a girlfriend?

CLEANER: no I don't

POLISH MANAGER: well then I won't lend you money

CLEANER -

POLISH MANAGER -

CLEANER: but I really need it if I made as much as you I wouldn't need it you know that

POLISH MANAGER: come to me after the shift – we'll make a deal

–

–

CLEANER: don't be surprised when they come to burn your house down

POLISH MANAGER: what?

CLEANER: nothing – it's just a song

## THE DEVIL LURKS IN YOUR KITCHEN APPLIANCES /j/

### 17.

#### **Runway: in the style of a fashion show**

CLEANER: He worked from the time he started school – had a rash for the first week – but that stopped – just as he stopped going to company day – he doesn't like anything about company day but the food – and there's not a lot of it anyway – but what he really didn't like was that the strong men who were supposed to liven up the party threw a tire a couple of times and went home – he didn't take home a sash from company day – sometimes when he's told to he takes off covers – and when he's told he puts them back on – he doesn't like the work – but to the question where he'd like to work – he replies here – because he can make almost 1000 zlotys a month – he doesn't want to rise – he wouldn't know what to do with the money the managers make – he wouldn't have time to spend it! – he's a theology student

ITALIAN MANAGER: he's slightly lost and he longs for the sun – generally a sunny kind of guy – it's cold over here – he'd like to wear a cap but then he would spoil his hair-do – which is enough to give him a headache – he loves scuba diving – he's stressed out – he has no time for a relationship and so he chases everything that moves – he doesn't know that if he revealed how much he earns – the majority of this audience would fall into a depression – it was he who thought of firing people in groups just

before Christmas so the firm would save on bonuses – the premium he got for the idea ensured he could buy his apartment and that the workers would hate him – in his new home he happened to catch the TV series “Top Dogs” and fell into a mild depression – he has problems expressing emotions and will probably see a therapist – for the time being he’s seeing a girl he stole from one of the managers – she caught his eye on company day – she was attracted by his salary – but soon he’ll dump her because she has bad habits and doesn’t like Italian ice cream

WORKER: he hasn’t been to company day yet – he’s been at the factory a couple of weeks – he worked so many places he can’t remember all of them – without him no one would throw out the trash – or patch up the roads – or make coffee – what he remembers best is when he worked as a sewer – at a jeans factory – a sewing machine with its safety cover off stitched his hand to a new pair of jeans and the table – he screamed till the end of the shift but no one heard him – it was so noisy in the hall – he couldn’t wave his hands – one of them being stitched to the table – he screamed at the top of his voice until he felt sick and there was blood everywhere – but boys don’t cry – from that time he wakes up at night because his left stitched hand contracts and hurts – what he was left with was nothing more than a self-contracting fist

DIRECTOR: God only knows why he agreed to work in a country where the summers are colder than Italian winters – the best scuba diver among directors – the best director among scuba divers – loves reading Umberto Eco – proud Oriana Fallaci is Italian – he loves Christmas and hates vodka – knows his wine and the Poles envy him for it – in his free time he meditates and sails – or at least has an excellent dinner – most women would give themselves to him for the pre-nuptial agreement he signed with his wife – in old age he’ll move to Venice and start writing his memoirs – once he was poor and stole a bicycle – but he’s not anymore

POLISH MANAGER: he got lucky – his friends say – he started out in the shittiest job – and ended up as a manager – he manages a whole line – and as a manager he really lives high on the hog – when the line he manages isn’t fulfilling its quota and doesn’t spit out enough fridges – he orders the covers to be removed – so the machine works faster – he really doesn’t get why he shouldn’t order them to be removed – just as he doesn’t understand why there’s no smoking in the corridors and entrance ways of trains – or why to cross on the crosswalk – he loves company day – he has a whole collection of company banners – backpacks and t-shirts – when he didn’t win the fridge at the last company day he drank himself into oblivion – but before that when the managers played the Italians at soccer he let his superior win – counting on them remembering it – but he was wrong – he lobbies for name recognition – but it excites him when they call him capo

LAWYER: take your life into your own hands – her mother told her and she decided to stick to that advice – she's a lawyer and often has to take a life into her own mouth – she started working in her third year of school – her CV is 8 pages long – of which 4 pages of voluntary work – her younger cousins want to be like her – the tsunami in Thailand drove her to distraction – she had a ticket – she had to spend her holiday in Dębki – which was nice too – but the pictures weren't what they could have been – she's tolerant and reads the women's supplement to the newspaper – she adores spaghetti – and arugula – hates sushi – but sometimes at a business dinner she breaks down and has some – then she throws up in the bathroom – but that's OK because she always carries breath freshener just in case – stressed out you feel sorry for her sometimes – a young journalist wrote a reportage about her in the series "young ambitious and successful" – the subtitle – you can go anywhere you want

## TRAINING AWAITS YOU TOO

### 18.

POLISH MANAGER: welcome to our training course – and please listen carefully – I'm not going to repeat anything – this is a security training course – normally you take a test – but you don't have to take it today because we don't have time – and so studies have shown unequivocally – that all accidents are caused

*(Enter She – her hair is died blonde.)*

SHE: I'm sorry

POLISH MANAGER: You don't come late here miss – all of us here have our watches set ahead five minutes

POLISH MANAGER: What was I just saying?

SHE: I said I'm sorry

POLISH MANAGER: all accidents are really caused by a lack of attention so you've got to be careful and best recommend yourself to some saint who will watch over you – just kidding – but I have Saint Anthony with me – the patron of managers – so let's see – in a minute we will assign you jobs – ya right – up to today we were proud of our accidents – that is, we never had any fatal accidents – unfortunately one has now occurred – and so the award for the safest factory of the year went to that – well – now I will show you the kind of fashion we have at our factory – and we ask the young lady who came in late to help me – because here at the factory we all help each other – this is the current fashion – the lowliest color – but also the nicest is white – and you will wear white suits – as someone wisely said – tired of education – time to try refrigeration – then there's red – for an operator – but for the time being you don't have to worry about that – and

then there's blue – but blue you don't have to worry about at all and you never will – we usually wear normal clothes – you wear weird clothes – and here is a little pocket for a sandwich or a cell phone – so as I was saying – before you go to work just like before you go on a trip it's best to cross yourself – it might be your last journey

*(The lawyer enters and whispers something in the Polish Manager's ear.)*

POLISH MANAGER: and now let's see – lads to the fridges – they'll tell you what to do over there – ladies get ready in the kitchen and the blonde lady please wait – this lady will have a word with you

–

–

LAWYER: miss - are you sure you want to find a job here?

SHE: I passed all the tests

LAWYER: but what is your reason really?

SHE: I'm employable

LAWYER: but what is it exactly?

SHE: because I don't have a job and I'm looking for one and I can get one here – so I came

LAWYER: you know miss – that's very hard for me to believe

SHE: if you don't take me I'd like to have it on paper – that you don't want to employ me

LAWYER: we'll have to wait a little bit

SHE: I have time

–

–

LAWYER: new hairdo?

SHE: yeah

LAWYER: blonde isn't very hip right now

SHE: maybe it's not

LAWYER: at least not as far as I'm concerned

SHE: I guess our tastes differ

LAWYER: so they recognized you and told us and we all know it's you

SHE: so what?

LAWYER: I don't know I think in your place I would have dyed my hair black

SHE: but I got a picture of it

LAWYER: a picture of what?

SHE: the machine without security cover

LAWYER: when?

SHE: what are you so worried about?

LAWYER: I'm not

SHE: no?

LAWYER: no – there's nothing for me to worry about

–

–



*(Enter Polish Manager.)*

POLISH MANAGER: well – we've found a little time for you to do a test miss  
– here are the questions – here's a pen – you have five minutes – please

SHE: what about the training course?

POLISH MANAGER: you just had the training course – well then please write  
down your name – your surname –

- what had to happen for the other thing to happen
- why didn't it happen earlier?
- because it didn't happen earlier
- what didn't happen earlier?
- first one thing happened
- did the other thing happen then?
- first one thing happened

POLISH MANAGER: well you see – unfortunately we've had a breakdown on  
the refrigerator line and we don't need any new employees – for the fore-  
seeable future – please don't put yourself out – you can stop writing now –  
we won't be operative tomorrow anyway – all production is suspended  
and we won't be needing new employees

–

–

LAWYER: a couple of women didn't get work today

SHE: I didn't get work today either

LAWYER: it wasn't their fault

SHE: it wasn't my fault either

LAWYER: that's what they say

SHE: so what have I really done?

LAWYER: nothing really – but “really” makes a big difference – have you  
thought of those women

SHE: no

LAWYER: it seems you're thinking of yourself – I heard that you don't go  
home at night – that you meet people – that's what they said – that you  
work in some pretty seedy places – and you have for quite a while in fact –  
that somehow you need that masculine support right now

SHE: who said that?

LAWYER: two or three women – who didn't get work today – that you  
work for some agency – it's horrible how people say these things –  
isn't it?

SHE: I've been getting silent phone calls – and not just silent ones – telling me  
to let it rest – but when I decide to do something I do it – I even managed  
to get production halted here

LAWYER: there was a breakdown

SHE: there was an accident – not a breakdown – but you won't be operative  
tomorrow – and I'll do everything to stop your production in future – this  
is just the beginning

## THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH – WHOSE SIN? – WHOSE DEATH? /c/

### 19.

WORKER: I was a packer in a condom factory – the ones I most liked were the ones that prolonged pleasure – that series had the best pictures on the boxes – a black girl stretched out like a cat – smiling – so I was smiling too – then next there was the line that guaranteed a shudder of emotion and extra lubrication – with two girls in blonde wigs sitting on the edge of a bathtub – it was an easy job – but it didn't pay too well – first you put the rubber in the foil – then in the box – I preferred the box – 700 zlotys in hand without overtime and a couple of boxes of condoms free – it's just that when you spend the whole day staring at those bare asses and tits on boxes – after a week I kind of lost interest and after about a month my girlfriend dumped me – and from the time she dumped me the trouble began because I was jealous of her – and I thought all the time maybe the box I was packing would be the one her new guy would open – and use that one on her – the one I packed – to do what I stopped wanting to do – so I started planning a new line – like a chili condom – I don't need to explain what I mean – or like – a glass fiber condom – as soon as I imagined how that would fuck up their night I stopped being jealous – so if something ever happened to anyone – I'm sorry – I was in love – anyway the fun came to an end – when the boss took one of the boxes right off my assembly line – I think it was one of the glass fiber ones – fired me on the spot – the boss was holding his pants when he fired me – and my girlfriend never came back

## YOU'RE NOT WORKING FOR FREE ARE YOU? /c/

### 20.

#### She/Sister

SHE: really it's an enormous hangar sometimes it seems like there's no one there – when they're all in those white suits – with my white hair I was completely invisible – I put on his suit – I rolled up the sleeves – I changed in the toilet and went into the hall – this was after they didn't give me a job – I took those pictures – and nobody saw me – really you can't see anyone in there

SISTER: you can't see anything in those pictures either

SHE: yes you can

SISTER: they said but how do you know you can?

SHE: I know – I stood there a long time and I know

SISTER: you don't even know where to take the picture – how would you know?

SHE: there was a little instruction plate in Italian

SISTER: but you don't know Italian

SHE: you could have come with me

SISTER: you didn't tell me

SHE: maybe you could have read what it said

SISTER: that's not written anywhere

SHE: what?

SISTER: where to take the picture

SHE: so anyway when I told them I took pictures they got all scared – that I might take the pictures somewhere and show them – tomorrow I'll take them to the TV and you'll see how that'll make them sit up – and this is just the beginning

SISTER: they're laughing at you

SHE: who's laughing?

SISTER: and mother is crying

SHE: I don't care if they're laughing

SISTER: you don't care if mother's crying either

SHE: I cry too – I can't sleep and I'm lying there staring at the ceiling and last night I felt as if I had kidney pain – but my kidneys never hurt before – and I went to the bathroom – and peed blood all over the floor

SISTER: some people from the block came to see mother and said you dyed your hair blonde and you should dye it black – and that you were hanging around the block and you were never at home and you should be at home – maybe you should go somewhere – not hang around here

SHE: I'll go away

SISTER: you're going away?

SHE: I have to meet with them – when I meet with them and sign everything I can think of going away someplace

SISTER: when do you want to meet with them?

SHE: now I don't know what to do – really – what should I do?

SISTER: what if they don't sign?

SHE: then I don't know – I have a five-year plan

SISTER: a five-year plan?

SHE: a five-year plan

SISTER: did you come up with that yourself?

SHE: yes I did

SISTER: they made that plan for you

SHE: it's for you too

SISTER: but I can go away

SHE: so why don't you

SISTER: because I feel sorry for you

SHE: sorry?

SISTER: sorry

SHE: sorry

SISTER: do you think he would want you to be going through all this?

SHE: no he wouldn't

SISTER: because you go and let someone plan your life for you for five years – you let them

SHE: because I don't know how not to let them – you know?

SISTER: well you should have learned

SHE: now I won't learn anything anymore – I just sit around and my kidneys hurt and something seems like it burst in my stomach – and a friend told me he would have become an alcoholic if he were in my place

SISTER: oh stop it

SHE: that's what he said – and I'm smoking four packs a day

SISTER: how many can you smoke?

SHE: well maybe three

SISTER: I don't want to hear it anymore – I don't know

SHE: I broke all the mugs that were on the plank – by accident

SISTER: something's always happening to you

SHE: but how can I help it?

SISTER: how is anyone supposed to help?

SHE: I don't know – I was supposed to look after myself – that's what we agreed – that I would get check-ups – and the rest of it – drink carrot juice – but now I don't have to drink juice and I can smoke

SISTER: but what happened? you never smoked

SHE: no never

SISTER: but you're smoking

SHE: now I smoke

SISTER: you're just throwing your money away

SHE: so my kidneys wouldn't hurt – only we were supposed to tell you all – but we didn't tell you – we didn't get the chance – and now I won't get the chance anyway – I was supposed to have a child – but I won't have one

SISTER: you didn't say anything – somehow you never said anything about it

SHE: I didn't get a chance

SISTER: that's weird – he didn't say anything either

SHE: somehow we didn't get the chance we wanted to tell you

SISTER: he would have told me

SHE: when would he have told you – we only see each other at Christmas – saw each other – we wanted to tell you when we were in the countryside – but now there's nothing to say

SISTER: I don't believe you

SHE: well what can I do

SISTER: I don't know what to do about it

SHE: come with me – you'll see for yourself

SISTER: see what for myself

SHE: I don't know – but maybe you'll see – you speak Italian – maybe you can find out something more – what to do with those pictures – maybe you'll know what to ask – I don't know anymore – I don't even know where to look and what to ask – I can't do it on my own

21.

**Cleaner/Worker/Polish Manager**

CLEANER: after I had to clean it up – I took a day off

WORKER: how can you afford to take a day off – who's looking after you

CLEANER: I can't afford it – either the one or the other – but I had to take a day off and I borrowed money

WORKER: I borrowed money too and now I'm scared

CLEANER: I'm not scared

WORKER: well I am – there's no way I can pay it back

CLEANER: but then I was scared – then I was really scared – there's a little door you go in – you have to bend down to go in – and I have a bad heart and I felt how bad it was as soon as I bent down

WORKER: but everything was switched off

CLEANER: and my hands started to shake and I tried not to notice them shaking – and on those doors – newly made graffiti doors for fridges – you can write all kinds of stuff on them and note things down – there was blood – bone gristle – and I thought – how would it look in the store – if someone didn't pay attention and put that door in a box – and someone had just bought the latest graffiti model fridge on sale and went home with it – and opened up the box – and got it out of the styrofoam flakes and there was bone gristle on the door – and blood – and I thought – but they're doors you can write on – you can wipe it off – so I wiped the blood off and then my own vomit – and I couldn't stop – and he was smiling and asking me why I was so pale – whether I saw a ghost – then I went and borrowed money from him

WORKER: you told me not to borrow money from him – you could have told me earlier

CLEANER: but you didn't ask – and I hired some guys from the block – I paid them with his own money

WORKER: how will you pay it back? that's funny – I don't know how I can pay him back

CLEANER: I won't pay him back – after they've taken care of him he won't want any money from me – It'll scare his ass off – he won't look at us the way he used to – he won't even look at us at all, he'll just look at his feet – and he'll be the first to say hello

WORKER: that'll never happen

CLEANER: he won't do it anymore

WORKER: I owe him

CLEANER: he's the one who owes

WORKER: I'm scared

CLEANER: I'm a little scared too

WORKER: Me not just a little

CLEANER: why are you being such a goody-goody? he's not – you know why  
he lets people borrow money?

WORKER: Sure I do

## **WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS – WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS – OF THE WORLD /j/**

*(The Polish Manager is beaten up to the following text.)*

WORKER: and my wife – she's not too happy anyway – when I get home –  
she's happiest I guess when I go out – and I don't know what she does  
all day – she says she makes more money than I do – and when we go  
down the street I look at all the guys – and I think about how much they  
make – and how much I make and why shouldn't she go off with one of  
them really – why should she stay with me – what can I really do for her –  
I'm getting older – I can get her something on installments – but she'd do  
best to pay them herself – I can't really afford it – I won't graduate at this  
point – I can only go on paying for the house and meals for the rest of my  
life – “and Poland is fucked up – she gives Europe milk and women – and  
the women's milk for our children – and fuck-all for us and our sons”

## **CHICKS GO FOR CASH? – BEWARE THE RICH?**

SHE: Maybe they should

beat up everyone

who can read and write and count and explain

everyone who ever

put on a suit and tie to go to work

and has an explanation for it

Maybe they should beat them up

Maybe it's the only way

to do it

Before it's too late and everything gets forgotten

Maybe the beating should last for days

maybe many days would be better

Better than living like this

Better than letting it happen

Better than not letting it happen

22.

**Director/Italian Manager/She/Sister/+ maybe Italian Manager**

DIRECTOR: in the light of what happened – and we're truly very sorry – in fact we really don't know what to make of it – all of us went deadly pale when we heard – after the accident everybody's scared as hell – we have had to increase our security budget – after the assault we've all been terrorized – of course I know that it's not a direct consequence – that it's because of certain things you've done – of course we're meeting with you out of a sense of duty – we care for everybody and we would like to emphasize that we've never economized on security and we never will – but these recent events – a man attacked without provocation – injured – one can't avoid the impression that it was a consequence of excessive media attention

SHE: there was no excessive attention

DIRECTOR: but this is tantamount to terrorism

SHE: and maybe it'll get more like that

DIRECTOR: it seems to me I should watch my words – if I didn't I wouldn't be sitting here at all

SHE: I can't hold it against anyone – that they did this to someone – he must have been pretty nasty to them for them to do what they did

ITALIAN MANAGER: of course we are joined with you in your grief – of course we feel the pain as well very much – especially as we have been a firm with an unimpeachable reputation up to this point – as you, miss, know yourself – right?

SISTER: but how is it that he got an advance and there's nothing about in on record?

ITALIAN MANAGER: but from what I can tell he got a raise

SISTER: he got a raise of 20 groszy

ITALIAN MANAGER: those are the rates – according to the regulations

SISTER: we would like to find out – who was on duty at the time – what manager

DIRECTOR: it just so happened that on the day of the accident no one was on duty

ITALIAN MANAGER: it happened that there wasn't even a director – let alone a manager

SISTER: so there wasn't anybody?

ITALIAN MANAGER: nobody

SHE: so you will not sign this declaration

DIRECTOR: miss – this man was like a brother to us – I remember him playing soccer with us on company day

SHE: he didn't play soccer – he played volleyball

ITALIAN MANAGER: but he was there on company day – I remember

SHE: you were there on company day – but on the day of the accident no one was around?

