# *Platform*

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# Editorial

There is history only as long as people revolt, resist, act.
Total institutions are attempts to institute the end of history.[1]

The idea about this issue's pivotal theme *Theatres of Resistance* stemmed from a genuine interest in theatre's ideological efficacy; can theatre effectively challenge and/or change social institutions? In contemporary capitalist societies politics have been demystified and as Baudrillard contends, "aesthetisized in the spectacle."[2] Theatre, as a commodified institution itself, has become either a normative medium of capitalist propaganda, or a spectacular simulation of resistance. Have we reached the end of history? If contemporary capitalism is a totalitarian institution, is there any form of resistance left? In this issue we tried to compile articles that addressed the notion of resistance in order to explore the ways in which it can be achieved.

The fact that we received papers from around the globe interrogating issues about forms of resisting theatre (or theatres of resistance) in Argentina, New Zealand, Greece, Nigeria and the States, reverberates and fulfills the scope of our initial intention: to demonstrate the global aspects of a vibrating and challenging art that can prove motivating for political action, and to offer an insight into current debates on nation and identity, sexual politics, totalitarianism (in any form) and resistance. The selected papers shed light on various theatres of resistance against several forms of totalitarian institutions: military dictatorships, patriarchal society, (post-)colonial contexts, capitalism. Are the terms 'theatres of resistance' and 'political theatre' synonymous? Can theatre shake up the complacency of the audience and disrupt their habitual role as spectators/consumers?

In "Moving Targets: An 'Illogical' Theatre of Resistance in (Pre)Occupied Territory," Ryan Reynolds puts forward the question whether theatre of resistance is viable in a consumerist, postmodern society. In order to overcome capitalist logic which is no longer crystallized but constantly moving, insidiously infiltrating social structures, Reynolds proposes a specific strategy of theatre of resistance. His account of *The Last Days of Mankind*, a type of interactive street spectacle, is a fascinating example of this strategy, mainly resisting the stability and primacy of meaning, unveiling the audience's entrapment in the consumers' society.

The interactive and disruptive element is also evident in "Confusing Gender: Strategies for resisting objectification in the work of Split Britches" where resistance is of a sexual nature, involving the performer's body. Emily Underwood makes the case for a type of theatre that resists the objectification of the female body imposed by the spectator's gaze. The insightful analysis of the various strategies employed by Lois Weaver in *What Tammy Needs to Know*, suggests the potential of undermining the tantalising power of the audience's gaze and overcoming the circumvention of the lesbian performer's body.

Interactivity in the realm of performance and theatre as a means of criticising audience's complicity and urging for political action also permeates "Accusing and Engaging the Audience through Theatreform: Griselda Gambaro's *Information for Foreigners*." Selena Burns considers Argentinean playwright Griselda Gambaro's "experiential promenade" utilized in this particular piece where she dramatises the

[1] Bourdieu, P. and L. J. D Wacquant, *An invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity P, 1992) 102.

[2] Baudrillard, Jean, *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena* (London & New York, 1993) 9.

human rights violation through torture that took place in Argentina during the early 1970s under military regime. The scope of such aesthetic choices is to stimulate both the emotional and critical awareness of the audience, confronting them with their complicity and individual/collective guilt. Overall, the paper raises thought provoking questions on the political efficacy of theatre, providing links to contemporary forms of 'legalized' violence and repression.

Philip Hager's paper provides a geographical transition to the colonel's dictatorship in 1970s Greece, exploring Greek playwright Lula Anagnostaki's *Antonio or the Message*, and the political implications of its 1972 production in Athens. He attempts to show the ways in which theatre established a political alliance with audiences in order to undermine the military regime and challenge the social structures that produced it. This paper explores the role of theatre in the resistance to the pseudo-ideological conflicts of the Greek manifestation of the Cold War.

Remaining in the same geographical location but moving forward in time, the next paper provides a link between Greece and Britain. In "Contextualising Reception: Writing about Theatre and National Identity" Marilena Zaroulia raises questions on Greekness and discusses the notion of resistance against the hegemonic images of national identity, through the production of foreign plays. She produces a methodological model for the analysis of reception, and a theoretical outline of her stimulating work on post-1956 British drama in post-colonels' Greek society.

Finally, in a different context, "The Literary Artist and Social Cohesion in a Multi-Lingual Setting: A Study of Ola Rotimi's *If… A Tragedy of the Ruled* and *Hopes of the Living Dead*" further explores the complexities of national identity in a multilingual framework. He probes how Nigerian playwright Ola Rotimi portrays multilingual diversity onstage, aspiring to bridge the gap between the language of the ex-colonizer and indigenous dialects, and to surmount the exploitation of linguistic diversity by Nigeria's post-colonial corrupt leaders. He thus makes a case for a political agency and progress based on unity and solidarity among Nigerian people, which should not be halted by linguistic heterogeneity, but reinforced by cultural and linguistic syncretism.

As a final note, we wish to thank Royal Holloway, and especially the department of Drama & Theatre, Nick Hern Books, Palgrave Macmillan and Intellect Books, as well as everybody who assisted to the creation of this issue and believed in its potential.

Marissia Fragou and Philip Hager (co-editors)

## Notes on Contributors

**Vicky Angelaki** is currently in the second year of her PhD studies in the Department of Drama and Theatre, at Royal Holloway, University of London. Her research, supervised by Prof. Dan Rebellato and Dr. Chris Megson, will produce a monograph on the work of Martin Crimp from 1985 to the present. She has previously completed a BA in English and an MA in Research (Drama & Theatre).

**Selena Burns** is currently a Ph.D candidate at Steinhardt School of Education, New York University.

**Philip Hager** graduated from the department of Theatre Studies in the University of Patras, Greece. He was awarded an MA in Performance and Culture (2002) from Goldsmiths College, University of London, and is currently on the third year of his PhD at Royal Holloway, University of London. His PhD research is on the production of politically engaged theatre during the dictatorship of the colonels in Greece.

**Busuyi Mekusi** holds a Masters Degree from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. He teaches Literature in English, Oral Literature and Criticism in the Department of English & Mass Communication, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria. He is presently undergoing a doctoral research in the Discipline of African Literature, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. His research investigates the ideas of memory, violence and identity as challenges for nation-building in post-apartheid South African drama. He is a creative writer and the author of a play: *Whispers Across the Wall.*

**Michael Pinchbeck** has ten years experience as a writer and live artist. He was a founding member of Metro-Boulot-Dodo on gradating from Lancaster University in 1997. On leaving MBD in 2003, he was commissioned by Nottingham Playhouse to write The White Album. In 2006, he attained an MA in Performance and Live Art at Nottingham Trent University. He is currently a Lecturer in Performance at New College Nottingham.

**Ryan Reynolds** was awarded a PhD with Dean's List Honours in Theatre and Film Studies from the University of Canterbury in 2006, where he now works as Technical Director and Tutor for Film. He is president of the Canterbury Film Society and continues to merge theory and practice, theatre and film through collaborative work / play with the Christchurch Free Theatre.

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**Marilena Zaroulia** has just submitted her Ph.D thesis 'Staging "the Other"/Imagining "the Greek": Paradigms of Greekness in the Reception of post-1956 English Drama in post-colonels' Athens (1974-2002)' at Royal Holloway, University of London. A Graduate of the Theatre Studies Department in Athens (2002), and awarded an MA in Research (2003) from RHUL, she has recently presented papers in conferences in Athens, Helsinki and Leeds. Her main research interest is the link between theatre, politics and national identity and her next project will be an exploration of contemporary European theatre and conceptions of European national identities.

# Abstracts

## Moving Targets: An "Illogical" Theatre of Resistance in (Pre)Occupied Territory

Ryan Reynolds (University of Canterbury, New Zealand)

The notion of a theatre of resistance implies a society of coercion. It is difficult, but necessary, to gauge the efficacy of such theatres at a time in which everything, and consequently nothing, is political. That is, almost all theatres today proclaim a politics, and yet there is widespread resignation regarding the inevitability of capitalism – which is itself the predominant coercive force. This article proposes a theory of resistance via the theatre: radical theatre today must assume that our nations and we ourselves have become (pre)occupied by this coercive force and therefore, like the French *Résistance* during German occupation, must act "underground" and employ a strategy of "moving targets".

I evaluate a performance from my own experience with the Christchurch Free Theatre: a devised production of Karl Kraus' play *The Last Days of Mankind* that occurred uninvited in public spaces primarily to unsuspecting audiences. This case study led to the determination that, in an age in which any political intervention is seen as senseless disruption and a form of pointless violence, theatres of resistance must employ strategies increasingly similar (as with the *Résistance*) to those of terrorist actions.

## Confusing Gender: Strategies for resisting objectification in the work of Split Britches

Emily Underwood (University of Glamorgan)

In this paper I will explore the construction of gender identity in the work of the feminist theatre company *Split Britches* with a particular focus on the show *What Tammy Needs to Know* by Lois Weaver. I begin by exploring two propositions - that all performance is inherently objectifying and that this problem is doubled for the female performer whose body is already socially identified as sexual other. I will examine strategies for resisting this social positioning that I have identified in *What Tammy Needs to Know* including:

1. Weaver's foregrounding of the construction of her femininity, both as herself and as her character Tammy Whynot, and her highlighting of the labour and tools involved in this construction.
2. Weaver's use of autobiography in order to transcend the subject/object divide and to create empathy with her audience.
3. How Weaver turns the gaze back on her spectators.

I will attempt to explore *how* Weaver achieves this and the impact it has on spectators of the work.

## Accusing and Engaging the Audience through Theatreform: Griselda Gambaro's *Information for Foreigners*

Selena Burns (New York University)

How can theatre use innovative forms to explore issues of human rights in a way that engages the audience rather than merely presents to them? Rather than writing for a traditional proscenium stage, in her 1972 play *Information for Foreigners*, Argentinean playwright Griselda Gambaro has tour guides lead the audience in groups through various rooms and hallways in which actors recreate scenes of torture or oppression. Gambaro uses environmental theatre and sometimes Brechtian presentations to deconstruct the expected relationship between audience and actors—allowing her to use the audience's passivity to comment on the ethics of being a "silent observer" and to create opportunities for self-reflection and motivation for political action. The unique relationship with the live audience allowed by the theatrical medium and enhanced by the structure of Gambaro's play forcibly removes the distance the news consumer has with a media story. Gambaro's work has contemporary relevance in the US in a time where the media presents pictures of government sponsored torture, and the public is faced with the choice of responding or ignoring.

## *Antonio or the Message*: Bourgeois conformism and the dictatorship of the Colonels in Greece (1967-1974)

Philip Hager (Royal Holloway)

This paper will engage with the analysis of Anagnostaki's play *Antonio or the Message* that was produced in Athens by Théatro Téchnis in 1972. Anagnostaki commented on the bourgeois society and its structures, focusing mainly on the institution of family as the molecular unit of bourgeois society and the site of bourgeois reproduction (both biological and social). Violence is the catalyst of the play, blurring the borderline between private and public spaces. I will argue that, within the specific socio-political context (the dictatorship of the colonels), Anagnostaki criticised bourgeois indifference to situations of extreme violence (both psychological and physical). In this sense, indifference means conformism and passive support. Furthermore, I seek to demonstrate the ways in which this particular production was an act of resistance against the colonels' regime, and the pseudo ideological conflicts of its time.

## Contextualising Reception: Writing about Theatre and National Identity

Marilena Zaroulia (Royal Holloway)

In recent years, theatre studies has seen an intensifying interest in the link between theatre and notions of the nation and national identity. This article proposes a methodology for writing about theatre and national identity, focusing on the reception

of non-national, foreign texts in other nations' theatre stages. Starting from four selected paradigms from my doctoral research on the reception of post-1956 English drama in Athens during the last quarter of the twentieth century, I emphasise the significance of contextualising reception for addressing questions about national identity. A comprehensive analysis of the historical moment in which a production takes place unveils 'hidden elements' in the image of the nation, recognising the theatre's influential role in resisting to hegemonic conceptions of the nation and national identity.

## The Literary Artist and Social Cohesion in a Multi-Lingual Setting: A Study of Ola Rotimi's *If… A Tragedy of the Ruled* and *Hopes of the Living Dead*

Busuyi Mekusi (Adekunle Ajasin University, Nigeria)

No doubt, language forms one of the viable means of human communication, which in turn enhances social cohesion most especially in a multi-lingual setting. Efforts are made in this paper to examine the functional description of language in its direct relevance to Nigerian society. The paper equally discusses the multi-lingual issue, focusing on Nigeria of Ola Rotimi's descriptions in *If…a Tragedy of the Ruled* and *Hopes of the Living Dead*, where polyglots are used to bridge the gap 'created' by linguistic multiplicity. Consequently, the paper submits that linguistic differences are amplified to establish a foundation for marginalization by the perfidious leaders whose inclination is to keep the unwary masses in perpetual subjugation. The paper concludes that active participation by all, achieved through the use of an interpreter for the benefits of the various linguistic groups in the texts and the audiences they elicit, is what is paramount in Rotimi's mind, a belief which has necessitated his sense of togetherness that pervades the two plays set against the discord of an exploitative selfish elite class.

# Moving Targets: An "Illogical" Theatre of Resistance in (Pre)Occupied Territory

Ryan Reynolds (University of Canterbury, New Zealand)

The notion of a theatre of resistance implies a society of coercion. Yet it seems accurate to say that few of us – at least of my generation and younger – feel as though we live in a forceful and oppressive society. Several years ago I was studying Augusto Boal's "Theatre of the Oppressed" in a university course. The lecturer asked one day that we share our own experiences of oppression upon which to base a Forum Theatre session. The students went silent. Nobody could think of an instance of oppression from his or her experience. We ended up creating Forum Theatre on other people's behalves, such as a friend of a friend whose father mistreated him because he was gay. A partial explanation for this scenario is clearly that the students from my class, almost exclusively middle-class and white, have more in common with the oppressors than oppressed in this society. That observation, while provocative, is insufficient. Most members of my generation, myself included, seem utterly unable to think politically or even *imagine* a society fundamentally different to the present one, and one's ability to perceive society as oppressive is severely limited if one cannot fathom any alternative.

Fredric Jameson sees nearly all art today as powerless to instigate political change because of an advanced mode of capitalism in which the cultural realm (of which theatre is a part) is inextricable from the economic and political realms. The logic of late capitalism is pervasive. It may seem counterintuitive to posit such a de-politicised society at a time when political debate and protest (and theatre) are rife. This "post-political" condition, however, is due not to a lack of political theatre,

actions, and ideas but precisely to their omnipresence.[1] Jean Baudrillard claims that, since 1968, everything has become political and therefore nothing is political (9). Being "political" or "resistant" – by traditional criteria – has arguably become the norm. Many or most theatres today proclaim a politics, and yet there is widespread resignation regarding the inevitability of capitalism.[2] But in this society of coercion that must meet with "resistance" from the theatre, it is clearly capitalism that is the predominant coercive force.

I wish to propose a contemporary theatre of resistance *à la* the French *Résistance* during World War II: radical theatre today must assume that our nations and we ourselves have been "occupied" by this coercive capitalist force and therefore must operate "underground" making tactical strikes against an overwhelming opposition. But capitalism is a daunting opponent: it dwarfs the coercive force of the German invading army yet is often completely imperceptible, fluid, constantly changing form. Paul Virilio compellingly theorised the disappearance of power into a vector of speed where any traditional notion of power – knowledge, wealth, or might – is eliminated and replaced by "moving power" (1986). The fortress of capitalism remains impenetrable because, in fact, no fortress can ever be located. I have titled this article "moving targets" because of these traits: capitalism itself is perpetually moving, shifting its loci of accountability and co-opting potentially subversive elements not by brute force and antagonism but by incorporating them into consumer society. Everything potentially threatening to dominant power, from theatre to

[1] See Ryan Reynolds, *Moving targets: Political theatre in a post-political age* (University of Canterbury, 2006), from which this essay has been adapted.

[2] There was a time when political theatre was considered to be that which sought for revolution. With that possibility seemingly gone in the "postmodern" era, there is no consensus on what it is to be political. A glance at the latest theatre journals reveals the confusing range of what is considered political: any unconventional interpretation of Shakespeare or Greek myth, any production investigating or representing identity (what it is to be black, Chicano, male, female, homosexual, Jewish, etc.), the aesthetic spectacles of Robert Wilson, the use of animals onstage, solo performances, guerrilla theatre, performances about activism, Beckett, theatre in prison, questioning copyright law onstage, and so much more.

political movements, can be disarmed into a capitalist product – and the speed at which this happens is constantly accelerating.

The traditional and established strategies of political theatre – employed by Piscator, Brecht, many troupes of the '60s, Boal – typically had fixed targets. These theatres were most often directed at (and against) a certain target audience, being theatres for the revolutionary proletariat and against the *bourgeoisie*. As Western capitalism has evolved, however, it is now arguably peopled by a vast *petit-bourgeoisie*: those with a vested interest in following capitalist logic but victimised and limited by that very logic. The "oppressed" of this society, to use Paolo Freire's (and later Boal's) term, are perhaps indistinguishable from the "oppressors." If a threatening sub-class or sub-culture arises, it quickly becomes commodified and complicit in the capitalist system. Most people today end up achieving a sense of identity through commodities – the clothes they wear or the tunes on their iPod – rather than through class alliance. Modelling a theatre on the *Résistance* enables it to be more adaptable. This theatre can seek out the moving targets of capital and track down target audiences as they move through public space, since everyone is both a potential "enemy" and a potential "ally."

The established models of resistance above also tended to advocate a fixed political programme – such as socialism – as a solution, which was substantiated by the radical cultures of their times. Since then, the dismantling of the Berlin Wall and collapse of the Soviet Union helped usher in, or punctuate, the widespread belief that any political structure other than the present one is utterly unreasonable. This is especially true for those of my generation who cannot meaningfully recall the Cold War and a time when various social systems were vying for legitimacy. Again, the *Résistance* model provides a more apt scheme: interconnected networks with a range

of ideologies but unified by a paramount objective to disrupt dominant power without necessarily positing an alternative.[3] Moreover, a theatre in this fashion can *become* a moving target to avoid amalgamation into the capitalist system of exchange. Unlike the accepted paradigms, then, this flexible theatre will likely not be recognisable as a theatre of resistance.

The paradigm of the *Résistance* is useful, but must evolve to meet this new kind of coercive force, given that those wishing to mount a theatre of resistance cannot extract ourselves from the capitalist system of which we are a part, nor can we isolate its source of power. Most people do not even perceive that there is an occupying force. Perhaps, then, one could say that our nations and our selves have been both occupied and "pre-occupied" by this capitalist force: for all its violence, it is idly obeyed as though a law of nature. In a society unable to conceive of a different way of being (or why one would wish to), any action that does not conform to capitalist logic is seen as senseless disruption, attention-seeking, a form of pointless violence. Consequently, this proposed *théâtre de résistance*, un-political by traditional criteria, is doomed to be misconstrued. Conceivably, it is precisely in its inability to be interpreted that its resistant potential lay.

