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Editorial

All things exist as they are perceived: at least in relation to the percipient.[1]

Before you came here, you made certain preparations. You came here with certain preconceptions. […] You were prepared to sit and having something shown to you.[2]

In May 2007, Royal Holloway hosted a one-day symposium, entitled "How do we Receive Reception?" Seeking to address theoretical and methodological questions about theatre reception, the papers and round table discussion at the symposium highlighted the diversity and complexity of the discourses surrounding these questions. The current issue of *Platform* was therefore conceived of as an attempt to consider some of these complexities in further detail. Our call for papers, which asked for an engagement with the idea of "reception" prompted a range of responses which approach this broad concept from a number of perspectives, using varied methodologies.

The papers in this issue, then, are linked by their starting point, and all shed light on particular elements of theatre reception. At the heart of each paper lies an impassioned urge to connect with the theatrical moment, to engage with the work as experienced, to consider and critique the conditions of production, to cross borders and, in doing so, to engage with the issue of reception. But, from thereon in, their remits, approaches, and conclusions are diverse and tread no specific "line."

"Translating In? Brian Friel's *Translations* in Irish-language Performance," by Nóra de Buiteléir, looks at the problems and ramifications of cultural transfer and translation. Examining the reception of two Irish-language productions of Friel's play, de Buiteléir addresses the ways in which the act of translation has political and ideological agendas, which, along with other cultural contexts, condition and impact on the reception of the piece. Using close textual analysis of the ways in which a translation might attempt to configure or reconfigure a play linguistically, and critically assessing the responses of critics to the productions she addresses, de Buiteléir's paper looks at the status of language and the cultural, political construction of artistic "value."

The second paper, "Pumpkin Fruit / Pumpkin Root: Participatory Theatre in a Ugandan Prison," is a practice-based piece, in which Kevin Bott narrates the development of an original, collaborative piece of theatre in a prison setting. Using a pumpkin metaphor to illuminate the process of the creation and the production of the piece, the author offers an insight of his own experience as the "other," as well as the impact of the experience on the inmates. Reception, here, is about process rather than performance; both to do with the personal engagement of Bott as a practitioner, and with the reception of theatrical workshops within sensitive, community-based settings.

Patrick Duggan's "Feeling Performance, Remembering Trauma" also engages with his case studies in a personal way, but from the audience's perspective. Drawing on trauma theory and its relation to theatre, he discusses the impact of trauma – whether real or representational – on the audience member. His paper is an individual, specific reading of theatrical events: his focus is on Sarah Kane's *Blasted* and Kira O'Reilly's *Untitled (Syncope)*, and he uses his own "reception" of these pieces to

[1] Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defense of Poetry," *Shelley: Selected Poetry, Prose and Letters* (London: The Nonesuch P) 1025.

[2] Peter Handke, *Offending the Audience*. *Plays 1* (London: Methuen, 1997) 21.

address the ways in which the visceral nature of live performance might create a space for an exploration of the difficulties of traumatic experience.

In "The Reception of Oscar Wilde and Bernard Shaw in the Light of Early Twentieth-Century Austrian Censorship," Sandra Mayer and Barbara Pfeifer remind us that reception is an historical, textual issue as well as a contemporary practical one. Using unpublished archival sources, their paper seeks to address issues of cultural transfer, as they shed light on the reception and censorship of the works of Wilde and Shaw in Austria. Their work considers the mechanisms of circulation and the practices of censorship, and highlights the ways in which the movement of plays into new cultural contexts has been conditioned and controlled. The archival sources demonstrate the ways in which reception is a shifting process, raising questions about the ways in which cultures and contexts contact and conflict with one another.

Finally, Jim Ellison's "Small Town Montréal: Critical Preconceptions and the (mis)Interpretation of Michel Tremblay's *Hosanna*" demonstrates that these issues of cultural transfer are not just historical. As in de Buiteléir's paper, the act of translation, and the critical responses to a work as it shifts contexts, are shown to be fraught and problematic. Using the first production of Tremblay's *Hosanna* in Britain, and critically assessing the ways in which the piece was produced and received by the critics, Ellison's paper highlights the fact that preconceptions and cultural stereotypes often condition the reception of a piece as it crosses linguistic and geographical borders, and encourages an active and critical response to the issue of reception.

As editors, we are immensely happy to be publishing such a varied collection of articles. Moving from the practice-based to the archival, from the reading of the review to the reading of the performance, crossing all sorts of boundaries on the way, these pieces take our initial call for papers and respond in strikingly passionate, diverse ways. In attempting to critically articulate the interaction of cultural, political and ideological contexts, and the personal or individual experience, they engage with a multiplicity of issues surrounding theatre's reception.

As always, we would like to thank the Department of Drama and Theatre at Royal Holloway, Palgrave, Routledge, Intellect Books, the University of Minnesota Press and everyone who has contributed to the realisation of this issue.

Rachel Clements and Marissia Fragou (co-editors)

Notes on Contributors

Kevin Bott is a second-year doctoral student in the educational theatre programme at New York University's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. Under the auspices of the non-profit Rehabilitation for the Arts (RTA), Bott has been facilitating drama workshops and original productions within New York State Correctional facilities since January, 2006. Through this work, he became interested in the experience of formerly incarcerated individuals returning to mainstream society, and began conducting a theatre program at Project Contact, an outpatient clinic on the Lower East Side of Manhattan serving ex-inmates and court mandated individuals suffering from chemical dependency. His doctoral research focuses on theatre as a tool for ex-inmates as they transition from prison back into the free world.

Joanna Bucknell studied Drama and Theatre Studies at Roehampton University, and completed an MA in Theatre Today (2005) at De Montfort University. She is currently in her 2nd year of doctoral study on a full funded bursary at Winchester University. Her thesis seeks to explore and understand the nature of specific audiences' experiences of particular contemporary, participatory theatre events. As well as holding the position of research student rep, sitting on the Arts RKT and RDC committees, Joanna lectures and leads seminars on a 3rd year undergraduate Contemporary theory and practice Drama module.

Rachel Clements is in the second year of her PhD at Royal Holloway, University of London, which focuses on the calibration of presence and absence on the contemporary British stage. She previously completed a BA at the University of Oxford, and an MA at University College London. She is a member of the editorial board of *Platform*. She is a visiting lecturer at Royal Holloway, teaching courses on Naturalist Theatre, and on female performance and stand up comedy.

Nóra de Buiteléir holds a BA (2004) in Modern History and German and an M.Phil (2006) in Literary Translation, both from Trinity College Dublin. She is currently a Lady Gregory Research Fellow at the National University of Ireland, Galway, where she is writing a doctoral thesis on theatrical representations of South Tyrolese history.

Patrick Duggan is a PhD researcher at PCI, University of Leeds. His research explores trauma in contemporary British and Irish performance. In May 2007 Patrick was co-curator of Masterworks, Leeds, a two day international conference and festival celebrating postgraduate performance and academic work. Patrick is also co-founder of Crisis Theatre, and a director. His directorial credits include Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, Christina Reid's *Did You Hear The One About The Irishman?* and Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis*, and as assistant director, *The Legend of King Arthur* (Red Shift Theatre) and *I'm the King of the Castle* (BT National Connections, National Theatre). He previously completed a BA at Warwick (Theatre & Performance) and a MA at Queen Mary, University of London (Performance).

Jim Ellison is a second year PhD in Drama and Theatre Studies and Visiting Lecturer in Postcolonial Drama at Royal Holloway, University of London. His research deals with cross-cultural performance and reception in the plays of Michel Tremblay.

Marissia Fragou is a holder of a BA in English (University of Athens) and of a MA Research in Drama (Royal Holloway, University of London). Currently in the third year of her PhD at the Department of Drama and Theatre at RHUL, she explores the work of American playwright Phyllis Nagy. She is one of the founding members of *Platform* postgraduate eJournal and member of the editorial board. She has presented papers in Chicago, Glasgow and Dundee and is presently working as a visiting lecturer teaching literary theory and women playwrights.

Bryce Lease is a 3rd year PhD student at University of Kent at Canterbury. His article, "Both Here and Gone: Polish Individuation in Teatr Pieśń Kozla's *Chronicles – a Lamentation*," was published in the first issue of *Platform*. For the past two years he has helped to develop "Texts for Theatre," a module which introduces undergraduates to discursive textual analysis.

Sandra Mayer studied English and History at the universities of Sussex, UK, and Graz, Austria, where she submitted her MA thesis on the impact of scandal on the reception of Oscar Wilde's works in early twentieth-century England. She is currently a PhD student at the University of Vienna, doing research on the reception of Wilde's plays on the Viennese stages in the twentieth century as part of the Austrian Research Council project *Weltbühne Wien* (*World Stage Vienna*).