DIRECTOR: but I mean to say – that if you need help with the funeral for example

SHE: maybe you already helped with the funeral?

DIRECTOR: excuse me?

SHE: yeah you already helped with the funeral

DIRECTOR: but we're talking about the financial side

ITALIAN DIRECTOR: let's talk about the financial side

DIRECTOR: if you were to need a car right now miss – we would of course make one available to you

ITALIAN MANAGER: with a driver – I could even be your driver

SHE: I would only like someone to admit

ITALIAN MANAGER: I'm very eager to be your driver

SHE: eager?

ITALIAN MANAGER: very eager

SHE: would you be just as eager to tell me who's responsible?

DIRECTOR: the case is already in the courts

ITALIAN MANAGER: well right

SHE: but I think I'm entitled now

DIRECTOR: the case must go to the court and we're prepared for five years

SHE: five years?

ITALIAN MANAGER: only who will remember it in five years when no one even remembers it now

SHE: I – I already have a plan for those five years

LAWYER: we used to have five-year plans – but we don't anymore and we should be happy

SHE: are you happy?

–

SISTER: please tell him to take his hands out of his pockets – it's insulting

LAWYER: we've had three experts' reports – none of them showed any cause

SISTER: maybe you stand around like that all the time – but to us it's rude

LAWYER: I think you should adapt to us in this instance – at least in this you could adapt – so – it will take some time

SISTER: please tell him to take his hands out

–

–

–

DIRECTOR: what does she really want

LAWYER: who do you mean

DIRECTOR: her

LAWYER: which one?

DIRECTOR: well what does she want?

LAWYER: it's nothing really

DIRECTOR: but she's saying something – she says she doesn't want – she really doesn't want anything – what's the matter with her?



LAWYER: excuse me?

DIRECTOR: maybe you should finally learn to speak Italian

LAWYER: Yes well I'm almost through with the training

DIRECTOR: Please miss – we're not paying you so much to have someone without training

ITALIAN MANAGER: well there let's not exaggerate – we have here an exemplary employee – very highly qualified to serve our business interests

DIRECTOR: well – what's the matter with her – she's so retarded – or dumb

ITALIAN MANAGER: but which one of them

DIRECTOR: that one

ITALIAN MANAGER: I don't know

DIRECTOR: she's stupid

ITALIAN MANAGER: stupid?

LAWYER: she's what?

DIRECTOR: stupid – retarded – where did she come from anyway?

LAWYER: I don't really

DIRECTOR: really what? explain

ITALIAN MANAGER: she's stupid – like that song – I'm just a stupid girl

LAWYER: well yes she must be

DIRECTOR: please have another word with her – persuade her somehow – not to talk to anybody – it's really an important matter – a political matter – if something bad happens – I really wouldn't want to be in your place

LAWYER: what do you mean a political matter?

DIRECTOR: I really wouldn't want to be in your place

LAWYER: I don't know – it seems to me we've already done what we can

DIRECTOR: I wouldn't – really – but if it comes to that – did you pay them?

ITALIAN MANAGER: for what? I didn't pay anyone

DIRECTOR: to beat him up?

ITALIAN MANAGER: no – but I thought you paid them

DIRECTOR: maybe they paid for it themselves

ITALIAN MANAGER: anyway it turned out all right

DIRECTOR: very much so

–

–

ITALIAN MANAGER: we will be leaving you now miss

DIRECTOR: we will be leaving you now miss – but not alone – with our lawyer here – she has a few more things to pass on to you – of course – if I may remind you – we have made the utmost effort to improve work conditions – that is make them even better than they were

– what had to happen for the other thing to happen

– why didn't it happen earlier?

– why did it not happen before?

– what didn't happen before?

– first one thing happened

- did the other thing happen after that?
- the first thing happened
- the first thing did
- oh yes the first thing did

## **HAVE A PROBLEM? WE'LL SOLVE IT FOR YOU /c/**

### **23.**

#### **She/Italian Manager/Polish Manager**

POLISH MANAGER: so maybe I will translate?

ITALIAN MANAGER: what?

POLISH MANAGER: I thought I would translate

ITALIAN MANAGER: there's no need – but I need you to go to the director's office – see?

SHE: I don't know what this conversation is for?

ITALIAN MANAGER: I would really prefer to go scuba diving – have you ever been scuba diving?

SHE: No I never went scuba diving

ITALIAN MANAGER: it's not hard – you can learn – would you like to learn?

SHE: No I don't think so

ITALIAN MANAGER: I saw you at that meeting – you shouldn't do things like that – you should be lying on the beach and scuba diving – with a mask and a tube – or with a tank – you put the tank on and you're gone for a few hours

SHE: how long?

ITALIAN MANAGER: it depends what kind of tank

SHE: it's dangerous isn't it?

ITALIAN MANAGER: no – everything is controlled – it's not dangerous – I could show you

SHE: but a mask like that could fall off

ITALIAN MANAGER: no it can't

SHE: and what if water gets in the tube?

ITALIAN MANAGER: no there's a little valve in there

SHE: so you'd have to cut it

ITALIAN MANAGER: yes you'd have to cut it through

SHE: does every diver have a knife?

ITALIAN MANAGER: you know you could get caught in a net or trapped in seaweed

SHE: and then you wouldn't surface

ITALIAN MANAGER: that's why you have a knife

SHE: and what if someone takes the knife away from you? – or you forget it?

ITALIAN MANAGER: then there's always someone to protect you who will give you his

SHE: so he would have to have a knife too

ITALIAN MANAGER: everyone needs a knife – like in the kitchen

SHE: you have to watch out in the kitchen too?

ITALIAN MANAGER: because besides scuba diving I love cooking – I could do nothing but cook all my life

SHE: you have to watch out you don't get burned

ITALIAN MANAGER: you've gotta watch out

SHE: or the flame goes out on the stove

ITALIAN MANAGER: we have pilot lights in our stoves

SHE: you think a flame like that couldn't go out?

ITALIAN MANAGER: it could but nothing would happen

SHE: and what if the flame is too high?

ITALIAN MANAGER: I always watch out not to burn anything

SHE: or the curtains might catch fire

ITALIAN MANAGER: I have shades

SHE: or you could slip and fall down and hit yourself on the table – I wouldn't like you to live – through what I'm feeling now

## **HOLIDAY SNAPSHOTS ARE AN IMPORTANT PART OF YOUR PERSONALITY /c/**

### **24.**

#### **Worker/Polish Manager**

WORKER: it wasn't me – I had nothing to do with it – with the beating  
–

WORKER: I really have it – that is I will have it – I'll have that money back to you – even by installments

POLISH MANAGER: it's OK

WORKER: but please – I'll have it back to you

POLISH MANAGER: I said it's OK – I have something to ask you

WORKER: no I won't go along with it – you don't do things like that – you can't do that – I'll do anything – I'll go to the police

POLISH MANAGER: the point is not to go to the police – what I want to say is when the inspection comes and they ask you questions – you should say – I wasn't at the factory the day of the accident – and that the safety covers were never taken off and that there's no way of doing it anyway

WORKER: but there is a way of doing it

POLISH MANAGER: but there isn't and they weren't and everything was in place – OK?

WORKER: there's no way of doing it

POLISH MANAGER: and besides you know – when everything calms down – maybe you'll get a fridge or something on company day? – and a backpack and sash into the bargain – that can be arranged

WORKER: I don't go to company day  
 POLISH MANAGER: but you have a sash  
 WORKER: sure  
 POLISH MANAGER: well you'd better hold onto it then

## FREE FOR ALL CUSTOMERS /j/

### **She/Sister**

SHE: I was thinking – maybe you could give me a few lessons after all  
 SISTER: what lessons?  
 SHE: you said you could teach me Italian  
 SISTER: yeah I did  
 SHE: well will you?  
 SISTER: it's not something you can do in a few lessons  
 SHE: I know – but so I have the basics  
 SISTER: but why Italian suddenly? And what basics  
 SHE: what is knife in Italian  
 SISTER –  
 SHE: and net?  
 SISTER –  
 SHE: and flame?  
 SISTER –  
 SHE: and oxygen tank?  
 SISTER: what do you need an oxygen tank for?  
 SHE: maybe I'd like to go scuba diving?  
 SISTER: scuba diving where?  
 SHE: in Italy  
 SISTER: how in Italy?  
 SHE: but you said yourself I could go away somewhere  
 SISTER: I wasn't thinking of –  
 SHE: but you were there – I'd like to go too  
 SISTER: but it's different for me  
 SHE: how different?  
 SISTER: it's just different that's all  
 SHE: I thought I'd go away – one of those Italian managers suggested it  
 actually – the scuba diving  
 SISTER: who were you actually talking to?  
 SHE: we talked just a minute  
 SISTER: and so you want to go scuba diving?  
 SHE: that's what I was thinking  
 SISTER: what were you thinking?  
 SHE: it just crossed my mind that's all  
 SISTER: you don't have anything better to do than go scuba diving

SHE: you yourself told me I should go away – maybe you could help me –  
give me that address – where you worked – or maybe we could go  
together

SISTER: no

SHE: why not – you were the one who encouraged me

SISTER: but not to Italy

SHE: why not?

SISTER: because I say so

SHE: I don't know why you don't want to

SISTER: you don't know –

SHE: it would help me a lot – it's very important to me now

SISTER: no

SHE: I can't count on you for anything – you coped all right – but I don't  
know how to cope

SISTER: you know how I coped? – how it was with that trip

I ran away from there

it all seemed – that it would be completely different – I

didn't talk about it to anyone

the bus was free

I didn't have to borrow money

and I was so glad because there wasn't anybody I could borrow money  
from

and when we got there after 36 hours

It wasn't so great anymore

it wasn't an Adriatic island at all

it was just the coast

and there wasn't any hotel there

there were dogs and barracks

and people with those dogs

when one guy I was sitting with in the bus

said he wouldn't work in those conditions

they forced him to drink as an example and nobody there had a first aid kit

and the bus had already gone

we picked olives they woke us up

at five to go to work

and it was hot and sometimes you saw ships on the sea

after three weeks when we hadn't been paid yet

one guy ran away and didn't come back

then they threw someone off a ladder

and they set the dogs on another guy

and I thought – it's a camp

and that no one in my family was ever in a camp

in the war

and there I was

and that it couldn't be happening now it must be some other time  
 and I couldn't sleep because I was afraid  
 and I still can't really  
 and we worked there for food only  
 and I knew that somewhere not far from there was a beach where maybe  
 tourists were tanning  
 and drinking iced coffee and eating olives  
 but not me  
 and I so much wanted to come back  
 I wanted so much to come back here  
 and go out every morning looking for a job  
 or not even look just get on the tram  
 and then I got in the car which stank  
 and I begged them to come and take me away from there  
 and I paid them  
 and I waited for my hair to grow back  
 and I came back  
 and I cut my hair because we had fleas  
 and now when I go to the deli  
 I don't look at the olives I'm afraid  
 that I only dreamed I came back  
 and I couldn't say that I didn't cope  
 because you have to be able to cope  
 and if you don't  
 no one can cope with it

## **THE STATE GIVES YOU A ROD – YOU GET THE HOOK YOURSELF /c/**

26.

### **Italian Manager/Cleaner**

ITALIAN MANAGER: I don't know how anybody can walk around here –  
 something has to be done around here so we get some order – we must  
 have order around here and we will and you are just the man to do it –  
 right?

CLEANER: right

ITALIAN MANAGER: order above everything right?

CLEANER: that's what they say

ITALIAN MANAGER: and anyway – I really liked that – and from the left –  
 from the right and the front – like a boxer right?

CLEANER: I don't understand

ITALIAN MANAGER: I guess he didn't understand either – how was it – left – left – right – front? Or right – right – left – front – right – front – front? I trained as a boxer once – I guess you don't work out?

CLEANER –

ITALIAN MANAGER: what have we got – Italy – Poland 1:1?

CLEANER: I really don't understand – that's not the kind of order I'm for

ITALIAN MANAGER: right – under the belt – front – like a boxer right?

CLEANER –

ITALIAN MANAGER: you can tell me

CLEANER: no I can't

ITALIAN MANAGER: I guess you can't – I have a bodyguard – but would you like to do it to me too? – for what exactly?

CLEANER: I'd like to go home now – I'm done

ITALIAN MANAGER: I know you don't understand – he doesn't understand – you think the new manager will understand?

CLEANER: what new manager?

ITALIAN MANAGER: some – new manager – but what if something happened could I count on you?

CLEANER: on me?

ITALIAN MANAGER: on you

CLEANER: I just work here

ITALIAN MANAGER: but you know – it was a great job – he's a different man now don't you think?

CLEANER –

ITALIAN MANAGER: well all right – you give it some thought – I'm going away – finally I'm going away – but I'll be back – so ciao – how do you say it in Polish? – up your ass?

## **POLAND LOST ANOTHER GAME /c/**

### **27.**

#### **She/Lawyer**

LAWYER: and if you need anything else – please give me a call – I have a new number –

SHE: I don't call you and I won't call you

LAWYER: maybe it's time to start

SHE: why did you say on the radio that I took the compensation?

LAWYER: me? I didn't say that

SHE: I heard you – everyone heard you

LAWYER: it must have been a slip of the tongue

SHE: no it wasn't – I won't let this be – I already said I'll move heaven and earth

LAWYER: you set too high demands – so now here you are

SHE: what too high demands?

LAWYER: it's just – we won't sign something saying we're responsible – it won't happen

SHE: different things might happen

LAWYER: yes – I heard about that – you know what? – I need to run to catch a cab

SHE: I have a new lawyer

LAWYER: oh yes? who?

SHE: the one from 34 Piotrkowska Street

LAWYER: Krzysztof

SHE: no

LAWYER: Tomek? Or maybe his father – it just so happens I know them – and very well too – who else will you go to – I know them all – I sucked his cock – and I'll suck the other's cock if I have to – he's been wanting it for years – You want to move things? – I move my head around his belt for 10 – well maybe 15 minutes and it's taken care of – you go ahead and move heaven and earth – I'll just move my head – well what? – are you going to the papers? – I'll go too – we'll go together – in a couple of days there'll be an article about how we're the most exemplary workplace in Poland – well whose place do you want to be in? I was in your place once

SHE: I doubt it

LAWYER: and some things take longer than five years – it can take 25 and then what do you do?

SHE: I know what to do

LAWYER: what are you going to do?

SHE: you don't even know what it's like

LAWYER: oh yeah? – what you think – things like this only happen to you? My uncle – did you hear about that? – the militia went into the mine – they even made a movie about it – so what? – I was in mourning too – and my dad's things went on hanging in the closet for almost ten years – until we sold the apartment in the end with the things in it – the people who bought it had no idea really – and for 25 years nobody knew what happened – up till now nobody knows – when I went to Warsaw from Silesia I already knew it wasn't worth – my mother said to me – kid you can do anything now – we couldn't – but you can earn money – work for money – and I knew what to do – and you still don't know

SHE: I really have no idea what you're talking about

LAWYER: I bet you don't

SHE: I don't

LAWYER: well then you can find out – life isn't seven years with one guy and putting all your hopes on one guy – you never know what can happen –

SHE: I don't want that –

LAWYER: this isn't kindergarten – though I guess you got stuck in kindergarten – so I'm telling you – think about it – what are you going to do now?



SHE: I told you

LAWYER: tell me – what are you going to do now?

SHE: I don't know

LAWYER: you don't know a damn thing do you – if someone offered me 50 I would take it and live on it for ten years – only you're offered 50 thousand – I make that much for three months work – and when I take care of this case maybe I'll make that much not in three – but in two – can you imagine

SHE: no – I can't imagine

LAWYER: do you imagine that I will give up?

SHE –

LAWYER: why would I give up? – I haven't done all this to give up now – so I'll do everything to do my job properly – the thing is – I have a lot to lose  
SHE –

LAWYER: can you picture what will happen to me if I fuck up? – you can't – so listen to me – this is how it works – I won't let – anything happen to me

SHE: I won't either

LAWYER: I won't

SHE: I know

LAWYER: well then you have a problem

SHE: yeah

LAWYER: so we got that straight – right?

SHE: we'll see

LAWYER: and I know you'd like to be in my place – I always wanted to be where I am and here I am and I won't let anyone get in my way when I'm where I am or stop me from going home at the end of the day and eat a salad and take a relaxing aromatic bath – which I will

SHE: you called a cab

LAWYER: it'll wait – it'll wait for me – plenty of things are still waiting for me – what if in those five years you get all broken up inside? – or you wind up in a psychiatric ward because you can't deal with it? and nothing will ever happen to you again – nothing like this will ever happen again – when you've given it some thought please give me a call – this offer is still on but it won't be for long

–

–

LAWYER: where is my cab?!

**WHERE DID ALL THE NORMAL PEOPLE GO? /j/**

**28.**

**DIRECTOR/POLISH MANAGER**

DIRECTOR: well so how do you feel?

POLISH MANAGER: I feel good

DIRECTOR: you know – I still don't feel too good

POLISH MANAGER: that is I mean physically

DIRECTOR: you know – I was supposed to go scuba diving – it's very important for my work – I do underwater photography – and then when I spend Christmas with my family I show them the pictures and it's fun – this year it looks like it won't be so much fun – there will be arguments at the table – and we won't have anything to talk about and we'll quarrel

POLISH MANAGER –

DIRECTOR: I can let myself – the city can't let itself – we create jobs for the city – so the city can have a peaceful Christmas – in a jolly mood – and you haven't turned out – despite the fact that you get results you don't fit in the image of the company – we here are invested in dialogue – understanding – presents for the kids – communication training and company day – so please go to the office and write a resignation letter – you owe it to us – really – it is your duty toward us

POLISH MANAGER: but where can I go now?

DIRECTOR: what do you mean where? – to the porter's lodge

## GOT A PROBLEM? WE'LL SOLVE IT FOR YOU /j/

### 29.

#### She/Sister

SHE: I don't know what to do anymore – I 've been moving heaven and earth

SISTER: It's not easy to move heaven and earth

SHE: I just wanted to – I heard what people were saying about me – and that you were saying it too

SISTER: no – we're not

SHE: when I went home I was alone all the time – there was just the goldfish – I wanted to kill myself – so I bought a dog

SISTER: and now you want to go away with the dog

SHE: it has a little basket – Nuisance

SISTER: poor creature

SHE: her name is Nuisance – because she gets in the way all the time – she's always getting in the way now

SISTER: and in this icy weather you're going to drive with her?

SHE: lately I was thinking there must be a fly on the wall – she eats flies – and she was staring at the wall and barking – but there aren't any flies – she's growling as if there – as if there were someone there but there isn't anybody

SISTER: it's like that sometimes that an animal's fur will stand on end and you don't know why really

SHE: she growls – and I ask her why are you growling

SISTER: maybe she smelled something – maybe there was someone there

SHE: and lately when I was driving I started skidding and I had the feeling for a second that some power held me back – I didn't have to do anything – I just drove – and I thought it's him – and that he was helping me – mother told me to burn a candle instead – when there's a ghost in the house – but I'm not afraid – why would I be afraid of him?