In seeing a need to expand ideas of what might be considered political theatre and what it might achieve, my hypothesis is on some level plainly "postmodernist". Philip Auslander is possibly the most influential "postmodern" performance theorist. His book *Presence and Resistance*, like this essay, seeks to redefine the political. Auslander argues that the apparently un-political performances of Andy Kaufman, the Wooster Group and others were in fact political. He consistently maintains that these performers were political by maintaining ambiguity and frustrating expectations. He

[3] Certainly links could be made between this proposal and Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "Nomadology" and "rhizomatic multiplicities" or similar concepts that appear in the works of Negri and others.

certainly seems correct in terms of their aesthetics, as in Kaufman's refusal to drop the "mask" of his character Tony Clifton or the Wooster Group's ambiguous use of blackface. What Auslander may neglect to recognise is that, as overtly commodified art, the examples he cites paradoxically *fulfil* expectations by challenging them. Wooster Group audiences are expecting the unexpected, and paying for it. This argument does not entail that Auslander's examples are impotent, but if the argument for their political worth is that they frustrate expectations, then fulfilling expectations as a luxury or even mainstream commodity seems to undermine the argument. Theatre of the *Résistance* model frustrates expectations not only aesthetically but functionally as well, as it is unable to be interpreted in terms of capitalist logic.

My first experience in the theatre, apart from one role in a high school play, was in late 2000 when I was invited to join the University of Canterbury's end-of-year Theatre and Film Studies production called *The Last Days of Mankind*.[4] Rehearsals began with what was called "Boot Camp" week, which ran from 10am to 5pm every day. We students arrived on Monday morning, not knowing what to expect, and were promptly ordered to go for a 45-minute run in the rain. We were treated throughout like the stereotypical new recruits in the army. Many of the exercises were strenuous and unpleasant, mentally as well as physically. Others were nonsensical, such as facing a wall and repeating our own names out loud for 30 minutes. I was simultaneously apprehensive and excited. I found it oddly enjoyable spending long hours doing something "senseless" without having to justify or rationalise it.

[4] *The Last Days of Mankind* is a World War I era social satire by Karl Kraus that he began writing in 1915. It is more than 800 pages long and generally considered unstageable. Kraus himself acknowledged the difficulty, writing in the introduction: "The performance of this drama is intended for a theatre on Mars" (3). The production in which I was involved – performed throughout October and November 2000, in association with the Free Theatre and directed by Peter Falkenberg – used little of Kraus' actual text and instead was a "devised" performance inspired by Kraus' themes and aims.

I anticipated that the oddity of this process would end after Boot Camp week, when we would begin more traditional theatre rehearsals, but the strange methods continued for weeks and culminated in a performance unlike any theatre I had imagined. For three consecutive days, we set up encampments in public gathering places in downtown Christchurch (New Zealand) and performed for 12 straight hours from midday to midnight. Even our meals were taken in character, served as military rations. The performances were free, unadvertised, unexpected, and often unwelcome. Much of the performance consisted of similarly absurd militaristic drills as those we had been doing during rehearsals, though they were now being done in public. As with the rehearsal process, this theatre engendered in me contradictory reactions of, on the one hand, terrible embarrassment and anxiety and, on the other hand, extreme feelings of liberation and joy. The source of both reactions was the same: I was publicly behaving in abnormal and improper ways.

Looking back on this experience six years later, it is astonishing to me that I underwent such a monumental process – a demanding, confrontational, and "inappropriate" performance – without once considering that it was somehow political. At the time, however, I knew only that something about *Last Days* was appealing to me, that participating in such theatre provided a sense of challenge, courage, and satisfaction that I had never before experienced. In this regard I "misunderstood" the performance, evaluating it purely via aesthetic and not political criteria. My misunderstanding did not prevent the performance from having long-term political effects, though, as it was this (aesthetic) experience that lured me to continue studying and practicing theatre, and eventually to write a PhD on political theatre. In fact, my inability to interpret the performance may have been crucial. Had I seen *Last*

*Days* as political (something at that time distasteful to me) I may not have embraced the experience as I did.[5]

Interestingly, *Last Days* provoked a range of reactions from the actors involved. Several actors were, like me, motivated to pursue more such experiences through continued work with the Free Theatre – a group whose name implies emancipation from conventions, both artistic and social. Other *Last Days* actors hated the experience and dedicated themselves to the mainstream theatre, or ran away from theatre entirely, as a result. This divergence, I think, is a sign that the experience was a political one. That which is political separates people; it cannot and will not appeal to everyone.[6] But it is interesting that people's "political" reactions to their *Last Days* experiences were not grounded in political awareness but in aesthetic judgements or rather indefinable "feelings." To me the process felt invigorating and "right." To others it felt embarrassing, uncomfortable, pointless, and "wrong." Neither faction, however, viewed it as a political assault on capitalist logic. *Last Days* was apparently un-political by traditional criteria – it did not offer resistance via articulate argument, head-on opposition, or by engaging with political issues – but nevertheless seems to have had a political impact.

The French *Résistance* analogy is a retrospective one, but the similarities are provocative: the structure of the *Last Days* ensemble and performance was paramilitary; the performances, or "actions," were planned in secret and executed without warning; and the object was, in whatever small way, to destabilise the power

[5] Mainstream society opposes aesthetics and politics and, at least since Piscator and Brecht, makers of political theatre have struggled against the "bourgeois" tendency to de-politicise performances by discussing only their aesthetics. Perhaps there has now been an inversion: that which is *understood* to be political is the norm, and actually complicit with the capitalist system, whilst that which is (mis)interpreted or experienced only on aesthetic grounds could potentially have political effects.

[6] Anything universally agreed-upon is not a political issue. A local group recently did a performance of anti-Nazi cabaret sketches from Weimar Germany. While the original performances may have been political – dividing audiences, expressing controversial opinions about one's immediate society – replicating them in 21st Century Christchurch is not political since everyone here already "knows" or agrees that Nazis were "bad."

of a seemingly insuperable opponent on one's home turf. Significantly, the three-day performance mentioned above was not the extent of *Last Days*. The campaign, like the *Résistance*, had been slowly gaining momentum, adapting, and moving targets for months.

We began by doing street theatre performances we called "Slow Walking" that happened roughly three days a week, for one to two hours a day, for more than two months. At various days and times between four and 15 members of the cast would dress in black business suits, ties, and black shoes, and hide on their person a plain white mask of their own face. Actors would separately make their way to a prearranged location – a parking garage or alleyway – where they would don their masks and begin walking a set route to a similarly obscure locale where they would secretly remove the masks and scatter in separate directions. The walking was very slow and stylised. A six-block walk would endure for about 60 minutes. Only the lower body was meant to move, with the upper body coasting on top as if floating. Eyes were wide open, unblinking, and focussed straight ahead. Arms were unmoving, with hands half-clenched at the waist. All turns were made at 90 degree angles. No talking was permitted. If people in the streets addressed us or asked questions, we were allowed to stop and stare at them but not respond in any other way.[7]

Reactions to this Slow Walking were many and varied. Interestingly, the vast majority of people ignored it – or tried to ignore it, or *pretended* to ignore it – as much as possible. Everybody was "pre-occupied" with their everyday business. Many

[7] Comparisons to Benjamin's notion of a *flâneur* (Arcades Project), Debord's *dérive*, or de Certeau's analysis of walking in the city are imperfect but possibly fruitful. *Flânerie* and its parallels are clearly urban notions developed in Berlin, Paris, and New York. Christchurch is a provincial town of 300,000, primarily a sprawling suburbia unsuited to these urban forms. Moreover, a *dérive*, for instance, was not done to be seen whereas Slow Walking was first and foremost a performance intended for an audience. And the models above were all considered to be liberating experiences, whereas Slow Walking was highly stylised and codified. Despite these vast differences, the Slow Walking actors had a privileged perspective of "observing" Christchurch without participating in it, which arguably created a critical distance for reflection akin to that of the *flâneur*. Perhaps in an "open" society in which everything is permitted, freedom is found only via restrictions.

people seemed not even to look or notice. Others glanced briefly and carried on unconcerned, or even quickened their pace to avoid us. Without wishing to deny the possibility that the performance had some impact even on those who ignored or avoided it, I want to focus on the small percentage of people who stopped to watch or engage with the performance in some way. Of this lot, the desire to interpret or ascribe meaning to the event seemed great. The actors often overheard observers pondering the meaning of the action. Busking of various sorts is common in Christchurch and was probably many people's first notion of what we were doing. This interpretation would be quickly rejected. The Slow Walking did not strive to be entertaining, was not directed at an audience, and there was no mechanism for payment. We nevertheless heard observers speculate that we were actors, but that interpretation was always insufficient, never explaining *why* we were walking in this strange way. There was no advertising, no accompanying message, and no apparent purpose – aesthetically or functionally.[8]

Hypotheses the actors overheard were often elaborate. Someone supposed that we were drama students doing an exercise to build discipline and confidence. Someone guessed that we were a cult of religious fanatics. Someone theorised that we were advertising for a new menswear store. Someone even posited that we were a sign of the apocalypse and was visibly agitated. But no interpretation was ever confirmed or seemed fully to satisfy an observer's curiosity. Few if any ever came to a conclusive decision.

[8] There seem to be surface similarities between this Slow Walking and the short-lived phenomenon of "flashmobbing" (arguably a contemporary version of Happenings). Flashmobs involved large groups of people seemingly spontaneously performing acts of nonsense, such as entering a furniture store and simultaneously saying "Oh wow, what a sofa" (BBC). While apparently purposeless, this phenomenon is *functionally* understandable: there is a common recognition that flashmobs are meant to be *fun* to participate in, and are therefore perfectly explicable as a form of exclusive leisure or entertainment. Slow Walking, by contrast, was not perceived as a leisure activity: the strict form, discipline, and long hours make Slow Walking appear a tedious occupation. Where flashmobs seem inane and fun, Slow Walking seems serious, intense, and purposeful – although that purpose is not apparent.

Watching this performance seemed to be an unsettling experience. Unable to rationalise the event, people were consistently "misunderstanding" or fearful of misunderstanding what was happening. Audiences of course tried to explain the spectacle in terms of conventional logic, the logic of capitalism. The proposal that we might be advertising suits was sincere, and sparked a conversation between two people about the marketing approach. Even the theory that we were actors doing an exercise to build confidence is a capitalist idea – that we were training to improve our marketable skills to become "successful" (paid) actors. (The coercive force of capitalism is constantly moving and adapting, steadily seeping into any new and threatening realms). Nevertheless, the uncertainty of the Slow Walking – its tendency towards misunderstandings – made it unsettling and therefore resistant to co-optation into the system of exchange.

The Slow Walking, like the *Résistance*, applied a strategy of "moving targets." Obviously the performance itself moved through the city, changing routes day by day, targeting different parts of downtown at different times. Moreover, the technique itself evolved, adapting to its context. New rules or principles were gradually introduced. The actors studied footage of shell-shocked soldiers, and trained our bodies to dissociate – for the movement of one limb, say, to appear independent from that of the rest of the body. After several weeks an adaptation was added: during the course of a one- to two-hour walk, each actor would have one spasm in which a limb would flail uncontrollably while the rest of the body maintained the discipline of the stylised Slow Walk. Over the course of weeks, more movements were initiated. Actors would step as high as they could and lift their eyes and arms to the sky as if expecting to be lifted away. Or actors would faint forward, catch themselves with their hands, and place an ear down to the ground as though listening intently. The infrequency of the

additional movements was a key aspect of the performance. Spectators could watch for a few minutes and, just as they were coming to a point of acceptance or an understanding of our "rules," those rules would apparently be broken. These modifications helped the ongoing performance remain a moving target against reprisal, unable to be categorised or "captured" by the depoliticising mechanisms of capitalist logic.

One particular change was made to target those numerous spectators who sought to ignore or avoid the performance. On some walks, our designated leader would pick a disinterested bystander, stop, stare, and menacingly point at him. At that signal, the other actors – often spread across an entire city block – would stop and point as well. The spectator thereby became a performer, the object of everyone's attention. Even ignoring the performance then became an active act, and one that other spectators were invited to examine. As this spectator moved, the pointing fingers would follow him, forcing an engagement – on some level – with the performance. The adaptations, that is, helped the performance target a wider audience based upon our reconnaissance from previous walks.

Those who engaged with the Slow Walking often ended up asking for, or *demanding*, an explanation from the actors. When the performers refused to answer, ignoring the observers and continuing our focussed walk, some people got angry and stood in our way, threatened us, and even (once) poured beer on our heads and ripped a performer's mask off. Several times someone followed us for an hour or more, all the way to our designated finishing point. These reactions and this persistence in demanding an explanation suggest that people's inability to satisfyingly understand this performance really did shake their faith in a society they thought they knew. In searching for some explanation for this spectacle that made no sense in terms of

capitalist logic, people were pushed to think outside that capitalist logic, opening themselves up to expanded ideas of "sense." On these terms, if this performance impacted an observer, it was precisely because it was *not* seen as being a political act. The inability to comprehend the purpose of the performance is what might, in some small way, have conjured up the possibility of an alternative logic. Had it been discovered with certainty that we were actors, the logic of the performance would still have been opaque. Even the truth of the situation, that we were voluntarily spending such long hours Slow Walking for no apparent reason or reward, was inconceivable in terms of capitalist logic.

In analysing this performance as "uninterpretable", I might be guilty of interpreting the event somewhat against the director's intent. In large part, this production of *Last Days* can be seen as a critique of the aestheticisation of war and a culture in which war is a defining facet in the creation of national identity. Many New Zealanders trace their identity as belonging to an independent nation, and not "merely" a British colony, to New Zealand's participation in World War I. The number of young people today making pilgrimages to Gallipoli, the locus of New Zealand's first major WWI campaign, is on the rise. As they ostensibly search for unique identity in an increasingly globalised Western culture, New Zealanders often define themselves through war. The last day of our *Last Days* performance coincided with Armistice Day, a commemoration of the end of the Great War, a day in which many New Zealanders were attending commemorative ceremonies and experiencing a sense of national identity. This correlation was, of course, intended by the director.

An exhaustive account of the *Last Days* campaign is impossible. It comprised numerous simultaneous actions, improvisations, adjustments for the weather and other environmental conditions, alterations due to equipment failures, and more. It was, like

the *Résistance*, always in flux. Most performers wore full military fatigues, with hair and faces painted white. The troops marched in formation to a prominent Christchurch location – the Arts Centre, Cathedral Square, Bridge of Remembrance (a war memorial) – where we unloaded two truckloads of gear and built an encampment, erecting tents and makeshift stages in a rectangular configuration thereby designating a performance area.

Audiences were free to explore the encampment. Each tent could be seen as an exploration of war as entertainment. One tent contained a salesman peddling war figurines – plastic soldiers, tanks, and guns – chattering about the thrills of staging battles and eliminating whole races, in the style of toy advertisements during children's television. The salesman was also selling a video of buxom girls in bikinis firing automatic weapons. This video was "found" material (like much of Kraus' text) that associates guns and war with the commodification of sex and the objectification of the body. Another station comprised a life-size painting of a dead soldier with the face cut out so that audiences could stick their faces through and get a Polaroid of themselves as dead soldiers. Using these gimmicks of advertising and tourist attractions, both war and the *Last Days* performance itself were "reduced" to entertainment, but in an exaggerated parodic manner that invited critique.

The different tents and stations, many more than described above, enclosed a central performance area that was a hive of activity throughout. There were routines from the troops that decomposed from precise marching and the singing of patriotic war songs, into shell shock and the menacing hissing of songs, and finally into macabre death scenes and moaning – while someone shouted through a megaphone: "When I want war, I want the real thing. I want to see *blood* and *guts* and rotting flesh – not some namby-pamby theatrical, impressionistic *bullshit*. You make me *sick*."

Brecht's *Cannon Song* (from *The Threepenny Opera*, a stark questioning of the morality of capitalism), about mincing one's enemies into steak tartar, was sung by uniformed marching girls – emblems of an iconic New Zealand sport that renders war aesthetic. Through these routines, nationalist patriotism was shown to glorify the gruesome.

On the final day of the performance, the Cathedral bells rang incessantly to mark Armistice Day (nationalist patriotic) celebrations while, in our little encampment below, Maori performers conducted a *tangihanga* ceremony of mourning the dead. It was a striking image: a shirtless, barefoot Maori warrior shouting a traditional ritual while dwarfed by the large Anglican cathedral in a grey stone square. The colonisation of New Zealand was achieved with soldiers and Christianity, which were being celebrated in tandem by the Armistice Day church bells. This celebration was starkly juxtaposed with a Maori ritual of mourning – the outcome, perhaps, of that very colonisation.

In 1936, Walter Benjamin critiqued fascism for introducing aesthetics into political life, claiming "All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war" ('Work of Art' 251). *Last Days* exaggeratedly celebrated and distorted the current mainstream aestheticisations of war, super-aestheticising them, to reveal a capitalist society strikingly similar to the fascist one Benjamin analysed. The *Résistance* movement against fascism is accordingly a pertinent model for a theatre of resistance today.

Despite the ability to analyse the performance as critiquing the aestheticisation of war, it is highly unlikely that any audience member explored the encampment and decided: "It's a comment upon the aestheticisation of war." That "meaning" was certainly available, but *Last Days* created its own frenzied universe and logic that

likely transcended any attempt to explain it. The event was public and free. It was not advertising anything or trying to generate membership in some organisation. It clearly involved arduous physical work and very long hours, for no apparent gain. That is, despite an obvious interpretation, the event remained an overwhelming and singular aesthetic experience that was, for most people, inexplicable. And this incomprehensibility is, I contend, the source of its resistant or disruptive potential in territory that has been (pre)occupied by capitalist behaviour and logic.

I wish to conclude with the open-ended observation that the September 11 World Trade Center attack, certainly a super-aesthetic spectacle, produced a similar reaction on a much larger scale.[9] The event had clear and obvious interpretations – attacks on the most prominent icons of capitalist power – and yet many or most Westerners were unable to make sense of it. Perhaps, at a time in which fundamental political dissent is considered futile and irrational, a theatre of resistance will necessarily have similarities with terrorism. From the fascist perspective, what was the *Résistance* but an underground network of terrorist insurgents?

[9] Baudrillard has analysed the radical prospect of suicide, an act that utterly lacks exchange-value (*Symbolic* 36-37) and even dubbed the September 11 event "*our* theatre of cruelty, the only one we have left" (*Spirit* 30). Many scholars of late have picked up on this and analyse the links between theatre and terrorism.

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# Confusing Gender: Strategies for resisting objectification in the work of Split Britches

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In this article I am concerned with three strategies for overcoming objectification of the female form found in the work of performance company Split Britches and how their strategies lead to a possible reading of the company's work as a theatre of resistance. This article particularly focuses on the show *What Tammy Needs to Know* by Lois Weaver. I will discuss how Weaver resists the female subject position of objectified sexual 'other' through foregrounding the construction of her femininity, both as herself and as her character Tammy Whynot, and by highlighting the labour and tools involved in this construction. I will also determine how Weaver's use of autobiography has enabled her to transcend the subject/object divide and to create empathy with her audience. Finally, I will examine how Weaver returns the gaze back to her spectators. For the purposes of this article the term objectification is defined within a feminist framework and refers to the female form as representing the 'other' in the psychoanalytic sense and this 'otherness' allowing the female body to be fetishized as sexual object.