Barbara Pfeifer (MA) studied English, German, and History at the universities of Vienna and Zurich. In 2006 she received a grant by the Austrian Research Council to work on a doctoral thesis on the reception of Shaw's plays on the Viennese stages in the twentieth century, as part of the *Weltbühne Wien (World Stage Vienna)* project. Her research interests include Shaw studies, literary and cultural theory and Viennese theatre history.

Abstracts

Translating In? Brian Friel's *Translations* in Irish-language Performance

Nóra de Buiteléir (National University of Ireland, Galway)

This paper takes as its starting point the crossover of theatre and translation studies – the frequently fraught reception of plays in translation. The play under examination here is that well-established classic of modern Irish theatre: *Translations* by Brian Friel. First performed in Derry in 1980, *Translations* has been staged to great acclaim all over the world, both in English and out of it. My concern here is with a translation of *Translations* which is generally overlooked but is, in fact, probably the most obvious and the most important of them all – that into the Irish language. In examining how Friel's play has been received into the Irish language and onto the Irish-language stage, I consider the notion of theatrical reception from a number of perspectives; that of the translator, making sense of an original text so as to recast it along the lines of his own interpretation; that of theatre directors, taking this translated text and re-contextualising it onto the Irish (or Northern Irish) stage; and that of Irish-speaking audiences, their responses shaped by their own beliefs and linguistic sensitivities, by their collective stance towards the historical background of the play, the questions raised by the play, and in this particular case, the very language of the play.

Pumpkin Fruit / Pumpkin Root: Participatory Theatre in a Ugandan Prison

Kevin Bott (New York University)

This practice-based article describes a theatrical collaboration between the author, an American practitioner of applied and community-based theatre, and male inmates in a minimum-security remand center in northern Uganda. Over the course of three weeks during the summer of 2007, the author worked with 100 inmates and helped to develop original plays based on tribal folktales. The author discusses how a commitment to, and a broad knowledge of, participatory theatre praxis can help navigate the challenges of engaging in humanizing and meaningful creative work within a prison situated in a culture that is not one's own.

Feeling Performance, Remembering Trauma

Patrick Duggan (University of Leeds)

In recent years there has been a surge in the growth of Trauma Theory as an important and engaging field of academic study and while it has begun to engage with both literature and fine art it is yet to be fully theorised in relation to theatre and performance. This paper seeks to briefly highlight one of the ways in which trauma theory might engage with performance and vice versa. Employing both theories of trauma and kinaesthesia this paper examines the felt quality of performance as a catalyst to receiving

an understanding of the performance and to a re-embodiment of (personal) traumatic memory through this. After briefly tracking the history and development of trauma theory, the paper reads it alongside examples of live performances. Through this the paper establishes live performance as the ideal site for an exploration of the difficulties of traumatic experience and the creation of understanding through the visceral quality of performance.

The Reception of Oscar Wilde and Bernard Shaw in the Light of Early Twentieth-Century Austrian Censorship

Sandra Mayer and Barbara Pfeifer (University of Vienna)

Against the background of reception and cultural transfer theory, this paper attempts to investigate the mechanisms of circulation and blockage of (foreign) cultural elements involved in the practices of theatre censorship in early twentieth-century Austria. This will be exemplified by Oscar Wilde's symbolist one-act tragedy *Salome* and Bernard Shaw's political satire *Press Cuttings*, both of which had been objected to by the Lord Chamberlain in Britain. Whereas *Salome* was approved by the Austrian censorship authorities without major internal and public controversy, *Press Cuttings* never made it to the Viennese stage, thus reflecting the early reception of these Anglo-Irish authors in fin-de-siècle Austria-Hungary. Based on unpublished archival sources, the essay explores questions relating to cultures in contact, play selection and the role of national stereotypes within the reception process.

Small Town Montréal: Critical Preconceptions and the (mis)Interpretation of Michel Tremblay's *Hosanna*

Jim Ellison (Royal Holloway, University of London)

Michel Tremblay's *Hosanna* was a smash hit that played to rave reviews in both its French- (1973, Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montréal) and English-language (1974, Tarragon Theatre, Toronto) premieres. Its British premier (1981, Birmingham Repertory Studio, Birmingham), a part of Birmingham's Canadian Days Festival, was not so fortunate and received a largely negative critical response. This article attempts to reconcile the critical reception of the 1981 production with the actual staging of the performance, and to offer some theoretical explanations for the ways in which the play was understood.

Translating In? Brian Friel's *Translations* in Irish-language Performance

Nóra de Buiteléir (National University of Ireland, Galway)

> "The sad irony, of course, is that the whole play is written in English. It ought to be written in Irish …" (Friel, "In Interview" 80)

Should a text that is itself a translation – albeit a fictional one – be easier to translate? What happens when a play that supposedly stages the death of a language is re-enacted in that very language? Set in the Donegal Gaeltacht on the eve of the Famine and premiered in Derry in 1981, Brian Friel's *Translations* has come to establish itself as a classic of modern Irish theatre. The reasons for its commercial and critical success are relatively clear: to any audience experiencing it for the first time, *Translations* seems, superficially at least, a remarkably simple piece of theatre. It establishes for itself an easily recognisable historical and geographical setting. It seamlessly combines the comic with the philosophical. It draws on the established model of Romeo and Juliet in setting up two lovers in the face of cultural conflict. Its dialogue is easily flowing and (apparently) naturalistic, packing a strong plot into the reassuringly familiar form of the Three-Act play. It is reasonable to assume that *Translations* owes much of its popular success to the fact that is easily accessible – *traditional*, almost. Underneath the naturalistic speech at the surface, however, is a language riddled with contradictions and ironies, a meeting place of Irish, English, Greek and Latin where translation is imperative and irresistible yet vulnerable and relentlessly destabilized. The added layer of Friel's theatrical conceit – the device whereby Irish-speaking characters speak English on stage and yet are understood to be speaking in "Irish" – can only feed the overall linguistic confusion. For *Translations* is not only *about* translation – the legitimacy of which is stretched and questioned right down through the length of the play – it *is* a translation, or at least

demands to be received as one. From the moment in Act One when Máire storms in, collapses onto a wooden stool and bemoans her inability to speak English – *in* English – the audience is forced to recognise that something somewhere on some level of the theatrical construct has been tampered with. Linguistic authenticity has been breached. From this point onwards, it is essential that the audience buy into the illusion that the lines delivered by the Irish-speaking characters on-stage are "in translation." We know, of course, that they cannot be, that this is an original work by Brian Friel, that Brian Friel is an English-speaking dramatist who works exclusively in English, and that there is not, and never was, an Irish-language source that these lines could conceivably have been translated out *of.* But for this elaborate hoax, however, and but for the audience's cooperation in maintaining it, neither the plot nor the dialogue of the play make any sense.

None of these complexities have prevented *Translations* crossing further linguistic borders out onto the European stage. It has been performed in French, German, Italian and Hungarian; testimony, perhaps, to the universal relevance of its treatment of the themes of language and communication. To translate a play and release it out into a major European language, however, is one thing. To translate it back into the language it pretends to have sprung from, back into the same linguistic community in which it claims to be set, is another thing entirely. Linguistic and cultural circumstances demand we approach Breandán Ó Doibhlinn's 1981 translation of *Translations* in an entirely different way to any third-language translation of the text; the ideologies and expectations shaping an Irish-speaking audience's reception of the play in performance are fundamentally different to those of either their English-speaking or European counterparts.

The Irish-language translator and director have, in many respects, some very obvious advantages over their European colleagues. As a translator, Ó Doibhlinn enjoys the unusual privilege of a perfect knowledge of both the source and target language. Both he and potential directors can count on audience familiarity with the cultural and historical background to the play. There is no obligation to "relocate" the text so as to facilitate audience comprehension;[1] the audience speak the language of Ballybeg, share its culture and understand its history. Both of the productions to be discussed here – that of Aisteoirí na Tíre in 1981 and that of Aisling Ghéar in 2002 – made a point in their tour schedules of bringing the play "home" to its own imagined setting in the Donegal Gaeltacht. This extreme degree of audience familiarity, however, is both a benefit and a drawback. Given that Irish-language monoglots are practically extinct in contemporary Ireland, a prospective production team has to deal with the fact that the audience is completely familiar with the original language of Friel's play. In many cases they may even be familiar with the original play itself. An Irish-language production does not serve the same purely practical purpose as a French or German one. An Irish audience does not *need* a translated version of the play in the same way that a foreign-language audience clearly does. So why perform it in Irish at all? Does an Irish-language performance succeed in opening up new perspectives on the text? Or is it a deliberate linguistic provocation on the part of Irish-language movement, a gesture, as Friel's Manus might say, "just to indicate […] a presence?" (Friel, *Translations* 391).

[1] Continental translators and directors have negotiated the cultural difficulties thrown up by Friel's play in a number of ways. Théâtre de l'Evénement's 1984 production for example, directed by Jean-Claude Amyl from a translation by Pierre Laville, featured French-speaking peasants drinking *eau-de-vie* rather than poteen, dancing *gigues* and *matelottes* rather than reels and hornpipes, and calculating distances in the *kilometres* that were as yet entirely unheard of in Donegal in the 1840s (Friel/Laville 1984).