SISTER: he will look after you now

SHE: even if he's the only one

SISTER: I guess you can count on him

SHE: I can't count on anybody else

SISTER: nobody

SHE: nobody

SISTER: nobody really

SHE: I'm telling you – only he can help me now – no one else will help me – I get up – around two I heat up the food and I wait

### 30.

#### **Worker/Director**

DIRECTOR: yesterday we were thinking – that we really don't have any unions here – we don't know why – here we've put some papers together – everything needed to set up a union like that – we in Italy have a long traditions of unions – and maybe we will carry it over to Poland – you know you gave us a pope – so in the same spirit –

WORKER: but the pope lived with you – once he was pope

DIRECTOR: well sure but he always greeted you first and besides that outburst of emotion after his death was so impressive the whole world wept with you

WORKER: yes – but we had to work on the day of his funeral all the same

DIRECTOR: I had to work too – we all did – and now when you familiarize yourself with these papers – you sign here – talk to people and then later we'll sort it all out together

WORKER: what do you mean all?

DIRECTOR: I heard you had marital troubles – now you won't anymore – you know the money is totally different at this level – some kind of premiums for unions

WORKER: who told you

DIRECTOR: people are talking – and now when you hear them come to me and tell me what they're saying and exactly who isn't happy about it – so I know what's going on

# WHEN THE INVISIBLE FIST OF THE MARKET HITS YOU IN THE FACE – YOU WON'T EVEN SEE IT COMING/c/

31.

## Worker/Cleaner

WORKER: well so? – you think you dealt with it?

CLEANER: get off my back

WORKER: you didn't deal with anything – this sort of thing can't be dealt with

CLEANER: I didn't want to deal with anything

## Worker/She

*(speaking simultaneously)*

– they started

going around with bodyguards –  
you beat one up and you've got  
another – are you going to beat  
him up too? doesn't really matter

But when you really get down to it  
you don't make any sense at all  
from this country's point of view  
you as such make no sense at all  
from the point of view of an  
advertising campaign  
you make no sense  
from the point of view  
of an insurance company  
you make no sense  
from the point of view  
of the economy  
you make no sense  
from the point of view  
of capital investment  
you are so insignificant  
that you really don't exist  
from the point of view  
of public TV and its mission  
you make no sense  
from the point of view  
of major Polish cities  
you might as well not exist

or for that matter  
from your own city's  
from the point of view  
of a newborn child  
it isn't important  
whether you exist  
from the point of view  
of a bomb survivor  
what does it matter  
whether you exist  
you don't exist  
for the movie star  
you just saw in a movie  
you have no meaning  
for the soccer champion  
you root for  
unless you have a great ass  
for the stressed out  
high earners who move  
with whoever's around  
you are insignificant  
because they move  
with whoever's around  
for the leading economists  
you count even less than  
a statistical error which  
doesn't take account of you  
anyway  
Even for the bartender  
pouring your favorite beer

you as such don't matter  
or you spending a third  
of your salary on beer  
as you know very well  
your salary isn't worth shit  
Maybe for someone on the  
44th floor of an apartment building  
you mean something because  
when you turn the light on  
in your room it makes a  
pretty panorama over the city  
But even so in the longer term  
we will go on investing in you  
because you are the hidden  
work force  
And it's always worth investing  
in that in the hidden work force  
3 times yes  
21 times yes  
and we'll find people  
who will be grateful  
you turn up to work  
and say good morning

SHE: Buy lemon  
Fanta  
or  
a liter bottle of Coke  
but maybe not Light  
and deli food  
or maybe something sweet  
deli food or chocolates  
and toilet paper and detergent  
the movie starts at 22.40  
and if it's no good  
we have a few records  
I bought from magazines  
you laugh at my magazines  
and come back soon  
so we can start our night  
so we can  
start this night  
and so we don't have to  
get out of bed for anything  
have everything at hand  
the whole house

# 6

## Excerpts From the Plays of Vivi Tellas

### KIDNAPPING REALITY: AN INTERVIEW WITH VIVI TELLAS

*Alan Pauls*

*Translated Sarah J. Townsend*

For the past five years or so all of my work has revolved around a single idea: to search for theatricality outside the theatre. I did four plays that I prefer to call “archives:” *My Mom and My Aunt* (2003), *Three Mustached Philosophers* (2004), *Cozarinsky and His Doctor* (2005), and *Driving School* (2006). In all



*Figure 4* Alfredo Tzveibel, Leonardo Sacco, and Eduardo Osswald in *Three Philosophers* by Vivi Tellas (Photo by Nicholas Goldberg)



Figure 5 Alfredo Tzveibel, Leonardo Sacco, and Eduardo Osswald in *Three Philosophers* by Vivi Tellas (Photo by Nicholas Goldberg)

of them I've worked with regular people and the real worlds to which they belong. The protagonists of *My Mother and My Aunt* were my actual mother and aunt, and certain myths and rituals from my own family history; in *Three Mustached Philosophers* I chose three philosophy professors from the university to expound on the connection between thought and personal life; in *Cozarinsky and His Doctor* I worked with the Argentine writer and filmmaker Edgardo Cozarinsky and his physician, Alejo Florín, who'd saved his life by detecting a serious illness in time; in *Driving School*, the last archive up to now, I deal with the relationship between cars and people, with two instructors from the main driving school in Buenos Aires and the only employee in the entire school, a woman, who doesn't know how to drive.

My premise is that every person has, and is, an archive: a reserve of experiences, knowledge, texts, and images. The point of departure is very simple: I see something or someone who makes me enthusiastic, who excites me, who sparks my curiosity, and often I'm alone and I think: "How great it would be to be able to share this." That's why I decide to put them on stage: because I want to share what I discover in certain people or certain worlds. So I take that world, I follow a method, I view it through my lens, and then I show the results.

## Worlds

In order to become theatrical archives, the worlds must be worlds I have personally experienced. That's the first condition. The second is that the worlds should have some coefficient of theatricality. What interests me is the threshold where reality itself begins to make theatre, what I call the Minimal Threshold of Fiction (*Umbral Mínimo de Ficción*, or UMF). There is UMF, for example, in the natural tendency toward repetition that is found in human behavior.

In *Three Mustached Philosophers*, which I developed after taking a philosophy class, two things caught my attention: first, the hierarchical arrangement of space involving some 40 people in chairs, in armchairs, on a staircase, and around a table, according to seniority and rank (since I was new, I had to spend a year sitting on the floor); second, the examples used in the class to explicate the material. In order to explicate itself, philosophy uses examples, characters, places, and objects. It was as though philosophy (as a discipline) didn't trust itself, as though it didn't trust the capacity of concepts and abstract ideas. I was disappointed to find that it used "scenes." And, at the same time, I felt that that was my terrain. What was disappointing about philosophy was the theatre!

*Cozarinsky and His Doctor* grew out of a "portrait," the theatrical fascination that Edgardo Cozarinsky exerted over me as soon as I met him. I had already known about him and his work as a documentary filmmaker, as a cult artist who lived in Paris, when one day I met him at a party. He was dancing the tango and told me he was about to shoot his new movie in Buenos Aires. I realized then that Cozarinsky was the living history of the 1960s artistic movements in Buenos Aires. He had done everything and known everyone. His way of telling stories and his expressiveness immediately transformed me into a spectator. It was as though he was telling me tales and I could never tell whether or not they were true. Later on I met his doctor and saw the relationship the two of them had. They told me the story of the doctor's life-saving diagnosis, and in that dramatic diagnosis there was theatre. I wondered how Cozarinsky had lived that diagnosis episode, if he'd been appreciative, if he'd felt indebted to the doctor, what it had all been like.

*Driving School* grew out of a driving course that I took two years ago (I finished the course, but I never took the exam to get the license). From the beginning, the school's installation – a miniature city, with streets, bridges, and traffic lights – was a theatrical space, a completely fictional simulation camp. The simulator I learned to drive with, which forces you to "act," to "pretend" that you're driving. Everything in the school seemed to point to the lowest forms of theatre.

## Acting

Performers always need to possess a certain something, some kind of spontaneous acting. In the case of my mother and my aunt it was the ability to repeat



particular stories, always the same ones, over the years. That was their form of theatrical knowledge. The philosophers taught classes at the university and were accustomed to dealing with an audience. In *Cozarinsky and His Doctor* there was the doctor–patient relationship, which always suggests “scenes,” roles, modes of conduct, scripts, so there again, all doctors know what it is to pretend, to play a role. The theatricality of pedagogy also figures in the performers in *Driving School*, who are also instructors in addition to the school itself becoming a theatre of simulation. Everyone engages in a sort of “acting,” but it’s an acting that is constantly under threat; it is marked by chance, error, lack of solvency. What these four plays stage is the *attempt* to act; because of that, because it is essentially naive, the acting of a non-actor produces uncertainty: there are no guarantees, so the spectator never knows what’s going to happen, if the play is going to turn out well or if it’s simply going to end, unless some accident happens to interrupt it.

## Kidnapping

I approach my subjects by saying: “I would like to do a play with you and about you.” I give them a card that says I’m a theatre director. This is the moment of the “kidnapping.” The philosophers, for example, accepted immediately. It was more difficult with the people from *Driving School*: in fact, the instructor I was most interested in declined to participate. From the moment they accept, they have to trust me, because they don’t have the slightest idea what’s going to happen. I don’t force anything on them: we work with elements of their personal lives, but they are the ones who decide what to show in public and what not to show. One of the driving instructors, for example, told a story about a financial collapse in a rehearsal that he later refused to tell on stage. I thought the story was great, but I had to cut it. And I also tell them that it might not work. That we’ll get together and nothing will happen, it might not be interesting, that I might not come up with an idea. It’s like a scientific experiment: failure is always on the horizon. “It could fail,” as a famous psychic on Argentine TV used to say before every demonstration.

## Method

Then we begin to rehearse. My assistant takes notes the entire time, jotting down what we do, what we say, anecdotes, details about clothing, the jokes that are told. There is a written account of absolutely everything. The rehearsal begins the moment the performers enter the door of the studio. I try to become very familiar with them, and I observe them closely. At the beginning, while we’re working at the table, I don’t look for anything in particular. Instead, I see what they bring, what they tell first, how they choose to present themselves. I have some guidelines, like buoys that I use to look

for things: written documents (letters they've written or received, for example), photos, images, objects that are important to them, things they obsess about. I'm very interested in any accidents they may have suffered, and in any contact they've had with film, theatre, music; with art and media. What particularly interests me, of course, is if they have any experience with the stage, if they've done theatre. That first moment is very strange, because people don't necessarily appreciate what they bring. It's as though nothing holds importance for them. I'm the one who gives it value. In a rehearsal, for example, one of the philosophers told us in a completely mundane way that when he was a student a political militant gave him three Molotov bombs to transport in a bag to a demonstration.

At some moment during the work, the play begins to ask for specific things. I think: "I need something violent" or "I need body, I want to see their bodies." Sometimes I give more weight to the documents, other times what the performers say about the documents. One of the actors in *Driving School* didn't meet all of the conditions I required for the piece: he'd started at the school a year before, he didn't have sufficient experience, and the job wasn't really what defined him. But one day, while investigating his relationship with cars, he told me this: "In Entre Ríos I spent seven years living in a car." He was a salesperson; he traveled around the province making sales. Another day he tells me that he'd sold matches. At the following rehearsal I made the association matches-fire – I also knew that he was a Leo, a fire sign – and without mentioning the matches I asked him if he had any particular connection to fire, and he told me: "Yes, one day my car caught on fire with my family inside." He'd never associated the matches, the fire, and the car. His was a tragic narrative: a match salesperson setting fire to his wife and his two children inside the car. Theatre ascribes intention to everything. In other words, the car salesman *wanted* to set fire to his family. And without explicitly stating it, that's where I look to see if I can pull something together.

## Form

Ever since *Three Philosophers* I've been working with a more or less stable structure of space and objects. A form with very simple components: a table, a clock, and different types of chairs. In the case of *Driving School*, they are car-chairs; in *Three Philosophers*, there are classroom chairs; in *My Mom and My Aunt*, the chairs were like chairs one might find in the living room of a grandmother's home; in *Cozarinsky and His Doctor*, there was a film director's chair and a chair with wheels which made it possible to be seated and in motion at the same time. The table is always the same: a table where pieces of actual evidence are displayed. The characters always go to the table in search of evidence to verify the truth of their stories. Then there's the on-stage clock, which gives a sense of real time. If you get bored, time passes slowly. If you get absorbed by the performance, you look at the clock and

see that surprisingly an hour has passed. Or five minutes go by without you taking your eyes off the clock. It's an element I took from John Cage, whose *Europera V* I staged in the Colón Theatre, the Opera House in Buenos Aires. But while in Cage the clock works as a sign for the performers, in my work it functions as a sign for the audience.

## Inadequacy

The archives are my way of "doing" worlds without adding anything. The worlds are already there, like the Surrealist *Objets Trouvés* or the Duchamp ready-mades. I don't produce them; I postproduce them. *Three Mustached Philosophers* is my way of "doing" philosophy. I might have gotten bored talking to my mom and my aunt, but *My Mom and My Aunt* was my way of "doing" my family. Kidnapping is a quick way of doing. Each time I stage an archive I organize someone else's world to my liking, I put on stage what I'd like to see happen by importing the real materials of these worlds. At the same time, I become a spectator. But I'm not interested in "correcting" anything. The principle is theatrical: I like to bring disparate and incongruous things into contact. When one of the philosophers tells me he has a Paraguayan ancestor, for example, a light goes on in my head, the light that only shines when things that don't entirely fit together are joined. Paraguay + philosophy? Philosophers are supposed to come from Germany, not from the most South American of all South American countries! Something's wrong, the alarm says, and that's when things get under way. Later the philosopher confesses that at the age of six he listened to Paraguayan harp music. Harps are very similar to bows, they're bows converted into musical instruments. In the performance the three philosophers pass the time shooting at a target with a bow and arrow. At one point the Paraguayan philosopher asks another philosopher to dance, the professor whom you'd least expect, and he dances with him to a Paraguayan song right there in the midst of a world that belongs to men of philosophy. In this way, there are two artistic categories that mean a lot to me: one is the *least expected*, which combines chance, incongruity, and unforeseeability; the other is the *laughing stock* [in Spanish, *hazmerreír*], an expression used for people everybody seems to consider a source of laughter because they're bizarre or not understood, or because somebody has to play that role in a group.

## Extinction

Although it wasn't my intention, all of the archives touch on the problem of the extinction of a world, a sensibility, a way of life. They are plays about "the last ones that..." about "what remains of..." *Driving School* is about the ruins of a world in which the relationship between men and women functions as a kind of stark, neat, ultra-binary opposition. A black/white dialectic, formed

by antagonisms, that at the same time creates a very strong theatricality because the false binary demands overacting on the part of those who are intent on sustaining it: one has to act like a Man, and one has to act like a Woman. They have to defend a disappearing model, and to do that they have to insist upon and emphasize it. It's dramatic. Because if those people let go of that model, what will they have left? I've realized that when a world dies, it falls into a kind of disuse that can become incredibly poetic. This inefficacy leads straight to theatre. In my family everyone said that my aunt did not know how to cook, which is why in *My Mom and My Aunt* she takes so many pains to tell – after 30 years! – how she made her first *torta* and how she'd begun selling them in the neighborhood. The same effort that showed my aunt's desire to be convincing proved she was acting. And when my mom reads the playbill of the beauty contest she took part in, she is recalling a "stage experience" she went through 60 years ago, when she had to "act," to exhibit herself in front of an audience. The playbill itself works as a theatrical prop! One day, in the driving course, they asked me to drive in reverse around a traffic circle that didn't go anywhere. It was nonsense. I did it. I went around the circle in reverse, but I thought: why am I doing this, if it's never going to happen on a real street? It was an absurdity: the automotive world in a poetic state. There's something deactivated in those experiences that become extinct, and what is deactivated always becomes poetic. Extinction is a Minimal Threshold of Fiction. It's what happens with objects displayed in a museum. Or what Thomas Bernhard said of "yesterday's" newspapers, which lose their efficacy, their reason for being, and go on to form part of a poetic world, part of the archive.

# EXCERPTS FROM THE PLAYS OF VIVI TELLAS

*Translated Sarah J. Townsend*

## ***My Mom and My Aunt (2002–2004)***

Scene II

Miss Geula

*(Aunt Luisa goes and sits down on the bench.*

*Graciela goes over to the table to get the Miss Geula program and then speaks about that day, into the microphone.)*

GRACIELA: This is the program from when I won the Miss Geula contest at a Sephardic club. I was very young when I was chosen queen. They had the event in a majestic hall; it was lovely, called *Les ambassadeurs*. They only held it twice. I was the last Miss Geula queen. *(She shows the photo from the contest program.)* Right here in the middle are all the contestants. And this one is me.

LUISA: *(seated on the bench)* My sister Graciela's main competitor was a magnificent girl, very rich, a millionaire who represented a club that her father was the president of. Her name was Sofía Michá. When Graciela began to promenade, the girl looked at her with terrible hatred. Everyone assumed this girl was going to win, but her father's money was no match for my sister Graciela's beauty and charm.

*(Luisa gets up and goes to get the dress and the red card that indicates the order of the promenade. Graciela reads the names of the program's sponsors into the microphone.)*

GRACIELA: *(reading)* The sponsors of that moment were Textilán, Armitex, Bazar Villa Crespo, the Flores silk business, Arditi, Mois Chamy (who was a relative of father's), Peria and Benzedra Brothers (my father's bosses)...

LUISA: The whole thing ended with a wonderful party, where we danced, had a good time...It was unforgettable.

### ***Three Mustached Philosophers (2003–2006)***

#### Scene XIII

#### Cards of Mustached Philosophers

*(Jaime and Eduardo turn their chairs around so that they sit facing Alfredo, who shows them cards with portraits of the philosophers on them. They take turns analyzing each moustache.)*

#### Benjamin Card

The moustache of a fugitive. This is what your moustache does when the Nazis are chasing you.

#### Dewey Card

Circumflex, pedagogical. He doesn't say much, but that moustache sure says a lot.

#### Reinhardt Card

Elegant, without even trying. I have no idea what he wrote, but the moustache: perfect.

#### Bergson Card

A fancy type. So civilized, so French that he could get rid of the moustache. It's almost an afterthought for him. Very much in keeping with the starched collar. That moustache said some interesting things.

#### Mona Lisa Card, with the Duchamp Moustache

That? No. That was a mistake.

#### Einstein Card

That is one screwy moustache. That's what the Theory of General Relativity will do to your moustache. *This* is a philosopher. At that level of theoretical physics we accept it, no?

#### Young Nietzsche Card

Militaristic, clichéd, vehement. A period moustache. It doesn't even look like it's his.

#### Later Nietzsche Card

What a moustache! It's a signature: "This is me."

#### Crazy Nietzsche Card

Nietzsche adrift. That moustache looks like a dead animal. It doesn't go with his face. It doesn't belong on that face. He always rejected pity, but this image makes me feel for him.

*(They finish and the three of them sit facing the audience.)*

Scene XIV

Molotov

*(Alfredo gets up and begins to speak about his experience in a political organization at the university.)*

ALFREDO: When I was seventeen I read *The Antichrist* by Nietzsche. And it changed my life. Not long after, two years later, more or less, I was in the school of Philosophy and Literature, in Independencia and Urquiza, working as an activist in a student group: *Tendencia Universitaria Popular Antiimperialista y Combatiente* (The Popular Anti-Imperialist and Combatant University Tendency, TUPAC). They called us "the Chinese." It was during the dictatorship and we carried out "surprise" protests. There was one in the Plaza de Mayo. El Bocha, a comrade, comes up to me with a bag and says to me: "Are you up for carrying it? It's four 'molos.'" I told him yes. What was I supposed to say? We took the 56 bus and arrived at the place. A 'molo' is a molotov. It's a bottle filled with gasoline with a little pouch of sulfur and potassium chloride tied to it. You could use it to make a fire barrier to stop the police cars and all their paraphernalia from getting by. My situation was more or less like this.