Split Britches are a theatre company based in New York. The three principle members are Deb Margolin, Peggy Shaw and Lois Weaver. Their first show, Split Britches (from which they took the name of their troupe), was premiered in October 1980 at the WOW café in New York. Weaver first performed the character of Tammy Whynot in the Split Britches show *Upwardly Mobile Home* in 1984, although Tammy has only been given her own show recently.[1] Weaver's one-woman performance *What Tammy Needs to Know* tells the story of Tammy Whynot, an ostensibly famous

[1] For a detailed performance history of Split Britches from 1980 to 1995 see Case 1-34 and for the script for Upwardly Mobile Home see Case 87-118.

country and western singer who now wants to become a lesbian performance artist. Tammy conveys this and other stories to the audience through a combination of country and western song and monologue. The principle part of the show is comprised of discussions with the audience. The script therefore has to allow for Weaver to repeatedly open up the performance space for her audience to speak and respond to what is presented and then find a way to return to the main structure of the performance. Due to the extremely high level of audience participation every show is different and can never be replicated, so in this article I am examining two particular performances of *What Tammy Needs to Know*, a shortened version that took place in the foyer of the Nuffield Theatre in Lancaster on 28th April 2006 and a full length performance that was staged in the Drill Hall Theatre in London on 21st May 2006. I am also considering the appearance Tammy Whynot made at the Performance Studies International conference at Queen Mary University in London on 18th June 2006, although on this occasion Weaver presented a cameo rather than a full show.

Two essential problems confront the female performer who is attempting to resist objectification in performance:

1. Performance is inherently objectifying.
2. As Mulvey outlines, female gender is socially constructed as carrier rather than creator of meaning, and the feminine body is socially positioned as an object to be viewed. (15)

All performance can be read as objectifying (and by this I mean performance in the realm of theatre and live art) since it relies on the audience being able to visually engage with the body of the actor as the space where meaning is constructed and located, that is, the performer's body is used as a tool to create meaning. The spectator must gaze at the body of the performer as the 'object' of the performance: that is,

something separate from them. In this way the performer is always *other* for the spectator. Mulvey uses a Lacanian model to examine how the objectifying gaze functions in narrative cinema. She argues that the cinematic viewing experience places the spectator in a privileged position where they are allowed to look on the unseen. This voyeuristic vantage point enables the spectator's psychic separation from the image of woman they are presented with and allows them to view the image on screen as sexual other, separated from them yet presented for their 'visual pleasure' (17). Drew Leder notes that it is only possible to move beyond looking with the objectifying gaze when empathy comes into play. He argues that empathy enables two people to experience the world from one viewpoint, removing any possibility of the objectifying gaze (96). He goes on to contend that as soon as either one of the two people stops extending her/his viewpoint from a shared look outwards towards the rest of the world and begins to see the other person as separate from them and as part of that 'rest of the world' the objectifying gaze comes in to play.[2] Leder's model of separation is always present in performance where audience and performer are entirely without a shared viewpoint, the audience *look at* the performer rather than *look with* them. This problem of objectification is doubled for the female performer who uses her body on stage - as a woman she is always already othered, resulting in her being objectified on two levels, both as woman and as performer.

Weaver begins the version of the performance shown in the Drill Hall in London walking into the space as herself. She introduces herself to the audience by giving her name and her age. She also immediately asserts her sexuality by talking about a "she" who she hasn't seen for a long-time but still thinks about, and gives a sense that the performance is going to draw heavily on her own personal history

[2] Leder's model of empathy is part of a wider argument concerning how the body is experienced under the gaze of another, however for the purposes of this article I am only considering his notion of empathy involving looking from a shared viewpoint.

stating "I'm itinerant, but I'm loyal." For most audiences of the work this information will confirm what they already know about the show, either from the pre-show publicity, or from a more in-depth knowledge of Lois Weaver as part of Split Britches. There is no shortage of knowledge about Weaver and her work; as Gwendolyn Alker notes Split Britches were one of the most widely debated companies of the 1980s and '90s amongst lesbian theatre communities. After the first introductory section of the show Weaver begins to change into Tammy both by putting on costume and by adopting the mannerisms and attitudes of her character. Weaver's Southern drawl, perhaps diluted by years of living in New York and London, becomes stronger and more pronounced and she begins the physical act of putting on her costume, cowgirl style clothes, large and very obviously fake blonde wig, brightly coloured jewellery, make up and false eyelashes. As she does this she talks the audience through the process. She discusses the difficulties of putting on false eyelashes when you are over 40 and how she loves them because "you are acknowledging that your own eyelashes are inadequate". At the end of the performance Weaver performs a strip tease. She counts to 56, her age, while removing all the signs of Tammy until she is simply herself as the performer in a red dressing gown. However, in both the Drill Hall and the Nuffield Theatre performance, she does not remove Tammy entirely and finishes the show with an acoustic country song complicating our understanding of which elements of the performance just witnessed were presented as Weaver and which as Tammy. By foregrounding her 'putting on' and 'taking off' of costume both through her actions and her speech, Weaver is highlighting how easily roles, and by extension gender roles, are constructed and is naming the props and attitudes used to do this. She turns into the uber-feminine Tammy through changing clothes and adding make-up and adopting the conventions

of country and western and burlesque performance, both forms which foreground a very particular type of femininity. However Tammy is also presented as someone who has just adopted a lesbian lifestyle and who is striving to become a performance artist. She can neither be located as the tame, slightly coy version of femininity of burlesque and country and western or as the perhaps more challenging version of femininity of the lesbian performance artist, instead she inhabits a somewhat marginal space between the two.

Elin Diamond examines the performance of male actors playing female roles in historical theatre models. Diamond states:

> Most disturbingly, when male actors impersonate female characters, though they are merely theatricalizing a discrete set of man-made gender gestures, they are, by participating in a mimetic activity becoming dangerously *like a woman*. (368)

As I have outlined, this mimesis is also present in abundance in *What Tammy Needs to Know*. Through her performance of the *character* of Tammy, Weaver becomes more like a woman than any *real* woman could ever be. Not only does Weaver engage in this mimesis but she pointedly demonstrates it is nothing more than an impersonation. This tactic of foregrounding the performance of gender and of the labour it involves is one that Split Britches use repeatedly in their work. Jaclyn Prior remarks on it in Peggy Shaw's performance in *Dress Suits to Hire* stating "[…] every lip pucker and shoulder roll working as a kind of half-baked citation of the repertoire of the feminine" (751). This makes for a compelling example of a way to expose the falsity of any essentialist view of female gender. Our gender and our objectification as women is something that is socially constructed and therefore something that we can deconstruct. As Sue-Ellen Case notes when she talks about Tammy Whynot in the earlier show *Upwardly Mobile Home***:** "Tammy is both the country-western star, and

the deconstruction of such a persona" (23). Weaver destabilises the notion of fixed gender identification by presenting how artificial the construction of gender is as well as how this mimesis is adopted. Indeed, Weaver has also used this play of gender to adopt the conventions of masculinity in *Lust and Comfort* where she performs as a man. Butler argues that gender is created through a process of repeated performative and linguistic acts. She states:

> The subject is not determined by the rules through which it is generated because signification is *not a founding act but rather a regulated process of repetition* that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects. (original emphasis) (*Gender Trouble* 145)

*What Tammy Needs to Know* reveals this 'regulated process of repetition' in action.[3] If gender is simply constructed through repeated performance of certain codes and conventions, as Weaver's work suggests, then we can perhaps overcome the objectification inherent in playing one version of woman simply by playing something else.

Throughout their work Split Britches have performed a variety of femininities, be this the dangerous, dark world of the film-noir femme fatale in *Dress Suits to Hire*, the working women of historical rural America in their first show Split Britches or the woman adopting masculine performance in Peggy Shaw's solo show *Menopausal Gentleman*. When read as a whole, their work highlights the possibilities for plural femininities rather than positing a singular femininity. Weaver exaggerates a particular construction of femininity in *What Tammy Needs to Know* but contrasts this construction with a performance as herself. A further version of femininity is opened up by Weaver's common identification as a femme lesbian woman. What unites all

[3] For a full discussion of the social construction of gender see Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990) and Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge, 1993).

these performances of female gender is the notion that femininity becomes something that Split Britches can adopt and disrupt as they choose and they never attempt to convince an audience that any of this is anything more than performance. The actors draw attention to their play at being these people rather than their adoption of a role in the usual theatrical sense and this adds to the power of Split Britches deconstruction of gender. [4]

Tammy Whynot often bears a striking resemblance to her creator, also a white lesbian performance artist in her mid fifties raised among Southern Baptists in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia[5], although Weaver has never had a career as a successful country and Western singer, and in her performance at Queen Mary University she confessed this to the audience in a bid to bring "authenticity and truth" to her work. Weaver does not use personal narrative to help the actor become more like the character; instead Tammy Whynot becomes more like the actor. During the performances Tammy tells a series of stories of things she has done or might have done, the line between truth and fiction is deliberately obscured. The audience don't know if these stories belong to Weaver, to Tammy, to both or to neither. For example, an audience with background knowledge on Weaver may well be aware of her strip for peace protest where she paraded naked at the Republican convention in America carrying a sign emblazoned with the words "more fucking, less fighting." During the show, Weaver tells this story as Tammy and hands around photos for the audience to have a look at. However, the woman in the pictures is clearly Weaver without the wig, false eyelashes and other accoutrements that mark her as Tammy. But then again in

[4] For a discussion of the play at work in Split Britches performances see Geraldine Harris, "Double Acts, Theatrical Couples, and Split Britches' 'Double Agency,' " *New Theatre Quarterly* 18 (2002): 211-221.

[5] Biographical information on Weaver gained from discussions with Weaver during a four day workshop run by Split Britches at Lancaster University as part of their Women Writing for Performance series of events.

these photos she has just performed a strip and is semi-naked; so is this Weaver or just Tammy undressed? Or is it Weaver performing Tammy undressed? These photographs immediately ask the audience to question whose story this is and who is telling it.

The level of autobiography and ambiguity between the character of Tammy and her creator is essential in terms of the show's critique of the performance and construction of gender. Without this complexity Tammy would not be an exaggeration of femininity at all, she would simply be a comic book character**.**

Laura Marcus notes that autobiography is a powerful tool that enables the author to move between subject and object position; the performer who employs autobiography in their work is both the object of study and the speaking subject that creates the work. Marcus argues that in this way autobiography "transcends" these subject positions making them redundant rather than "transgressing" a binary opposition (14). Weaver's use of autobiography enables the audience to share in her view of the world, looking out together from one viewpoint as in Leder's call for empathy in order to overcome the objectifying gaze. If, as Marcus argues and as I have argued through my application of Leder's proposal, through the use of autobiography it is possible to transcend the position of subject and object, autobiography must also be a powerful tool to overcome objectification. Claire McDonald maintains that autobiography enables a female artist to "confirm her legitimacy and coherence as a speaker while exploring the complexities and fragmentation of her experience" (188). Weaver in *What Tammy Needs to Know* is drawing on this "complexit[y] and fragmentation" through her use of autobiographical material. She employs her own seemingly contradictory background both as 'country gal' raised among Southern Baptists in rural America and as cutting edge lesbian

performance artist. She finds a way to bring these two elements together in the character of Tammy Whynot. Altogether, the complexity of the performance and the shared viewpoint force the audience to engage with Weaver -the speaking and multifaceted subject- rather than simply viewing her as the site of performance. When coupled with Weaver's stressing of the construction of gender it removes any chance of seeing Tammy as the normalised version of femininity that Mulvey argues is essential in order for the objectifying gaze to function. This is a significant step towards overcoming the objectification in performance.

Lacan states that the gaze can be a multidirectional model where the person viewing is also the object of their object or a newly introduced third person's gaze (72). That is, he develops the gaze from the one-way model he first proposes (and that is employed by Mulvey to examine how the gaze functions in narrative cinema) and makes it reciprocal, the person being viewed can look back and the original spectator is placed within the visual frame. Lacan's model presents some interesting possibilities in live performance where the performer can directly return the spectator's gaze and the audience can see one another. This possibility of seeing the people looking on is avoided through the use of conventions such as the raised stage and darkened auditorium in much West End/Broadway theatre. In Weaver's work these devices are dispensed with; the performance takes place in a studio space where both audience and performer are well lit and seated café-style with the performance taking place around the audience's seats and tables. Weaver looks back at her audience and directly engages them in conversation preventing them from inhabiting the voyeuristic spectator position outlined in Mulvey's gaze. Thus, the audience is as much part of the spectacle as the performer and at times the visual and aural focus of everyone in the room will be directed at individual audience members. Not only does

Weaver make the audience the centre of attention, but she also brings the focus to individual members of the audience preventing them from hiding as part of a larger crowd. In doing so, she turns the gaze back to the audience. The audience members are forced to write the performance on their own bodies and with their own words. If they are going to objectify Weaver with their gaze they are also going to have to face being viewed themselves, placing the spectators in a similar subject position to the performer.

Weaver's use of the devices of returning the gaze, autobiography and the foregrounding of the construction of femininity presents a compelling set of theoretical strategies for resisting objectification in performance. For the two full length performances discussed in this paper the audience has been almost exclusively female. It has also been staged in a venue noted for staging lesbian work and in a feminist theatre conference. Weaver's cameo appearance at the Performance Studies International conference at Queen Mary University was part of a discussion about the role of artists in debates on human rights. These are all arenas in which, it might be assumed, the audience is going to be supportive of a presentation of the possibilities for deconstructing gender and objectification, however, certain audience reactions to the work bring this into question. At the Lancaster performance Weaver had some difficulty taking off her neckerchief and an audience member offered to assist calling out "can I help you with that." Weaver accepted the help. Later in this scene she comes to remove her bra, this was greeted with an enthusiastic cry from the audience of "can I help you with that!" Although this could be read as an ironic response with audience members highlighting the performance of objectification that Weaver has presented, I propose a more complex reading of the role of sexuality and desire in Weaver's work. Instead of seeing the eradication of objectification as necessitating

the destruction of desire, Weaver presents a place where alternate models of desire are privileged. In order to overcome objectification it is not necessary to become sexless. As another performance artist, Carolee Schneemann, has said, we should still express our desire and be desired by others and we should acknowledge and embrace our existence as sexual beings in our performances (194). Weaver's work offers strategies which allow women to take control of our objectification and to define it within our own terms; not to be limited *only* to being the sexual object or other for a patriarchal society but to determine how we both celebrate and exploit our own sexuality and desire. As Elin Diamond says when discussing Tammy Whynot in *Upwardly Mobile Home*:

> Through subtle exaggeration, Weaver defuses the obvious fetishization inherent in that role, even as she reroutes Tammy's seductiveness for the spectatorial pleasure of her generally all-woman, generally lesbian audiences at the WOW Cafe in New York's East Village. Weaver foregrounds Tammy's exploitation "without" (as Irigaray puts it) "allowing herself to be simply reduced to it". On the contrary, Weaver, a skilled performer, can explore the desire that drives the fetishizing, exploitative gaze, but in a "stage set-up" that deliberately privileges the female eye. (373)

Through her strategies of foregrounding the construction of femininity, her use of autobiography and her turning back of the gaze on the audience Weaver performs a theatre that goes beyond resistance of objectification. She completely transcends the binary opposition of 'objectified' or 'not objectified' and offers an alternate way of looking at the female from outside the patriarchal construction of sexual 'other.'

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# Accusing and Engaging the Audience through Theatreform: Griselda Gambaro's *Information for Foreigners*

Selena Burns (New York University)

*Information for Foreigners*, written by Argentine playwright Griselda Gambaro in 1971 and 1972, reads more like a tour through a haunted house than a stage play. In the preliminary stage directions, it is suggested that the play should take place "in a two story residential house with empty rooms, some of which interconnect, and passageways, some dark and some crudely lit" (Gambaro 69). The audience is to be divided into groups who are led through the house (and thus through each of the twenty scenes scripted by Gambaro) by guides. "I ask that you stay together and remain silent. Careful on the stairs," says each guide before breaking off with his or her group to witness the scenes in a different order, until the final scene where all the groups gather together (Gambaro 70-71). However, rather than being led into rooms with ghosts and ghouls and peeled-grape eyeballs, Gambaro's unsuspecting theatre audience is lead through a horror house of torture. They are taken past prisoners who are kept locked in vertical wooden boxes and into rooms where they view sometimes highly realistic and sometimes highly theatrical scenes of torture, abduction, punishment, and deference to authority. Some of the scenes they witness are recreations of incidents being reported in Argentinean newspapers of the time.

In 1971 and 1972, incidents of disappearances and torture of civilians labelled as dissident were indeed being reported in the media, but at that time, play translator Marguerite Feitlowitz suggests, there were both Argentinians and non-Argentinians who were either actively ignoring such reports or accepting the half-truth explanations for it– thus prompting the

ironic title of the play (Feitlowitz 6). According to Antonius Robben in his anthropological study of political violence in Argentina, torture and "disappearances" of criminal suspects, both common and political, had occurred in the country throughout the 20th century irregardless of the particular government in power, with torture turning into a "routine practice" in 1970, as guerrilla organizations rose in number (Robben 215). In 1976 under the Videla military junta, a reign of terror lasting through the early 1980s that came to be known as Argentina's "Dirty War" would begin, during which time as many as 30,000 citizens labelled as left-wing subversives by the government were arrested, tortured, and often murdered or "disappeared" (Taylor, "Theatre and Terrorism" 207). Gambaro, who had thematically addressed political disappearances in previous works, including in her more traditionally staged play *The Walls*, written in 1963 and performed in Buenos Aires in 1966 (Gambaro 14), is seen as somewhat prophetic as an author, though she explains this as stemming from her being tuned into the data "floating around" in her role as artist (Betsko 188).

Why in 1971 did Gambaro move to an experimental interactive play structure to explore the escalating situation of human rights violations in Argentina? Robben notes that in 1971, there was a marked increase in the number of disappearances, and that the system of abduction, torture and disappearance that the Videla junta would later systematize and expand was already in place by 1973 (263-264). Marguerite Feitlowitz argues that Gambaro's work "…..is a combative theatre, and grows out of the belief that the human condition can change" (3). If this is so, then it is possible that in *Information for Foreigners* Gambaro is responding to the escalating political and artistic repression by escalating the intensity of her communication with her audience. *Information for Foreigners* stands apart from Gambaro's earlier works on the topic of political violence in that, in combining an experimental promenade play structure with unusual

presentational modes, it attempts to harness the inherent interactive possibilities of the theatrical medium in order to not just present information and ideas, but to actively critique the audience, and to create opportunity for reflection and motivation for action. One of the concepts Gambaro presents through these means and asks theatregoers to engage with is the idea that state sponsored torture is a performance for which the Argentine citizens are the complicit audience.

In keeping with the ideas of dramatic theorist Richard Schechner, who describes performance as a continuum that ranges from the traditional staged theatre performance to "life" performances such as public events and demonstrations (Schechner 41), Diana Taylor, in her afterword to Marguerite Feitlowitz's translation of three of Gambaro's plays (*The Walls*, *Information for Foreigners* and her 1986 play *Antigona Furiosa*) argues that spectacle of arrest and torture in Argentina is a real life performance, intended to demonstrate the authority of the military and police to the public. She notes that Gambaro deliberately mirrors this performance of torture in her plays of the 1960s and 1970s in order to "expose the theatricality of Argentinean political violence" (Taylor, "Violent Displays" 161). In *Information for Foreigners*, this is explored not through narrative storytelling, but through the staging of a variety of scenes representing experiments, children's games, abductions and torture, that are seemingly unconnected to one another, except that they expose the theatrical nature of those techniques used by those in power to control, persuade and silence. Furthermore, in this play Gambaro uses interactive techniques in order to comment on the ethics of being a silent observer to these theatrics. In one scene for example (scene four in publication, but the order the audience might see it in varies), Gambaro does this by recreating the infamous Stanley Milgram psychology experiment conducted at Yale University in 1961-1962.