While an examination of the re-contextualization of *Translations* into any foreign-language setting is illuminating,[2] there can be little question that the case of Irish-language reception is the most interesting and the most problematic of them all. It is problematic precisely because Irish is *not* a language foreign to the play. Although almost entirely absent from the original English text, Friel encourages his audiences to catch glimpses of Irish through layers of (imagined) translated dialogue, to constantly distinguish between English spoken as Irish and English spoken as English, to take an interest in the history and in the fate of the Irish language as it starts to crumble in the face of an English-speaking modern age. While foreign-language performances cannot but move out and away from Friel's text, incurring an emotional distance as well as a geo-historical one,[3] Irish-language productions move in the other direction, closing in on the themes of the play in an uncomfortably intimate way. In investigating how *Translations* has been received into the Irish language and subsequently out onto the boards of the Irish-language stage, it is worth considering the notion of reception from various perspectives; that of the translator, making sense of an original text so as to recast it along the lines of his own interpretation; that of the director, taking this translated text and re-contextualising it on stage; and that of the audience, its responses shaped by its own beliefs and sensitivities, by its collective stance towards the historical background of the play, the questions raised by the play, and in this case, the very language of the play.

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[2] See Nóra de Buiteléir, *From Ballybeg to Ballybabel: Translating In and Out of Brian Friel's Translations* (Trinity College Dublin, 2006) from which the early sections of this paper have been adapted.

[3] Belfast director David Grant has argued that the distancing effect of foreign-language staging can be highly constructive. Discussing his experience of bringing *Translations* to the Hungarian-speaking minority in Cluj-Napoca in northern Romania, Grant insists that the production vindicated his own theory that "the use of a third language would actually serve to clarify the bilingual reality that was being represented on stage" (Grant 53). Whether or not this reality actually asks to be "clarified" is, in light of Friel's embracing of confusion and linguistic ambiguity, highly questionable.

The process of reception starts with the translator. He is the original audience member, the first to grapple with the text and to draw on his own resources to make some kind of sense of it. Forced to prioritize certain aspects of the text and sacrifice others, it is the translator's interpretation of a play that is passed on to the potential director who in turn makes it the basis of his own representation. What is perhaps most significant about Ó Doibhlinn's version of *Translations*, however, is not how well he translated it, but that he saw fit to translate it in the first place. An Irish translation is not, as noted earlier, in any way technically necessary for the play to be brought to Irish audiences. Lionel Pilkington goes so far as to claim that "it is the audience's acceptance of English as a theatrical convention for Irish and the recognition that this convention is itself a matter of theatrical expediency that serves as Friel's most convincing demonstration of the inevitability of the loss of Irish as a contemporary spoken vernacular" (Pilkington 218).

Read in this light, the imposition (or re-imposition) of the Irish language in Ó Doibhlinn's translation would appear to contradict the very subject matter of the play. Does this contradiction damage and undermine Friel's text, however, or does it in fact respond to it and question it in a valid way? Anyone in a position to understand *Aistriúcháin* is unlikely to be entirely convinced of the "inevitability" of the loss of Irish. Pilkington may be slightly too quick here in identifying Friel's own recognition of this loss. The Irish-English movement in the play, anticipated by the interplay of Greek and Latin in Hugh Mor's classroom, is arguably more indicative of historical language shift than of definitive language loss. Friel's tactic of putting the classical languages back into the vernacular (as illustrated by the banter of Hugh Mor and Jimmy Jack) is a direct challenge to the unhelpful label of "dead" languages. If Greek and Latin can sit up and talk back at us from the grave, cannot Irish do much the

same? In an article marking the 2006 centenary of Mairtín Ó Cadhain, Declan Kiberd points out that the Irish language has been pronounced dead by every generation of Irishmen since the Flight of the Earls in 1607. The problem, he continues, is that Ireland is a country where "the dead seem to never know that they are dead" (Kiberd 16). If this is true of the lively classical corpses in *Translations* then it is equally true of the supposedly extinct Irish voice that chatters its way right through *Aistriúcháin*. Pilkington is right in suggesting that Friel's replacing of Irish with English in the text is an acknowledgement of contemporary linguistic conditions in Ireland, but wrong in assuming that the play kills off Irish entirely. The dramatist's provocative exposition of classical elements in the dialogue opens a door to the possibility of language reincarnation; it is through this door that Ó Doibhlinn's translation appears.

The very existence of *Aistriúcháin* is something of a political statement, a challenge to the hegemony of English in Ireland and on the Irish stage and a demand for recognition and for linguistic equality.[4] The audience is obliged to buy into the idea that the English-speaking characters are speaking English in the very same way that an English-speaking audience buys into the idea that the Irish-speaking characters are speaking Irish. "Translated" speech is shown up against "authentic" speech along much the same lines in the two texts, denying the audience any opportunity to suspend their linguistic disbelief. In this respect, the experience of watching *Aistriúcháin* comes far closer to that of watching the original *Translations* than does the inevitably more distanced experience of watching a third-language translation.

[4] Benedict Anderson describes how the widespread emergence of bilingual dictionaries in the nineteenth century "made visible an approaching egalitarianism among languages – whatever the political realities outside, within the covers of the […] dictionary the paired languages had a common status" (Anderson 71). The mounting trend in recent years of staging classic plays in minority-language translation – be it Friel in Irish, Moliere in Scots Gaelic or Beckett in Guadaloupian Creole – can be read as a three-dimensional expression of that same principle.

Friel represents an absent Irish in the play through a Hiberno-English that is audibly different from the British English of the native anglophones; Ó Doibhlinn takes this intralingual distinction and develops it using his own resources. His peasants communicate in their native Donegal dialect. Lancey and Yolland, the outsiders who are understood to speak only English, use an unmistakeably Munster Irish. This strategy has the effect of both maximising richness of expression and of placing the dialogue in an established Irish context where misunderstandings between dialects are a very familiar feature of Gaeltacht life. Ó Doibhlinn exploits the theatrical possibilities of this with considerable skill, harnessing the existing rivalries between various dialects to release a comic potential dormant in the equivalent English-language lines. This is a shrewd reception strategy on his part, anticipating the audience's enjoyment of such interregional linguistic jostling:

> YOLLAND: What do you call it? Say the Irish name again?
> OWEN: Bun na hAbhann.
> YOLLAND: Bun na hAbhann.
> OWEN: Again.
> YOLLAND: Bun na hAbhann.
> OWEN: That's terrible, George.
> YOLLAND: I know. I'm sorry. Say it again.
> OWEN: Bun na hAbhann.
> YOLLAND: Bun na hAbhann.
> OWEN: That's better… (Friel, *Translations* 410)

Most productions in the English-speaking world would probably opt to have Yolland speak with an identifiably English accent. Many productions, in Ireland at least, would more than likely play up the contrast by giving Owen an audibly Irish one. It should be clear at this point then, that what Owen is doing is correcting Yolland's English pronunciation of Bun na hAbhann to correspond with his own native way of pronouncing it. This correction, however, takes on a whole new dynamic when *both* characters speak Irish fluently:

> YOLLAND: Bun na hAbhann.
> EOGHAN: Tá sé sin millteanach, a Sheoirse.
> YOLLAND: Tá fhios agam. Tá brón orm. Abair arís é.
> EOGHAN: Bun na hAbhann.
> YOLLAND: Bun na nAbhann.
> EOGHAN: Tá sin níos fearr … (Friel, *Aistriúcháin* 31-32)

It is clear from the context here that the only way to distinguish between the native and the foreign pronunciation of the placename is to have the actors use different accents. These have already been specified by the dialogue, so the only way for this correction to make any sense on stage is to have Yolland start off by saying "Bun na hAbhann" in his own native Munster tones and be gradually forced by Eoghan to imitate the same words in an Ulster accent. This act of self-correction within a native language is both in keeping with the ironies of Friel's play and a source of potential humour. The triumph of the Ulster dialect is bound to draw some kind of reaction from the audience – not least from linguistically patriotic Northerners.

Yolland and Lancey, meanwhile, each draw on the same distinguishing features of Munster Irish; the reshaping of the standard *seo* into *so*,[5] for example, *Gaolainn* instead of *Gaeilge*[6] and *san* instead of *sin*.[7] Within this shared dialect, however, Ó Doibhlinn succeeds in drawing out their opposing linguistic sympathies, elements absent in Friel's text and yet very much in keeping with it. Friel's Yolland is a hibernophile, fascinated by the sounds and etymologies of the Irish language and frustrated by his inability to speak it. He displays his affection for the language by taking pleasure in enunciating the place names of the area and by symbolically correcting his own pronunciation of *Ballybeg* to *Baile Beag* (Friel, *Translations* 416).