*(He lifts up the bag and walks along the street that is outlined with ribbons on the ground.)*

I was going to take the 56 with a bag holding "molos."

*(He stops. Sets the bag on the floor and takes out the "molo.")*

This is a replica.

*(Shows it, slowly, to the audience. Then he puts it back and takes out the bus ticket.)*

And this is the ticket. And this is the *Red Book*. We all had it. I don't know if everyone read it, but...

*(Opens the book to one of the first few pages.)*

With the photo of our leader.

*(He puts the book away and walks to the other end of the table, where he sets down the bag. Then he walks toward the light.)*

At the plaza everyone had to keep walking. We walked individually or in pairs, acting as if everything was fine. Since they were flash acts, surprises, there was always a signal to begin. That day the signal was, "A single cry: unrestricted admission!"

ALFREDO, JAIME, AND EDUARDO: "A single cry: unrestricted admission!"

*(The three of them remain in silence for a few moments.)*

## Cozarinsky and his Doctor (2005)

### Scene VII

#### The *Positif* Review

*(Cozarinsky goes to the table and gets the Positif magazine. He comes back to the front and speaks to the audience.)*

COZARINSKY: And this is a copy of the December 1996 edition of the French magazine *Positif*. The review that hurt me the most appears in this edition. It especially hurt because it was a film I liked, one that I still like very much, out of all the ones I made. It was called, it is called, *Rothschild's Violin*. And the review is a brief note, very bad, that ends by saying: "Cosarinsky a choisi l'oeuvre à thèse, lyrique, il est vrai, mais sans se rendre compte que l'on peut faire, avec de très bonnes intentions, du bien mauvais cinema." "Cosarinsky," spelled incorrectly, with an "s."

DOCTOR: In short, the review says, "Mr Cozarinsky reveals that with the best of intentions, one can make the worst of films."

### Scene VIII

#### Bomb and Revenge

*(Edgardo sets the magazine on the table and takes the bomb.)*

COZARINSKY: For a while, after reading that review, before falling asleep I wouldn't be dreaming, exactly, but I'd have a recurring fantasy. I was driving one of those Scania trucks that they use over in Europe to do international moves. Trucks with several trailers, that have two very, very large wheels on each side. I was driving, and the fellow from *Positif* magazine was lying in the road. From where I was at the steering wheel of the truck I saw him and I ran over him, which isn't possible in real life, because if you were in the cabin of one of those trucks, driving, you wouldn't be able to see a person beneath the wheel, but I saw the tire run over him and saw the fright on his face, and I saw it as though I were in the cinema, with a montage effect: my smiling face, greeting him right as I crushed him. That last detail is very important: because what mattered to me wasn't to kill the poor devil, but for him to know that it was I who'd killed him.

*(Cozarinsky sits down in the Doctor's chair with the bomb in his right hand.)*

That is, the fact that he could see my smiling face right as I crushed him was the most important thing. I'm telling this because I have no scruples, really. I have no moral scruples about killing. If someone promised me impunity, something that no one can do, I'd have already bumped off two or three critics, one or two producers, and an individual from my personal life.



## ***Driving School (2006)***

Scene V

Matches and Fire

*(Carlos stops in the center of the space and explains to the audience)*

CARLOS: I lived in a car for seven years. I was a traveling salesperson in Entre Ríos. I sold matches. The way I used to sell matches was like this.

*(He shows the wax matches.)*

CARLOS: This is a wax match. This match is not a safety match. These are very old. If you throw one on the ground it keeps burning, it doesn't go out. The gauchos used them. They'd toss them on the grass while they were sitting on their horse. These matches were often used to burn fields.

*(He shows the safety matches.)*

CARLOS: On the other hand, this...*(shows a match and lights it)* If you toss it on the ground it goes out. *(Tosses it)* It's better quality. Plus, it withstands the humidity!

*(He takes out another match, sucks on it and lights it.)*

CARLOS: I sold two hundred units a day. *(Mentally calculates)* Bsss a month...

*(He goes to the table, grabs a calculator and calculates how many matches he sold.)*

CARLOS: Nine million matches. Nine million flames that lit water heaters, cigarettes, stoves...

*(Breathes).*

CARLOS: One day I loaded my family into the car, I started the engine and it caught on fire. My situation was more or less like this.

*(The car is assembled using the two red-cushioned chairs for the front seat and the two green-cushioned ones in back.)*

*(Re-enactment. Carlos, Guido, and Lili perform the roles in the scene.)*

CARLOS: I was with my wife and kids in the car. All of a sudden, down below I see a glow and my wife starts shouting, "Fire! Fire!"

LILI: Fire! Fire!

CARLOS: Lili, you turn around and get the girl, a baby at the time. Turn around like this...Meanwhile, I open the back door and take out the boy, who didn't want to get out...*(Guido, who plays the "boy," resists being removed.)* When we were all out, we ran far away from the car and stood there watching it. We thought it was going to explode. But no. My wife shouted, "Help, help!" And a lot of people came up to help. One got out with a soda syphon to put out the fire! Afterward we realized that some gas had leaked and I pushed the car away and the fire was left behind on the ground...

*(From the rear of the stage, the three performers look under the car to see where it caught on fire. They ask for help.)*

CARLOS: Everything ended when the company gave me twenty boxes of matches at no cost so I could sell them and pay to repair the car.

*(He gets the soda syphon.)*

CARLOS: With a seltzer bottle like this one we put out the fire.

*(The three of them drink soda water.)*

## Scene IX

"That castle is mine!"

*(Guido looks at the photo of the castle projected against the back wall, points to it and bursts out with a cry)*

GUIDO: That castle is mine!

*(The garland lights go out. Lili remains seated in her chair. Carlos goes and sits down in the red chair next to it. Guido goes up to the table, then moves over to where the book, box, and envelope are lying. He carries the three elements to the end of the table. He picks up the book and shows it.)*

GUIDO: This book is called *The Castles of Friuli*, which is where my family lived. I got the set of books through the Internet, on Amazon. It came in this envelope *(shows the envelope)*. And it arrived by mail, packaged like this.

*(He shows the box. Then he comes forward to the center of the stage with the book. He looks for the light, opens the book and shows the photo of his family's castle, on page 253. End of the projection of the photo of the castle.)*

GUIDO: In this book, on page 253, there is a photo of Valentinis Castle. *(Shows the photo)* It says here: "Valentinis Castle." I could be living here. The record of the surname dates to 1300. And it's not famous because of a count, but for a woman: Elena Valentinis. When her husband died, Elena donated all of her wealth to the state and the church. Afterward the church beatified her. That's why all of the women in my family are named Elena.

*(Without saying anything, he walks over to the curtain and uncovers a painting. He comes forward again to the center of the space, carrying the painting.)*

GUIDO: This painting stayed in the family. It is a portrait of the Blessed Valentinis. This is a replica.

# 7

## *Art, Life & Show-Biz*

### AN INTIMATE LOVE LETTER: AIN GORDON'S *ART*, *LIFE & SHOW-BIZ*

Robert Vorlicky

*Art, Life & Show-Biz*, at its core, is Ain Gordon's intimate love letter to live performance and the artists who create it. First performed at New York City's PS 122 in January 2003, Gordon's work is an act of remembrance and memorialization, fashioned through memories – quite often by way of giddy, wondrous recollections of “the first time” something happened or by naming recent acquaintances in show biz – and the actions of the present. The production's subtitle alone is an oxymoron in its self-proclamation: a “nonfiction play.”

A specific type of documentary theatre, *Art, Life & Show-Biz*, at first glance, appears to be crafted from verbatim dialogue culled from Gordon's archive of interviews, conversations, and improvisations with three actresses; threaded throughout the text are fictional devices necessary to create a “play.” In Gordon's hands, however, the form and content of the piece are more self-consciously constructed in their intricacy and organicism. He stages a multi-layered oral history, informed by, but not limited to, autobiographical and biographical materials (from the women's and his lives) *before* it is “part of the archive.”<sup>1</sup> In doing so, he creates an under-theorized hybrid of conventional documentary theatre: the pre-archival performance as (a variation of legitimate) archive.<sup>2</sup> By deconstructing the mechanics of playwriting and foregrounding them in his play, Gordon boldly and entertainingly blurs the lines previously delineating autobiography, biography, and fiction (specifically characterology) to push the literary and theatrical boundaries of contemporary documentary theatre. His successful experimentation deliberately challenges preconceived notions of the genre.

“Fiction must come in for the work to be constructed as a play,” remarks Gordon. Yet, he continues, “in some sense, every word in the ‘script’ [of *Art, Life & Show-Biz*] is a collaboration with the art of these women – their ‘performing art,’ which the stories are about, and their ‘storytelling art,’ as they related these incidents to me.”<sup>3</sup> A third component, it appears, is the

women's actual performance – their “life art” or “art life” captured in real stage time.

Gordon has always been fascinated with blurring the line between reality and fiction, from *The Family Business* (1994, Obie Award – Special Citation) and *Wally's Ghost* (1996, Obie Award for Playwriting) to *Art, Life & Show-Biz*.<sup>5</sup> In shaping *Art, Life & Show-Biz*, Gordon brings together three supremely talented, independently minded women performers whose professional careers, having spanned generations, take distinct directions from one another. Yet each woman's story necessarily intersects and diverges from the others Gordon theatricalizes, as all stories must when they involve a life in art. The women whose lives ground the art of Gordon's piece are Helen Gallagher, double Tony Award winner in musical theatre; Lola Pashalinski, multiple Obie Award winner and founding member of The Ridiculous Theatrical Company; and Valda Setterfield (Gordon's mother), renowned dancer, most notably with Merce Cunningham and David Gordon (her husband and Ain's father).<sup>6</sup> At various points throughout the women's lives, each met the other (if only as recently as in the creation of this piece), but Gordon's interest in bringing them together on stage is far more personal. He greatly admires each woman for sustaining a career and surviving a life in show biz. Gordon's quest is to lionize and secure them as his own role models. Theatre, after all, is a business that demands the disappearance nightly of the actors. For Gordon, these women, as well as all actors, are to be remembered.

Informing his complex theatrical realities, Gordon finds inspiration and challenge in M. C. Escher's “Relativity” (1953), one of the Dutch graphic artist's most famous and “impossible structures.” The lithograph captures flights of staircases going in every imaginable direction making it impossible to know the “real direction.” Figures walk on top of, underneath, and on the side of the various staircases that lead to a variety of entrances and exits within the frame of the canvas. Quite simply, the Real is not clear. The relationship between art and life is unclear, as Escher invites the spectator to see, to think, and to react to the image apart from merely prescribed notions fostered from exposure to the familiar.

Escher amplifies Gordon's wish to understand the “real direction,” the meaningful connections between “Art, Life, and Show-Biz.” “How do I navigate the truth and fiction of humanity, of thought, of age, of career?” Gordon asks as he narrates the opening moments of his four-person piece.<sup>7</sup> For Gordon at any given moment, one of Escher's random staircases is the representation of truth while simultaneously the parallel or intersecting staircases embody fiction. What is undeniable is that they coexist in the same space. One does not automatically cancel the other.

Gordon shapes his three-act (intermissionless) nonfictional play by exploiting a structural device attractive to non-linear, narrative writers who often see their work produced in non-commercial venues (i.e., those that are not committed primarily to dramatic realism or musical theatre). For the stage,

Gordon creates a multi-media, theatrical equivalent to Escher's impossible structures, yet the playwright does not see his experimental piece frustrated by the need for resolution. For Escher, his images create the "seeming impossibility of resolution" as determined not only by their subject matter but also as bound by the limitations of the canvas. But the conventions of theatrical representation do not restrict Gordon as he seeks instead to reveal and wallow in every available theatrical conceit for their sheer capacity to heighten limitlessness and possibility. While the actors' bodies may disappear after a performance, it is the author's desire that their stories and their images live on in the imagination and memory of the spectator.

Bent upon exploring textured dramatic voices throughout *Art, Life & Show-Biz*, Gordon relies upon self-referentiality, or a postmodern self-consciousness, that articulates the process of creating dramatic structure. While celebrating the women whose stories are the substance of his play, the author never forgets to bring to the audience's attention the actual construction of the play, the architecture that is "art." As narrator of the piece during its first half, for example, Gordon tells the audience when a forthcoming moment is "a flashback, a sidebar, a subheading and the point." The enunciation of the artifice of art is central to the author's playful presentation. It also keeps the spectator on point in terms of grappling with notions of what constitutes the "Real" on stage. (This device is not new to the US stage. It has been a popular dramaturgical strategy, in particular, since the 1960s, used by US playwrights and experimental companies writing for alternative theatres and clubs. Most recently, the device was central to downtown artist Lisa Kron's semi-autobiographical play, *Well*, which moved to Broadway in 2005 after a successful run in New York City's not-for-profit theatre.<sup>8</sup> However, once the play was presented in a commercial setting [i.e., one that traditionally has been less accepting and encouraging of alternative or experimental productions], some critics and audiences were critical of Kron's self-referential devices and her speaking about the actual construction of a play as part of her performance and the text's dramaturgy.)

For Gordon, the dialogic form in non-solo documentary theatre billed as a nonfiction play is liberating and anarchistic. Multiple perspectives on any given event are assured. Contrary to most documentary theatre, characters' memories are not driven by an obsession for authenticity, accuracy, or conventional archival legitimacy. Recollections are shared, confirmed, disputed, and dissolved among the characters. Time is malleable, unstable, and slippery. Herein lies Gordon's unique contribution to the expanding definition of documentary theatre's dimensionalities.

What is constant in *Art, Life & Show-Biz* is that the life stories of three women artists shape the play's content through a seemingly random, spontaneous layering of representations. At any given instance, Helen, Lola, or Valda oscillate between speaking as themselves, speaking as themselves playing the characters of themselves, or playing characters other than themselves.

Life becomes art and art becomes life. This equation, for Gordon, creates the completely magical dimension of experience he calls “show-biz” – a space in which the lines between reality and fiction are necessarily unclear. This blurred space, Gordon invites us to recognize, is actually the stuff of existence – as we (all) move between realms of identification and displacement, the material and the fantastical in the moment to moment of being.

Gordon’s self-conscious, playful naming of the structure of the play is a narrative strategy complemented by the multi-media theatrical devices employed throughout the show that create a counterpart through non-verbal “articulations.” Slide images conveyed on screens behind the actors provide a visual narrative that exists in tandem with its verbal counterpart. Music accentuates, underpins, or stimulates an aural narrative, one that bridges, unsettles, or heightens the narrative of the lives on stage. Actors carry their scripts in hand, signaling the textual construction of this nonfiction play. Gliding their chairs on casters across the stage floors, these accomplished women, costumed as if going to a dinner party, are in control of their own placement, at any given moment, in the play’s structure and staging. The artists’ relationship to these theatrical devices – photographs, music, scripts, and chairs, to name but a few – and Gordon’s manipulation of these devices, call the spectator’s attention to Gordon’s reliance upon all possible resources to tell his story most fully. Gordon’s choices suggest that if the artist turns to the theatre as the venue for celebrating these women artists, then the creator should consider all the ways in which the technical features of the venue (including the production elements embedded in the text, those imagined by the director, and those spontaneously enlivened by the actor) can be analyzed and exploited to the benefit of all. As the characters’ stories deepen in their personal resonance, so the audience is drawn in by the multi-valence, verbal and non-verbal narrative structures and strategies that heighten our awareness of the historical, cultural, and aesthetic values embodied differently by each woman on stage.

The engaging structure of *Art, Life & Show-Biz* is immediate in its ability to draw in the spectator’s involvement. Gordon relies upon the effectiveness of a solo performance convention at the opening of the piece by sharing with the audience his own personal story – a subway ride to visit a close woman friend whose impending marriage is overlapping with Gordon and his partner’s purchase of an apartment. These young people are on the verge of negotiating their manifestations of the otherwise traditional institutional conventions of union, domesticity, and shelter and the ramifications of their choices reside in how they approach their futures. Here, the Escher staircases point to particular entrances (or are they exits?), as it were, and how the young adults will fare on their ascending and descending journeys remain necessarily unknown.

But Gordon is most interested in the *known* in his nonfiction play. The known embraces both historical facts and expressed feelings – reason and

passion – over one's lifetime. The seeming paradox of the *known* drives the content of his piece, as Gordon shifts the spotlight from himself to the experienced lives of the three iconic actors who are the sole focus of *Art, Life & Show-Biz*. These lives have navigated Escher's stairs. For good or ill, they have relied upon their agency in determining directions amid apparent randomness. Yet their choices ground the evolution of their successes. Each woman pursued art in her own field – Helen Gallagher in the commercial theatre, Lola Pashalinski in "underground," alternative theatre, and Valda Setterfield in modern dance – and survived her era by rising above the norms of each generation. Each woman, it can be argued, crossed generations in her ability to sustain a life as a working actor because she knew who she was, she defined herself, and she maintained her integrity as she passed through the doors of the unknown into the known. Tremendous faith must reside at the foundation of a piece between the performers and their collaborator Gordon, who is entrusted with an enormous responsibility when crafting such courageous stories into theatre. To convey honesty and trust require artifice and craft when writing for the stage. And for Gordon, artistry underlies the theatricalization of (the women's) truth.

Toward the end of Act II, a painful truth surfaces in *Art, Life & Show-Biz*. It is a notable departure from the unproblematic narrative of Act I. Amid a prose montage of non-sequential dates and events in their lives, the women "move unknowingly toward [...] change." The galvanizing memory that stimulates recollections of significant change for each woman is when Valda speaks about a life-altering event in June 1974. On a "slightly foggy, very humid day," Valda was a passenger in a car that was hit by a "full speed locomotive" – "I had gone, face-first, through the windshield." Merging with Valda's stories, Lola and Helen also recollect the times when they, too, were "hit" in their careers and personal lives – when they knew something was over (as Valda, whose "era was over," came to recognize in terms of her future with Cunningham). Lola left Ludlum and The Ridiculous, and after several good years of working with other experimental directors, she ended up working in a factory; Helen doggedly remained employed despite Broadway's rejection by doing a lot of out-of-town shows and television commercials. At such pronounced, harsh moments in their personal histories, the women can collectively empathize with Lola's sentiments: "Who the fuck was I? Why was I suddenly invisible?"

"Being a performer is very strange work," Valda concludes. "It's sometimes very hard to wake up to another day and wonder if anybody will want what I have to offer? Because – I'm offering me." Act III returns to the celebration of the women artists' lives as the personal narratives recount each woman's return to visibility (least of which is not her ability to make a living as an artist) in a profession that demands her disappearance. These stories complete the women's narrative portraits in Gordon's nonfiction play. The women express their subjectivity, their sense of community in the theatre, and, as

Helen remarks, their ability to “still stick” to the culture and to “show biz.” While youth has passed them by – a truth that we all must reconcile in time – the women humbly acknowledge their mortality and their drive to persevere. “If they could see me now.”

*Art, Life & Show-Biz*, therefore, is a scrapbook filled with snapshots from the lives of three inspirational artists. If Gordon has his wish, not one of these women will fade from our memories or from theatre history. Their existences are well worth remembering. His play is a theatrical testament to this personal belief. Quite often, such lives that are commendable – whether on or off stage, actors or not – are those that at the very least understand and respect the vitality of experiences that blur the boundaries between art and life. After all, one might argue – as certainly this play theatricalizes – existence is often most dynamically engaged in the gaps between the imaginary and the real. In the landscapes often thought, traditionally, to be outside the boundaries of documentary theatre. In the possibilities inherent, but rarely valued, in an M. C. Escher drawing.