Stanley Milgram, in an attempt to discover why there was so little resistance to authority and so much complicity in Nazi Germany, designed an experiment intended to test obedience to authority. He attempted to see how far subjects would go when instructed by a scientist in a technician**'s** coat to "teach" another supposed subject by zapping them with increasing volts of electricity every time they missed an answer on a word association game. In Milgram's original experiment, the "student" subject was an actor and the electrical volts were not actually delivered, but the student would scream in pain, sometimes driving the "teacher" subject to tears as he or she continued to deliver shocks of increasing value in deference to the instructions of the scientist (Milgram 13-26). Sociologist Erving Goffman, whose ideas provided a foundation for the theories of Schechner, pointed out that performances take place in everyday life that indicate rank or power. Furniture and décor might serve as "scenery" and "setting" presented to make an impression while clothing might serve as a "costume" that indicates the hierarchical "role" one will play in interaction with others (Goffman 22-24). Accordingly, in Gambaro's reproduction of the Milgram experiment in a room in her house of horrors, she places emphasis in her stage notes on the laboratory accoutrements and the lab coat, or the "setting" and "costume" of authority in the experiment, thus highlighting the legitimization of inflicted pain through costumes and institutional settings of authority (Gambaro 74-75).

Further, Gambaro plays with some of the word associations used in the learning game in order to connect the scene to current events in Argentina. "Nation-Germany" and "torture-dissuasion" are initially given as word pairs by the scientist. At one point the "student" subject, who has been screaming in pain as he is "electrocuted" in response to wrong answers, is asked to recall which word was originally paired with Nation, and given the multiple choice options "prison, bars, Germany, torture". He ends up screaming "Argentina" as the answer rather than

Germany. At the end of the scene, the scientist relates to the audience that 85% of subjects in Germany and 66% in the U.S. went up to the maximum voltage of 450 volts in Milgram's original experiments. Further, he informs the audience that many of Milgram's subjects, when debriefed after the experiment, claimed lack of responsibility for their actions due to the fact they were only following the rules. The guide quickly ushers the theatregoers out with chiding words to the scientist: "Don't wear out the audience, these experiments took place in Germany and the U.S. Here among ourselves it would be unthinkable, absurd," (Gambaro 84). In recreating Milgram's experiment and explicitly suggesting parallels to Argentina, Gambaro enacts a commentary on torture as a performance, enhanced by costumes and settings of authority. At the same time, by having her actors break the fourth wall and acknowledge the role of the audience as spectator, Gambaro implies an uncomfortable connection between her theatre audience and the public who turns a blind eye to what is happening in Argentina –suggesting that citizens who accept the arrest and torture of political dissidents out of respect for rules and authority are complicit in their torture or death.

Torture as performance and audience complicity are also explored in scenes more directly and explicitly tied to the particularities of the situation in Argentina. In another scene in the play (scene 3), a clearly terrified woman sits in a chair while a man establishes his control over her with language and gestures of intimidation. Everything he says to her is a performance, but one designed for her to see through. His words taken on their own seem benign and possibly even kind: At one point he says to her "What a mess- they fill the tub but don't put any of the towels. Was it [the water] warm (Gambaro 72)?" What is evident from the subtext of the scene, however, is that the bath is clearly for holding the girl's head down under dirty water, a torture method that was used on the "disappeared" political prisoners in Argentina (Robben 217).

Further, seemingly innocent comments to the girl by the man such as "Don't you have a boyfriend," become suggestive of implied threat of rape through his physical caresses, alluding to women political prisoners being frequent rape victims of their guards (Robben 227). Both the man and the girl reference the presence of the audience in this scene, with the man pointing to the spectators and offering the false comfort as he loads his gun "Nothing will happen to you. There are lots of people. They're watching us" (Gambaro 73). Later, when the man tells the girl to go to the bathroom her response is a humiliated reference to her exposure to an audience: "They're watching me (Gambaro 73)." Gambaro in this scene uses the breaking down of barriers between the audience and the actors to comment on the ethics of being an audience to the theatrics of torture, as the theatregoers become complicit in the girl's humiliation in their role as silent, passive observers. The author takes advantage of the interpersonal nature of the theatrical medium in order to move the relationship between the torturers, the tortured and the Argentine public into the same shared physical space. In doing so, Gambaro confronts the theatre audience with the active role the inactive public plays in the face of human rights abuses.

As her use of audience-actor interaction indicates, is not just through the content of the scenes that Gambaro presents in the various rooms of the house but through the "guided tour" format of the play that the playwright makes her commentary on citizen inactivity in the face of government sponsored torture. Gambaro manages to allow theatregoers to be engaged in typical and expected modes of audience behaviour (her stage notes specifically indicate that they should never be forced to participate) while simultaneously taking advantage of the power of the shared actor-audience space to implicate the audience in the action of the play. One can guess that the cognitive dissonance between the physical proximity to suffering and the adherence to regulated modes of audience behaviour (an audience member on a guided tour typically does not interfere

in the presentation) has the potential to inspire a sort of witness guilt in audience members. The interactive elements of the play related to its "tourist and tour guide" format seem designed to foster and enhance such guilt. For example, at the end of scene seven, the theatregoers are offered wine and refreshments (all included in the price of the ticket) by an usherette just after they have witnessed another scene between the girl prisoner and the guard, in which she has clearly recently been tortured and begs "I'm thirsty" while raising her hands to the audience (Gambaro 90).

One might assume that this creation of witness guilt in the audience is in line with Aristotelian notions of creating pity and fear in the spectator, or even an Artaudian eruption and reformation, yet the goal of Gambaro does not seem to be purging these emotions or providing a type of therapy, but rather politically harnessing them. Gambaro says of Argentine theatre: "Our theatre is […] connected with a social element and our plays deal directly with a political and social content. We also believe that society is modifiable, changeable" (Betsko 195). She adds in response to the relationship between the audience and her plays "I believe that all theatre means to produce not shock but a response in the spectator. It could be an emotional response or a rational, sensible response" (Betsko 196). In keeping with this aim, Gambaro also, at several points, seems to use what might be described as Brechtian distancing techniques in order to prompt the audience not just to feel, but also to think. Brecht suggests techniques such as unrealistic and exaggerated costumes and gestures in order to "alienate" the spectators from the action on stage in order to allow them to think critically about what they are seeing (Brecht 136-47). In her recreations of disappearances reported in Argentine newspapers, Gambaro frequently uses stage directions and modes of presentation where she calls for exaggerated acting. For example, the stage directions for scene 9 read:

> The room is lit with a rosy light. Four chairs. There is a group comprising a man, a woman, and two other adults, disguised as children, a girl and a boy. Their makeup is exaggerated and their clothes are cheap, vulgar. The MOTHER is sewing, the FATHER is seated a little apart and the CHILDREN are playing at throwing a hoop.
>
> On the far side of the room are the CHIEF and two POLICEMEN. They sit very erect with their arms crossed over their chests. The characters act very broadly, a little like marionettes. The tone is grossly exaggerated. (Gambaro 92)

This is a scene of an arrest, but it is presented with over the top falseness, including gestures that are described as being like those from a heroine in a silent movie. Other highly stylized scenes that seem intended to remind the audience that they are observing performance include an abduction scene staged as a musical comedy (scene 14) and a scene in which an actress who has supposedly just been killed is told in the stage directions to make it obvious she is "only acting" and still alive (scene 13).

In addition to potentially providing the audience members with moments of emotional distance where they can think and reflect rather than be caught up in feeling, the very artificiality of the abduction recreation scenes seems to comment on the trustworthiness (or rather untrustworthiness) of the official story being told in those papers and recounted by the guides. Rosalea Postma points out in her 1980 article, "Space and Spectator in the Theatre of Griselda Gambaro," that in *Information for Foreigners,* the guides are frequently telling the audience deliberate lies. Postma notes that from the first moment of the play the audience must see the guides as untrustworthy, when they claim they won't let anyone in who is younger than 18, older than 36 or younger than 35 (but let in everyone who pays) and claim there will be no foul language in the play (while proceeding to use a great deal themselves) (Postma 39). Because the audience is put in a position of being dependant on the guides and deferent to their authority, the play itself then reflects the wider political situation of those reading news vetted by the

Argentine government. The artificiality of certain dramatized scenes juxtaposed with the "explanation for foreigners" extracted from real newspapers and police blotters and delivered by these untrustworthy guides certainly seems a pointed commentary on the untrustworthiness of Argentinean authorities. Further, it calls attention to the lies the audience members (be they in Argentina or abroad) must tell themselves in order to acquiesce to being guided by untrustworthy authorities.

On the other hand, in spite of these unrealistic elements, which it would seem to cause distancing and space for analysis and reflection, the particular environmental theatre context in which Gambaro places the audience may indeed provoke an emotional response rather than a critical one even to such exaggeratedly presentational scenes. After all, "distanced" performance is juxtaposed with excerpts the guide reads from true stories taken from Argentinean newspapers. This juxtaposition highlights the fact that the scenes being presented, in spite of all the costumes and fake acting being used to represent them, are taken from events that are real. Thus, the aim is perhaps not necessarily, or at least not only, Brechtian "alienation" or distancing as much as**,** once again, an attempt to provide an interactive commentary on the reaction of a passive audience to the political spectacle of arrest and torture. What does it mean after all if you are able to distance yourself from this performance of abduction, murder or torture which is based on events that are actually occurring in your own country merely because of the stylized means through which the information is delivered to you? What does it mean if you are able to distance yourself from the reports of the disappearances you read in the news? Is there a difference? Gambaro's play begs the question of whether or not the public has a reciprocal obligation to the news and to the arts –that of not being uncritical, silent and passive consumers.

In *Information for Foreigners,* Gambaro exposes what was happening to Argentine artists and journalists in 1971 in a scene recreating the recent arrest of troupe of actors, whom she shows performing *Othello* at the time of their arrest. She also presents the arresting officers as themselves speaking lines from *Othello*, again exposing the performative nature of the act of arrest and perhaps (through her choice of *Othello* in particular) indicating the harm to innocents based on false information that was then occurring in Argentina. At the end of this scene, the guide informs the audience that all the members of the acting troupe plus a journalist were jailed for 9 months before being absolved. The 1980 Organization of American States Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in their "Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Argentina" confirms that, even before 1976 and the military junta that officially started the Dirty War, newspapers were subject to government censorship and journalists were being arrested, detained and probably tortured (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Chapter VII, pars. B1, D1-D2). According to the Report, by 1980, with the Dirty War well underway, the press was "refraining from assigning any importance to the 'operations' involving the seizure of citizens regarded as terrorists or subversive elements by the authorities" and refusing to print paid insert lists of the missing which even the commission described as "understandable in light of the circumstances" (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Chapter VII, par. B2). If real information does not lead to action and clearly false information is met with passivity and acceptance –is the audience also complicit in losing truthful news and truthful political art altogether?

The multitude of questions that are brought up by Gambaro's play seem particularly relevant to a contemporary US audience who, particularly since 2004, have been exposed to media images and reports of US soldiers and interrogators torturing detainees in Abu Gharib and

Guantánamo, from the April 28, 2004 *60 Minutes II* television news magazine report and May 10, 2004 Seymour Hersh New Yorker article that broke the story in mainstream media by revealing photographs of Abu Gharib torture victims, to the recent March 31st 2007 *New York Times* article detailing the experience of a prisoner who reported that he made a false confession at Guantánamo after being tortured (Liptak and Williams A10). Does the distance provided by the mediated nature of these images and stories make them easier to ignore? Is it too easy to turn away from a painful media image –to turn off the television or avoid clicking on a link– to be an audience who goes back to their wine and refreshments after being rushed away from witnessing something unpleasant? Are we complicit in the torture if we watch someone's humiliation without acting, or if we accept political spin without questioning it? Can the interpersonal, proximal and potentially interactive nature of theatre play a role in creating citizen reflection and action by confronting them face to face with the reality of torture? Can it do so by highlighting the fact that a silent spectator performs action even by their lack of action? Can theatre provide an alternative to making news consumers complicit in a victim's torture through their role as an audience to humiliating photographs? Can theatre be a unique tool for combating citizen complacency about human rights violations? Certainly with the multitude of new plays surrounding the issue of torture –including those based on real stories of contemporary human rights violations, such as *Guantanamo: Honor Bound to Defend Freedom*, the 2004 ethnodrama by UK playwrights Victoria Brittain and Gillian Slovo– the question is an important one. Are such plays "preaching to the choir", as *Chicago Tribune* critic Chris Jones indicated of *Guantanamo* in its original London production (Jones)? We might imagine that the response that *Information for Foreigners* implicitly gives to this accusation is that knowledge that something is happening and belief that it is wrong does not imply action. It is worth noting that Slovo's words

about the urgency of the themes of her own play echoes the major theme of Gambaro's play. "We are all complicit," says Slovo. "If it raises discussion, that is the way art can effect change" (Rourke).

"I ask that you stay together and remain silent" are the words that begin her play, but Gambaro herself harnesses the possibilities of the theatrical medium to try to get the audience – be they Argentinian, or those outside Argentina consuming the news and free to act with fewer restrictions– to do just the opposite: to resist authority, to stand apart from the crowd and to speak for change as she herself does as an artist. Unlike the contemporary *Guantanamo,* which has been performed not only in the UK but in several major US cities, including Washington DC, *Information for Foreigners* could not be performed inside the country the play was written about at the time it was written as it would have put the author's family in Argentina at risk. Gambaro smuggled the play out with her when she went into exile in 1977, and copies circulated on the international scene (Feitlowitz 6). The play was not published in her home country until 1987, four years after the restoration of democracy in Argentina, and as late as 1992, twenty years after it was written, the play had still never been produced (Feitlowitz 6). Today however, the play gets produced both in Argentina and abroad. Just recently, in March 2006, the city of Junín, Argentina included an adaptation of *Information for Foreigners* by El Groupo Experimental Teatro in its "week of memory" events commemorating those affected by the March 1976 military coup that started the Dirty War ("Noticias"). In the US, City College at CUNY (City University of New York) put on the play in March 2007 ("CUNY Events Calendar"), and in April 2007, the Undergraduate Theatre Association at the University of Wisconsin at Madison staged a full production of the play ("Production"). The current interest in mounting the play in US perhaps indicates that students and artists find that the play indeed speaks to contemporary

US political issues in a uniquely powerful way. Victoria Lantz, director of the Wisconsin production commented on what they hope to accomplish with their own distinct staging choices, "I am hoping to walk a fine line between comfort and discomfort […] hopefully taking the conversation of the play outside the time and space of the performance and connect discussions to present-day oppression and antagonism." Thus, thirty-five years after it was written, the play continues to raise questions about the citizen's role as spectator in human rights violations and to serve as an example of the potential power of the theatrical form to speak for action and change on an individual, national and global level.

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# *Antonio or the Message*: Bourgeois Conformism and the Dictatorship of the Colonels in Greece (1967-1974)

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2007 marks the fortieth anniversary of the 'Revolution of the 21st of April,' the coup executed by a military troika, the junta that seized power for seven years (1967-1974). During this specific period theatre gradually became a medium through which the people of Greece participated in the public affairs. In a coercive society defined by a military State, political activity was reduced to the private sphere. Theatre publicised private opposition and created a condition of political complicity between stage and auditorium. Audiences were not sole observers of an action, but a living group of acting individuals that fulfilled their part as citizens. Theatre, as it is a place of illusion, offered the illusion of citizenship. Moreover, since it created the conditions for the forbidden to occur, theatre functioned as a place of resistance to the dictatorship of the colonels. It must be clear though, that resistance through theatre is only symbolic; that is, it can only *inspire* resistance in the social sphere.

The period of Greek history that begun at the end of World War II in 1945 is defined by the civil war between nationalists and communists, and its consequent polarisation. The dictatorship of the colonels was the climax and the end of this situation of partial democracy; partial, because one part of the population experienced an ordinary bourgeois capitalist everyday life, while another part of the population (the communists) was violently repressed. The Greek civil war is seen by many historians as the Greek manifestation of the Cold War: Greece, as a dependent State participated in the global policies of polarisation.

Haralambis argues that the dictatorship was a result of contradictions within Greek social structures and observes that the army was 'identified with the idea of the

nation […as its] source, and guarantor; the precondition of the nation's existence' (Χαραλάμπης 77).[1] National identity was defined by the repressive apparatuses as the opposition to the anti-Greek other, the communists, who were also referred to as Slavs, or reds. According to this logic, democracy could only be maintained when the traitors of the nation would be extinct. 'The revolution was not aiming at the death of democracy, but at democracy's salvage from death that would come with the red totalitarianism, as a result of actions carried out by the politicians of the time' (Μακαρέζος 14). A gradual democratisation of the State occurred during the 1960s when a party of the centre won the elections. However, this government was deposed by the palace. This led to a period of political abnormality and popular demonstrations, requesting a more democratic regime. It was a period in which political awareness was growing in parallel with the explosion of oppressed leftist activity.

Poulantzas, in *The Crisis of the Dictatorships* discusses the existence of the para-State in post-war Greece, and defines it as a network that 'functions behind the façade of the State Apparatuses, which carefully disguise it […and] provides a permanent recourse for the bourgeoisie in their struggle to maintain and safeguard their power' (Poulantzas 100-101). Therefore, the para-State and its practices were illegitimate. When the colonels seized power in 1967, they claimed legitimacy on behalf of the para-State. The purposes of the dictatorship were the conservation of bourgeois State, the rescue of the national character, and the elimination of the communist danger.[2]

[1] All quotations from Greek sources are translated by me.

[2] Nikolaos Makarezos, of the leading troika of the 1967 coup, in his book *How We Were Driven to the 21st of April 1967*, claims that '[t]he need for an effective confrontation of the [political] dead end created by the pre-April national crisis, dictated the following double mission to the Military Revolution of the 21st of April:

I. **The prevention:**

The 'Revolution' came as a result of the destabilisation of the bourgeois order aiming at the reinforcement of law and order. For that they employed practices of 'brute violence' (Close 282). The coup was an act of autonomy of the para-State. It was an attempt to legalise unlawful aggression and violence. The bourgeoisie trapped in its (nationalist) contradictions remained indifferent to the new social condition, hence providing passive support to the colonels.

In 1972, Théatro Téchnis in Athens produced Lula Anagnostaki's play *Antonio or the Message*. Anagnostaki was a fairly young playwright and this production marked the initiation of the celebration for the 30 years of Théatro Téchnis. The socio-cultural event itself (the celebration) added significance to this particular production. Carolos Coun (the artistic director and founder of Théatro Téchnis) was one of the most acknowledged theatre directors in Greece, and Théatro Téchnis was a highly legitimate institution in Greek avant-garde theatre. Most of the production's reviews start with a quick reference to the celebratory character of the occasion and Coun's overall contribution: 'Theatro Technis has reached thirty years of activity, constantly devoted on creative work of a higher artistic level' (Δόξας 2). 'One of Coun's finest traditions is that he gives the chance to young dramatists to break the *barrier of silence*. The ones, however, who manage to walk through the *Narrow Gate* are subjected to the danger of *crashing* against the wall of the *unacceptable*' (Καλκάνη 4). The latter quotation reveals the difficulty of *entering* the (re)strict(ed) world of Théatro Téchnis and the conservatism of the bourgeois mainstream theatre audiences.

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a) Of the pre-arranged outbreak of the fourth Communist Round and the consequent massacre.
b) Of the overturning of the bourgeois order and the establishment of a Stalinist Dictatorship.
c) Of the incorporation of Greece behind the [Iron] Curtain and its geographical mutilation.

II. **The safeguarding** of the preconditions for a normal functioning rhythm of the public life in the Country, and the return, as soon as possible, to parliamentarism on healthy ground. In other words, the settlement of the clearly political problem' (Μακαρέζος 13).