[5] English: *this*
[6] English: *Irish* (used in reference to the language rather than to the nationality)
[7] English: *that*

Ó Doibhlinn's Irish-speaking Yolland does not yet have access to the name *Ballybeg* and is thus unable to formulate this correction. The impact of his enthusiasm for the Irish language, meanwhile, is somewhat muffled by the unavoidable fact that he already speaks it fluently. In a canny move, the translator compensates for this loss by introducing a parallel movement in the dialogue whereby Yolland, the fluent speaker of Munster Irish, starts to develop obvious sympathies for Donegal dialect. Just as his English-speaking counterpart delights in "picking up the odd word" (411), so the Irish-speaking Yolland starts to use some of the same phrases and pronunciations of the people around him. When he mentions to Eoghan that a little girl spat at him on the street, for example, the term he uses is not the usual *cailín* or the Munster *gearrchaile* but the unmistakeably Ulster *girseach*. When Máire re-appears and addresses him in "Irish" he is as bashful and confused as ever, but this time he formulates his lack of comprehension with the Donegal *"*Goidé atá á rá aici?" rather than the more obvious *cad atá á rá aici*.[8]

Lancey's speech betrays none of this local solidarity. His Irish bears the traces of another influence entirely – English. It is with unmistakable irony that Friel deliberately fills the cartographer's speech in English with words of Greek and Latin origin – *majesty, government, topographical, survey* – classical languages he does not himself actually speak. In much the same way, Ó Doibhlinn's Lancey speaks an Irish full of gaelicized English words, traces of a language that he does not so much not speak, but is not allowed to speak as a result of the theatrical conventions of the play. Lancey's English influences can be seen in his fondness for words like *conclúid, gobhairmint, úinéir* and *mapa.*[9] There is nothing in any way wrong with these words. They are absolutely valid terms in Irish. What makes them special, however, and what

[8] English: *What's she saying?*
[9] English: *conclusion, government, owner, map.*

distinguishes them from the vocabulary employed by the rest of the characters in the play, is that they wear their English-language origins visibly. The translator could easily have opted for the more commonly-used Irish words of *focail scoir, rialtas, sealbhóir* and *léarscáil.* In choosing the words he does, however, Ó Doibhlinn is offering more than a response to the etymological patterns set by Friel in the speech of the original Captain Lancey. The presence of these words in the text actively foregrounds the English influences contained within the Irish language, just as Friel's showcasing of Hiberno-English illustrates the reverse.

Despite translating "in," or indeed precisely because of translating "in," Ó Doibhlinn's text is probably as nuanced and linguistically complex as any recasting of Friel's original could hope to be. *Aistriúcháin* continues to be something of a favourite with amateur Irish-language theatre groups; to date, however, none have drawn much by way of critical success. In reviewing the reasons for this, and in moving this investigation of the reception of *Aistriúcháin* from the page out onto the stage, I shall focus here on two productions; that of Aisteoirí na Tíre[10] in 1981, and that of the Belfast-based Aisling Ghéar[11] company in 2002. Aisteoirí na Tíre premiered the play in Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe in September 1981 before touring it around Limerick, Dublin, and the Donegal Gaeltacht town of Gaoth Dobhair. Despite the production drawing respectably-sized audiences, the response of both the Irish- and English-language press was decidedly muted. The reaction of the *Irish Times*, the country's most respected broadsheet, speaks volumes about the position of Irish-language theatre in Ireland. A week before Aisteorí na Tíre's production arrived in Dublin, the paper's much-loved *Irishman's Diary* column ran an enthusiastic, faintly whimsical piece on the project, featuring snippets of interviews with representatives

[10] English; *The Folk Actors*
[11] English: *Bitter Vision*

of the theatre company and with Friel himself (Kiely 9). This was something of a publicity coup for Aistoirí na Tíre, as the *Irishman's Diary* was and remains one of the most widely-read columns in the most influential daily newspaper in the country. Curiously, the newspaper chose not to review *Aistriúcháin* when it opened in Dublin some time later. None of the other English-language national papers bothered either. Where the play did meet with a certain amount of critical attention was – predictably enough – in the Irish-language press. Here again, though, the reaction says far more about the poverty of Irish-language theatre than about either the power of Friel's play or the accomplishment of Ó Doibhlinn's translation. Nóirín ní Nuadháin's review in *Comhar* draws attention to the rushed nature of the production and the poor standard of the acting, comparing it unfavourably to the "*draíocht*" [magic] of Field Day's inaugural production of the previous year (Ní Nuadháin 15). The bulk of her article, however, celebrates the fact that the play is being performed at all, that audiences are getting the chance to see it at all, that theatre in Irish is even *possible* at all. The actors might not be convincing, she argues, but they are certainly putting in a titanic effort ("*ag cuir dua orthu fhéin*") and this is to be admired. Her review, despite being fundamentally negative, ultimately emerges as rather positive. This, she seems to suggest, is a rather mediocre production of a play you would probably rather see in English but feel a certain duty to go see in Irish. The actors are not particularly good. But – *but!* – aren't they great all the same?

If the critical reception of *Aistriúcháin* in 1981 was marked by this mixture of condescension and apathy, then much same reaction was measured out to Aisling Ghéar's production twenty years later. Again, the *Irish Times* published what can only

be described as a novelty piece[12] about the production; again it neglected to grant it the dignity of an actual review. Again, the Irish-language press drew attention to the production as a welcome "occasion" (Ó Caireallàin 4); again its reviewers proved reluctanct to discuss the performance critically (Ó Liatháin 10). This is curious, given that Aisling Ghéar – the island's only professional Irish-language theatre company – staged a version of the play which was not only far more technically polished than that of Aisteorí na Tíre, but that took considerable liberties with Friel's original linguistic vision. To understand how two quite fundamentally different performances could be met with much the same critical reaction requires a certain understanding of the status of Irish-language theatre in Ireland and of the make-up of its audiences. One of the advantages – or disadvantages – of producing this kind of theatre is that the assumptions to be made about audience and critics are far safer and more predictable than in the case of anglophone theatre. There is a blunt reason for this. Despite the unmistakable presence of Irish that hovers around the classic works of Synge, Murphy and Friel himself, despite the ready availability of Irish-speaking actors and the fact that many of the country's most influential theatre-makers are Irish enthusiasts (Fiach Mac Conghail, artistic director of the Abbey and one of the most powerful figures in Irish theatre is a native speaker), theatrical production in the first official language is not generally taken terribly seriously in Ireland. This can be put down to the fact that theatre, unlike lyric poetry, has no historical tradition in Irish. It was virtually invented out of nowhere by language enthusiasts such as Douglas Hyde and Augusta Gregory during the Gaelic Cultural Revival of the late nineteenth century, and despite the fervent support of the fledgling Irish State in the 1920s and 1930s, the establishing of the Taibhdhearc as the National Irish-language theatre, and

[12] "Nice Translation," *The Irish Times Online* 3 Aug. 2002, 10 Aug. 2007 <http://www.ireland.com/weekend/2002/0803/102774202214.html>.

the provision of generous arts funding, it has never come to pose any serious challenge to Irish theatre in English.[13] It is for this reason that the press in Ireland tends to treat Irish-language theatre as a novelty rather than as an an object for serious critical attention. The Irish-language press meanwhile, mindful of representing a linguistic culture under constant threat, is understandably slow to appear overly critical of any attempt to promote the language through theatre. Any cultural activity in Irish tends to be welcomed by the language movement, a generous and inclusive policy which can sometime backfire in facilitating works of questionable artistic merit. It is, as the argument goes, all *ar son na cúise* (for the good of the cause), the cause in this case being nothing less than the struggle for linguistic survival.

If the *ar son na cúise* argument influences those who make and promote Irish-language theatre, then it influences those who consume it all the more so. While any prospective *Aistriúcháin* audience is likely to include the usual selection of theatre fanatics and Friel buffs, it will also almost certainly feature a sizable quota of Irish-language enthusiasts who are very much Irish-speakers first and theatre-goers second. Baldly put, plays in Irish are frequently patronized by people who would never consider going to see a play in English. This backbone of the Irish-language faithful – filling the theatres for what some may consider all the wrong reasons, but filling them nonetheless – is the reason that Aisteoirí na Tíre's underwhelming *Aistriúcháin* made healthy box-office returns in 1981. In 2002, however, Aisling Ghéar decided not only to draw on the support of the *ar son na cúise* language-loyalists, but to acknowledge and actively indulge them. Aisling Ghéar showed their audiences what they knew

[13] The underdeveloped condition of drama and theatre in Irish is starkly reflected by the dearth of relevant scholarship on the subject. Pádraig Ó Siadhail's *Stair Dhrámaíocht na Gaeilge: 1900-1970* (Indreabhán, Conamara: Cló Iar-Chonnachta, 1993) is the only monograph to have been published on the subject to date.

their audiences wanted to see – even if this was quite categorically *not* what Friel had wanted them to be shown.