Herein reside the pleasures of Ain Gordon's *Art, Life & Show-Biz*.

Read, envision, and enjoy.

Go ahead.

Mind the gap....s.

## Notes

1. In “Bodies of Evidence,” Carol Martin notes that “[m]ost contemporary documentary theatre makes the claim that everything presented is part of the archive”; Gordon's play problematizes this generalization (*TDR* 50:3 [T191] Fall 2006:9).
2. Also creating a variation of the documentary form, but one that is distinct from Ain Gordon's work, is Forced Entertainment, under the direction of Tim Etchells. The Sheffield, England-based ensemble, according to Etchell, creates “intimate documentary, hybrid documentary, mutant documentary, fragmentary documentary – as if to signal that [its] goal lies beneath, to the side of, or in some way beyond that of strictly factual documentary” (*TDR* 50,3 [T191] Fall 2006:110). Speaking, in particular, about the ensemble's pieces *A Decade of Forced Entertainment* (1994), *Instructions for Forgetting* (Etchell's multi-media solo piece, 2001), and *The Travels* (2002), Etchells notes that Force Entertainment's “performers are more or less present as themselves, sharing time and space with those watching [...and as] work on *Decade* developed, the autobiographical ‘we’ employed in the text to describe ourselves gradually gave way in many places to a semi-fictitious alter ego, ‘they.’ This device – talking about ourselves in the third person – allowed us some distance from the narrative and opened up the possibilities of fiction within the essentially documentary form” (ibid.:109). Unlike Force Entertainment's reliance upon third-person plural pronouns as a strategy to acquire a desired access to fiction, Ain Gordon's usage of “I,” “you,” “we,” and “they” in *Art, Life & Show-Biz* remain anchored in the (collective or group) autobiographical performance, which in turn suggests its legitimacy as its own archive, albeit one that is performative.
3. Author's interview with Ain Gordon on 29 June 2006.



4. Email to the author, 10 July 2006. Further clarifying the nature of the play's text that is published in this collection, Gordon notes that "this script was never 'final' – we continually made small refinements as each woman thought more about her own story and some were never even written down, just ad-libbed, and so are not reflected here" (email to Carol Martin, 15 January 2007.)
5. Gordon received his third Obie Award in 2007 for his performance as an actor in *Spalding Gray: Stories Left to Tell* (concept by Kathleen Russo; Minetta Lane Theatre, NYC, opening night 6 March 2007). Unlike the other three cast members, Gordon was the only actor in the original production who had previously performed in autobiographical work as himself (*Art, Life & Show-Biz*). In this way, Gordon's link to Gray, whose autobiographical solos are memorialized and honored in *Spalding Gray* through the performances of multi-actor presentations, extends to Gordon's and Gray's shared attraction to autoperformance and autobiographical content.
6. Gordon's parents committed early on in their artistic careers to the creation of nonrepresentational, experimental art. Along with his wife's, Valda Setterfield's, postmodern performances as a featured dancer in the company of choreographer Merce Cunningham, David Gordon, a founding artist in the Judson Dance Theater, "pioneered the use of text and textual narrative in dance." According to the website for his "Pick Up Performance Co.," which was founded in 1971, "Gordon's early work not only presaged his later turn to writing and directing for the stage but also predated the live theater form which came to be known as 'performance art.' [...] In 1992, Ain Gordon (David's son) joined the company as Co-Director. Starting with his first work in 1983, Ain Gordon found his roots in the performance art world his father helped to create and by the late 1980s he was producing and touring his work nationally. In 1987 Ain Gordon was awarded support from the National Endowment's inaugural round of 'New Forms' grants – designed specifically for artists who defied clear classification. By 1992, Ain Gordon began a move toward a more continuous emphasis on text-based theater or playwriting. In 1994, Ain Gordon and David Gordon collaborated on *The Family Business* (as writers, directors, and performers) and received an Obie Award for their work." <<http://www.pickupperformance.org/pickUp.swf>>.

The Gordon family – father, mother, and son – have collaborated with one another in a variety of pieces, many of which drew from their favored subjects: fictional families and autobiographical material (demonstrated prominently in *Art, Life & Show-Biz*). Regarding the former, in *Epic Family Epic, or the Hell Family Supper* (1988, revised 2003) writer-director Ain Gordon played outlandishly with twisted (fictional) family relationships at a holiday dinner, where his own mother portrayed an estranged relative. In 1996, Ain and his father collaborated on the lyrics (along with Arnold Weinstein) and book for *Punch & Judy Get Divorced*. This post-modern vaudeville caper of familial dramas draws from *commedia dell'arte* puppet theatre as it follows the timeless scenario of boy-meets-girl (Punch-meets-Judy), boy-marries-girl, boy-girl-make-babies, boy-girl fight, boy-girl divorce, and so on.

But it is the Gordon/Setterfield family's work on the Obie-winning *The Family Business* that captured the fullness of their familial collaboration. Written and directed by Ain and David, the play's three actors when it premiered were Ain, David, and Valda. *The Family Business*, notes Joan Acocella, is "truly a family business, produced by a family business and it is, with no apologies, about a family" (*Art in America*, April 1995). The play is a mixture of realism and stylization, as Valda portrayed the majority of characters while Ain played two male characters and David played only one (Aunt Annie). The primary focus in the play is the

ailing, elderly Annie, and her contact with family members and caregivers. The Gordons highlight the moments when Annie conveys stories about her life, some of which are informed by her identity as a Jewish American. Her final story is spoken prior to her death on stage. "By making Annie real but packing her in artifice," concludes Acocella, "the play turns her into a symbol. She is the pull, the undertow of life: the thing we can't get rid of. We make art; she is what we make it about" (*Art in America*).

7. *Art, Life & Show-Biz* (p. 269).

8. Prior to the 1960s, US writers certainly created narrators whose direct address to the audience in the "real" time of the play framed the "memory" of the play's action (consider Tom in Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* and Alfieri in Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge* as examples of this technique). But rarely did pre-1960s US playwrights have characters speak, self-consciously, to the audience in an effort to explain dramatic structure. One notable exception is Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, where the Stage Manager – a fictional character – comments on the play's structure and content, as well as steps into the play's action as a different character only to step back outside the play's action in order to provide exposition and to articulate the passing of time.

What distinguishes Gordon's and Kron's works from those previously mentioned is that their "narrators/characters" are their real selves, who are speaking from their own points of view as playwrights about the construction of the play in which they exist. They are speaking from their autobiographical perspectives, within the context of a fictionally rendered event, about the construction of fiction. Furthermore, in a Brechtian manner, they are always themselves playing the various "roles" they've constructed for themselves inside the world of the play. Yet expanding upon Brecht's vision of acting, these postmodernists also are playing themselves as the "characters" of *themselves* while on stage.

# ART, LIFE & SHOW-BIZ

Ain Gordon

*(On stage are four black upholstered rolling office chairs arranged in talk-show format: Three guests and one interviewer. Upstage of the chairs is a wide, floor-to-ceiling projection screen. Throughout, images from the real-life careers of all three women as well as select phrases from the dialogue are projected to fill the screen. There are too many slides to note here except where crucial to the readers' understanding. All four performers carry and refer to their scripts throughout.)*

*(As the audience enters, the projection screen is filled with computer program thumbnails of every image to be projected during the ensuing performance. A selection of dramatic ballet music and show tunes is playing.)*

*(Helen, Valda, and Lola enter followed by Ain. The women sit, Ain steps downstage to a music stand, pre-show music cuts out.)*

AIN: Good evening. Art, Life, and, Show-Biz – a non-fiction play.

Scene 1. Flashback. There's a struggle here – in my kitchen.

It's September 27th I'm eating chocolate. Here's the struggle – Helen Gallagher, Lola Pashalinski, Valda Setterfield – period. Every time I try to write for – or about them – I find I'm writing two different things. On one side I'm writing about the "theatre," about Art – because it's my life and theirs. On the other side I'm writing about Life – because I think it's Art. BUT when I start writing, each of these things – Art and Life – derails the other. My Life tendency to play six-degrees-of-association with every idea available is at war with my Art instinct to tailor life's confusion into 90 minutes for the stage. I want to write a play BUT I want to let life tell its own story.

Like, I'm reading this novel called...see, I'm already doing it – drifting to a "sidebar." **Six-Degrees-Of-Association** – I can't help it.

Anyway, "sidebar." I'm reading this novel called *American Pastoral* published in 1997 and written by Philip Roth. Now, Philip Roth is...uh oh.

**Sidebar – subheading A.**

I read Philip Roth's legendary first novel *Goodbye Columbus* when I was 19. Twenty-one years later, this past summer, June, another flashback: I'm in a bookstore.

*(Women improvise background talk as customers talk in bookstore.)*

Hmmmmmm, *American Pastoral* – Philip Roth – where has he been all this time? BANG.

(*Women stop chatter*)

I'm furious with myself. I want to kill people who say things like that about other people's careers. Where he's been, Ain, is writing 20 novels that don't all have to be famous or hit your tiny one-brain radar screen in order to matter.

OK, back to the **sidebar**. September 27th, I'm reading this novel, Philip Roth, on the subway. It's the Lexington Avenue IRT local...uh oh.

**Sidebar – subheading B.**

New Yorkers *above* a certain age call the subway lines – Lexington Avenue IRT, 7th Avenue IRT, etc. Other, younger people say 4, 5, 6 or 1, 2, 3, etc. **Neither** of us knows what the **other** is talking about.

Back to the **sidebar**. I'm reading Philip Roth, I'm on the **IRT**! Sitting next to me is a woman, standing over her is a man, they're talking business. He says...

LOLA: (*As subway man*) "We need to bring in some gray hair, you know, in some advisory capacity. You know, someone who doesn't need the money – time on their hands – you know, gray hair."

AIN: This fucking guy is like 33 if he's a day. And while his hair is, **for now**, BROWN, I think he better watch out for his assumptions because the clock is ticking buddy!

ALL: Tick, tick, tick, tick.

AIN: Back to Philip Roth. Half-way down the page, QUOTE...

VALDA: "...the more I think about something the further my thoughts carry me **from that thing**."

AIN: His words are like a knife in my subway fog. Me too Philip. But, I always come back – just, sometimes, it's such a long journey.

HELEN: (*As conductor*) Eighty-Sixth Street!

AIN: ...the conductor says. My stop.

What comes next is a flashback, a sidebar, a subheading and **the point**. One of my closest friends in the world is getting married. We'll call her "Meg," – it's her name. Today, is "Meg's" last fitting – for her wedding dress. I'm running across...

HELEN: (*As conductor*) Eighty-sixth street!

AIN: I'm walking in the door – Meg's already in her dress. We're both 40, Meg and I.

LOLA: (*As subway man*) "You know, gray hair."

AIN: We've known each other for 20 years – and, now, on September 27th – "Meg" is finalizing plans to be a bride which is to be, well, to be grown up – I know we both think that – and I just got off the phone with a realtor because me and my partner, Wally, want to buy an apartment. We don't say anything, "Meg" and I, about these coinciding momentous moments in our lives but we **know** – and isn't that – **all** of that –

VALDA: Art...

HELEN: AND...

LOLA: Life.

AIN: Helen Gallagher, Lola Pashalinski, and Valda Setterfield, surprise me LIKE Philip Roth and his career and 33-year-old men on the IRT who don't hear middle age coming and the beauty of someone I've known for 20 years in a wedding dress.

*(Ain joins the women in his seat)*

Interviewing Valda about her first big job in show-biz, I pushed and pushed her to cram her life into a theatrical Art-size sound-bite. "How did it feel to finally be hired.?" "Did you feel vindicated?" "Did you feel famous?" You know what she said?

VALDA: I was pleased, as I still am today, whenever I'm lucky enough to get a job.

AIN: Like that man on the IRT, I had assumed she was past that.

LOLA: *(As subway man)* "You know, gray hair."

AIN: I had assumed that – off stage – life was linear. **Sidebar.** Years ago, my father told me a story about his mother. He said...

HELEN: "I was avoiding my family. One day my mother said to me, "I know you don't come to see me. I know what you're doing. I'm sorry to tell you, it doesn't work, *you can't get away.*"

AIN: A year ago I wrote a monologue using my father's exact words – **That's** what I call an "M. C. Escher"

HELEN: You know M. C. Escher – the artist. You know, the famous image of many flights of stairs that go both up and down both from underneath and on top making it impossible to find the real direction?

AIN: Art, Life, and Showbiz. How do I find the real direction? How do I navigate the truth and fiction of humanity, of thought, of age, of career?

*(Turns to Helen who is seated next to him)*

We'll start with the early days – back-story.

HELEN: *(To imaginary intercom)* Who is it?

LOLA: *(As doorman)* Yeah, Miss Gallagher, I got a Gordon here to see you.

AIN: Scene 2: Flashback: May 28th. Before Philip Roth, the IRT, the realtor, and the wedding dress. My first interview for this script.

LOLA: The set is a large New York Upper West Side pre-war apartment.

VALDA: *(As doorbell)* Ding-dong.

HELEN: Hello Ain.

AIN: Note to casting: Helen Gallagher has eyes that sparkle, tear, and shoot daggers. She should be played by a woman exactly like herself.

*(Pulls Helen's chair closer to him)*

HELEN: *(As she rolls)* Come in.

AIN: Sorry I'm late. I take three trains to get here, I'm sorry.

HELEN: What do you take – the IRT? *(Both look at audience)*

AIN: I brought a tape recorder – is that OK?

HELEN: Sure. *(Reacting)* Oh, that's my cat – just push him off the chair. You want a glass of water?

AIN: I have a Samantha Protein Blast.

HELEN: You want me to start?

AIN: I'm ready.

HELEN: My life story, the early years – was difficult.

AIN: (*Hesitant*) Good.

HELEN: I was born in Brooklyn – Flatbush – we (my mother, father, uncle, aunt, and me) moved from there when I was two to Scarsdale. My father was in the banking business, and then of course a year later, 1929, the bottom fell out. My father was out of work for about nine years. **That's when the difficulty began.**

AIN: (*To audience*) What a great line. "That's when the difficulty began." Curtain. The end. (*To Helen*) Go on.

HELEN: We moved from Scarsdale to the Bronx when I was just about – four – and we all lived in this one apartment. My mother went back to work and my brother went to school. So I was by myself. And so coming from the sun and freedom up there...

AIN: (*To audience*) "Up there?" – Scarsdale. So, **two** settings, Scarsdale, the Bronx. **Six** characters.

HELEN: Fortunately, with my mother – also Helen – my mother named me for herself – my mother was a *wee bit controlling* but, fortunately, she went back to work – which saved my life...

AIN: The mother – a leading role.

HELEN: So we all lived in this dark apartment and I mourned the fact that my brother and mother weren't there. I sat in the window waiting for them to come home. I pushed my cheek right up against the glass.

AIN: Let's imagine that.

(*Helen holds pose as Ain frames her – silence*)

**OK.**

HELEN: Then we moved down the street and my mother and brother and me lived in one apartment and my father and my aunt and my uncle lived in another. (*Silent movie-style music fades in*) Six months – then we moved to Richardson Avenue.

AIN: (*To audience*) Now, I hear music. The radio? It's good.

HELEN: We lived on the third floor, in the front. The other group lived on the fourth floor, in the back. But that didn't work. So then my mother sent me off to boarding school – when I was six – with my brother. And it was the nuns. I was OK. I was lonely and...I missed everybody. But, my mother used to walk, every weekend, five miles to get to see us.

AIN: (*To Helen*) The controlling but loving mother.

HELEN: (*Cuts Ain off*) She loved to walk anyway.

AIN: (*Chastened*) **OK.**

HELEN: Then I got sick. They said I had Saint Vitas Dance. "Dance," key word. What I was – was very nervous because the nuns were anything but loving. So me and my brother moved back in with my father and my

mother lived three blocks away. We had such fun with my father. It was a house dedicated to the amusement of children. My father would read to us until he was hoarse. Dickens mostly.

AIN: Of course.

HELEN: Of course. That lasted only until I was ten. Then they decided, like the dreamers that they were, they would live together again – my parents. So we moved – again. My mother moved a lot – you get the feeling? Well this was the depression and her excuse was you got three months free rent when you moved. But that wasn't the reason. Then my darling father left, permanently. So we moved again. By this time my mother *could* leave us alone – we *were* old enough – but she was petrified I would be raped. She had bolts up and down the door.

Next – she decided to learn to drive. She flunked the test three times, finally passed and she picked up her two kids and drove to California. That was some trip. I sat in the front seat, Mom, put the break on! Mom, push the clutch. (*Notices Ain*) Could I get you some coffee?

AIN: (*To audience*) She didn't offer me coffee. I would've **liked** coffee.

HELEN: I offered you water.

AIN: I changed my mind.

HELEN: Too late. So, we got to California and lived with my mother's mother.

AIN: Your grandmother?

HELEN: (*pointed*) I never liked her. A manipulative woman. There's an antenna in me and if somebody's going to manipulate me I go (*growls*) even as a child.

AIN: Though you spend your life being directed and choreographed?

HELEN: Not without a fight. Have you noticed? (*They laugh*) Anyway, I developed asthma. I was out of school more than I was in. So my mother decides to move back east. So we're back in the Bronx. Now I'm 15–16 and I've managed to miss school for a year. And I go back to dancing school (on the weekends) – which was the only thing I ever wanted to do because years before I had been in a recital.

(*Rising from her chair, she strides to the end of the stage*)

Three months in class and I had a pink tutu and toe shoes and I got on stage, **AND SOMETHING HAPPENED**

(*Music swells and cuts out*)

AIN: Sidebar. The first time I saw Helen Gallagher – it was 1971. I was nine. (*Helen returns to her seat as he speaks*)

HELEN: (*Sitting*) I was 44.

AIN: I was in the audience.

HELEN: I was on stage. The show was called NO, NO, NANETTE.

AIN: On Broadway. I went with my best friend Antony Silva. My mother took us.

HELEN: My mother on opening night...We were all at Sardi's. I had on this wonderful dress – that my mother made.

*(Slide of Helen in "Nanette" costume)*

Not my costume – my dress.

*(Slide out)*

Anyway, I was feeling very high but the whole night my mother had this sour look on her face – I didn't know why. Then Rex Reed came over to congratulate me – my mother loved Rex Reed (and Liberace and Merv Griffin) – and my mother leaned across my husband and pushed me out of the way so SHE could talk to Rex. Suddenly, it hits me – she was jealous of me. It took me 44 years to see it.

AIN: After the show I went home – I had school in the morning.

HELEN: Because of the show I won my second Tony. We'll talk about that later.

AIN: Sidebar – **Subheading A:** Helen Gallagher has been in the biz since 1944 – She has worked with Jerry Robbins, George Abbot, Agnes DeMille, Anne Bogart, Gower Champion, Helen Tamiris, Julie Styne, George Ballanchine, Bob Fosse, James Ivory...

HELEN: And more.

AIN: And spent 14 years as Maeve Ryan on TV's RYAN'S HOPE.

HELEN: Ah, the luck of the Irish. Wonderful writers, cast, crew, and the part suited me to a "T." I finally got my wish – a large loving family and sidebar – the stagehands did the housework and I won three Emmy's.

AIN: Currently, Helen teaches singing at the Herbert Berghoff Studios.

HELEN: My absolute passion.

LOLA: *(As stage manager, claps hands)* OK people, let's start.

AIN: Flashback: March 26th, 2002. I've written a play – first day of rehearsal – first read through – first time meeting Helen. *(To Helen)* Hi, I'm Ain.