I will argue that this production was an act of resistance to the cultural and physical submission of the country to an illegitimate (and illiterate) military regime, as well as an attempt to raise political awareness among the bourgeoisie.

*Antonio* is set '[i]n a room without walls where people from various countries live together. The room has view over streets, squares, and gardens where soldiers and policemen meet in an attempt to impose a new order' (Μιχαηλίδης 35). This house is located, according to descriptions, somewhere in England: 'On Sundays, after the meal, we always have tea here. With lemon. I don't like tea. I warn you… You will have to get used to the habits' (Αναγνωστάκη 10-11). The house is shelter for refugees from places where the 'new order' has been imposed; it resembles a prison, or an asylum. The regime constitutes an invisible and ambiguous threat of violence that eventually becomes visible and physically affects everyone inside and outside the house.

Threat generates action, which comes in the form of words spoken by men and women that enter the house. The message of fear and violence is announced through their language in increasing waves, to conclude in a spectacle of brutal physical violence by the regime. Anagnostaki pointed out that in this play the characters are given freedom; they are fragmentary, and their actions are often incomplete or completed by another character. Moreover, events progress 'freely and are introduced by the characters; accordingly they lead everybody, finally shaping the play, with their own meaning and autonomy' (Αναγνωστάκη 15). Therefore, the characters are not complete individuals, but fragments of a collective unconscious, and it is up to the events to construct the plot. Anagnostaki created an abstract sign-system that is characterised by lack of logical consistency and psychological causality.

The residents of the house live in constant fear: they fear what is to come; a certain establishment, an order from which they hide. It is a totalitarian order that spreads like a plague; so does the fear. The terror of totalitarianism and violence (reality) generates fear, and creates tendencies of escape. The house offers an illusion of privacy, which means detachment from reality, and therefore safety. The shelter they seek is the very illusion of the house being a shelter: they escape reality in order to feel safe. Reality is fear. The illusion is severely damaged when it is clearly exposed: physical violence invades the house in parallel with a counter-message of reaction that has been spread by a group of young men and women, Antonio's trusted friends. Antonio is a double figure within the play: he is the adopted son of the owner of the house (Aliki), and a mythical revolutionary. The former is an oppressed boy in a man's body and physically present, while the latter is the representation of an ideal and physically absent. The former is matter, while the latter is spirit. Antonio's friends appear as friends of Aliki's son, but reveal themselves as followers of the ideal. They appear to play a game, and discuss the future of their resistance. They are interrupted by State agents who appear to confirm the threat and bring violence on stage.

Meaning within the play is produced by its irrationality and its resistance to traditional structures of realist drama. The characters are stripped off their individuality and act accordingly. In this chaotic universe only the structural variations of the theme of threat do not fall apart. The structure of the play derives from the notion of threat of violence. The rest of the structural elements (the dynamic relations between events and characters) are built upon this ground, following an internal causality of succession of events, and not a logical/psychological causality of behaviours.

Moreover, threat spreads and gradually dominates the space in the form of a disease surrounding the house.

The atmosphere of the play consists of a poetic darkness and constant menacing signs, creating a claustrophobic environment. The domestic space can be described as a closed circuit, from which there is no point of escape. The circle asserts a certain degree of continuity, in that it does not have a starting or an ending point. Threat enters the circle of the house from the periphery of a wider homocentric circle. It surrounds the space of the house, thus creating a circular notion of siege, that gradually closes down to the centre. The outer circle is defined as the State. It is a continuum of oppression and violence, which is represented by waves of threat that occupy the whole of the outer circle, and gradually invade the inner circle. The latter is the private space of the house: it is a smaller reproduction of the outer one. They share hierarchical structures and power organisation schemes, but reversed. The inner circle is the structural centre of the play; it is the exemplary case within a wider context. Fear/threat comes in an outside → inside scheme.

The two circles are presented as the Family and the State. However, the specific case of family is consisting of various elements, often with opposing needs and wills; they are strangers to each other. Thus, it is not a typical example of a bourgeois family. Fear (of the outside) gradually leads to conformism, as a medium of anonymity and safety, which again leads gradually to loss of identity, mass stereotypes, separation from the experience and the self, alienation. The slow but steady invasion of fear creates events within the microcosm of the house. The reactions to the outside are only passive; they follow the events without participating. It is only a matter of time for the menacing vibrations to invade the private in material form: physical violence.

The only active resistance to the threat comes from Antonio's friends. Their actions radicalise the inside/private by making it part of the outside/public struggles. They invade the inner circle before the agents of the State. They dissolve the private, in order to confront the terror of the public. The connection between the youth and the environment of the house is established by Eleni: she represents the house in the *game*.[3] The inside space of private safety has been shrinking since she joined the strange family living in this house. The private space of the house is defined by conformism to the local habits, and the bourgeois ideology of passive observation of spectacular life. For its residents, the house is a place of anonymity, a safe place in which they can continue an unsuspected life. The safety of the private is the last thing dissolved by the State. The physical invasion of privacy by the public/State is the ultimate mechanism of suppression and oppression employed by the established order. Slater points out that, according to Marxist theory, 'private life appears free yet has in fact been colonized by public commercial and political institutions' (148). Therefore, the safety of the private appears as a vital myth/illusion of the bourgeoisie.

In the scene with Antonio's friends, a message of counter-action is delivered, reversing the dynamics of relations and events. The main struggle of the play is encapsulated here: the various power structures fall apart and their mythologies are disillusioned to reveal reality. Reality exposes the State Apparatus as a set of repressive and reproductive institutions. For the most part of the play the private is dominated by the public (on the symbolic/psychological level). At the end the private is physically eliminated: the lack of the illusion of safety, will remove individuals

[3] It is a game of questions and answers: its logic is that each one answers to the previous question. Thus, truth reveals itself, but hidden under a seemingly illogical order. Eleni asks the questions and the youth answer. The universal character of the youth movement is revealed in some of the answers: 'Have you ever honoured your parents? Not me, my brother has. I was doing other stuff. Were you ever in Paris, in the spring? I can't remember any more. Were you ever a follower of fire? Whenever it was needed, yes' (Αναγνωστάκη 84).

from their alienated privacies, and turn them to active agents. This scene is at the centre of the circular structure of the play; it is its climax and counter action. It marks the explosion of the private, and its consequent public struggles.

The structure of the play creates a spatial binary, from which various signifiers arise. The *message* of the title is to be found in the succession of binaries; it is a reaction to these binaries, or even reaction to the notion of binary and polarisation, which was integral part of the collective consciousness and a determining factor in the historical developments in post-war Greece.

The spatial binary (inside – outside) implies the binary safety – danger. It is, moreover, the distinction between two phases of reality: the familiar and the unknown. The inside forms the private space, while the outside is that of the public. Bourdieu argues that '[o]ne might add to this theme of privacy […] that of the residence, the house as a stable, enduring locus and the household as a permanent unit, durably associated with a house that is endlessly transmissible' (65). In the sphere of the private/household we find the notion of the family: '[…] when we think of privacy as the domestic, intimate and familial world, we associate it with (for example) emotion rather than reason […] personal rather than monetary or material bonds'(Slater 144).

The people in Aliki's house share a bond of fear; they stay together in order to survive. They form a stereotypical family, in order to escape participation in the violence of the public. Bourdieu again suggests that according to '[t]he dominant, legitimate definition […] the normal family […] is a set of related individuals link either by alliance (marriage), or filiation, or, less commonly, by adoption (legal relationship), and living under the same roof (cohabitation)' (64). The individuals that form the household in *Antonio* are not related by blood, and are not married; this

household consists of strangers. However, the core of the family is Aliki and her adopted son, and they all share a bond that consists of trust and immaterial motives.

Anagnostaki presented on stage the nucleus social unit, the oppressed and oppressive bourgeois family. The State is the absent power structure that appears only at the end, forceful, invasive, and oppressive. Anagnostaki underlined the domestic oppression and violence, which is succeeded by the State violence. The former is mostly psychological, whereas the latter is physical.

For the characters of the play the private space provides the illusion of safety. 'The bourgeois idealization of the private was bound up with the idea of home as *haven* from the public world' (Slater 146). Family, based on regularities and stereotypes provides this illusion of safety, while at the same time 'it is the main subject of reproduction strategies' (Bourdieu 69). It is, according to Bourdieu, the locus of both biological and social reproduction. Respectively, the State aims at forming a corpus of regulations that will promote a specific type of family, thus encouraging 'logical conformism and moral conformism' (Bourdieu 71). The individuals that live in the house, under Aliki's rule, conform to the local logical and moral stereotypes to be accepted by the local (bourgeois) community, and eliminate any suspicion of irregularity.

Bourdieu concludes that 'family is indeed a fiction, a social artefact, an illusion […], but a "well-founded one," being produced and reproduced with the guarantee of the State, it receives from the State at every moment the means to exist and persist' (72). In *Antonio's* case the illusion is demystified due to the violence of the State and its physical presence within the private space of the family. When the State physically crosses the line that separates the public from the private, it suspends the distinction between the two levels of social activity/reality; it *breaks the rules* that

itself has established. The characters of the play fear this *unlawful* deed, and they find shelter in escaping reality: Aliki insists on the continuation of the conformed life she leads, although the menacing waves bring the message of violence closer. It is the bourgeois myth of safety within the private world of the household. The *unlawful order* imposed by the State, illustrates an oppressive totalitarian bourgeois State, and implies the regime of the colonels: it was a case of illegitimate para-State agents claiming legitimacy. Aliki's reaction to it reflects the reaction of the bourgeoisie to the dictatorship of the colonels in Greece: there was, until then, no public reaction to the regime. Inaction means, in this sense, support to the established order.

The domination of the private by the public is already revealed from the very beginning of the play (or even before that); the difference at the end is that the domination has become material, physical, violent.

> Whereas family life, leisure and consumption have been presented as sacred and as autonomous spheres of freedom, they have in fact become the objects (and vehicles) of modern forms of social control such as advertising and marketing, State policy, bureaucratic rationality. (Slater 148)

Aspects of totalitarianism, such as oppression, and violence, complete an idea of Anagnostaki's indirect point of reference: the State of Greece in 1972.

When the private sphere is discredited, the only resistance to the State is the group of Antonio's friends. Michailides argues that in *Antonio* the youth undertake the difficult role of raising collective awareness: 'What happened between *The Gathering* [Anagnostaki's first play] and *Antonio* were the events of May 68 in Paris. The youth have taken on their part, found their character' (Μιχαηλίδης 39). Antonio's friends reflect the generation of the 1960s; they echo the collective consciousness of a generation that negates the bourgeois logic. The private sphere exits from the domestic space, it becomes public: 'the personal is political' (Slater 149). The

dissolution of the private points at the every day acts of resistance: revolutions in every day life.

Plant points out that 'daily acts of disruption and resistance to work, authority and consumption showed that the spectacle was being contested' (32). And this is exactly the kind of action the young revolutionaries want to undertake:

> YOUNG MAN B: It will be a bizarre invasion. We will all wear the same clothes, nothing special or fancy; for example a blue shirt and a pair of tweed trousers. We will be silent. […] From now on they will constantly find us in front of them, because we will never leave any more. (Αναγνωστάκη 81-82)

The 'they' of the above is the bourgeoisie; the people that 'suspect nothing' (Αναγνωστάκη 79). The youth must go and 'talk to them about enemies they can't see anywhere' (Αναγνωστάκη 79).

Kristeva argues that 'liberation of social behaviour was experienced as a revolt against bourgeois morality and family values' (18). And this is what Antonio's friends are determined to do; scare them with unconventional behaviours, so that the bourgeoisie will be able to recognise their entrapment within the bourgeois contradictions. The youth reverse the structural scheme (inside → outside), thus signifying that private must become public in order to resist the new totalitarian order. The reaction starts from the private sphere, in the everyday lives of the oppressed: the intimate, non-material relations of the private sphere should expand to the public and construct a new society free from the bourgeois stereotypes.

The reception of Anagnostaki's play by the critics was positive, but with question marks. A part of the establishment was supportive even though they had spotted problems in the play. The critical response to *Antonio* reflected the expectations of the theatre establishment in regard to an emerging playwright, as well as their scepticism towards Modern Greek playwrights; the discourse was focused on the originality and

especially the binary content – form. A clear message was expected due to the peculiarities of the socio-cultural context; a message against the regime, which the opposing feeling would grasp. Anagnostaki herself announced a message in the title of the play, but then created a complex universe that was not easily deciphered.

*Antonio* was mainly criticised for its lack of causality, the absence of fully drawn characters, and the lack of action; all the above add up to the absence of a clear message: 'no one can really see the message of the play' (Δόξας 2). Kritikos, delivering the most intimidating critique of the play argues that '[*Antonio*] includes nothing truthful and significant under its *serious* skin. […] Violence and oppression are to Ms Anagnostaki just words, and not real life experiences' (Κριτικός 4). Margaritis, in his own account of the play and the performance, disagreed with Kritikos suggesting that 'whatever may seem like a deficiency in the eyes of the uninformed spectator […] is in fact intended' (Μαργαρίτης 2). Furthermore, Kalkani argued that '[…] my logical and poor frame of analysis is betraying *Antonio*; that is, its musicality, the surreal narrative of the play, the very deeply drawn and fascinating small scenes in which humans reveal themselves' (Καλκάνη 4). She implied that the depth of the play is far beyond reason and merely a matter of sensitivity, which cannot be analysed in a review.

Kalkani grasped and clearly reflected what Anagnostaki tried to expose, a plague created by humanity. Abuse of power, oppression, violence are the main themes of the play; 'all the characters are fugitives in indoor spaces that are not asylums, because fear has dominated them, and because the epidemic spreads closer each time, more monstrous, present, constant; there is no safety anywhere' (Καλκάνη 4). Here she points out the imprisonment of the individuals within their own space; they are fugitives, their asylum/prison is the house, their illusory space of safety.

Within the social context of the performance, the only logic according to which she could approach Anagnostaki's dramatic world was that of everyday life under colonels: oppression, threat, and fear were the disease that was spreading among the Greeks.

Georgousopoulos argued that '*Antonio or the Message* is without a doubt Anagnostaki's best product. […] She always gave the impression of a sensitive and cultivated receiver of the zeitgeist of our times' (Γεωργουσόπουλος 41-42). Her message was delivered in an unconventional manner; the irrationality of the play not only proposed a new contemporary form, but also created meaning in itself. In other words, the logic of the form corresponded to the logic of the play in terms of content

In *Antonio*, Anagnostaki negated the constitution and division of society that intimidates the weak. Anagnostaki's point of reference was the bourgeois society, and more specifically the Greek bourgeois society, in which fear was the main component in the post-war years. The youth do not belong within this logic, therefore signifying a radically different vision. Anagnostaki, part of the young generation, participated in the youth movement. The production of *Antonio* was a celebration for the thirty years of Théatro Téchnis, and at the same time the celebration of a growing movement. The students were carrying out a noisy protest, which was limited in range, but constant and spontaneous. This movement gradually grew stronger and reached its climax in November 1973, when it managed to incorporate the (bourgeois) public of Athens. Anagnostaki understood her position within time (history) and space (Greece); her play was inspired by and inspired the flowing ideas of her time. Anagnostaki criticised the bourgeoisie, which was sinking in fears and traumas of its past.

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# Contextualising Reception: Writing about Theatre and National Identity

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In October 1974, three months after the downfall of the colonels' dictatorship, Alan Ayckbourn's *Absurd Person Singular* (1972) opened in Athens. Reviewers deemed the play 'too English', irrelevant, alien. Indeed, when locating the play - a farce about English middle-class of the 1970s - in the period's theatrical context, defined by growing demands for politicisation and an emphasis on 'the Greek', the critics' response appears valid. But is this the only possible reading of the production, or can contextualisation open up new ways of interpreting it?

In December 1983, two years after Greece's accession to the European Community, the staging of *Top Girls* (1982) introduced Caryl Churchill's work to the Athenian audience. Since the early 1980s was marked by an upheaval of the women's movement in Greece, the selection of Churchill's play as the first production directed by a woman at the National Theatre comes as no surprise. However, some reviewers denied the play's feminist politics, suggesting instead that it is a play about 'all people'. How can contextualisation provide insight into this response?

In October 1990, almost a year after the demolition of the Berlin Wall, Edward Bond's *Summer* (1982) was staged. The production of the play - that explores the past and present relation of two women in a non-defined Communist country - was praised by Greek critics, for it was seen as capturing the period's momentum following the cataclysmic shifts at the end of the 1980s. But was the play's selection pertinent only due to these international reasons or was it in any way resonant for the Athenian audience? What is the significance of 'building contexts' for addressing such questions?

In December 2001, a month before Greece's entry in the European Monetary Union, Mark Ravenhill's *Some Explicit Polaroids* (1999) premièred. In a context of intensifying debates about globalisation and its impact on local and national identities, the play was considered a theatrical articulation of global issues. But does this imply that the play raised only global problems, thus effacing local concerns? Can the context challenge this reading of the play and production?

Each of the abovementioned productions-examples from my doctoral research coincided with a turning point in the history of post-colonels' Greece, a moment when debates about Greek national identity were intensified.[1] Following the development of new approaches to such vexed terms as the nation, nation-state, nationalism and national identity in other disciplines, the relation between theatre and nationhood has emerged as a key area of enquiry in theatre and performance studies.[2] A number of studies examine how theatre and performance as cultural practices might offer insight into notions of the nation and contest the established vision of national identity as a natural and stable condition. The editors of *Theatre, History and National Identities* recognise the theatre's pivotal role in the process of nation-building: 'From creating national ideologies to dividing audiences, and challenging national histories, the theatre can be seen in its ongoing role of sustaining and critiquing notions of national identity.'[3]

[1] The main aim of my research is to investigate the link between theatre and national identity, by exploring the staging and critical reception of certain post-1956 English texts in Athens in relation to the evolution of Greekness during the last thirty years.

[2] I am referring to current debates in the fields of social and political studies and new conceptualisations of nationhood as a construct, bound up with discourse and socio-political institutions. Among these theories, I regard Benedict Anderson's perceptive reading of the nation in his seminal *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1991) as the most relevant for an examination of theatre and the nation. Anderson disassociates the nation from the nation-state as a political entity, suggesting that 'nation-ness' is a 'cultural artefact', tied to and disseminated through a variety of cultural practices (4).

[3] Makinen, Wilmer & Worthen, 2001: 14. Indicatively, other studies that offer divergent perspectives on the topic include: L. Kruger's *The National Stage* (1992), S.E. Wilmer's *Theatre, Society and the Nation: Staging American Identities* (2002), S.E. Wilmer (ed.) *Writing and Rewriting National Theatre Histories* (2004), J. Harvie's *Staging the UK* (2005).

In this article, I employ the abovementioned examples as a starting point for proposing a methodology for writing about theatre and national identity. My main argument is that a comprehensive analysis of the reception of non-national, foreign texts by means of building contexts and locating productions and reviews within them, can provide insight into the complexion of a nation's identity at a certain historical moment. In other words, contextualising the reception of 'the Other' might enhance the understanding of 'the self' - in the case of this research, 'the Greek'.

Brian Singleton, in a discussion of interculturalism, has suggested that approaching foreign theatrical traditions 'can be described as "the pursuit of otherness for the investigation of self"' (94). Even though Singleton develops his argument in the context of a different scholarly debate, I read the reception of English drama in Athens as indicative of a similar process. The staging of English drama as 'the Other' can be perceived as a potential way of comprehending 'the self', 'the Greek', in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Locating the staging of 'the Other' in an historical context, offers evidence and paves the way for a reconstruction of, or an imaginative approach to, what it meant to be Greek in each period. This approach does not reduce 'the Greek' to a static condition but explores the dynamic dimension of national identity as a lived experience, shaped by and manifested in different aspects of public life.