Aisling Ghéar's production was in many ways the production that Aisteoirí na Tíre's had wanted to be. Ó Doibhlinn's translation was originally commissioned as a bilingual piece, the idea being that the groups on stage would express themselves through their respective native tongues. "I would have thought," remarked company manager Colm Ó Tórna to *The Irish Times* at the time, "that the jokes would have been even more obvious using both languages, especially as Aisteoirí na Tíre will be performing to audiences who understand both […] but the author may think that it [the two-for-one conceit] is an intrinsic part of his play" (Kiely 9). Friel most certainly did feel that it was an intrinsic part of his play and refused permission for the translation. "Otherwise it doesn't make sense," he protested, "the conceit is part of the strange logic of the play" (Kiely 9). Ó Torna is right in suggesting that the clash of two languages on-stage would make the jokes and puns "more obvious" – this, in fact, is the problem. An Irish/English performance of *Translations* is *too* obvious, too natural, and forces the play into precisely the kind of restrictive, straightforward realism that Friel deliberately avoided in writing the play – and that, in 2002, Aisling Ghéar actively sought in staging it. Company founder Gearóid Ó Caireallláin explained to the *Irish Times* that a bilingual staging "sets the play in its realistic setting," and more forcibly brings home "the brutality of the way the English language was forced onto the Irish speakers".[14] And so in Aisling Ghéar's *Aistriúcháin* the English soldiers speak English, the Irish peasants speak Irish, and, as

[14] For full interview with Ó Caireallain and director Bríd ní Ghallachóir see "Nice Translation," *The Irish Times Online*, 3 Aug. 2002, 10 Aug. 2007 <http://www.ireland.com/weekend/2002/0803/102774202214.html>

a gesture towards monoglot anglophones, simultaneous translations are provided through headphones.

On a purely theatrical level, this shedding of Friel's two-for-one language device has massive consequences for the audience's experience of the play. In the performance's Northern Irish context, however, it is the political ramifications of such a move which are of most interest to us in our investigation of the play's reception. Here it is necessary to draw some dividing lines between Southern Irish audiences watching Aisteoirí na Tíre's production in 1981 and Northern Irish audiences[15] sitting down to see Aisling Ghéar twenty years later. Whereas Irish in the Republic has come to shed its traditional nationalist associations and grow increasingly cosmopolitan, north of the border it remains a symbol for republicanism and opposition to British rule. The prominence with which leading members of Sinn Féin wear the *fáinne*[16] attests to this. So while a director in the South can assume that an *Aistriúchain* audience will be made up predominantly of language enthusiasts, his northern counterpart can take it as a given that *his* northern audience, simply by virtue having opted to attend a play in Irish in the first place, will be drawn almost exclusively from the nationalist community. Even the provision for simultaneous translation is unlikely to open any Irish-language production up to a Unionist audience. Aisling Ghéar's performance space is situated in the Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich on the Falls Road; Northern Ireland has, unfortunately, not yet reached that point where members of the Protestant community can feel entirely at ease attending a theatre in the heart of nationalist West Belfast. In staging *Aistriúcháin* bilingually then, Aisling Ghéar pitched a nationalist interpretation of the play at a nationalist-dominated audience.

[15] While Aisling Ghéar did in fact tour the Republic –and the Scottish Western Isles – with the play, the production was conceived as part of the West Belfast Féile an Phobail (Community Festival) and both the cast and production team were very much dominated by Northerners.

[16] A small metal ring worn pinned to the lapel to indicate that the wearer speaks Irish. They can be coloured, silver or gold, depending on level of fluency.

Director Bríd ní Ghallachóir's explanation that "déanann sé an coimhlint idir an Gaeilge agus an Béarla an-soiléar"[17] is a statement of intent. And this intent was never Friel's intent. *Translations*, as he went to great lengths to clarify, "has to do with language and only language. And if it becomes overwhelmed by political elements, it is lost" (Friel 1979). Staged in Irish, *Aistriúcháin* remains a play about language. Staged in both Irish and English, it cannot be received by the audience as anything other than a play specifically about the historical relationship between Irish and English, an emotive subject which cannot but generate political meaning in a Northern Irish context. Ironically, it is when English is allowed a voice that it announces itself the enemy. Aisteoirí na Tíre's *Aistriúcháin,* for all its technical failings, makes a case for the durability of the Irish language. Adhering to Ó Doibhlinn's painstakingly accurate translation, it demonstrates that Irish can express Friel's theatre as clearly as English can, that the two tongues are cultural equals, that Irish is by no means dead. In Aisling Ghéar's self-consciously realist rendering, however, Irish is stone-dead – because English kills it and the audience witnesses the killing.

Twenty-seven years ago Brian Friel was instrumental in founding the Field Day theatre company, a bringing together of Northern Irish artists from both communities in an effort to promote a "Fifth Province" of the mind, a theatrical common ground where Irish and Northern Irish of traditionally antagonistic traditions could come together to question the basis of the factors dividing them. *Translations* was their maiden performance; the Catholic Friel dedicated the play to his Protestant friend, the actor, Stephan Rea. When *Translations* opened in Derry that year, it was celebrated as a theatrical occasion for both communities, lauded by the local papers

[17] English: it [the bilingual performance] makes the conflict between Irish and English very clear.

on both sides and packed out every night with punters from both the Bogside and the Waterside. The play was met with thunderous applause on its opening night – legend has it that it was the Unionist mayor of the time who led it. It is sobering to reflect that a play that marked a moment of cultural reconciliation at the height of the troubles could come to deliberately exclude a Unionist audience and serve instead to further perpetuate some of the us-and-them myths of nationalist history. Some hope, however, rests in the fact that the version crafted by Breandán Ó Doibhlinn – himself, like a Friel, a native Derryman, but also a classicist, a Professor of Modern Languages and very much a representative of the more cosmopolitan branch of the Irish-language movement – remains a exemplary piece of translation and a sound basis for productions in the future. The Irish language, one hopes, has not finished with Friel quite yet.

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Pumpkin Fruit / Pumpkin Root: Participatory Theatre in a Ugandan Prison

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This theatre is not much to look at. It is a single, rectangular room with no seats except the few wooden chairs that were taken from the administration offices to accommodate the six guests, American friends of the co-director (and author of this paper), none of whom will understand a single spoken word of the performance. The rest of the audience, consisting of about two hundred Ugandan prisoners, is squeezed tightly together on the concrete floor. They are thin and muscular. Most are barefoot. Almost all belong to the Acholi tribe, a Nilotic group whose population extends into Southern Sudan. The once-white concrete walls of the "theatre" are streaked now with stubborn black mold and the red dirt that is pervasive here in the north. Iron bars fill the frames of the pane-less windows that line each side of the room. I walk through the crowd with Peter[1], an inmate and former schoolteacher who has served as translator and co-director throughout the three-week theatre project. We explain to the audience that three different performance forms will be presented over the course of the afternoon. Two forms, the traditional tribal dances and the contemporary dances, have been created and rehearsed by the inmates alone. The third form was created over the course of our workshop: short, original plays based on Acholi folktales.

Finally, the performance begins with the words used to begin all Acholi folktales. The storyteller indicates that a tale is about to be told. The audience members signal their readiness to begin (Ocitti 74):

[1] All names, including that of the prison, have been changed.

Storyteller: “Ododo-na moni en-yo!”
Audience: “Eyo…”

Te Okono obur Bong’ Luputu

There is a well-known proverb used amongst the Acholi: *Te Okono obur bong’ luputu* – “the pumpkin in the old homestead must not be uprooted” (P’Bitek 41). The phrase refers to the pumpkins that once grew wild in the northern districts that comprise the tribe’s traditional territory. In his introduction to Okot P’Bitek’s epic poem, “Song of Lawino,” G.A. Heron explains, “[p]umpkins are a luxury food. […] To uproot pumpkins, even when moving to a new homestead, is simple wanton destruction” (P’Bitek 7). P’Bitek, the renowned Acholi author, uses the proverb as a unifying metaphor in his poem, and provides an added layer of meaning to the refrain. Through his protagonist, Lawino, P’Bitek uses the repetition of the proverb to plead with and admonish his people not to destroy their cultural identity by turning away from their past and from their traditional values.

Te Okono obur bong’ luputu has taken on particular resonance for the northern Ugandans in the years since independence. Four decades of dictatorship and civil war coupled with the modernizing effects of post-colonial globalization have acted to loosen the once-powerful ties to traditional culture. Over the course of three-week prison theatre collaboration between the author, an American theatre practitioner, and about 100 Ugandan prison inmates, the idea of the pumpkin and its roots became a powerful metaphoric frame. In this paper, I extend the metaphor to outline the ways in which the values inherent to inclusive education and participatory theatre shaped my work in Uganda; to describe a process in which participatory theatre techniques were used to build an inclusive and trusting environment; and to describe the process of creating

collaborative theatre within the constraints of a prison environment. For the purposes of the analysis I'll divide the metaphor into three parts: the root, the fruit, and the seed, wherein each part corresponds to a stage in the process of the collaboration.