HELEN: I thought so.

AIN: *(To audience)* The theatre is in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

HELEN: **Sidebar.** I did a show called HIGH BUTTON SHOES. We played on Broadway **but** it was set in **New Brunswick**. THAT was 1947.

LOLA: *(As stage manager)* Places Miss Gallagher!

AIN: THIS, is April 26th 2002, opening night in New Jersey.

ALL: *(As Jersey audience they burst out laughing)*

AIN: Helen plays a dead woman talking to her daughter about her difficulties with her own mother.

HELEN: *(As the character in the play)* "Mama says this to me. 'I know you don't come to see me.' 'I know what you are doing.' 'I'm sorry to tell you, it doesn't work, you can't get away.'"

AIN: Escher times ten.

VALDA: *(As phone)* Riiiiinnng.

*(Helen switches to Lola's chair as Lola heads to the edge of the stage)*

LOLA: Hello sweetheart, it's Loler – are you there?

AIN: Scene 3: A Brooklyn apartment that should be nice – but it's not, it's my home. *(Aside)* See why I called the realtor?



LOLA: Hellooooooooo? It is Loler...it is I.

AIN: It is a flashback: October 2001. Lola calls me five months **before** I meet Helen.

*(Lola heads for the chair next to Ain)*

LOLA: OK, well we should talk, it's not terrible, it's not, though I am killing myself about it – it IS terrible.... *(Sits)*

AIN: *(Cuts in)* I was in the shower.

LOLA: Oh OK. Do you wanna go back?

AIN: Imagine this: sitting at a nineteenth-century ladies writing desk – phone in hand, IS Lola.

*(Lola holds pose as Ain frames her – silence)*

OK.

LOLA: It's not my fault – it's nobody's fault – but I should've seen it coming – but I did – I told you – didn't I?

AIN: You can't do the show. *(To audience)* The part Helen will eventually play. Classic playwriting – see the characters connect. Escher, Escher Escher...

LOLA: Do you hate me?

AIN: I love you. **SIDEBAR.**

The first time I saw Lola on stage was in Charles Ludlam's BLUEBEARD. Imagine this – Lola, stark naked, a great luscious sex-doll of a woman rolling around on the ground with her hand wrapped around Charles Ludlam's penis.

LOLA: Oh yeah, – anybody who saw me in the first few years of my career remembers me nude and getting fucked by Charles.

AIN: I was an immediate fan. I was 12. My mother took me.

Flashback. July 26th, 2000. I'm working with Lola on a script about her parents and her time as a member of the Ridiculous Theatrical Company.

LOLA: Take it – I have more humus.

AIN: But we're not working – we're eating – and talking about BIRDSEED BUNDLES, a play, I wrote it – Lola was in it – it closed.

LOLA: Your father laughed at that line in dress rehearsal but the audience wouldn't laugh.

AIN: Cause the line before got a huge laugh and audiences don't laugh at two jokes in a row.

LOLA: What is that – The Gordon theory of comedy?

*(Valda strides to edge of stage speaking)*

VALDA: **Sidebar.** I'm Valda Setterfield, I'm not there.

**Subheading A.** I'm in Montauk – I love the ocean and I collect rocks. So does Karen Graham, she's a dancer.

**Subheading B:** we're dancing together, next month, at the Joyce theatre, February 18th to 23rd – BUT it's hard collecting rocks at the ocean because they're all wet and rocks often look better wet than dry so you have to predict... BACK to the sidebar – the two lines Lola and Ain are

discussing were mine. I played an English woman whose daughter marries an American – and has an American son – who, perhaps, writes things...

*(Valda returns to her seat)*

LOLA: Your father laughed at both jokes in dress rehearsal.

AIN: Because my father is a person who, who, uh...

LOLA: Laughs when he feels like it. That's why they didn't laugh. Because it was the "bum" of the Ba dum bum. It's technical – like making a clock. But my hopeless goal in life is to get people to laugh at every single thing – forget the clock. BUT if you got three jokes planted in one paragraph and the last one's buried at the end – you've got to motor all the way through. You've got to make the clock. The audience is saying, "oh, oh, I wanna laugh at that." But you keep going. The audience is saying, "oh, oh I wanna laugh so bad I can't hold it." But you keep going. Then, WHAM, you deliver the zinger and you take a breath and the flood breaks and the audience goes nuts and you stop the show. The show must go on – except – for when you can stop it.

AIN: Note to casting: Lola finds humor in misery, misery in happiness, and collects 1940's art pottery.

LOLA: You want coffee?

AIN: No, she also didn't offer me coffee.

LOLA: I always offer you coffee. Here's a story, the first time I felt I was an actress, or at least acting, was in Charles Ludlam's first play BIG HOTEL, this is 1967. Charles had Pleurisy and missed four performances. Maybe it was two. No, it had to be four. But wait, we only did four performances – and Charles didn't miss them all...He had Pleurisy – I said that. So, I played a character named Chocha Caliente (Hot Cunt). Charles had two parts but he also had Pleurisy. So one part went to...whoever – and the other part went to me. The part of...I don't remember. BUT I *played* the part as Chocha Caliente *playing* the part. And one time I ad-libbed and the audience laughed.

*(Rises from her chair and heads for the edge of stage)*

I did something and **they** laughed. This, I thought, must be ACTING.

AIN: Lola Pashalinski has worked with Lee Breuer, Richard Foreman, Joanne Akalaitis, Ethyl Eichelberger, Anne Bogart...

LOLA: *(Heading back to her seat, to Helen)* We were in that one together – THE WOMEN.

VALDA: They asked me to audition – I was busy.

LOLA: *(To Valda)* Oh you would've been wonderful.

*(Women improvise talk about the show, etc., it gets out of hand, Ain desperately raises*

*his voice to be heard)*

AIN: ...Neil Bartlett, Brian Kulik, Robert Wilson, Tony Kushner, David Gordon

LOLA: (*The women still talking*) We did TWO of *his* shows...

VALDA: No, we did three.

AIN: (He's my father) Lola has appeared on film in I SHOT ANDY WARHOL –

LOLA: (*To Ain*) **Sidebar**.

AIN: Yes. The relationship of Andy Warhol and M. C. Escher – not yet. Lola was also in Woody Allen's SWEET AND LOW DOWN as Uma Thurman's girlfriend – and GODZILLA.

LOLA: And more.

AIN: Lola is also a founding member, with Charles Ludlam, of The Ridiculous Theatrical Company – a group without whose seminal insanity much of the work that blossomed in the 1980s **In this very building...**

(*Slide of PS122 where this run took place*)

...couldn't have happened. Ludlam once wrote – quote...

"I call my work Ridiculous because the only ideas that interest me are paradoxes. (No, I'm not serious. I'm anti-serious.) It is this state of conscious-mess..."

LOLA: "It is this state of conscious-MESS..."

AIN: "...that I play with at every point in the plot: the seeming impossibility of resolution."

LOLA: "The seeming **impossibility** of resolution."

(*All hold to savor the thought – silence*)

AIN: OK.

(*Valda stands and speaks*)

VALDA: Would you like some coffee?

(*Valda moves to the chair next to Ain as Lola replaces her*)

AIN: Now, there is one woman who really offers me coffee. Valda Setterfield, my mother.

VALDA: (*Sits*) An English woman who married an American and had an American son, who, perhaps, writes things? Cannibal.

AIN: Valda Setterfield has worked with JoAnne Akilaitis, Woody Allen, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Caryl Churchill, Richard Foreman, Brian de Palma, David Gordon, Marie Rambert, Yvonne Rainer, Michael Sexton...

LOLA: (*To Valda*) Yeah, THAT's the show where they wouldn't laugh at your two lines.

AIN: ...James Waring, Robert Wilson...

VALDA: (*Cutting Ain off*) It started at a garden party. I was about four.

AIN: Scene 4: Interviewing Valda – Montauk, late afternoon, July 5th, 2002.

(*Slide of a tape recorder*)

VALDA: Does this thing have a mike?

AIN: Right there.

VALDA: OK. Miss Brenda Jones, my first dancing teacher, asked that I dance a solo at a garden party – **my** solo. I was only four – but it was mine. My solo began with me running in a circle and finished with me going into the center to do a rather difficult bit. The music started.

*(Ballet music plays, Valda approaches the edge of the stage)*

I heard my cue, and I began to run in a circle. Fairly quickly – I realized I hadn't the faintest memory of the difficult bit I was to do in the center. I didn't feel a hint of panic. I simply went on running in a circle. I heard a little ripple through the audience.

*(As garden party guest: women quietly laugh)*

Laughter. And it grew as I kept running and turned into applause.

*(Women gently applaud)*

So I kept running until the music finished then – I ran off – to even greater applause.

*(Women laugh quietly and applaud)*

I was not a failure, on the contrary, I felt great power.

*(Pause as Valda savors the past...She snaps out of it)*

Look at the ocean, what about fresh tuna for supper?

*(Valda returns to her seat)*

AIN: Valda is a founding member of the Pick Up Performance Company – my father – David Gordon's, company – and, since 1992, **our** company – and for ten years Valda danced with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. **My first ten years on this earth.** So I don't know when I first saw my mother – off stage **or** – on stage. She was always a performer – she was always my mother.

VALDA: When I got pregnant. I said to Merce, I'll come to class as long as my tights stay up – and I did. Then you were born. '61 right.

AIN: '62 – I keep telling you.

VALDA: I remember YOU – NOT the year. SO, in '64, some people left the Cunningham Company and Merce asked me to go to Chicago. Before we left, I went to rehearsal to learn the piece – alone with him – and YOU. Merce had this orange towel and every time he put it down – you picked it up and you RAN – I mean, I was running after you – and you RAN across the studio with Merce's orange towel – you were all over the place. I had no idea how to learn the steps AND tell you not to do that. But Merce was very nice about it – or – he didn't say anything.

This rock is **no** good. Let's go buy lots of tuna.

AIN: Scene 5: A Conversation That Never Took Place. Warning: scenes like this – about nothing – usually mean the playwright is announcing a theme.

VALDA: Remember Lilly Tomlin's one-woman Broadway show – no not the revival – the first time – SEARCH FOR INTELLIGENT SIGNS – etc.?

Lilly Tomlin as Trudy the bag lady holds up two identical cans of Campbell's chicken noodle – one in each hand.

*(Valda holds up her two hands as if with two cans)*

She says "**ART – SOUP \*\* SOUP – ART.**" So marvelous.

LOLA: Andy Warhol.

AIN: Right. Escher had stairs – Warhol had soup. When did I first see that Art and Soup could be the same thing? Oh, I know...it was a musical. THE BOYFRIEND. It opened on Broadway in 1970.

HELEN: Imagine this: Just ten blocks north, I'm rehearsing NO, NO, NANETTE.

LOLA: Imagine this: Just 40 blocks south, I'm performing BLUEBEARD.

VALDA: THE BOYFRIEND starred Judy Carne, Sandy Duncan, and my friend David Vaughan.

*(Slide of David Gordon)*

Not David Gordon, David Vaughan.

*(Slide of David Vaughan)*

He had a featured role as a middle-aged Englishman (which is sort of what he was). So we went. Afterward we went round.

AIN: Americans say we went "back" or we went "backstage" – Valda says "oh we went round" and we did. We stood in a dressing room as Valda spoke with a woman – who, just a few minutes before – on stage – had been a very French lady in a headband and 20s dress.

VALDA: Now, in stocking cap and a very UN-French accent she grabbed my dress and asked IS IT REAL?

AIN: I didn't understand the question.

VALDA: IS IT REAL? – she asked. "Of course it's real, Paris Flea Market," I said. "YOU CAN JUST TELL," she said. She reached for her costume, the one she'd just worn on stage when she was *pretending* to be French – she said, "MINE'S REAL TOO."

AIN: Two dresses – both from the 20s – both now in the 70s – one a costume on stage – one an outfit off stage – BUT both "real."

VALDA: Art AND Soup.

AIN: That's life. So, Lilly Tomlin using Andy Warhol outdoes M. C. Escher?

HELEN: That's showbiz.

LOLA: Scene 6.

AIN: Note to director: This scene is a fantasy fugue. Imagine this:

*(Still seated, each woman strikes a pose as described)*

Valda is still in Montauk – now cooking tuna on the outdoor grill. Helen is still at home on her sofa in turtleneck and sweatpants, petting her cat. And Lola has moved from her desk to her table now surrounded by the New York Times, her medication and a flyer for a drag show.

*(All three women hold poses as Ain frames them – silence)*

OK.

HELEN: "Teenage beginnings."

LOLA: I was 14 – my family were great music lovers but I hadn't seen or heard any opera, except in the movies.

*(Refers to imaginary paper)*

See this headline? Our president is such an idiot! Anyway, I'd listen to records over an over trying to teach myself to sing opera. I wanted to take classes in ear training and sight-reading but neither me nor my parents could afford the fifty bucks. So my sister, my little sister, she was nine – SHE, of course, had a bank account – **she** loans me the money. So the joke is – a few years back they roasted me – and my same sister stands up

and says I STILL hadn't paid her back and at three percent compounded over forty –some-odd years I owe her fifty-seven thousand, seven hundred something dollars. I thought it was funny.

HELEN: I was 15 – the first musical I ever saw was OKLAHOMA. Joan McCracken was in it – in the chorus. Her face looked THIS BIG.

*(Refers to imaginary cat in her lap)*

Yes you silly cat – you didn't expect to get this old did you – get off. Years later, I did Ado Annie in a City Center production of OKLAHOMA and some girl named...I can't remember – but she was doing the Girl Who Fell Down – and I said "that's what McCracken did?" And they said "oh yeah, that's what she did." And I said "that's impossible! McCracken was one of the stars of the show!" She had a face that went half-way across the stage. Dynamite.

Oh, there goes my bitty kitty.

VALDA: I was 16 – I'd had some quite lousy dance training (all of it very interrupted by the war). So, I took myself to London.

*(Refers to imaginary cooking)*

Is this grill even on! This tuna is raw. I'm shutting the lid.

The year before, I was still at school, and I saw Zizi Jeanmaire do an excerpt from *La Fille Mal Gardée* – which – who does an excerpt – but she did. I went. I thought she was divine. I waited afterward to get an autograph, it was very cold, and she said in French "oh, is it snowing?" And I said "oui." I felt very glamorous. The NEXT year I went to London – to audition for the school run by Marie Rambert. I thought I stood a chance with her because Rambert was known for taking oddballs. First, Erica Bowen, the secretary, had me do two plies and an arabesque – in my street clothes – an odd hat with a tassel and a dreadful beige dress. I held on to the bar – not the ballet bar – the bar where people drank – and did my plies. I was accepted. Then I was taken to see Rambert. She was shrieking unmercifully at some girl "filthy, filthy dancer – my God your filthy, empty sarcophagus feet, I cannot stand to look." She whipped round to me and hissed "she will make a marvelous Giselle." I thought, I can't wait to start.

How 'bout **you** set the table for supper?

LOLA: I was also 16 – in a school production of OUR TOWN. I played the part of the Lady in the Audience. So, the day of the show – they hand me my costume – a skirt. I don't want to wear it. I **never** wear a skirt, not to school or anywhere. I **always** wear jeans. So, they give me this skirt and I get very upset – I cry. I'm enraged. All I have to do as the character is sit in the audience – why do I have to wear that skirt! It's very interesting why it upset me. I didn't know who I was, yet, *you know...* **but** I knew I didn't want that skirt. I ran home and when I got there my parents were going out the door to come to the show. I told them, I walked out. We had a huge fight. My mother yelled at me. She said to me, **you don't walk out, you never walk out on a show – not even if you're the curtain puller.**

AIN: Scene 7:

HELEN: (*Stands*) It's 1944.

VALDA: (*Stands*) I'm ten.

LOLA: (*Stands*) So am I.

HELEN: I'm not.

(*Moves DS right to column as if doing Ballet Barre*)

I'm studying at the American School of Ballet. I'm in class and...

LOLA: (*As teacher*) aaaaand plie, one, two, three...(Continues under)

HELEN: A friend of mine, Betty Durance – looks at me and says...

VALDA: (*As Betty doing barre DS left*) I'm gonna audition for a show.

HELEN: (*whispers*) Oh I'm not ready for that!

LOLA: (*As teacher*) Releve, one, two, three...(Continues under)

VALDA: (*As Betty*) Oh come on, let's go.

HELEN: (*To audience*) I had a terrific little body. Great legs and this little black leotard that my mother made. So Betty and I auditioned for Anton Dolin...

VALDA: **Sidebar.** Eight years later, I auditioned for Anton Dolin.

HELEN: **Sidebar – subheading A:** Anton Dolin's real name is...

V&H: Patrick Healy Kaye.

HELEN: Anyway, Dolin looks at me...

AIN: (*As Dolin*) Gallagher!

HELEN: Yes.

AIN: (*As Dolin*) With a name like that you better be able to dance.

HELEN: Cross my heart – that's what he said. SO, he hired me. So I went back to the ballet school and said...

(*Plopping down in her seat, to Lola*)

Excuse me, I'm gonna be gone for ten weeks.

LOLA: (*As teacher*) Where – for ten weeks!

HELEN: I've been hired for a show. SEVEN LIVELY ARTS.

AIN: **Sidebar.** SEVEN LIVELY ARTS starred Bea Lillie, Alicia Markova, Benny Goodman, Dolores Gray, Bert Lahr...

LOLA: (*Cuts in – as teacher*) Helen Gallagher – you can't work. You're an intermediate student. We do not allow intermediate students...

HELEN: (*Cuts in*) I don't know why everybody else is here but I'm here so I can work – so I'm gonna work – so I'll be back – but I'm going!

(*To audience*) Now, one part of the show was Dolin's ballet. The other, was a jitterbug by Jack Downahue. I was not good in the ballet – *intermediate*. BUT the ballet dancers couldn't jitterbug. But I could. Hell, I was from the Bronx.

AIN: **Sidebar.** In those days Equity had a rule – if a show wanted ten girls – they could hire 13. At the end of the third day – they'd fire the three they didn't like.

HELEN: So it's the third day. They're about to fire the third girl – her name is – I can't remember – but she was crying...

VALDA: (*As girl crying*) Please, please. What am I going to do. I gave up my job, I gave up everything, please! (*Continues under*)

HELEN: She worked hard on the boss's heart, so he said....

LOLA: (*As boss*) Well then we'll have to fire Gallagher.

(*Girl stops crying, sighs with relief, wicked smile*)

HELEN: But Downahue said...

AIN: (*As Downahue*) Fire anybody BUT Gallagher – she's the only one who can jitterbug.

HELEN: So they fired some other girl.

LOLA: (*As other girl*) Oh shit!

HELEN: She was out – but I was in. I – was in show-biz.

AIN: Scene 8: Going to the Opera and Coming Out.

LOLA: I was STILL 16. I was seeing THE GREAT CARUSO starring Mario Lanza. This is 1951.

VALDA: 1951 – I was in London – with Rambert.

HELEN: 1951 – I was just back from London – having done TOUCH AND GO.

LOLA: We'll get to that.

(*Lola and Ain pull themselves down center in rolling chairs*)

1951 – I was a huge Mario Lanza fan. The movie had a whole montage of Mario as Caruso singing all over the world. About 20 different arias. But this one was from LA BOHEME Che Jelida Manina. It was only half the aria but – I fell in love with it. So I bought my first LP album. Long Playing. The complete LA BOHEME. It cost 17 bucks and 85 cents – big money in those days. Who knows where I got it.

ALL: You stole it from your father.