The article begins with two ideas that stem from the analysis of the selected example and outlines the methodology of this research. The brief discussion of the four examples that follows, offers some reflections on the significance of contextualisation when addressing questions about theatre and national identity, mainly drawing on Tracy Davis' thorough and astute discussion of 'The Context Problem.' Davis' starting point is that 'the encounter with "gaps" is a major

conundrum of the discipline' and her article, which compares methods of contextualisation with painting techniques, elucidates what kinds of 'gaps' theatre historians encounter and how 'context' might fill them in (203). 'Gaps' are usually equated with absences in documentary evidence and the process of contextualisation helps 'to convey the immediacy of performances in the past, compensates for their perishability, and conveys their relevance to the past and the present' (204). Davis also considers 'gaps' as corresponding to wider methodological issues in theatre historiography, acknowledging that one must always contest 'what "context" accomplishes and what it does not' (207).

I interpret 'gaps' as not only the missing primary evidence that render the use of context inescapable for reconstructing productions. I argue that contextualisation is instrumental for unveiling 'gaps', what remains hidden or not acknowledged even when there is plenty of documentary material at the historian's disposal. In my research, contextualisation provided 'explanatory mechanisms', producing a complex picture where theatre-making and theatre-reviewing are bound up with socio-political and cultural networks and illuminate conceptions of the nation at a given historical moment.

**'The Other' and the Image of 'the Greek'**

Researching the staging and critical reception of post-1956 English drama in Athens, I have identified a trope articulated mainly in reviews but also practitioners' arguments: the development of a clear 'border', an opposition separating Athenian productions or audiences from English plays. In other words, English drama is considered as 'Other' when put on Athenian theatre stages and critics often assess the merit of a performance based on whether practitioners managed to render the play less 'Other'

for the audience. Such critical positions subtly reiterate the fundamental element of Greek national identity, what I consider Greekness' 'ideological cornerstone', the clear dichotomy of 'Greek' and 'non-Greek', 'Other'.[4] This conceptualisation of Greekness is bound up with an emphasis on 'the Other', located outside the Greek borders, and the critical reception of English drama enforces this image of the Greek nation, often regardless of the actual staging of the plays that might resist to this static dichotomy of 'Greek' and 'English Other'.

**Contextualisation, or (Resisting to) the Image of 'the Greek'**

By focusing on 'the Greek' rather than 'the Other', this approach to Greekness is destabilised. The notion of 'the Greek' as opposed to an imagined 'Other' is problematised by exploring productions within broader socio-political and cultural frameworks. In other words, instead of focusing on 'the imagined Other' outside, manifestations of 'the Greek' inside the country are investigated. As Susan Bennett has pointed out in her important *Theatre Audiences*, 'the relationship between production and reception, positioned within and against cultural values, remains largely uninvestigated' (86). Positioning the productions and reception of English drama against cultural values or notions of the Greek nation is pertinent for addressing wider issues about the link between theatre and national identity.

Based on the four selected examples, I want to suggest potential ways of using contextualisation in order to re-write these moments of Greek theatre history, unveiling 'gaps' - what I interpret as hidden or neglected - in their contemporaries'

[4] Greekness is used here as a short term for Greek national identity and corresponds to the often-debated word *Hellenikoteta*, which is considered tantamount with the essential feature that defines the Greeks and emerges as a quality that can be traced in and enforced through culture. The political analyst, Constantine Tsoucalas, discussing notions of Greekness in the context of expanding Europe, historicises and explains the main connotations of *Hellenikoteta*: 'Greekness is mainly and explicitly an individual "quality", emanating not from a recognisable and conquerable system of thought or norms

critical reception. Ultimately, by contextualising these productions, a new approach to Greek national identity is developed: one that is no longer bound up with a process of imagining 'the Other' but instead focuses on the concrete, lived experience of Greekness in each historical moment and the ways in which theatre reflected, corresponded to, or ignored these present manifestations of 'the Greek'.

**a**. **'Binocular Rivalry', or Juxtaposing Contexts**

The negative reception of the production of *Absurd Person Singular* in 1974 can be read as a direct repercussion of the historical moment, since the play and the production did not seem to contribute to the theatre's social and political purposes. However, taking into consideration the complexity of this transitional period from the dictatorship to democracy and the conflicting elements that shaped it, this response to the production can be challenged. In an alternative reading of the period, Ayckbourn's play is no longer 'the Other' but, instead, corresponds to class relations in Greece during the dictatorship and the immediate post-colonels' period.

The Greek translation of the play's title as 'The Bourgeoisie is Playing Jokes' emphasises the play's social critique.[5] While the word 'absurd' in the play's actual title can be read as raising general questions about human relations, absurdity and falsity, the term 'bourgeoisie' in the Greek translation makes an explicit statement about a particular social class. Ayckbourn associates absurdity with the individual, 'the singular', while Matessis' translation hints at a social class. Research of socio-political events during the first year of the democracy (1974-5) showed that one of the major public demands expressed mainly in the form of marches was the need for 'purging' society from those classes who still supported or were associated with the

produced by man [sic], but from "something" that is already there preceding and transcending him.' (1993: 70)

[5] The actual Greek translation by Pavlos Matessis is *Η αστική τάξη αστειεύεται*; here I cite my translation of the title.

colonels' regime: the bourgeoisie and some parts of the petit-bourgeoisie.[6] For the purposes of this article, a detailed analysis of class relations in the immediate post-colonels' period cannot be provided. Nonetheless, the significance of these developments for a more comprehensive analysis of the historical moment should be emphasised. Considering these elements, a new context can be built where Ayckbourn's play is no longer the farcical critique of the 'alien, English Other' but a subtle, dark critique of 'the Greek (petit) bourgeois'.

Davis argues that the context is inescapable, always present in any historiographical approach but the question of '*how* it [i.e. a historical event in a context] is perceived and *why*' should always be addressed (209).[7] Making an analogy between theatre historiography and neurology, she names cases of divergent or opposing perceptions of the same historical event - theatrical productions - 'binocular rivalry', suggesting that it is the individual's 'stimulus' that determines the perception of the event. In this paradigm, juxtaposing the 'contemporaries'' perception of the production with my reading does not only validate Davis' assertion about the partiality of any historiographical account of a theatrical event. It also indicates how reviewers have 'painted' a particular background in order to place the production; in so doing, they reiterate the 'ideological cornerstone of Greekness', the static dichotomy of Greek and 'alien, English Other'.

**b**. **'Blank Spots', or Producing Wider Contexts**

When *Top Girls* opened in Athens, the production was promoted as the theatrical celebration of the growing feminist movement in Greece.[8] However, a number of

[6] Resources included the period's press and annual theatre journals – mainly *Xroniko* (Chronicle) – that published lists of significant political and theatrical events of each year following the transition to democracy.
[7] Davis' emphasis.
[8] The Library of the National Theatre in Athens holds a file of press cuttings where the production is presented as 'the female conquest of the stage.' (15 Dec. 1983)

critics argued that the play is not a feminist play but a play about 'all people'. This response could be mistaken as a claim for the play's universality but, in fact, implies a key element that defined notions of Greekness in the early 1980s. Following the election of the socialist government in 1981, discourses about the legitimate needs of 'the people' saturated the public sphere. In this political climate, the obscure term 'the people' was equated with 'the nation', 'the populist' with 'the national'.

Research on the development of the feminist movement in Greece after the fall of the colonels showed that most women's organisations were strongly affiliated to political parties and, gradually, women's issues were considered part of wider demands of 'the people'. However, Greek feminist scholars suggest that this equation of the feminist with 'the popular' and, I would add, 'the populist' led to the demise of the movement.[9] Hence, the reviewers' argument that Churchill's play is about 'all people' resonates with the period's populist ambience that did not allow an autonomous expression of women's issues; instead, gender differences remained hidden behind the all-inclusive concept of 'the people'.

Davis refers to 'blank spots' in historiographic narratives, suggesting that in some cases contextualisation cannot construct a complete picture of the moment when the event took place, and historians must be aware of the limitations of theatre historiography as a medium.[10] For the example of *Top Girls*, I approached contextualisation considering this notion of 'blank spots'. Scrutinising the link between feminism and the wider political ambience of populism led to unveiling a 'blank spot' in that historical moment. This 'blank spot' cannot be fully analysed

[9] See Kyriazis (1995) for an elaboration of the issue.
[10] Davis refers to the technique of *passage* - the use of 'white spaces of canvas amid pigment' - in some of Paul Cézanne's later paintings; through this method, 'the ideal', what the painter has in mind, has not yet found a way to be represented (204). A similar process can define theatre historiography, when the historian leaves 'blank spots', 'white absences' to correspond to 'the ideal' beyond 'explanations of time and culture' (205).

since it is hard to research actual experiences of Greek women at the time; at the same time, though, it can offer insight into the paradoxical reception of *Top Girls*, revealing that being 'Greek' in the early 1980s was synonymous with being one of 'the people'.

**c. '*Rondeur*', or when Context and Theatre Blur**

The analysis of the reception of *Summer* is paradigmatic for further understanding and appreciating the method of contextualising reception. Even though the production was considered a pertinent reflection on the changing *status quo* following the downfall of the Eastern Bloc, research on Greek political events at the threshold of the 1990s provided further insight into the production. Due to political and economic scandals, the end of the 1980s was a turbulent time for Greece, a period of crisis of democracy, marked by trials of politicians and a wider public demand for justice. Considering that justice is a key issue in Bond's play and reading the director's interviews where he emphasises the need for a 'theatre of public service', it became obvious that the production aspired to constitute a theatrical intervention on Greek civil society rather than make a comment about the changing international order.

Davis borrows the term *rondeur* from Cézanne's painting techniques, suggesting that sometimes, when writing theatre history, the line separating event from context cannot be distinguished and the two are blurred. By means of an analysis of the staging of *Summer* and the development of a distinctive theatricality that corresponded to actual experiences in the public sphere, such a picture where theatre and context cannot be disassociated was created. In this way, the reviewers' response that focused on 'the European Other' was destabilised and a complex picture that resonated with concrete socio-political situations in the country emerged.

**d. 'What do we miss?', or Contextualising 'the Local' in 'the Global'**[11]

When *Some Explicit Polaroids* was staged, reviewers recognised that Ravenhill's play constitutes an acerbic critique of global phenomena and lifestyles that are consequential of liberal, late capitalism. Nonetheless, many of them suggested that the play did not correspond to actual Greek experiences. It is interesting that almost thirty years after the production of *Absurd Person Singular*, the 'Greek/Other' dichotomy resurfaces in reviewers' discourse. However, by locating the production of *Some Explicit Polaroids* in the period's political and ideological framework, as well as debates about notions of 'Self' and 'Other' at the age of globalisation, a new reading that resisted the reviewers' responses, emerges. In other words, 'the global' operates as a catalyst that destabilises the static dichotomy of 'Greek' and 'English Other'.

During the late 1990s, Greek political and public life was defined by a movement for modernisation and convergence with other Western countries-members of the European Union. This impetus was manifested in concrete reforms introduced by the government but also permeated other aspects of public life, including theatre. Such aspects of public life can be interpreted as the country's attempts at responding to global orientations and developments. Indeed, in some respects - for example, considering that the late 1990s was a time of avalanche of English plays on Athenian theatre stages - the production of Ravenhill's play can be interpreted as a theatrical manifestation of this impetus for Europeanisation.

However, the juxtaposition of some aspects of the play - significantly the nostalgia for greater political causes - with particular, Greek memories and conditions, such as the disillusionment with the generation of young radicals of the 1970s that was considered compromised, paved the way for a re-reading of the staging and

[11] Here, I refer to Davis' intriguing question 'what might the unseekable be?' when writing theatre history (208).

reception of *Some Explicit Polaroids*. This process of contextualising reception proved that if the production is approached only as a manifestation of how 'the Greek' becomes part of 'the global', 'we miss something', something remains 'unseekable'. Instead, when recognising that local, Greek experiences can be traced within a 'global' condition of disillusionment with politics, new potential open up for comprehending the shifting complexion of Greekness at the dawn of the third millennium.

As demonstrated through these indicative examples, contextualisation reveals 'gaps in reception' or how theatre reviewing operates as an apparatus that often maintains ideological constructions of national identity. Building contexts introduces alternative readings of reception, resisting static notions of Greekness.

However, as Davis acknowledges, context should not be perceived as a panacea for the historian. It can always be questioned and new contexts can replace existing ones and new readings of the same historical event can be introduced. Contexts are built based on precise research questions and there is always an element of incompletion in any historiographical narrative. However, as Erika Fischer-Lichte has argued, this element of incompletion or, in her terms, 'partiality' is necessary for writing theatre history. In 'Some Critical Remarks on Theatre Historiography,' she argues:

> A partial perspective is a condition of the possibility of a history of theatre. Everyone must delimit the subject area of their theatre history in accordance with their specific epistemological interests and competence, select the events that are likely to be productive in terms of the questions they are asking, and construct their history from their examination of the documents related to these events. (3)

My methodology of contextualising reception is informed by Fischer-Lichte's perspective since the subject area - the reception of English drama - is defined with

respect to questions of national identity and the material discussed is selected based on these theoretical criteria. Indeed, my reading of the reception of examples of post-1956 English drama in Athens is partial, hence subject to revision and contestation; yet this partiality is necessary for writing national theatre histories. If, for example, multiple paradigms about the link between Greekness, theatre and reception are introduced, a comprehensive image of Greek theatre history might emerge. Most importantly, though, such a process of writing national theatre histories by locating theatre events in multiple or even contradictory historical contexts can indicate how national identity is not a stable condition but a lived experience, subject to change.

Finally, this methodology emanates from identifying the 'Greek/Other' dichotomy as the cornerstone of Greekness. However, the 'Self/Other' opposition as a key element in the construction of national identities is not a particular Greek phenomenon.[12] The analysis of the reception of 'Others' in divergent national contexts can lead to the crystallisation of a wider methodology for writing national theatre histories by means of contextualising 'the Other's' reception in order to imagine 'the self'. It would be interesting to compare the findings of research conducted in this field, in order to unveil potential similarities in constructions of 'Self' and 'Other' through paradigms of reception in different parts of the world.[13]

[12] Jen Harvie makes similar observations about the complexion of British national identity through difference and opposition from other European countries. See Harvie, 2005, chapter 5.

[13] This final suggestion resonates with discussions about 'borders' and 'border-crossing' in the field. Reinelt's 'Staging the Nation on Nation States' (1999) is exemplary of this perspective; I believe that her observation that 'the staging of other nations' narratives and texts redeploys "foreign" national images and tropes for local purposes' (126), exemplifies key issues when writing about theatre, reception and national identity and begs further critical attention.

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# The Literary Artist and Social Cohesion in a Multi-Lingual Setting: A Study of Ola Rotimi's *If… A Tragedy of the Ruled* and *Hopes of the Living Dead*

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## Introduction

Human beings naturally communicate with one another to enhance social cohesion and sustainable development. That language is one of the media of communication and a reliable one for that matter, has almost become a platitude. Sapir sees language as "a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols" (8). This is handled slightly differently by Christophersen who emphasizes that the expression of one's thought and feelings should engender understanding from the receiver(s). However, Barber describes language as "the great machine - tool which makes human culture possible" (1). Velma Pollard, quoting James Baldwin, submits that "people evolve a language in order to describe and thus control their circumstances or in order not to be submerged by a reality they cannot articulate" (60). Whichever way language is described, what is imperative, as observed by Femi Akindele and Wale Adegbite is that it is used "to establish social relationship" (2).

However, borders created by diversity in language used by individuals from different backgrounds have the potential to impede the establishment of social interactions. Different inter and intra interactions amongst people, mostly across borders, have led to the emergence of multiplicity in linguistic usage. One of the many manifestations of such, is multilingualism. This is supported by Gerda Mansour who holds that "forced labour migration, military conscription under colonial rule added to

other movements that led to a new linguistic heterogeneity" (24). The characters in Ola Rotimi's *If… A Tragedy of the Ruled* and *Hopes of the Living Dead* are reflective of people in multilingual societies whose diversity is exploited by corrupt leaders to perpetuate their nefarious activities in power. The attempt by Ola Rotimi is to bridge the linguistic divide so as to attain a utopian society by experimenting with multilingualism on the stage. Based on the use of literature to achieve national unity in a multi-lingual state, this paper examines how Ola Rotimi envisions social fusion and sustainable progress in a multi-lingual setting as reflected in *If, a tragedy of the ruled* and *Hopes of the Living Dead*.

**Multi-Lingualism**

Multilingualism represents a situation where an individual or society speaks more than two languages. *The Oxford Companion to the English Language* defines multilingualism as "the ability to use three or more languages, either separately or in various degrees of code-mixing" (222). Gerda Mansour simply captures multilingualism as "communication through several languages" (1). A probable explanation for this is found in the *Holy Bible's* account of the "confounding" of the existing language (tongue) at Babel (Genesis 11:4-9). Tracing the origin of language diversity to the story of the Tower of Babel, Einar Hangen concludes that "when men are separated by barriers of time and distance, their languages deviate in regular, if sometimes astonishing, ways" (1). In another account of the origin of linguistic diversity similar to that of Hangen, Ben Elugbe opines that "movements in time or in space or both result in language diversification" (44-45). The annexation of the geographical space of the region brought together people of varying

languages for the purpose of administration, leading to a complex system of multilingual language use. As long as literature reflects and mirrors life, it can be written to explicate virtually all human endeavours. Oftentimes, a piece of literary work could be expanded beyond the art-for-art's sake principle advocated by intrinsic approach favoured by New Criticism to the functional responsibility of investigating the sociopolitical life of the people. Penina Muhando Mlama describes arts as "a mobilization and conscious raising tool" (14), submitting that theatre, among all other things, makes "a conscious attempt not only to bring to the fore the voice of the dominated classes, but also to involve them in a process of bettering their way of life" (20). Therefore, the effort made by Ola Rotimi in these texts to use literature as an instrument of national cohesion, most especially in a pluralistic cultural and linguistic environment, is commendable.

Adegbite and Banjo have acknowledged that Nigeria is a multi-lingual nation, with an estimated 250 ethnic groups that speak over 400 languages (75; 90). Language issues, since the amalgamation of Southern and Northern Protectorates in 1914, have been tied to politics and thereby threatening the indivisible entity instituted by the colonialists. The political readings to language issues did not make the idea of evolving an indigenous language possible, following the description of the use of foreign languages as an extension of imperialism. This has been corroborated by A.D. de V. Cluver, citing Kelma, who pontificated that the selection of one of the many indigenous languages in a multilingual country "might lead to the domination of the other groups within, resulting tension that could lead to fragmentation" (48; 44). Such tensions are precipitated because of the attachment every individual has to his culture based on the view of Noam Chomsky who writes that the "alleged social factors in language use often

have a natural individualist-internalist interpretation" (32). All the political delineations in Nigeria since independence have been done across linguistic demarcations, leaving the nation with the uneasy idea of majority versus minority, and the idea of marginalization. This reechoes the nature of exclusion feared in using one of the languages in a multilingual nation, since according to Vic Webb and Kembo-Sure, "language has been a useful tool for the purposes of political manipulation, discrimination and exploitation" (8).