Root/Structure

> Politics itself is not the exercise of power or struggle for power. Politics is first of all the configuration of a space as political, the framing of a specific sphere of experience, the setting of objects posed as "common" and of subjects to whom the capacity is recognized to designate these objects and discuss about them. Politics first is the conflict about the very existence of that sphere of experience, the reality of those common objects and the capacity of those subjects. (Ranciere no pagination)

Perhaps it goes without saying that facilitating theatre at the intersection of prison and war within postcolonial Africa is a political act. To operate within any one of these arenas is to position oneself ideologically. To operate simultaneously in all three is to enter a complex terrain of competing stances in regard to, among other things, power; personal and cultural identity; punishment and rehabilitation; individual agency; 'otherness'; and human roles within institutional and societal structures that continue to preserve hierarchic aspects of colonial rule.

Ranciere's statement suggests that the political can be seen as the discourse surrounding the right to identify and interpret reality. Theatre is one medium through which an interpreted reality can be performed. But who are the subjects who get to decide what "common objects" to discuss? Whose reality gets performed? How are the conflicts of perception, interpretation, and capacity negotiated? And if there are such things as "best methods," what are they in the context of facilitating drama with populations that are vulnerable on multiple levels? In this section, I will explore the ways various theatre praxes inform my own attempt to confront these issues within a prison context.

There are many pedagogical and theatrical traditions that have influenced the potentially humanizing work of prison theatre. These traditions, which privilege the experiences of individuals and communities, and in which top-down methodologies are eschewed in favor of bottom-up and co-creative approaches, are like trees in a forest. Their shared and entangled roots draw from the same soil, overlapping and intertwining, making the naming and dividing of such practices a matter more of convenience than of accuracy.

My work in prisons is grounded in the values of community-based, educational, and applied theatre. All are interested, through their various forms and to varying degrees, in co-creative and collaborative methods that engage individuals in a process of inquiry concerning a particular issue. Community-based and applied theatre, situated as they are within non-traditional theatre spaces and community settings, and commonly working with disempowered and vulnerable populations, tend to be more explicitly political than educational theatre in that they engage groups of people with shared identity with the intention of discussing and challenging issues of personal and community concern (Cohen-Cruz 1-2). There is a desire to foster criticality amongst participants, empower individuals, and improve people's lives (Taylor, *Applied Theatre* 3-9; Nicholson 2-8). A sense of partnership and shared responsibility prevails between facilitator and participants, just as it does between teacher and students in progressive models of education, which emphasized experiential, child-centered learning (Taylor, *Drama Classroom* 118).

Influenced in particular by the work of John Dewey, a number of educators including Winifred Ward, Caldwell Cook, and Peter Slade began to incorporate and

advocate for the use of classroom drama as an educative tool. The interplay between drama, classroom, and community continued throughout the 20th century, notably in the work of Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, who developed a participatory approach to teaching literacy that challenged the traditional relationship between teacher and student (Nicholson 9). His book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972), inspired his compatriot, Augusto Boal, to create the techniques known as "theatre of the oppressed," which constitute perhaps the most well-known and implemented form of participatory theatre in the world today.

Under the umbrella of participatory theatre, community members themselves are acknowledged as subjects capable of identifying and discussing the common objects of concern within a specific realm of experience. This privileging of the individual as the discerning subject is found in much of the Theatre for Development (TFD) work that exists throughout sub-Saharan Africa today.

TFD began in the early 1950s when government-sponsored troupes of actors traveled to rural areas of Africa to perform propaganda plays promoting the colonial agenda on such topics as hygiene, birth control, agriculture, and effective methods for producing cash crops (Nogueira 103-8). Much has been written about TFD,[2] and it is beyond the scope of this paper to outline its history. What seems clear is that it has evolved into a more participatory, dialogical form of theatre that can be used as a powerful tool to raise consciousness and engender criticality around important, local issues. Examples can still be found of top-down approaches to TFD (see Odhiambo, 189-99) but, taken as a whole, the literature reflects a predominantly positive view of the

[2] For recent commentary of TFD, see Abah 1996; Chinyowa 2007; Nogueira 2002; Odhiambo 2005; Wa'ndeda 1998.

field. Chinyowa and Abah present it as a liberatory, inclusive practice that has the power to confront the "cultural bomb" of colonialism (Thiong'o, qtd. in Abah 250), from which the fallout continues to destabilize, invalidate and destroy indigenous cultures and values (Abah 245; Chinyowa 134). Abah compares TFD's political function with what he calls the subversive politics of Drama in Education (DIE) in a way that has resonance within a prison setting. While both forms seek to raise awareness through dialogue and shared enquiry, DIE operates to reveal hidden oppressions and amplify silenced voices within a school site whose function is to reproduce the *status quo* through "socialization into the cultural, political and economic systems" (Abah 257). DIE is subversively political in that it undermines the primary function of the institution.

Theatre with prisoners similarly undermines an institution, one whose primary functions are to contain and punish. Gaining entry is no simple task. An artist must "walk a tightrope between incorporation into and resistance to the criminal justice system it seeks to exist in" (Balfour 3). While it's not uncommon to find individual administrators who believe in the importance of educative and creative outlets for their wards, "the humanizing process […] exists in contradiction to the administrative task of the institution" (Balfour 2). Prison theatre often exists under the heading of "rehabilitation," a term that can hold vastly different meanings for warden and artist.

There is no need for an artist to try and disabuse "the system" of its notion of rehabilitation, which, in current criminological discourses, focuses on the individual responsibility of the so-called "wilful offender" (Balfour 4-7; Heritage 32; Hughes 44) who must be re-socialized in preparation for his eventual release from prison. For the artist grounded in the theoretical and practical frameworks of participatory theatre, it is

possible to acknowledge the philosophical perspective of the institution, while expanding the meaning of rehabilitation to include an approach that "values the human individual and is committed to their potential for growth" (Hughes 61). Thus, artists wishing to "walk the tightrope" often play a linguistic game: accepting the *signifier* while silently quietly operating from their own understanding of the *signified*.

Inspiration/Seed

The idea of *signifier* and *signified* has relevance when working in cultural contexts that are not one's own, especially when the primary communicative signifier, the word, is not of a shared language. Throughout my three weeks in Uganda, I communicated verbally through an interpreter, and often found myself flipping through my mental rolodex for alternate ways to express meaning when my first (or second or third) attempt failed to resonate within the inmates' frameworks of understanding. Physical gesture and facial expression were often effective tools, but at other times missed the mark. My task throughout was to find ways to lessen the linguistic and semiotic distances between us. In this section I will describe my work with the Ugandan inmates, and the various approaches I employed in the process of creating theatre.

Under the initial terms of my agreement with prison officials, I was to work with the participants from 9 am until noon, Monday through Friday, for three weeks, after which the men were to perform for the rest of the population. However, due to a scheduling snafu I was told to complete the workshop on the Tuesday of the third week, and have the men perform the next day. What was to have been a three-week process became a two-week process, considering that the days immediately preceding the performance would inevitably be focused more on "product" than on process. I had

wanted to spend the first week engaged in exercises and games that would foster a sense of community and build trust between the inmates and myself. I hoped that this work would reveal issues of concern within the group that could then be developed over the course of the remaining two weeks. But the shortened schedule, combined with the fact that over 100 men asked to participate in the workshop, forced me to altar my plans. Instead of using theatre exercises to generate ideas collectively, I decided, in the interest of time, to put forward a proposal of how best to use our time – an idea to be discussed and voted on. I was concerned that I was already moving away from the ideal of collective decision-making toward a more expedient, democratic form. When working in institutional settings there is often a tension between the commitment to process and the pressure to produce a culminating product. It can affect positionality in relation to decision-making, forcing choices to be made that attempt to balance one's commitment to inclusion with the needs of the institution and those of the participants.

I wasn't sure of my direction but I knew I wanted to ground our exploration in Acholi culture. During my time in Uganda, I had seen many examples of traditional dance and song, but I hadn't seen spoken performance, though I knew that oral storytelling was one of the dominant forms of entertainment and cultural transmission amongst the Acholi (Ocitti 73-9). Their popular folktales highlight human faults, foibles, and weaknesses through the adventures of animal protagonists. The stories are didactic and moralistic, reflecting the values of the tribe. Proverbs, too, are commonly used amongst the Acholi to express cultural beliefs and values (Ocitti 70-3). Initially, I wasn't sure how we might play with the folktales and proverbs but, having discovered them – as

well as the proverb from "Song of Lawino," – I thought I had found a way to create word-driven theatre with the inmates through the use of culturally familiar material.