LOLA: Oh yeah. So I bought the album. I thought it was the most extraordinary thing. It WAS the most extraordinary thing. I went to see it at City Center and my love for opera was sealed. Then, well not then, but later, I met Robert Moss.

AIN: **Sidebar.** Robert Moss, eventual founder of Playwrights Horizons and the Hangar Theater – where – at 20 – I do my first season of Summer Sto...

LOLA: (*Cuts in*) Bob was supering at the Met – in AIDA – playing a Nubian – yeesh! I went to see it and afterward we went out. We went to “THE VIL-LAGE.” It was my first time – I was from Queens. We went to the Café Rienze and drank “cappuccino” – also my first time. It was the fifties, Beatniks, cappuccino – it was so gorgeous. All these people were gay and I had never – I was not – OUT. But over cappuccino we talked about sexuality, about gay-ness, and I sort of – came out – at the table. And when I left – my god, the street – it was choc a bloc with lesbians. It was so emotional for me. When I got to the subway to go back to my parents and Queens, I stopped. You know I just...I threw up.

HELEN: (*As toaster oven*) Ding.

AIN: The toaster oven goes ding. Lola leaves and returns with a pile of organic Feta cheese pockets – that are exploded. Burnt shells smeared with blackened cheese.



LOLA: Want some? DER ROSENKAVALIER, another opera, was a big part of my growing up and finding art and coming out. In that opera a woman plays a young man and falls in love with and KISSES a girl – two girls! She had this older dame, who was – gorgeous – and then she found another – with music! Gorgeous! But where did I put that album?

*(Slide of album cover, Lola sees it)*

Good, see the blonde, that's the great Diva Elisabeth Schwarzkopf (what a voice!) See her looking up with love at the woman playing a man.

Then the girl has to disguise herself as a girl – double drag – Double Gorgeous! Art like that is so important to homosexual people. *(Aside)* And that's the queerest line I ever had to say. You don't have to READ in anything – it was spelled out for you. Seeing it performed was like swimming in some bath of your deepest fantasies.

I mean one's inner fantasies as a lesbian of being a boy or, at least, dressing as a boy or whatever the hell the Escher-type sentence is! And the delicious twist, the woman kisses the girl who's playing a boy who is really a girl – disguised as a girl – and it's delirious. It's psychological delirium for somebody who is 17 and who is a Lesbian and who is living in the fifties.

AIN: Scene 8A.

LOLA: You know, Charles told of going to see Renata Tebaldi sing TOSCA.

*(Screaming soprano from Tosca burst in and cuts out)*

And when it came time for her to throw herself off the parapet – she ducked behind a flat and screamed.

*(Scream cuts in again and music continues playing, Lola makes her way over to DR column)*

But her dress was still sticking out on stage so you saw her hand reach out and yank it back in.

*(Music volume drops under, Lola makes her way to edge of stage)*

That's the paradox Charles loved – that we all loved – magic on the scale of grand opera – cut dead by pulling your gown in after you –but – to us – the act of killing the magic was magic. Except, in the Ridiculous, we went *further* and kept pulling our gown right on up until we showed our ass. And then, we made THAT into.... magic.

*(Music swells to deafening volume, aria finishes, we hear the opera audience applaud madly, Lola soaks it in...Ain cuts it off, Lola skulks to upstage chair as Helen joins Ain in the DS chairs)*

AIN: Scenes 9 thru 18 – in which Helen meets Jerome Robbins, Agnes DeMille, and dances a tango – Valda looks at rocks, talks about Rambert, and performs in Italy – Lola acts on a bar, meets Lotte Lenya, and sings at the Public.

And **everybody** goes to audition.

Scene 9.

VALDA: *(As doorbell)* Ding dong.

HELEN: *(Talking a mile-a-minute)* Hello-don't-worry-the-cat's-hiding-are you ready? So, then I met the man who had the greatest influence on

me – Jerome Robbins. Mean. Mean and evil – but I loved him. One time Jerry was working on LA RONDE for the City Ballet and he calls in some of his dancers – he'd use us to create steps – for no money – we certainly weren't in the ballet – you know some of those Actor's Equity rules – like getting paid for rehearsals – Jerry. (*Takes a breath then...*)

I'd offer you something to eat...

AIN: Oh we....

HELEN: (*Cuts in a mile-a-minute*) But I don't eat lunch – and we're here to work. Oh, I hate to talk about myself. Next – Agnes DeMille. I auditioned for BRIGADOON. DeMille was the choreographer – I was smart – I dressed *like* I was a DeMille dancer and she picked me. BUT I was the farthest thing from a DeMille dancer you can imagine. Almost right away – she could not stand me – SHE COULD NOT STAND ME!

I remember one time, we were on a break, sitting in the wings and Forrest Bonchire says to me, come on let's show the kids the number we understudied in BILLION DOLLAR BABY. I said, no DeMille will kill us (DeMille was out front). But Forrest prevailed and we started doing the number – and right out from the audience came this voice (I'll never forget it) – “that's right Gallagher you keep it up – you'll get there.” So I leaned out the wing and said – *I intend to*.

(*Helen heads to upstage chair as Valda slowly comes DS*)

AIN: Scene 10. Montauk.

(*Long silence*)

VALDA: ...at least the rain makes all the rocks look good. (*Sits*) ...you shouldn't worry you don't know what you're doing – with the script...it's more important to just be *DOING*...(Pause)

AIN: Scene 11?

VALDA: (*Back to business*) All right. Marie Rambert – I adored her and she liked me a lot but I knew I would not get in her company. I was taller than the other girls. I didn't have much technique – everyone, important people, said, we've got to find the right place for you – but where was it? And Rambert didn't really train dancers other than to say “if you believe you can do it – you WILL do it.” And staring her in the face – you DID do it – you were inspired – but you didn't know *how*. Like you and your script. Rambert, I suppose, was like me – she hadn't much formal training in any one thing but she had taste and she had appetite.

AIN: Taste and appetite.

VALDA: BUT, I was not going to get into the company. I started going to auditions. Many auditions. Many, many, auditions...

AIN: Scene 12.

LOLA: (*Replaces Valda in DS chair*) The whole 13 years I was with Charles Ludlam and the Ridiculous I never auditioned – we were a company. And before that...

AIN: You worked for Encyclopedia Britannica.

LOLA: My job was going after delinquent accounts.

AIN: Really?

LOLA: Yeah, how I could have been good at that I don't know.

AIN: Well, maybe you weren't.

LOLA: (*Chuckles*) Well maybe I wasn't. But I was! Then one day, my friend Harvey Tavel told me some people were rehearsing and they needed a script girl. What a script girl was – I didn't know, but I went.

AIN: OK – *why*?

LOLA: I guess...I wanted something.

AIN: Right. And – you *still* want it?

LOLA: (*Pause*) Yeah. Everyday.

AIN: Everyday. Yes. So, you were the script girl?

LOLA: This was 1966. The show was THE LIFE OF LADY GODIVA by Ronald Tavel – where I met Charles. I was a good script girl but then I got promoted – to playing a nun – who sings.

I sing (*Sings*) “guadalahoouoooooooo.”

Later that year, I'm Chocha Caliente. “Hot Cunt,” I told you. NOW, it's 1969. We premiered BLUEBEARD (you saw this one but not THIS one) this one was at La MaMa. Mel Gussow came and raved about us in the *New York Times*. We wanted to extend – But La MaMa wanted rights in perpetuity throughout the cosmos on everybody's natural life – so we moved to this gay bar right near the highway – Christopher's end – we performed the show on top of the bar – and the opening where the bartender would be was, I think, covered over by planks to make a stage. It was very, very small – rather like the size of the stage we're on now. Forty-five years later and I'm still singing in a bar! Anyway, we couldn't use the chaise we normally used for the sex scene so we had two kitchen chairs wynched together plus a slipcover – I could say, it increased the comic value.

The world beat a path to our door. Lotte Lenya – when she was in Cabaret – she came – and we were seated all in line in this narrow passageway with our costumes above on us on strings – very colorful. I'm told Lenya felt a kinship with us because it was like the old days in Berlin. That show put us on the map – or above ground – since they called art like ours – underground. For me it was my moment to step out – to believe *I might have something special*.

AIN: Scene 13.

VALDA: (*As doorbell*) Ding dong.

HELEN: (*Walks down center*) I left BRIGADOON to do HIGH BUTTON SHOES.

My partner was a fellow named Paul Godkin – a phenomenal dancer and without a doubt – the kook of the world. He played Uncle Willie and I was the maid and the director, George Abbott, decided we would have this tango. But Jerry Robbins would never get around to staging it. Never! So finally Abbot says...

LOLA: (*As Abbot*) Cut the tango.

HELEN: And I thought: That's my only number – there goes my job. So Abbot says...

LOLA: (*As Abbot*) Oh Gallagher, the scene will still be there, you'll do a couple of steps, Nan will interrupt and that's it. You won't lose your job.

HELEN: So, it's opening night out of town, we do the couple of steps, Nan interrupts, we stop, and the WHOLE audience goes...

ALL: Awwwwwwwww

HELEN: And, sure enough, the next day, Abbot says...

LOLA: (*As Abbot*) The number goes back in...

HELEN: ...*because* Nan needs time for her costume change – the serendipities of show-biz.

AIN: The serendipities of show-biz.

HELEN: But Jerry hated that number. It **was** a *little* dance – BUT it was a **funny** *little* dance – he staged it in 20 minutes, and, of course, it stopped the show! But he still hated it – Jerry hated things that came easy to him.

AIN: "Hated things that came easy to him."

HELEN: But I loved it – got me my first rave review.

AIN: Scene 14.

(*Valda crosses down center*)

VALDA: Many auditions. Many, many auditions. (*Long pause*) Many auditions.

AIN: Scene 15.

(*Lola joins women down center*)

LOLA: OK I lied. I did one audition while I was with Charles – at the Public Theater. They were thinking of having a cabaret type thing – you know, exactly like what they got right now! I went in with the song, "Everything's Coming Up Roses." I said, hello, and – wham! I got a terrible flop sweat. I opened my mouth to sing and I got the words wrong. The people were nice and everything like that and said, start over, but I did it wrong again. It should be, (*Sings*)

THINGS LOOK SWELL

THINGS LOOK GREAT

GONNA HAVE THE WHOLE WORLD ON A PLATE.

I sang (*Sings*)

THINGS LOOK GREAT

THINGS LOOK SWELL

GONNA HAVE THE WHOLE WORLD ON A...(*Her voice fades*)

AIN: Scene 16.

VALDA: Many.... many..... many..... auditions.

AIN: Scene 17.

HELEN: (*Sings*) "*Somebody loves me...*" That was my audition song.

AIN: Scene 18.

*(Valda crosses to edge of stage as others take their seats upstage)*

VALDA: Another audition. The girls are all in necklines that plunge to their navel and their bottoms are NOT covered and they have huge tits. I am deeply uncomfortable. Then a man with a gold tooth named Monsieur Charlie says...

AIN: *(As Monsieur Charlie)* You're hired.

VALDA: The show was, BUONNA NOTE BETINA, an Italian review. Before I left for Italy David Vaughan said...

HELEN: *(As David)* You know, there are people in America who don't mind if your leg doesn't go up to your ear.

VALDA: But David, what do they want **instead**?! Anyway, when I got to Victoria Station the first thing I saw was a pair of girls called Marian and Carol. Marian had JET-black hair that fell very lusciously over her face and amazing clothes like I had never seen. Carol was ASCHE blond and swathed in fur exactly the same color as her hair. And they NEVER had to pick up their luggage...

Next morning, I saw Marian and Carol without makeup – they had no eyebrows! Their whole face was plucked! I didn't know girls who did that, not where I came from. Well, in the show, there was this blues number that scared me to death. As a finale, we had to go right down to the edge of the stage and act "sexy" for eight bars – each – a solo! I had no idea how to be sexy. Well, I had on this long bit of fake hair that I got from my auntie Vera and I did this –

*(Twirls her finger through her imaginary long hair, bats her lashes, and sinks in and out of one hip in silence...for a long time...then, whispers)*

Oh there's Fellini and Giulietta Massina.

*(Drops the reenactment)*

Well, my dears, I was the success of the evening. Men rushed to the foot of the stage grabbing my ankles calling out...

ALL: "Bambola!"

VALDA: Which means "little doll." "Little **doll**" – yes. Little girl from England – a bit less. *(To Ain)* This is silly, you'd better go to Scene 19.

*(Ain joins Valda down center)*

AIN: Scene 19 – in a classic play this would be the time for a crisis – a reversal – a cliff hanger – WITH music, then, intermission. BUT this is real life. So we give you OUR Scene 19 – in which three heroines move unknowingly toward what we'll call – **change**.

*(Helen joins down center)*

HELEN: The next show I did was TOUCH AND GO by Walter Kerr. I was an H.A.P. – half-assed principle. We closed on Broadway late '49. But then some English producers got interested. So in 1950, with my part greatly improved, I headed for London.

VALDA: BUONNA NOTE BETTINA closed in 1957. I headed back to London. I'd saved my money.

*(Lola joins down center)*

LOLA: The Ridiculous got its first money from the National Endowment for the Arts – in 1972 – after four years – \$10,000.

HELEN: After nine months, Julie Styne brought me home from London to do MAKE A WISH – but I didn't have the lead.

LOLA: The next year, Charles announced our new show – CORN – I had the lead.

AIN: Change.

HELEN: The next year, Julie Styne put me in PAL JOEY – I win a Tony – but I still don't have the lead.

VALDA: In less than a year, I decided to follow David Vaughan's lead. I booked passage for America.

AIN: Change.

HELEN: Then, in 1953, Julie Styne commissioned a show from Ben Hecht – for me! HAZEL FLAGG – I was the lead. The lead? Hell, I was the star.

AIN: Change.

LOLA: So, I got on the stage to be a star.

HELEN: So, I got on the stage to be a star

VALDA: So, I got on the Queen Elizabeth to be a dancer.

AIN: Scene 20 – Intermission – don't get up – just imagine it.

*(Women cross upstage to drink water, stretch and move chairs as Ain crosses to edge of stage)*

You're peeing, you're talking, you're smoking. Meanwhile, in our three stories – time is passing. Meanwhile, in our creative process – time is also passing. It's the middle of September – Valda, Helen, and I head to Florida for five days of intensive interviews – and that CHANGE – changes the whole tenor of this script. Meanwhile, Lola has left for La Jolla to do a play – more change. Meanwhile, Wally and I have made an offer on an apartment and found ourselves in a full-scale bidding war – more change. This imaginary intermission is the pause between Act One – the back-story of youth – and Act Two – living your life – there's a reason they always call this part of life – ACT Two – scene 1, The first day in Florida.

*(Ain sits on the bottom step of the audience risers – all three women are now seated in a line facing the audience)*

HELEN: HAZEL FLAGG – I was the star. First of all, the producer, Julie Styne – TOO creative to be a producer. Julie had a million ideas but he didn't always know the good from the bad. Like this: George Abbot would listen to *anybody* (even a chorus girl) *if* she had a good idea. But Julie Styne listened to *everybody*. That show was like crossing the English Channel on a raft. Don't get me wrong – Julie did a lot for me. He moved my career along big time. But on this show...well, I've been trying to figure this one out for years. I was still very young. I had just kind of sailed through my career up to this point – everything had worked out – I thought this would work out too. BUT things went wrong. They cast John Howard, as my leading man.

Too old – and we had no chemistry. We went into the Mark Hellinger Theater. The place was mammoth – the set was mammoth. It was an intimate little show. I was drowning. I needed help. I needed *someone* – not my agent – because he had another client – Julie Styne. Not the director – he was trying to stay afloat himself. I didn't get help from anybody. People think I'm tough – but in those days I had trouble speaking up for myself. If you're gonna be a star you got to be able to fight – or have someone fight for you. Like Larry Gelbardt said, "If Hitler is alive – I hope he's out of town with a musical." You know, I loved Julie Styne, I did – but he disappeared when I needed him. He disappeared, I guess, like my father. Bottom line, the show wasn't a hit. It ran for months but it took the shine off my career. When you come out of something like that people in this business, as in other businesses, act like you have a disease – and it just might be contagious. (*To Lola*) The other side of the coin.

LOLA: CORN was a huge success. I got my first Obie. I played a country-western star with her own group – Lola Lola and the Lucky Stars. We were such a hit we did our own shows at the Thirteenth Street Theater – as a band – just songs. We got all kinds of reviews – some teen music rag called me the "Bette Davis of Rock and Roll." There was talk of us going on Johnny Carson – but I was still very young. OK, not so young. I was in a hit and getting a taste of stardom and I was suddenly faced with things I didn't understand. A sleazy producer pressured me to leave Charles and stay in town while the Ridiculous went on another European tour. Was this ABOUT me or were they USING me? I got so paranoid – even of the people I was working with. I didn't have any savvy – I didn't know who to trust – I didn't know if I could trust myself. I didn't believe in myself – by myself. I stayed with Charles. I was furious – but I was overjoyed. How 'bout you Valda?

VALDA: David Vaughan met me at the Dock and I plunged into American modern dance classes. Everyone talked about pain and ecstasy. I was deeply uncomfortable. David introduced me to Jimmy Waring – he talked about Freud and Zen – he intrigued me. Jimmy introduced me to everything from the Museum of Modern Art to Coney Island. He asked me to work with him – we rehearsed twice a week – all year – for **one** performance. Jimmy took me to watch Merce Cunningham teach. A very tall man walked in (Merce.) **Merce talked about alignment**- about rhythm! After class, I told Merce, I'm coming to you – and he said, good – and don't worry about the money.

I married David Gordon in 1960 and then I went off with Merce on a three-week tour starting in Illinois – (about the only work for that year) – we traveled in a Volkswagen bus that John Cage had won on an Italian version of the game show – the \$64,000 question – his category, mushrooms.

One night before I went on in a piece called CRISIS, Merce turned to me and said, "my dear, this is an entrance worthy of Edith Evans – take it." With Merce, I really danced. His phrasing was so exhilarating that it drove

me to better dancing than I believed possible. Here was somebody, *finally*, who knew what to do with me – so that I, finally, knew what to do with myself. (*To Ain*) Then I had you, then I was in the company, then ten years began to pass. One year...Merce makes HOW TO PASS, KICK, FALL, AND RUN. Two years, he makes PLACE...

V & L: Two years...

LOLA: Charles writes CAMILLE, three years, he writes STAGE BLOOD...

L & H: Three years...

HELEN: A solo act in Vegas, in Chicago, The Plaza in New York. Four years. I quit a starring role in PAJAMA GAME to do a road tour of BUS STOP opposite Rip Torn. But it's a scam. The producer wants the studio releasing the movie to buy him out. That too is show-biz.

ALL: Four years.

LOLA: Charles writes DER RING GOT FARBLONJET – a three and a half hour adaptation of Wagner's entire ring cycle – adapted for a three-piece band. I am Brunhilde. My love affair with opera comes full circle. I sing. I'm a diva – in a play. Another Obie.

VALDA: Four years, Merce makes WALKAROUND TIME – my first solo – five years, on tour with Merce, in a hotel room, I learn a solo from cut-up-and-glued photos sent by mail. I do it stark naked in a mixed bill called Dancing Ladies.

AIN: Scene 2: Florida – Day II.

HELEN: THEN I did the most famous flop in the history of musical theater. Walter Kerr said – and I paraphrase – it's not the worst show I ever saw but I've only been seeing musicals since 1919. I begged my agent not to let me take it. I begged the producers to close it out of town. This was my return to Broadway after HAZEL FLAGG. PORTOFINO...I don't have any pictures. I couldn't tell you what the show was about. I think I was a racecar driver. I think Georges Guitary was an Italian duke and there was an emissary from the Devil and a witch. Smells like a hit – right? All through the first act, I would look at this Chinese statue – Quan Yin – and murmur a silent prayer. So finally, Georges Guitary – with his thick accent (you couldn't understand a word HE said – lucky son of a bitch) finally Guitary said "vat iz diz zat you zay?" I had to say it out loud.