However, the adoption of 'marginalization' is a diversionary tactic to blur the view of unwary masses in unveiling the innocuous-looking but inimical activities of their leaders. It is commendable enough that different writers such as Ngugi, Soyinka, Achebe, Armah and others have painstakingly reflected the dismal performances of indigenous neo-imperialists who took over from their Western masters. With the investigations done by Gabriel Okara in *The Voice*, Achebe in *Anthills of the Savannah*, Armah in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, and with the redefinition of a nation-state given by them, the oppressed masses have been reoriented to forge a common front in order to challenge their arrogant 'lords'.

The foregoing, therefore, reiterates the concept of the 'empire writes back' that permeates post-colonial discourse. Efforts have been made to investigate the various hybridizations that took place between the cultures of the center and that of the peripheries, mostly the act of what Wolfgang Iser calls "laying bare how knowledge and fantasy are superimposed on distant lands that are ruled by the metropolitan centre" (177). Obviously, the past subjugated knowledge, achieved by the imperialists, necessitated a contrapuntal reading in order to make bare the "new configurations of

culture, which Said takes pains to illuminate" (Iser 183). Making a reading of race and postcoloniality, Apollo Amoko posits that the latter "traces the vexed historical and enduring relationship between culture, race nationality and imperialism" (127) concluding that "the colonial encounter resulted in the consolidation of the idea of European or Western modernity at the apex of human civilization" (132). Language forms one of the enduring legacies the centre bequeathed to its former colonies, and what the latter has appropriated in the remapping of the past charted by the colonizers.

As part of the desperate moves to achieve decolonization, Frantz Fanon being the first proponent of anti-imperialism, has advocated that a flight away from one's language is a departure from one's culture, since the two are inseparable. Although attempts were made to replace the languages of the colonizers leading to the serious consequence of narrowed audiences, part of the new postcolonial readings, syncretism, has located the positive impact the imperialist language has on the literature of the peripheries. Tracing the origin of the word syncretism to comparative religion, Christopher B. Balme posits that theatrical syncretism is "the process whereby culturally heterogeneous signs and codes are merged together" (1). Analogous to what Ola Rotimi does in the two texts under study, Balme holds that "the emergence of post-colonial syncretism is thus a natural response to situations of multivocalism" (11) in order to reach a multilingual audience.

**Literature and Multi-Lingual Society: Ola Rotimi's Position**

By its characteristic nature, language can be used to construct and reconstruct identities based on the spatial location the user occupies at a point in time. However, some

measures of complexity arise because according to Oswald K. Ndoleriire, "the possession of a distinctively socio-cultural identity is possibly a non-negotiable and basic human need, with members of a particular group both unwilling and unable to relinquish their identity and to vanish into universal inconspicuousness" (284). The dual possibilities attributable to language are aptly captured by Robert K. Herbert who posits that

> language has been used unconsciously to mark 'social boundaries'. Language diversity acts at once, then, as a social resource (in shaping social action) and as a social problem (at the level of the nation-state) where linguistic diversity is often seen as a barrier to the integration of population. (2)

This is what Vic Webb and Kembo-Sure refer to as "the binding or separating function of language" (2). Nigeria becomes susceptible, naturally, to these disintegrating tendencies, being a multilingual nation. Ola Rotimi's double extraction, with an Ijo mother and an Egba father, earns him what Reuben Abati calls "half Yoruba, half Ijaw" (16). In a collection of interviews with Anglophone African writers, Ola Rotimi enthuses that "my knowledge of the vernacular is miserable because I grew up in an ethnically heterogeneous family. My dad hails from Yorubaland, my late mother hailed from Ijaw in the Rivers State" (Lindfors 348). The position of Ola Rotimi on the use of colonial languages by writers from the empire quoted by Christopher Balme is instructive: "The real issue should not be *why* an African writer resorts to perpetuating a colonial tongue. Rather,…it should bear on *how* the writer uses that tongue to express the conditions and yearnings of his linguistically *diverse* peoples" (108).

Rotimi's dual ethnicity, the socio-cultural and linguistic differences between his parents, and the concomitant problems of ethnicity and the need to foster cohesion amidst linguistic divisions, could have informed his promotion of social cohesion in the face of linguistic variations. He makes language the leading motif, as shown by his reliance on

the use of polyglots in *If* and *Hopes*. Reuben Abati sees this as using varieties of English language as a thread that may unite a country in diversity (40). Aside the fact that the English language has enhanced the sharp divisions that exist within people in these plays, it, at least, offers Ola Rotimi what Balme captures as the "growing political commitment as a result of the ethnic disputes in Nigeria, which are closely tied to issues of language and language status" (113).

Rotimi's major concern in *If* and *Hopes* revolves around some emasculated or, in his words, 'chosified' individuals in the contemporary society. The setting of *If i*involves certain depraved characters in a multi-tenanted building, whose lives the landlord ungraciously threatens with quit notices to secure their votes. The landlord becomes a signifier of the ruler in Nigerian nation struggling to make sense of multiplicity in political transition, towards achieving manipulation and exploitation. *Hopes* is a satire of a group of people whose 'insignia', leprosy, symbolizes poverty and deprivation in a society unknown to beautiful objects of experimentation.

Both *Hopes* and *If* are full of characters who could pride themselves on the leadership qualities of Papa and Whyte, respectively. However, *Hopes* is set in Port-Harcourt and has people analogous to Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* surviving the malice of their oppressors as a result of collective revolt. In a similar vein, the unfortunate people in *If* are not lucky enough as they face the brutalization and dehumanization of the landlord that culminates in the death of Onyema, the beacon and symbol of hope, who should have enliven the struggle and precipitate the desired egalitarian society. The demise of Onyema is reminiscent of Wole Soyinka's encapsulation of the wasted generation.

Though reflective of the balkanization of Africa in colonial times, Nigeria's linguistic proliferation and physical splits, called state creation measures, have been exploited by the elite class to hold unfortunate people down in perpetual subjugation aimed at bringing back erstwhile political and economic violations of the pre-independence era. This is affirmed in the view of Martin Banham, reiterated by Balme that "the vulnerability amongst the patients that the authorities hoped to exploit was the diversity in their backgrounds and languages […]. The parallel with the political unity of present day Nigeria is clear" (114). Rotimi therefore relives the consciousness that the literary artist uses his work as a veritable instrument for the liberation of the masses from all sorts of life-taking elements around them. One of the devices through which the 'haves' abuse the 'have nots' is the divide-and-rule method occasioned by the apparent linguistic plurality existing among them, and which invariably threatens to destroy mutual understanding. Ola Rotimi salvages the situation by bridging the gulf with the interpretation done in English to secure smooth interactions between the players and the audience to achieve what Vic Webb and Kembo-Sure say to the effect that "the role of the ex-colonial languages and the indigenous languages are complementary, not oppositional" (127).

Considering the pivotal role the sending and reception of codes play in communication, Rotimi realizes that the inability of the people to understand one another remains the only thing that consistently and tenaciously forces them apart. Ola Rotimi reflects on this when he declares that "the frightening ogre of tribalism stirs in almost every form of our national life. Politicians capitalize on this for partisan ends; labor is infested with it; even human relations are sometimes tinted by tribal bigotry" (Lindfors

349). To ensure communication, cohesion and mutual understanding in the face of this variegation Rotimi engages the use of interpreters in *If* and *Hopes* so as to educate people on the need to recognize their common enemies and fight them accordingly.

Rotimi's multi-tenanted building in *If* becomes the microcosm of Nigeria as a nation-state creating characters that represent the different geo-political zones that now form the basis of most discussions in Nigeria. These characters include Akpan, Chinwe and Dokubo from the East, Malam Garuba Kazaure and Dr Hamidu (alias Che Guevara) from the North, Banji and Betty from the West and Mid-West respectively. Apart from people such as Papa, Mama, Banji, Hamidu, and so on, who speak 'standard English', others such as Adiagha, Betty, Mama Rosa, Chinwe and the fisherman speak, according to Saint Gbilekaa, "either in their mother tongues, pidgin or simple everyday English" (169). The foregoing is evident of the use of language to achieve social distinction. English language is seen as the language of the elite class while the use of the indigenous language and pidgin is indicative of people who are peasants, petty traders and land workers. The use of language as a social marker is considered by Rajend Mesthrie et al who enthuse that language "is indexical of one's social class, status, region of origin, gender, age group and so on" (6).

More particularly, Rotimi relies on the service of Mama Rosa as a polyglot in *If* to amplify the repressed voice of the fisherman who could best articulate his plight by using Kalabari, understood only by a select few, mostly those in the murky water around him. Banji and other characters in *If* are expected to share the trouble of the fisherman with him. The fisherman is a symbol of a group of people in the Niger Delta area whose blessing has equally been a source of anguish. Their land is blessed with crude oil, which

is depleted and 'impoverished' in desperation by the multi-nationals to achieve economic aggrandizement without adequate palliative measures in the face of environmental degredation.

The exploration of crude petroleum leaves their water polluted thereby making it absolutely impossible to either engage in aquatic trading or get drinking water. This nefarious act is often done in collaboration with the government officials and their stooges, who embark on open or subtle extermination of 'dissidents', if possible. Analogous to this amplification of anguish and extermination are the activities and death of Ken Saro-Wiwa. Martin Banham reviewing the introduction of the Kalabari fisherman, believes that "Rotimi uses translation as a dramatic device and underlines the way in which language can be used to divide and rule" (715).

Rotimi's intention in using this polyglot in *If* is to acquaint the ideologist Banji, and others, with the forces of exploitation and the need to be freed from that which Hamidu says has "gripped them in the stranglehold of an inguinal hernia" (*If* 16). The catalyst for change, according to Hamidu's big IF, is the people's votes on the one hand, and a mass struggle on the other, each of the measures being a product of mutual understanding and solidarity. Hamidu appears to speak the mind of Rotimi about what the latter preaches among 'chosified' individuals:

> HAMIDU: […] Which brings me to the final point. It has to do with the way Papa handled the Betty issues. Solidarity. The day our solidarity dissolved is the day our humanity ends, and our worthlessness begins. (*If* 16)

Similarly, Rotimi advocates a sense of physical and psychological display of togetherness among the invalids in *Hopes,* in the face of abandonment by the government and discrimination from the elite class. The case of linguistic multiplicity is made evident

since Whyte and Hanna speak Kalabari and English, Mallam speaks Hausa, Nweke uses Edo and English, Catechist converses in Ibibio and English, Dancer and Inmate relate by using only Ibibio and Edo respectively. Jimoh is fond of articulate good Yoruba while Mama Musi speaks Yoruba and what Ayo Banjo calls "a demotic form of English" (9), just as Alibo solely expresses his feeling by using Okrika. Saint Gbilekaa posits that "*Hopes* makes use of at least eight diverse Nigerian languages" (169).

In spite of this variegated linguistic milieu, Whyte, in a move characteristic of an ideal leader, strives to seek the participation and consent of the people in the decision making process as concerted efforts are similarly made to settle rifts exposed by the various interpretations of the existing polyglots. Apart from the essence of dramaturgy which this device stands to confer on Rotimi's plays, it allows or every section of the Nigerian state to be maximally involved in things that affect their well-being. This participation has been referred to by Rotimi as, according to Gbilekaa, "ultra-realism," and that "the attempt strives at reaching a wider cross-section of Nigerians who might be alienated by the use of a foreign language like English" (169). The experimentation with multilingualism on stage by Ola Rotimi smacks of sociopolitical significance which Christopher Balme claims is close to Brecht's use of "the stage as an experimental preview of a better society" (115).

Considering the nature of the audience in a Nigerian theatre, emphasis is placed on the type of language a writer infuses his characters with. Therefore, as a result of the concern Rotimi has for the meaning Nigerian listeners make of his work based on language use, he declares in an interview with Dapo Adelugba that "the language should be simple and necessarily simple enough so that it would bounce on the plays […]", as a

result of this desire he continues that he has his "ears turned to linguistic vernacular phrases which conjure up beautiful images which one wouldn't find in the drabness of our everyday English colloquialisms" (34-35).

*Hopes* is, therefore, Rotimi's miniature representation of Nigeria as a multi-lingual nation fraught with dehumanizing and frustrating tendencies. The assertions made by Harcourt Whyte to the leprosy-ridden individuals succinctly re-echo Rotimi's heart-felt desire:

> HARCOURT WHYTE: Now, I want everybody to remember this. We all are part of this land. We are not fighting the people. We are fighting for the people. We are fighting for the simple things which everybody wants. The strong or the sick; Fulani or Ijo; man or woman; Yoruba or Ibibio: old and young, Hausa or Urobo; rich or poor, Kanuri or Ibo: everybody wants one thing in life […]. (*Hopes* 58)

The above comment is a condemnation of the bulwarks built by political charlatans who always deprive the masses of life-giving measures only to perpetuate themselves as "saviours." The divisions we have today, most especially across the linguistic line in contemporary Nigeria, are meant to bring ethnic sentiments into the relationship that exists among various groups of people from these regions.

Akanji Nasiru examines Rotimi's preference for the use of the English language to reach different levels of his audience. He writes that Rotimi claims to handle the English language in his plays by striving to "temper its phraseology to the ear of both the dominant semi-literate as well as literate classes" with a view to getting "assimilation and clarity in identification" (22).

Examining Rotimi's *If* and *Hopes*, Gbilekaa also recognizes the need for grassroots participation and submits that "Rotimi has planted polyglots who convey to the

monolingual dramatic personages of these two plays what is being discussed to obtain their own views" (169). In another vein, Reuben Abati holds that "language became an interesting tool" in *If* and *Hopes* where Rotimi "deployed varieties of English to probe thoughts and define situation and character, and again, to reflect the diversity of the Nigerian nation and the common threads that unite us" (40).

**Conclusion**

We have been informed of the complimentary role the English language plays in a multilingual society where it is viewed as a vestige of imperialism. The language has offered itself as an instrument through which the periphery reflects on its sociopolitical precarious situation often exploited by corrupt leaders. By experimenting with multilingualism on stage with the use of an interpreter, all shades of people that constitute the audience are well reached and informed. Christopher Balme submits that in "Rotimi's view the use of the colonial language has certain advantages in terms of mutual understanding in a linguistically heterogeneous country like Nigeria" and therefore the deployment of multilingualism on stage "is not just a dramaturgical device but is rather an integral part of the political message of the play(s) that linguistic diversity does not automatically exclude political unity and cooperation" (114). Rotimi's *If...A Tragedy of the Ruled* and *Hopes of the Living Dead* are a recreation of the multi-lingual Nigerian state where the only forms of panacea to push oppression, dehumanization and frustration to the background are togetherness, unity in diversity, and solidarity, even in the face of linguistic plurality.

Rotimi's dramaturgy and vision are closely linked in the two plays. The

playwright seems to believe in the survival of a multi-ethnic Nigerian nation, but the dehumanized and frustrated characters warn his readers not to be foolishly optimistic. Unlike the epic and romantic values that characterize Rotimi's *Kurunmi* and *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*, *If* and *Hopes* smack of satire, comedy and farce. The varying problems associated with multilingualism have been made bare, even as a concerted effort is made to achieve creative reconstruction and political mobilization of the masses in the face of the bourgeoisie's infiltration and onslaught. For once, the language of the ex-colonizer is used to pull together the chunks of the depleted past of the periphery in fostering the realization of an ideal nation using the stage as the spring-board.

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## *A Beckett Canon* by Ruby Cohn

University of Michigan Press, 2005, 423 pp.

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**Do We Need Another Book on Beckett?**

During the year 2001, there have been 21 books on Beckett published in English and French alone, the same number in 2000 and 15 in 1999. Among them are such titles as *The Complete Critical Guide to Samuel Beckett* (2000, Pattie David), *The philosophy of Samuel Beckett* (2001, John Calder), *Beckett and Religion* (2000, Marius Buning) *Beckett and Eros* (2000, Paul Davies), *Beckett and Postructuralism* (1999, Anthony Uhlmann) *Beckett and Beyond* (1999, Bruce Steward), *Engagement and Indifference: Beckett and the Political (*2001, Henry Sussman), *Chronicles of Disorder: Samuel Beckett and the Cultural Politics of the Modern Novel* (2000, David Weisberg), *The Painted Word: Samuel Beckett's Dialogue With Art* (2000, Lois Oppenheim), *Samuel Beckett and the Arts* (1999, Lois Oppenheim), *Saying I No More: Subjectivity and Consciousness in the Prose of Samuel Beckett* (1999, Daniel Katz), *Empty Figure on an Empty Stage: the Theatre of Samuel Beckett* (2001, Less Essif), *Samuel Beckett's Theatre: Life Journeys* (1999, Katharine Worth), *After the Final No: Samuel Beckett's Trilogy* (1999, Thomas Cousinau), *Sails of the Herring Fleet: Essays on Beckett* (2000, Herbert Blau), plus memoirs and critical collections: *How It Was: a Memoir of Samuel Beckett* (2001, Anne Atik), and others entitled simply *Samuel Beckett* (2001, Peter Brockmeier, 2000, Manuel Montalvo, 2000, Jennifer Birkett) or even simpler, *Beckett* (1999, Didier Anzieu).[1] Only a few authors in Western Literature have been written about so often, but the writing keeps coming, and Beckett has the luck (or misfortune) to be one of the most popular targets. We can't go on, but

[1] Year 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005 were comparatively weaker to previous years, so there were only 30 titles all together (in English alone), but 2006 again picked up with 11 English language tomes.

we go on. Fact: there is a vast body of work to ponder and Beckett's elusiveness is particularly open to generating what Gordon Rogoff calls the Beckett Industry. Can it be that, by now, we don't need another book on Beckett?

With Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault's essays on the death of the author as function of criticism, it would seem that participating in any cult of an Author would be a critical *faux pas*. Not so with Beckett. The critical worship of Beckett as Author-Prophet and existential therapist-mystic still looms heavily in Beckett criticism. In 1968, Barthes wrote: "criticism still largely consists in saying that Baudelaire's *oeuvre* is the failure of the man Baudelaire, Van Gogh's is his madness, Tchaikovsky's his vice: *explanation* of the work is still sought in the person of its producer, as if, through the more or less transparent allegory of fiction, it was always, ultimately, the voice of one and the same person, the *author*, which was transmitting his 'confidences.'[2] And following Barthes, Foucault added in his 1969 essay, "What is an Author?": "the subject [Author] must be stripped of its creative role and analyzed as a complex and variable function of discourse."[3] Which is like saying that the author truly does not exist. Or, at the last, his biographical self has no relevance while approaching his work. If Beckett's criticism still largely consists of saying that Beckett's texts are the reflection of Beckett, what then does the Beckett Industry tell us about the current Beckett discourse? And where in this context does the latest Beckett publication, Ruby Cohn's A *Beckett Canon* fit?

Those in the writerly business know that the relationship between creative writing and criticism has always been ambiguous, if not to say, antagonistic. In Beckett's case, the problem becomes even more complex, and not only because of

[2] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," *Image, Music, Text*, Ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill, 1977) 50.
[3] Michel Foucault, "What is an Author," *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP; New edition, 1980) 138.

Beckett's candid derision of "the critic." Beckett appeals to what is highly mature and highly immature in us; he arouses both the highly rational and highly irrational, and the highly analytical and highly emotive. Thus, the analytical aspects inspire criticism while the immature impulses inspire idolatry. Paradoxically, between the need to worship and the need to criticize, the critic who declares his love for Beckett is caught in a double-bind. He finds even his own laudatory writing sacrilegious: if one truly claims to understand Beckett, one should understand that even the desire to analyze him undermines the very claim to comprehension. Beckett – or so it seems - should be absorbed like a religious experience - no explanations, no understanding, and God forbid, no criticism needed. Any other approach negates the very essence of his *oeuvre* the same way that the scientific formula for light particles negates the aesthetic experience of the sunrise. The critics self-conscious of their treachery validate their right to criticize the "uncriticable" by appealing to what will prove that they *did* absorb Beckett on the mystical level; their criticism, they might say, came only as a secondary response to Beckett's unsurpassable sublimity.