Seed/Sowing

> The heat, chaos, and excitement of play places the physical body in a super-alive relation to the environment and transforms the relations between that person and their world … [They] move outwards, or forwards from the body and do not stay within its physical limits… Play fills the body with an adrenalin that incites it to look to others: to engage more vividly. (Thompson, 54-5)

In the humid confines of the cramped barracks the men are laughing and slapping hands. Sweat drips from my face as I watch the men speaking excitedly to one another in Lwo, their native language. It's the end of the first week of the workshop and the men have just completed a variation of Boal's game called, "One person we fear, one person is our protector" (Boal 141). We call it, "The Elephant and the Lion." The men loved it, each one running around the room laughing and trying to keep the "elephant" between themselves and the "lion." For the first few days, we simply played for almost half of each three-hour session. Each game finished with laughter and chatter, and served to create an atmosphere of joy and trust. Prison is a space completely devoid of play, and I could see that the sheer silliness of the games relaxed the men. In the singular presence required, in the utter absence of self-consciousness that comes with true laughter, there is a feeling of freedom. The joyful atmosphere allowed the work to move forward.

Now at the end of the week, the games are what we look forward to after our mornings of work. We start the day now with a 'check-in,' during which the men take a moment to be 'alone.' The men mill about the room, keeping to themselves, and I ask them to notice that even in the midst of many men, it is possible to find some solitude.

When I began on Monday the men giggled throughout, but now they are silent and focused. I ask them next to make eye contact with one another. They do, and they can't control the wide smiles that spread across their faces. Now I call out a word and ask them to create physical images with their bodies of the word as I count down from five. "Joy!" A hundred bodies twist themselves into images of joy. "Anger!" "Love!" They embody anger and, through peals of laughter, love. They play the image game as fully as they play the silly games. After each, the men shout and clap.

Image work becomes our bedrock. The men enjoy using and moving their bodies. I know that most of them are illiterate and that the Acholi were a non-literate society before the colonial period. I imagine that this is why I never have to implore them, as I do with American students, to "get out of your head!" I feel as if the men truly live in their bodies, that emotion and thought is expressed physically. The image work is comfortable for them and it is a language we can all use to communicate easily. I find myself using fewer words and more of my body as the weeks go on.

To begin the second week, I divide the men into twenty groups of five. Peter whispers a well-known proverb to each group. I ask the groups to create tableaus that get at the meaning of the proverbs. They're to keep the proverbs secret so that, later, we can try to guess the proverb based on the image. The men huddle for a moment and then, almost instantaneously, they are on their feet, twisting and moving into various positions. They are still absorbed in the work as I am escorted out. I'm never allowed to stay past noon, but the men are allowed to continue working into the evening.

When I return after the weekend, they are eager to show me their work. One by one the groups display their images. To help the others guess, and to generate dialogue, I

ask the viewers to describe what they see and what they think is happening in each tableau. The men deconstruct the images piece by piece and eventually try to guess the proverb. I sense that this kind of discussion is boring to many of the men. Quite a few are having side conversations, or walking into the yard. A core group of about thirty men stay and get very engrossed in the conversation, but I am concerned that I'm losing so many. I worry that I'll only be able to move forward if I keep things "fun." But I decide that it's as important to honor those who are enjoying the analysis of the proverbs as much I honor those who have lost a bit of interest as the work becomes more cerebral. One of the proverbs that generates heated discussion is *Te Okono obur bong' luputu.* The men talk about the relevance of the phrase and how the "pumpkins" of their culture have, in their opinion, already been uprooted. The one white-haired man in the group brings up "Song of Lawino" and explains to the younger men the connection of that phrase to the end of colonial rule. I am fascinated by the discussion and, remembering the folktales, I ask the men if they would be interested in extending our exploration of cultural meaning by delving into some of the local folktales. I explain that I think we could try to create contemporary, human dramas from the stories. They readily agree. I question myself again as to whether I am 'driving' the agenda, but I feel that I'm simply harnessing something that emerged naturally, and using it to move forward. But the men seem intrigued by the idea. They say they've never thought about transforming the tales into human drama. One man suggests that anyone who knows a folktale tell it to the rest of the group so that they can decide which ones to focus on. Peter suggests to the men that they choose two or three folktales to concentrate on, and asks them to strive to retain the

lesson of the original. One by one, the men come to the center of the room and begin to tell stories:

> "Ododo-na moni en-yo!"
> "Eyo!"

I didn't know it then but my work was more or less complete. Very naturally, Peter took over. I continued leading warm-ups each morning, but the conversations about which folktales to choose and the process of work-shopping them was easier for everyone without having to have each conversation translated. I was content to sit and watch Peter work with the men. He would occasionally ask me for advice, or have me look at a scene, but for the most part the men made the work their own, which in my mind, made the workshop more successful than I could have hoped.

Fruit/Display

The day of the performance is a celebration. The men have been eager to perform and are particularly excited that I was able to bring my wife and a few friends to see their work. As in New York, the chance to interact with, let alone perform for, "civilians" is special; the men relish the opportunity. The entire performance lasts over three hours and consists of dancing, music, poems, as well as both the telling of three traditional folktales and the enacted skits the men have created. Throughout, I think about language and symbols. The Americans have been so excited to come to the prison. I sense, as I do with many newcomers to prison, that they are romanticizing the experience. The danger, the crossing into this hidden world, is exciting. The men are excited, too, but for them it is the brief glimpse of the outside world, something different, which excites. To them there is nothing romantic or interesting about prison. During the performance the reactions differ,

too. What has the Americans clapping and shouting – the traditional music and dancing – is commonplace to the Ugandans. They sit passively throughout, and don't applaud at the end. Why would they? Culturally, the dances are enacted during ritual and celebration; they are not performances. On the other hand, the skits based on the folktales have the prisoners literally screaming and doubled over with laughter. Each skit produces loud cheering and several minutes of conversation as the men recount the events in the play. The Americans, despite being given written translations, don't engage with the tales, but why would they? There is no cultural connection for them, no shared understanding or point of reference.

The performance runs long so instead of having a joint conversation with participants and audience, we are forced to move the debrief to the following day, which, unfortunately, only the workshop participants are permitted to attend.

What strikes during the final conversation is the depth of feeling and gratitude from the men: "Never could I have imagined that it was possible to make a play like this. I know the direction forward now;" "You have shown us a way to use our own stories to create the drama." The white-haired man stands and solemnly thanks me for coming to Uganda and for reintroducing these folktales to the community: "The conflict has interrupted the cultural traditions. This really reminded us so much of all of it. None of us expected the dramas to be so wonderful." A young man who had taken a leading role in one of the folktales stands and tells the group that they have a "responsibility to the younger generations to teach them the customs of the people." He promises that when he is released he will work with the youth and teach them these and other dramas based on the Acholi stories.

The comments extend to the three-week process as a whole. “Through the process that you brought to us, I feel that when I go [out of prison] I can live in any situation. I also didn’t know that the folktales could be [transformed] like this. Now I will use your method to transform the rest of them.” One man said that the prison was more lively in the past three weeks and that he had “felt as though in freedom [sic]. I was able to relax and review my entire case from the very beginning and I was relieved of my bondage.” At the conclusion of the sharing, I thank the men: *Afoyo matek!* – “Thanks a lot!” I circle the room and shake hands with each man. The workshop is complete.

Fruit/Harvest

When people talk about prisoners “reentering the community” they often forget that prisoners are, in fact, a community unto themselves as well as a subset of larger communities in the outside world. Prisoners are hungry to feel like valuable members of the communities to which they belong, both inside and outside the prison walls. The process in northern Uganda was empowering for the participants and inspiring and entertaining to the rest of the population. The actor-inmates were encouraged by a sense of direction for their future work, both in regard to theatre in prison, and their projected contributions to the free world.

As a practitioner, I have mixed feelings. On the one hand, I am delighted that in the short time we had, we were able to work in a way that left the men feeling empowered by the process and affirmed by the responses of their peers. I am excited that we were able to find a way of making theatre that employed my knowledge as a theatre practitioner and the cultural knowledge of the Acholi men. On the other hand, I am disappointed that I wasn’t able to take more time to generate our workshop theme

collectively. The idea to use the folktales and proverbs was mine and, to that extent, was "top-down." On the other hand, while I came in with the idea of creating spoken theatre, I don't feel I forced the issue. It was after discussing *Te Okono obur bong' luputu* that I proposed exploring and transforming the folktales. Had the idea not been met enthusiastically, I would certainly not have forced it upon them. But I was confronted by a problem of time and logistics that forced me to slide down the scale from a hoped-for collective approach to a democratic one. It is easy to see how a practitioner under similar constraints, even one with the best of intentions, could consolidate decision-making power in a desire for efficiency and in an effort to make the "best" product. What I learned is the importance of having a wide understanding of various participatory theatre theories and practices, as well as a sincere desire to learn from the population with whom one is working. A built foundation of trust and respect between myself and the Ugandan men, coupled with my own knowledge of the various approaches to inclusive and dialogic theatre, allowed us to create meaningful, culturally grounded theatre within the constraints of a prison environment.