(*She crosses to edge of stage*)

"Oh Quan Yin, Goddess of mercy, ye who conceived without sin – allow me to sin without conceiving."

Hush...curtain. End of Act I. And there was an Act II.

We opened on a Friday. We did a Saturday matinee – Saturday night – we closed – the longest run *for my life*.

(*Returns to her chair as women continue*)

VALDA: Six years, Paris, Rome, Milan, Merce makes SIGNALS, seven years – I improv with the Grand Union at La MaMa – eight years, a film by Yvonne Rainer called LIVES OF PERFORMERS, eight years, Yugoslavia – I drink slivovitz, Merce makes LANDROVER...



LOLA: Eight years, 1978, The Ridiculous goes on a magical tour of California. (To Valda) Jack Daniels. (To audience) I begin to do some projects on the side. A play by Stephen Holt called COLD. We perform it in the director, Martin Warman's, apartment – in his kitchen – at the end, I stick my head in the oven.

L & V: Nine years.

VALDA: It's the late sixties, early seventies.

(She crosses to edge of stage)

Merce has a deceptively simple-looking solo in SECONDHAND. For the first time, Merce starts having some trouble with it. Looking at him dance, it suddenly occurs to me that Merce is almost 15 years older than I am.

HELEN: Nine years. Then, ten years.

VALDA: (Returning to her seat) June, 1974. (Sits)

A woman drove me out to see her house as a possible summer rental. It was a slightly foggy, very humid day. I bought some strawberries – nice ones. On the return the woman drove and I tried to keep the strawberries from toppling. We came to a level crossing. The sound was very muffled. The trees were quite leafy – dense, I mean. There was no light, there was no sign, there was no nothing – but – it was a train crossing. She drove up on to the tracks – just as far as she needed – to see if something was coming. Something – was – coming. About as far away as the end of this room was a full speed locomotive. The woman driving thought we were in reverse but we were in park and we couldn't move.

LOLA: Leave? I didn't want to leave the Ridiculous so much as I didn't want to do the next play – that's what I told myself. I remember telling Charles on the phone – I said, as great an artist as you are I have the need to go and find out what kind of artist I am. Before this – before the phone call, there was a second California tour to San Francisco to a theatre where we could run in rep with our three big plays and the producer was sure we would be there for a year. But, evidently, it was so HARD for the audience – our core gay audience – to make it over to where we were from the Castro – or wherever the hell they lived. And we didn't look like the right kind of show – although we were – very gay – we didn't find our audience. We moved too fast, we talked too fast – we frightened *the Hell out of them!*

VALDA: *The train hit us.* It locked with the car and dragged it and us until we slammed into a signal post that tore us from the train. I'm told that when we were found the woman driving was circling the car in a state of shock and I had gone, face-first, through the windshield.

HELEN: Oh my God, Valda.

AIN: Helen?

HELEN: What? Oh, the show must go on.

Whatever weakened state my career was in – PORTOFINO gave it the knock out punch. I started doing a lot of out of town work. Denver,

Muni Opera, West Coast tours, I did a movie, an awful lot of television...I always worked – not on Broadway but I ALWAYS worked. I started doing commercials. The queen of Madison Avenue. Tide, Scot, Dash, lots of them. That got me though the first half of the sixties. But it got harder. I remember my last audition. The guy says, we're doing a commercial with a lead and two chorus girls. He said, "I see you as the second chorus girl." I said...OK. He said, oh, well, if you'd like to read the first chorus girl? I said, you know what, I have no aspirations when it comes to the chorus. I read and I walked.

LOLA: At our San Francisco premiere the audience was silent – not a sound. So, we failed, we had to pack up and go home. I guess by then it had turned into 1980. The seventies were over. It was March – and I was emotionally exhausted – and I was the oldest member of the company and I began to be very worried about my future. I thought I would ask Charles for a leave of absence – but in my heart of hearts I knew. *So, I called Charles.*

VALDA: *I wanted to leave Merce's company* before the car accident – but I hadn't told anybody. The people I'd danced with weren't there anymore. I hadn't been put in the last piece. Maybe I thought I'd shot my wad. My...era, was over. I came home from the hospital and, as soon as I was at all well enough, I WALKED to Merce's studio – alone. It exhausted me. Sweetly, Merce talked about little things he could see out the window until I got the strength to tell him – I can't stay with the company. I don't want to go anywhere else *but I can't be here.*

HELEN: I lied, I did one last audition for a commercial. I came in, they gave me the script and I did the reading. Then, this kid says to me – uh huh, yeah, you know, the way you read that came across very "*hard.*" Could you do it again and make it *softer*? Something snapped – I said, you people are unbelievable! You think you're gonna get me do it SOFT after you look in my face and tell me how "*HARD*" I am! When are you people gonna learn how to talk to actors! *That's when I stopped.*

LOLA: *I left the Ridiculous* and had a couple of terrific years – stretching myself – working with Foreman, Akalaitis, regional theatre. Then suddenly in 84–85 the bottom dropped out. I couldn't get any kind of work. I felt lost. I thought about learning to work a computer or proofreading. I considered giving up – I did. I took odd jobs and here is the oddest, George Osterman got it for me, a Cubic Zirconium factory. We shared a floor with a place where Mentally Retarded people packed boxes of pencils. You had to walk through them, to get to us, a bunch of queens playing with fake diamonds. Oh, it's funny – now. But I was...scared. Who the fuck was I? **Why was I suddenly invisible!?**

*(Slide: "Suddenly Invisible")*

*(All three women turn up stage. Silence. They sing)*

ALL: THERES NO BUSINESS LIKE SHOW BUSINESS  
LIKE NO BUSINESS I KNOW

*(Women turn back to audience)*

EVERYTHING ABOUT IT IS APPEALING

EVERYTHING THE TRAFFIC WILL ALLOW...

VALDA: Scene 3: Dinner that night in Florida.

*(Swan Lake Act 3 cuts in at full volume, Ain steps on stage, he turns to audience, music continues under speech)*

AIN: They're playing a montage of all the most heightened, most tumultuous moments of all the ballets – we'll call them Tchaikovsky Killer Moments. And the three of us are talking about great ballerina's and their (as it were) swan songs – and how we've thrilled to watch their gladiator-like battle against time – their fight to keep dancing out the sacrifices of a life spent **forcing** passion into technique for a body that would now desert them. And soon, we're talking about everybody who ever walked across the stage and we even, in all our drunken seriousness, get to the smell of the greasepaint and the roar of the crowd. We have goose bumps – we have tears brimming – we have salad with bacon bits and we even froth out words about loving bacon – loving smoked anything – we're talking about our crazy blood lust infatuation as it applies to everything! Everything as theatre because the stage is the unquenchable, insatiable PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY-like beast. Always starving for new bits of life and blood and thoughts – always wanting the hearts of a new generation to entertain the subscription audience of an old generation. Yes, over second-class red wine and Killer Tchaikovsky Moments, the three of us can hold nothing back from the altar because The Stage is our Lolita and we are its Humbert Humbert. And soon, we're talking about talking about it. We're postmodernizing our passion by living IN it and commenting ON it at the same time. Oh, if they could only see us at this dinner! Oh, if we could only get this feeling on stage – wouldn't that be it – wouldn't that be the whole show!

Our life-long one-night-stand with the fantastical drudgery of a life lived across the boards summed up in one Florida dinner. And now, dessert is served – and, because we're all watching our figures because I have just right now, raised the question of costumes for this show – dessert cools our ardor – and anyway, the wine is finished and I have to get up at seven to write and the music stops.

*(Music stops)*

Scene 4: Florida Day three. *(To Valda)* Are you ready?

VALDA: Yes.

*(She crosses down center)*

So, I've been hit by a train, I'm out of work, I'm bereft and I'm 40. Then, David, my husband, suggested we start working together. Was David already thinking about getting back to making dances – he sort of stopped for a time – or did he do it to help me...or both? David began making a piece called CHAIR where I had to fall out of a chair sideways – on my

right side – over and over. I got unbelievably bruised – but like the good girl trouser I always was – I did it. Then it started to really hurt and the more it hurt the more I thought, I'll never be able to do this – THAT was devastating. I wept in rehearsal. David and I fought and we hugged, which is, actually, exactly how it still works. David piled coats on the floor so I could fall on something soft. We used this fur coat I had, my Dingo Yetti, I loved that coat. And each day we took one more coat away until I could fall on the bare hard floor. Metaphoric, isn't it? Anyway, I did it. Then David asked me to learn it all on the LEFT side! I did that too. We performed CHAIR everywhere, we went on tour, then we moved to a loft with a dance studio – so we could rehearse at home – then we started giving duet concerts in our studio then David incorporated the Pick Up Company. Actually, my forties were wonderful, they lasted till I was 55.

*(She goes back to her chair as Helen crosses down center)*

HELEN: I hadn't been on Broadway in eight years – since PORTOFINO – when I see that Gwen Verdon's doing a new show – SWEET CHARITY. I call my agent, I want to audition for Gwen's stand-by. Turns out the producers also want to see me for the part of "Nicki." "That's a chorus part," I told my agent, "tell them no." So, the stand-by audition goes great – soon as I finish, I open my big mouth and say "you want me to read for Nicki?" She had one great speech, so I do it and get the whole place laughing. But, I tell my agent, "I don't want to play that part!"

"What did you read it for?" *I had an audience.*

Well they offered me the standby and the role of "Nicki." BUT Bob Fosse, wanted to know what kind of shape I'm in. Never mind that, 20 years before – when Bob was a standby for PAL JOEY, I taught him all of what I danced with Harold Lang – on my own time – when I was working and **BOB** needed a job.

Anyway, the producers say to Bob – if Helen says she's in shape – she's in shape but I say to Bob, look, I'm thrilled to be Gwen's standby but the part of Nicki...I can't come back to Broadway as a chorus girl – but I love to rehearse, so, here's the deal – I'll play "Nicki" **but** if the part gets cut down to nothing – could you let me just step aside and be the standby? He agreed. But – the part only got better. I was back.

*(She goes back to her chair as Lola crosses down center)*

LOLA: I did an audition for Joe Papp – for Mabou Mines' production of THE TEMPEST at the Delacourte – starring Raul Julia. Lee Breuer was directing and he coached me for the audition – 'cause he didn't want me to frighten Mr Papp – so he taught me what he called "office acting." *Scale*. Lee wanted me to play the part of Trinculo – usually a man's part – but Lee saw a lot of gay humor in the lines so he wanted **me** to play **Trinculo** as **Mae West**. Well, I got the job – I also got my Actor's Equity card – it was a big deal for me. And I felt good because Charles and the Ridiculous had prepared me well for Shakespeare – for everything really. After that, I started doing

small roles in movies, some soap opera stuff, AND theatre. Experimental and...regular...theatre – I bounce back and forth. But my first job after the terrible Cubic Zirconium time was ELECTRA at CSC. Opening night, I gave the whole cast – fake diamonds.

*(She joins the other women in the row of seats)*

AIN: Scene 5: Lola's still in La Jolla and it's the last day in Florida.

*(Valda and Helen launch into uncontrollable fit of laughter)*

VALDA: Osteoporosis.

HELEN: Ha! The shock of my life.

AIN: Scene 6.

LOLA: I'm finally home from La Jolla. I'm sitting in my armchair in my apartment. I'm 60...**never mind!** I'm listening to Schwarzkopf sing DER ROSENKAVALIER. – like I've been doing for almost 45 years – this music is a dear old friend.

*(Aria from Der Rosenkavalier fades in)*

She sings of the passage of time. She looks in the mirror.

*(Lola stands and escorts Valda downstage, Valda speaks the lyrics over the music)*

VALDA: "HOW CAN IT HAPPEN?

HOW DOES THE DEAR LORD DO IT?

WHILE I ALWAYS REMAIN THE SAME – INSIDE"

*(Lola escorts Helen downstage to join Valda)*

HELEN: "AND IF HE HAS TO DO IT LIKE THIS,

WHY HE DOES HE LET ME WATCH IT HAPPEN

WITH SUCH CLEAR SENSES?

WHY DOESN'T HE HIDE IT FROM ME?"

LOLA: "IT IS ALL A MYSTERY, SO DEEP A MYSTERY,

AND ONE IS HERE TO ENDURE IT.

AND IN THE 'HOW'

THERE LIES THE DIFFERENCE."

LOLA: Imagine this...

ALL: You're all – our age.

AIN: Act III.

*(The women take their seats as Ain moves to sit behind them)*

These days nobody likes a play with three acts – but in life it's a different story...

LOLA: Now it's New York, 1999. I'm doing GERTRUDE AND ALICE with Linda (my partner in life of many years) and there's this one woman. She comes to the show and – before it starts – she sends an envelope backstage. On it she writes, do you remember me, my name is so and so – can I see you after the show? Inside the envelope is a picture. It's me –**25 years ago** at some party with the Ridiculous around the time of BLUEBEARD. I put it on my dressing table. I'm doing my makeup – I'm also drinking coffee. And – accidentally – I put my coffee cup on the picture – and there's a stain. After the show I go see the woman. Now she asks in person, do I remember her, the

party, she hosted it, 25 years ago? In spite of myself, I'm angry. Does she say anything about what I'm doing right now – **what she just saw me do?!** Anyway, always the soul of graciousness, I say, I'm sorry I don't remember you or the party or anything about it, I'm sorry. And I hand her back the picture IN the envelope. Without opening it, she holds it up with a big smile and says – this is my only copy. I don't know how to tell her about the coffee stain.

But, for **myself**, working on GERTRUDE AND ALICE – well for the first time in my life I had created my own work – Linda and I had collaborated and we had compiled and edited and acted in it AND as Gertrude herself might say, "I guess it was a great success." I had done something NOT expected. It was a new idea about me – a new part I could play.

I was in charge. Finally, after all these years, I can quiet the eternal voice of self doubt. (*To Ain*) Not that it's gone away – it's eternal! And it's there for a reason. (*To audience*) And a couple of years after that, I made my Broadway debut in FORTUNE'S FOOL by Turgenev, he's dead, it was also his Broadway Debut – I'm sure he's very encouraged.

IF THEY COULD

ALL: SEE ME NOW

THAT LITTLE GANG OF MINE

I'M EATING FANCY CHOW

AND DRINKING FANCY WINE.

VALDA: London 1981. Three p.m. I ring the bell. No answer. Ring again, I hear a voice. Leaning out the window is a 93-year-old woman. Very patiently, she explains she is not well enough to come down and let me in and who am I and what do I want? The old woman is Rambert. I've had a lot of trouble getting this appointment. I know she's been sick and I – I want to see her. Eventually, a nurse comes to let me in. Rambert is much smaller than I remember her. We all sit down, Rambert is a bit nervous and asks the nurse to stay.

I remember Rambert, once years before, stopping class and crying out "my God people, sometimes I think I must be mad! I look at what you do and I think it bears NO resemblance to what I think I just showed you! But ONE girl..." She points to me, "ONE girl restores my faith in my sanity. I look at what SHE does and I know I have made myself clear to ONE person and **that is enough.**" Now, Rambert realizes who I am and let's the nurse go. We talk about dancing. She tells me, "I think I have learned a new way to jump." (*Smiles*) The next year, Rambert dies.

Being a performer is very strange work. Sometimes I wish I owned a store – with things – that I could sell...like lamps. Because, even, if one day, nobody seems to want my lamps anymore – they're STILL lamps. It's sometimes very hard to wake up to another day and wonder if anybody will want what I have to offer? Because...

(*She opens her arms to the audience*)

...I'm offering me.

The thing is – is it interesting to be a lamp?

So, now I dance AND I act. I have a Bessie and an Obie. Right now, I'm acting – true, I'm playing myself – or (*Points to Ain*) his idea of me – but I'm acting. And next month I'm dancing, with David – at the Joyce, February 18th to 23 .... well you know the dates.

IF THEY COULD

ALL: SEE ME NOW

THAT LITTLE GANG OF MINE (*Turns to Helen*)

I'M EATING FANCY CHOW

AND DRINKING FANCY WINE

HELEN: Now it's New York 1971 – and I'm winning my second Tony – I said I would tell you this story but – for you to really know what it means to me we gotta back up – way back.

New York 1947. I'm invited to entertain at the Tony's. They don't give awards to musicals. As soon as I finish my number, I cut out of there.

Now it's 1952. I'm featured in PAL JOEY and I've been nominated for a Tony. But I don't want to go. Julie Styne has to drag me – he has to go out and buy me a dress. Musical awards get announced early in the show – to get them out of the way. When they call out my name and I get up on that stage – I'm frightened – I'm trembling. I feel surrounded by people who don't know me. Quick as I can I say, thank you, and leave.

Now it's 1971. I'm nominated for a best female performance in a musical – NO, NO, NANETTE. I go with my husband. It's the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Tony's – the exact 25 years I've been in the business – and the entertainment is full of numbers from shows I remember because I was playing next door, or across the street. AND there are numbers from shows I was in. Nan Fabray does a number from HIGH BUTTON SHOES. I am mesmerized. Suddenly they're announcing the awards for actors in a play – I turn to my husband – did I miss the musicals? My husband says no. This year, they're saving the musicals for last – interesting.

They call my name. I've won. I get up there – I don't know how – to all that applause – all that affirmation – I feel like everybody in the audience wants me to win. I feel included in the community of theatre – really for the first time. I start to cry. I HATE people who cry when they get awards. So, to distract myself – I look up in the balcony. Right there, in the center, in like a halo light, were all the kids from the show – SCREAMING! It pulled me together.

*(Grainy video of the Tony telecast pops up on screen, we see the silent image of Helen making her acceptance speech)*

I say – you know, in this business...many times I've been out of work and thinking – I should do something else – but I never could figure out what.

*(Helen onstage raises her hand if still holding the trophy – as she actually is in the film projected behind her)*

So this is for all of us who have stuck.  
That was 32 years ago – and I’m still stuck.  
IF THEY COULD

ALL: SEE ME NOW

THAT LITTLE GANG OF MINE

AIN: Now it’s September 27th – again – and I’m exiting the subway, I’m running across Eighty-sixth Street, I’m walking in the door. Meg’s already in her wedding dress... We’re both 40. Now it’s October 6th, and Meg marries David – not David Vaughan, not David Gordon – David Rosen. Now it’s December 28th and Wally unlocks the door to our new home – the one we own. Now it’s January 3rd and this show is opening. Now it’s tonight – and here we are. Now it’s our closing night and Valda gets her wish and we all go out to eat or drink or something. And at the bar, I think Charles Ludlam was right about the plot – or life – and the – quote “seeming impossibility of resolution.” Warhol was right – about the can and the painting – aren’t they both each other? Then I look up into these women’s eyes and it’s a drawing by M. C. Escher – hundred’s of Lolas, Valdas, Helens and mes, in all different sizes and ages and decades all crowded around the table laughing and toasting. It’s 252 years of Art and Life out on the town for fries and a martini – except for THIS **one** minute – it’s all soup – very, very good soup. In *AMERICAN PASTORAL*, Philip Roth wrote, “Life is just a short period when you’re alive...”

LOLA: Of course that was only a quarter way through the book.

HELEN: That’s show-biz.

VALDA: Thank you and goodnight.

*(Black out)*

THE END



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