In *A Beckett Canon*, Ruby Cohn, is conscious of the dilemma. Indeed, she even entitles her opening chapter "Rather Highly Self-Conscious," and as with many before her starting with Martin Esslin, Cohn emphasizes the personal nature of her Beckett endeavor. The opening paragraph recalls her first encounter with Beckett's work which generated her long-lasting relationship and many books on the subject. The important fact, however, about this initial Beckett encounter was that Cohn had never heard of Beckett before and thus, her fascination germinated from Beckett's pure genius, or rather from her own pure genius in recognizing him as such without having other critics as arbiters of his greatness. Analyzing Beckett we are like adults explaining ourselves as former teenagers to our teenage children. Why indeed do we

love Beckett? There is something shameful in loving Beckett without wanting to analyze him. Yet, there is also something shameful in analyzing Beckett without asserting that once upon a time one has loved Beckett without wanting to analyze him. *Ad absurdum.*… It is this dilemma that makes Beckett criticism so drudgerous to read. The relationship with Beckett – as Cohn also asserts - is always personal, but on this personal level, the writing loses its object and loses itself in one's own divagations on Beckett's greatness and the ontological impact his work had on the eager critic. Obviously, not all critics are Becketts and the personal on Beckett becomes neither Beckett nor personal.

Although Cohn is not like other self-respecting critics who need their "take on Beckett" for the sake of having their "take on Beckett," the question still remains which "take on Beckett" is worth our forever unregainable weekend we have spent reading it, with twenty other books published yearly on Beckett alone, and a couple of thousand on other subjects? Or are we just better off simply reading Beckett? Alas, Beckett scholars should read all Beckett books to write more Beckett books for another Beckett scholars to write their own? *A Beckett Canon* is a culmination of Cohn's life work on Beckett and without questions, it is a thoughtfully researched and well-organized book. Every theatre scholar or dramaturg will find it a useful reference tool, but does it add any astounding intellectual breadth or originality to the Beckett canon? After the highly self-conscious first chapter, Cohn catalogues chronologically all of Beckett's works, including his lesser known poems and critical essays, summarizing each one and pointing out its referential position in the entire Beckett *oeuvre*. The references to Beckett's life construct a historical framework for his texts, and the book abounds in logistical details and structural and semantic connections which solidify the Beckett Canon as a unified and cohesive body of one Author's

work. But "Literary criticism is not a bookkeeping" – wrote Beckett in the opening sentence of his Proust essay, Cohn reminds us. Indeed, it is not.

Cohn published *Beckett Canon* for the first time in 2001, and she reprinted it (as new edition) in 2005. The new edition does not add much to the first Beckett Canon (especially in light of other books on Beckett popping up on every corner), yet it was readily reprinted. Why? Cohn is one of the last critics who knew Beckett. She's aware that she is a part of the passing entourage. "For some of us," she writes about Alan Schneider's death – Beckett's foremost director - "it was the end of an era of fidelity to Beckett." For the coming generation, the history of the twentieth century and the history of the twentieth century literature will become indeed only history. Is it "good" that our most shameful century will cease being memory and will become a history or is it "bad"? I don't know. Along with the Twentieth century becoming history, Beckett himself is becoming a history and the few remaining scholars who knew Beckett and his times have an obligation to report what they know before the second-hand Beckett Industry completely overflows us with cultish quasi-criticism. As critics, however, they also have an obligation to desacrilize their idol. What is a better tribute to one's master than trying to overtake him? As Foucault would say, our books on Beckett say more about us than about Beckett. In a hundred years, scholars will read Beckett criticism analyzing how we produced our truth to ourselves via our truth to Beckett. And they will be right, for what gives us more access to the truth to ourselves than trying to analyze someone else? Do we say about Beckett that which we don't dare to say about ourselves? Do we then need another book on Beckett? No, we don't. Yes, we do.

## ***Performance and Place*** **edited by Leslie Hill and Helen Paris**
Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, 296 pp. (paperback)

Michael Pinchbeck (New College Nottingham)

Odd. The word Leslie Hill uses to describe tourists who queue to see the Mona Lisa only to take a photograph. In *Stealing the Mona Lisa: What Art Stops Us From Seeing*[4] Darian Reader points out that more people visited the Louvre to see the empty space left behind. Hill bemoans the fact there is no Live Art Louvre we can visit to see Carolee Schneeman unravel her infamous *Interior Scroll* (6). And if we did would we take a photograph?

Edited by artists Hill and Paris, with insightful contributions from placers and makers *Performance and Place* is a timely, and at times, poetic engagement with an elusive sense of place. Operating between opposite poles of "place" and "placelessness", writers hop from personal recollection to academic rhetoric. Lois Keidan reminisces about Forced Entertainment's 'sublimely bleak' early work for audiences 'who grew up with the television always on' (12) before describing a 'place for audiences to contemplate their own relationship with "the Other"' (14). Perhaps Emily Puthoff's television is always on, her claim that the notion of 'place' has become 'so multi-faceted it shimmers' (76) credits a hair commercial bracketed by live coverage of the Indonesian tsunami. The unfolding debate is controlled by a creative but restless editorial remote control. It can be difficult to locate the "place" inhabited by writing on "place". The words, like the notion, shimmer.

Where there are ludic games they are best played in the chapter titles: *Out of the Furnace and into the Cyberplan* (34) is Martha Wilson's erudite description of Franklin Furnace's online forays. Wilson echoes the editors' view that cyberspace is 'the ultimate example of placelessness, a meeting place that is no place at all' (3).

[4] Darian Leader, *Stealing the Mona Lisa: What Art Stops Us From Seeing*, (London: Faber: 2002).

Johannes Birringer plays games of site and semantics. He argues that place 'no longer holds a self-evident authority nor provides stable context; it is as fictively constructed as any other mediated reality.' Birringer proposes site-specificity as medium-specificity in the case of videodance, where the camera is implicit in both content and context and the dancer's body when remediated or choreographed digitally is 'no longer in (one) place' (89).

*Theatre in a Crowded Fire* (209) invites artists or incites alchemists to wreak havoc with their laptops, what Hill calls 'electronic tinderboxes' (211). As I write, news breaks of a book shop raided in Birmingham for selling 'incendiary works.'[5] As I read, Hill asks 'Where are the contemporary spaces that offer the heat and friction, the danger and excitement the theatre tendered back in the days when it was the most combustible building in the city?' (211). Though Andrew Kötting gathers wood for the fire and words for the text at his Pyrenean Retreat in *Hidy Hole and Inner Sanctum* (234), there is nothing inflammatory here. Only funders and curators burning their candle at both ends.

Mark Waugh quotes Derrida via Sir Christopher Frayling (30) as he comments on the disorientative, making sense of the margins of his 1980s notebooks. He asserts that 'Live art is a passport that simulates belonging to multiple states of perception' (29) in relation to the anarchic interventions of Mad for Real. Pinning up a certificate banning them from the Tate as an artwork in another gallery. Raising the politics of belonging and a smile. Performance memories collide with curatorial remit as Helen Cole reflects on the dislocative and relocative power of the medium. In response to the post-event statement 'You had to be there' she asks the question, 'If Live Art is placeless, where then is 'there'?' (21). Live Art is 'leaking' (19) she says. Seeping

[5] Byers, David. *Islamist bookshop was known to sell 'incendiary works'.* Times Online. 31 January 2007 <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2-2576281,00.html#cid=OTC-RSS&attr=Britain>

through the walls of venues. Eluding definition and location before we can pin it down. Or pin it up. Like a certificate.

For Lin Hixson, Director of Goat Island, 'there is no place for performance until taped lines go down on the floor' (213). Literally outlining where 'the beginnings of landscape architecture take place' (214) and time becomes a perpendicular bisector of performance. The gymnasium floor where Goat Island conceive their work is covered in traces of tape from each piece they have created. Palimpsests of performance. Perhaps the company has chosen to make their current work their last because there is no floor left to tape. On tour, as a rectangle of tape delineates audience and location, so the location delineates time zone. London or Chicago. Their work is conscious of its different localities. And the time the 'get out' takes is as important as the time it takes to perform. As Mark Waugh points out 'the journey [is] as significant as the destination' (32). It is no coincidence that Matthew Goulish forensically follows the architectural footprints of Lawrence Steger in *The Ordering of the Fantastic* (252). Goat Island are architects of both space and time.

*Through the Wrong End of the Telescope* sees Graeme Miller 'peel back the present' (104) in his account of a forgotten landscape along the M11 rebuilt in radio transmissions until the transmitters fail. On recalling an emotive visit to Dungeness he writes 'A moment overtook me, place-full and timeless, urgent and meaningful with meaning which seems not to refer to anything or anywhere else. In an overpowering second you are revealed exactly where you are. Where you are is a kind of who you are' (105). His tracing of lost cartographies best illustrates the need for a narrative of nostalgia from those who were there witnessing, funding, curating or creating the work as and where it was 'placed'. As if now there is no land left to map, we must map the past instead. As Hill says: 'They happened. And then they were over. You

really had to be there' (6). Perhaps what *Performance and Place* fails to map is the process of placing rather than the product placement. The conceptual space rather than the space left behind. Not a placelessness. But a placefulness. Perhaps as a result this is a photograph of the empty space. Odd.

## *Against Theatre: Creative Destructions on the Modernist Stage*, edited by Alan Ackerman and Martin Puchner

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, xii + 259pp. (hardback)

Amy Simpson (University of Hull)

The title, or more accurately sub-title, of Ackerman and Puchner's *Against Theatre: Creative Destructions on the Modernist Stage* is deceptive. What presents itself as a study of modernist theatre (the 'modernist stage') is in fact a far more wide-ranging project. There is, surprisingly, little discussion of the key modernist movements in performance, with Dada and Futurism, arguably epitomic of 'creative destruction' getting only passing mentions. Instead, the collection incorporates analysis of play texts, scenography, opera, and the Symbolist and Primitivist trends, amongst others, alongside wider arts movements (fine art, cinema, and the novel). Running through the diversity of the articles is the central theme, the question of 'anti-theatricality', the 'Against Theatre' of the title.

It is good to see the (anti-)theatricality debate contextualised in terms of modernist culture, and Ackerman and Puchner's collection encourages the reader to see the multiple facets not just of the term 'theatricality', but also of the modernist movement itself. It is the scope and variety of the text which is most beneficial to the reader. The essays themselves range from adequate to exceptional in their form, content, and expression. Marjorie Perloff's exploration of the work of John Cage (133-148) is particularly strong, and, shirking the trend towards anti-theatricality,

begins with Cage's whole-hearted avocation of theatre as an expressive medium. Perloff analyses the theatrical in Cage's less overtly 'theatre-centred' performances, clearly demonstrating the artist as striving after the theatrical moment in opposition to the anti-theatricality of his counterparts. Similarly well argued is Herbert Lindenberger's discussion of 'Anti-Theatricality in Twentieth Century Opera' (58-75), which achieves the difficult balance of being both accessible and engaging to the non-specialist.

However, it is the sum of the book, rather than its parts, which is most valuable. The interdisciplinary focus allows the reader to make connections across the diverse subject matters. Like the modernist artists, *Against Theatre* clearly understands and exploits the potential of collage as a technique. Ackerman and Puchner encourage the reader to make connections across articles in their concise introduction and contextualization, and this is reinforced by the clear structure of the book which, by dividing the essays into three main areas manages to give diversity a certain coherence. As a result, it is impossible to see the articles in isolation, and each impinges on the reading of the others. This cross-fertilization is effective in prompting the reader to engage with the ideas presented, as well as maintaining interest in the central theme of anti-theatricality.

Paradoxically, although the scope of the articles is to be commended, it is also the text's greatest source of problems. The terms 'theatricality' and 'anti-theatricality', as the editors acknowledge in their introduction, are multi-faceted in the extreme. As a result, Ackerman and Puchner wisely offer a broad and workable definition, that "anti-theatricalism always emerges in response to a specific theatre and, by extension, that the modernist form of anti-theatricalism attacks not theatre itself but the value of theatricality as it arose in theoretical and practical terms

throughout the nineteenth century" (2). In light of this statement, as Herbert Blau asserts in the collection's concluding article (231 - 247), Ibsen and Brecht are both equally 'theatrical' and equally 'anti-theatrical'.

The definition of 'anti-theatricality' encouraged by Ackerman and Puchner is without a doubt inclusive. It is also, however, problematic: each contributor defines 'anti-theatricality' on their own terms. These constantly shifting definitions make it difficult to orientate oneself as reader, although the best articles make their use of terminology clear from the outset (for example, in Elinor Fuchs' contribution on anti-theatricality in clown shows, 39-57). Articles which do not immediately make these definitions clear are harder to engage with, and at times the reader is left playing catch-up on the author's argument.

If there is a further criticism to be made of *Against Theatre*, it is the assumptions made in certain articles regarding the prior knowledge of their readership or the material with which they are working. Charlie Keil's 'All the Frame's a Stage' (76 - 91), for example, although an interesting discussion of the advent of sound in cinema in light of the anti-theatricality debate, assumes a degree of understanding of film terms on the part of the reader. This is doubtless a result of the restrictions in terms of space placed on articles in a volume of this nature. Although understandable in light of the interdisciplinary nature of the collection, the theatre-specialist - attracted by the 'modernist stage' referenced in the book's title - can find engaging with the text problematic.

In other articles, notably Kirk Williams's 'Anti-Theatricality and the Limits of Naturalism' (95-111) or Rebecca L. Walkowitz's 'Narrative Theatricality: Joseph Conrad's Theatre of the Page' (171-188), connections are assumed but not fully interrogated. Walkowitz repeatedly references theatre, in terms of the stage adaptation

of Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, but never makes explicit how her discussion of the novel relates to the stage. Analysis of the stage version is repeatedly deferred or referenced tangentially, leaving the reader desiring more from the article. In contrast, Williams's work presents as natural assumptions which could easily be challenged: his claim that the weavers in Hauptmann's play are 'truly anti-theatrical in that they are, for all intents and purposes, dead bodies' (104), for example, does not take into account Roland Barthes well-known claim that theatre and death are synonymous (Barthes 31).

These are, however, minor criticisms of an overwhelmingly worthwhile project. The indeterminacy of 'anti-theatricality' as a term, combined with an interdisciplinary focus, leads to a productive and engaging plurality in *Against Theatre*. The reader is encouraged to read one article against another and to seek out their own location in the matrix of ideas. The pinnacle of the book is Blau's masterly 'Seeming Seeming', reflections on the plausibility, even possibility, of 'anti-theatricality' as a concept. Both challenging and absorbing, Blau's poetic style pulls the reader into a world of questions and doubts. A microcosm of the book as a whole, 'Seeming Seeming' raises more questions than it answers. Appropriately, Blau ensures that *Against Theatre* ends on a note of thought-provoking uncertainty which is, arguably, no bad thing.

Barthes, Roland *Camera Lucida*. London: Vintage. 2000.

## ***Here We Stand*: *Politics, Performers and Performance*, by Colin Chambers**

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In *Here We Stand*: *Politics, Performers and Performance* Colin Chambers, Reader in Drama at Kingston University, London, does not embark upon an easy task. There is one main reason for this: The fruit of Chambers' labour is not a primarily critical/theoretical work that draws its conclusions from its many case studies. One the contrary, *Here We Stand* features three main protagonists: Charlie Chaplin, Isadora Duncan and Paul Robeson. It is these three artists, pivotal enough to their place and time to bestow upon the performing arts universe a significant inheritance, that constitute Chambers' respective case studies. The engagement with the life and work of these performers, however, only forms the first part of Chambers' extensive study. The second section, more general in its scope, examines issues that are highly pertinent to the domain of performance in our time. These relate to the artist/performer's position in societies of censorship and to the link between questions of politics and the performing arts. Chambers' work also provides the reader with a bibliography of print as well as electronic resources related to his undertaken analysis. These are valuable suggestions for further reading to the researcher, who will be interested in pursuing questions and exploring areas similar to those that the author visits in this work.

As regards the three case studies, the reader will find that *Here We Stand* follows an approach whereby the individual as a personality shaped through concrete life experiences and the individual as an artist displaying a range of career choices are two entities irrevocably linked. This is a characteristic element throughout the first part of the work and accounts for one of the virtues of Chambers' study, as we are

presented with a wealth of varied information. This not only illuminates the realities of Robeson, Duncan and Chaplin as performers, but also enables one to arrive at interpretations of their respective artistic courses, attempting to trace the causal relationships between the life and the work. Chambers' decision to provide complete portraits of these intriguing personalities makes this book a helpful tool in the hands of an academic, researcher, or student.

We must bear in mind the intensity of the life and art of these individuals: Robeson was a renowned and politically vocal African American performer, who did not sacrifice his convictions in spite of mainstream approval. Duncan was a female dancer/choreographer who exceeded gender and geographical limitations and articulated her stance through her work, embracing unfamiliar environments without hesitation. Chaplin, finally, was a legendary filmmaker who bent the boundaries between the commercial and the political and lived to endure the public consequences, while even recognition in later life did not alleviate the severity of the political cost he paid in previous decades. The substantial level of detail disclosed in the three case studies will be largely appreciated by part of the readership and perhaps to a smaller extent by another share, interested in less biographical accounts of artists' activity. This does not necessarily constitute a shortcoming for the book: Chambers merely follows the route more commonly pursued in dealing with case studies such as these investigated here and it rests with the individual reader to focus on that degree of information that s/he deems essential for the understanding of these practitioners' work.

The second part of this book is what will undoubtedly be of more use to the reader who is not specifically researching the life and/or art of the three performers on whom Chambers focuses in the first and more extensive section of this work. "Would-

Be Gaolers of the Imagination: Contexts of Coercion and Control," the first of the two chapters in this section, offers a rich, highly informative account of situations whereby the production and consumption of performance in various *media* has been directly affected by sociopolitical conditions. The findings of Chambers' research are such that the reader will encounter a wide range of examples, some extremely recent, which are handled with remarkable ease and succeed in mapping a territory so extensive that most of the readership is bound to identify areas that are pertinent to individual interests and/or research. However, without reducing the relevance of what has been addressed by Chambers until this point in the book, it is the ensuing chapter that deserves a particular mention. This section concentrates on what has essentially been one of the most intriguing questions of theatre-related discourse: Namely, the relationship between politics and aesthetics and the ways in which politics can be or have been conceptualized in the performing arts. Similarly to the preceding chapter, this one takes into account a variety of crucial factors, too, providing a study that is detailed as much as it is engaging. Indeed, Chambers seems to further advance this ongoing debate by entering into the consideration of phenomena where art and politics intermingle, taken directly from the realm of contemporary quotidian reality. By virtue of this fact, the readability and applicability of his text are significantly enhanced. While this is an area that will be of great use to those sharing Chambers' research concerns, it is also a section that a wider share of the readership will be able to appreciate.

In these two chapters the link between Chambers' case studies and the more theoretical pat of his work is not severed: The interaction is maintained and it is more an instance of placing the specific in a more general context, enriching the study in terms of content and providing an altogether more solid substantiation. Overall, *Here*

*We Stand* offers an insightful look into its chosen subject matter, constituting a helpful source of reference to those interested in the necessary connection between artist, performance and politics. The wide chronological scope of this study must also be noted as one of its main advantages. Certainly recommendable.