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Feeling Performance, Remembering Trauma

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> Maybe bodies come to be "ours" when we recognise them as traumatic (Phelan 18)

> Trauma we are told is a perpetual present, resilient in its persistence and timeless occupation of a subject who does not and cannot know it. It happened but I do not know it – that it happened or what it was that happened. Yet this happening is not past since it knows no release from its present because it is not yet known: never known, never forgotten, not yet remembered. (Pollock)

Both Phelan and Pollock, somewhat differently, articulate the ever-presence of the traumatic event and the difficulty of recognising/understanding that event. Traumatic events have long been the focus of attempted representation in the theatre. Since the ancient Greeks, theatre has been concerned with the representation and resolution of trauma (principally through classic tragic modes); trauma is an evocative and emotive force that binds an audience to the theatrical action drawing them ever deeper into the performance event. That trauma pervades the survivor's life is not in question, but before entering into a discussion concerning the nature of traumatic representation and "presence" in the theatre it is important to briefly track the history of a theory which, much like its subject matter, is becoming increasingly pervasive within the academy, and especially in the arts.

Historically, trauma has been associated with physical injury, studied and treated by doctors and surgeons. It was not until towards the end of the nineteenth century, after a sustained period of development in "creative psychological theorizing" as Micale puts it (115), that the conception of trauma began to be reconfigured within psychopathology and its definition started to shift from physical blow towards that of a shocking event, the impact of which is felt within the nerves and mind of the survivor. This period developed the foundations on which modern understandings of

psychoanalysis/psychotherapy, psychology, and psychiatry are built. While trauma has been redefined and reconsidered over many decades, there is still no single definition and understanding of it; however, one of the most succinct and useful definitions of trauma in its psychological rather than physio-medical understandings is from Cathy Caruth. She defines trauma as "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (11). It is important, here, to highlight that while the return of the event is an imagined re-living (or remembering) it is nonetheless a powerfully visceral experience that the survivor embodies; it seems to be happening again, so to speak.

Dominic LaCapra, in a widely supported argument, has proffered that traumatic events numb the senses to the moment of impact and therefore they cannot be registered at the time of their occurrence. It is only after a period of latency that the impact of the event is felt (174). There is no objective viewing of the incident in the moment of its happening, it is only afterwards in its "endless impact on a life" (Caruth 7), that we come to understand the original moment as the beginning of the trauma. It is an event which happens too unexpectedly and with such immediacy that it cannot be fully comprehended as it is happening. Biologically speaking, our "fight or flight" instinct takes over in these moments of unimaginable difficulty. As Brown very succinctly puts it, trauma is "an event outside the range of human experience" (100). We have no field of reference within which to understand it as it happens; our bodies are only concerned with surviving the event rather than understanding it.

In her musings on loss and (its) "survival" in the introduction to *Mourning Sex*, Peggy Phelan touches on trauma as already existent within human kind from the moment of birth, her language evoking a sense of evisceration at birth as we are

"severed from the placenta and cast from the womb" only to enter the world as "amputated" bodies defined by our own mortality (5). During these opening pages she postulates that "trauma is untouchable […] it cannot be represented. The symbolic cannot carry it: trauma makes a tear in the symbolic network itself" (5) – trauma, in other words, is beyond representation. This is not to deny the possibility that traumatic memories can be triggered through the witnessing of representations which, in themselves, may be read or received as "traumatic;" while specific traumas, on an individual level, may be outside the scope of representational forms we do have access to presenting images, action and language which may be considered generically "traumatic" in the experiencing of them.

Judith Herman asserts that,

> Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community. They shatter the construction of self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience. They violate the victim's faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis. (51)

Trauma causes a shudder in the make-up of the victim's understanding of themselves and the world in which they move, making them question their understanding of the ordering of life. In his examination of "post-dramatic" theatre, and quite separately from trauma theory discourses, Hans-Thies Lehmann elucidates a similar argument for performance claiming that it "has the power to question and destabilise the spectator's construction of identity" (5). This striking echo of Herman's assertion that traumatic events "shatter the construction of self" is particularly interesting as it allows us to begin to plot the line between performance and trauma: both share a destabilising power so it would seem that theatre, more than any other art form, is perfectly placed to attempt a dialogue with, if not a representation of, trauma.

Malpede further clarifies this argument suggesting that "[b]ecause theatre takes place in public and involves the movement of bodies across a stage, theatre seems uniquely suited to portray the complex interpersonal [and intrapersonal] realities of trauma" (168).

Sarah Kane's *Blasted* self consciously attempts to bear witness to and portray the traumas of war, rape, domestic violence and loss. Using the Bosnian conflict of the early 1990s as a central inspiration, Kane wrote a play that so graphically depicts and describes multiple acts of violence that its original staging in 1995 was met with almost unanimous vitriolic condemnation in the nation's press. The reaction surrounding this performance and the abundance of critical attention it received indicates that there was something in the experience of being at the performance that caught the nation's collective attention; even the tabloids picked up on this "feast of filth," as Jack Tinker infamously put it (5). *Blasted* grabbed attention in a society where representations of violence were becoming normalised, it presented violence and trauma in too "real," too embodied, a way for the British public to ignore.

The play articulates the way in which traumas tear the fabric of peoples' lives without reason or warning:

> It was about violence, about rape, and it was about these things happening between people who know each other and ostensibly love each other… suddenly, violently, without any warning, people's lives are completely ripped to pieces. (Kane qtd in Sierz 101-102)

The repetitive and cyclical nature of trauma is a central thread throughout the play: perpetrators have the traumas they have committed turned upon themselves (for example, the Soldier rapes Ian after Ian has raped Cate); Ian and Cate's very relationship is a perpetual cycle of wounding and re-wounding which neither can escape; the pain of survival is revisited upon Ian *ad infinitum* at the end of the play,

left alive he has no choice but to revisit and relive the traumas he has experienced as both perpetrator and victim – as Annabelle Singer says, “He can’t even die” (140).

> *Darkness.*
> *Light.*
> *IAN masturbating.*
> IAN: cunt cunt cunt cunt cunt cunt cunt cunt cunt cunt cunt
> *Darkness.*
> *Light.*
> *IAN strangling himself.*
> *Darkness.*
> *Light.*
> *IAN shitting.*
> *And then trying to clean it up with newspaper.*
> *Darkness.*
> *Light.*
> *IAN laughing hysterically.*
> *Darkness.*
> *Light.*
> *IAN having a nightmare.*
> *Darkness.*
> *Light.*
> *IAN crying, huge bloody tears.*
> *He is hugging the Soldier’s body for comfort.*
> *Darkness.*
> *Light.*
> *IAN lying very still, weak with hunger.*
> *Darkness.*
> *Light.*
> *IAN tears the cross out of the ground, rips up the boards and lifts the baby’s body out.*
> *He eats the baby.*
> *He puts the sheet the baby was wrapped in back in the hole.*
> *A beat, then he climbs in after it and lies down, head poking out of the floor.*
> *He dies with relief.*
> *It starts to rain on him, coming through the roof.*
> *Eventually.*
> IAN: Shit. (Kane 59-60)

Dramaturgically, *Blasted* bombards its audience with image after image of horror and trauma, both in its action and language, it quite literally blasts them into confronting numerous traumatic events; it is an attempt to portray and bear witness to the power and intricacies of inter- and intra- personal traumas.

I have seen two productions of *Blasted*; the first was in Warwick Arts Centre's studio theatre in late 2000, directed by Russell Whitehead. The production was both visceral and experiential, holding true to the *mise-en-scène* that had defined the original. This was in part due to some excellent acting and to the director's unwaveringly detailed staging of the violence in the piece. No quarter was given; not once did the actors shy away from the action and the audience was constantly drawn into the harrowing world presented on stage. One element of this production that remains clearest as I recall it was the feeling of claustrophobia in the studio, a feeling that engulfed the audience giving the production a sense of relentlessness and a viscerally experiential quality. While the studio is a fairly large space it has the adaptability to be closed in on its audience, the action brought forward to the point where auditorium and stage seem one and the same space. The proximity to the performers enabled the audience to hear their bodies collide together and to more easily connect to the physical exertions of some the most violent scenes. There was a palpable tension amongst the audience and audible gasps gave a sense of collectively feeling the action; much of it was, as it must have been in the tiny Theatre Upstairs in 1995, too close for comfort, too "real." This was a performance defined by its attempts to represent the realities of traumatic experience and I felt the violence of it hammer through my body.

In July 2005 I saw Thomas Ostermeier's production of *Blasted* (*Anéantis*) at the Avignon Festival. In its scale alone this production was the opposite of Whitehead's; the scenography was fabulously detailed, to the point that when the hotel is "blasted by a mortar bomb" (Kane 39) rubble quite literally exploded over the stage as the room crumbled. Ostermeier's direction was masterfully understated, moving away from the brutality of the violent acts to focus on the language and

subtleties of the characters' relationships. Yet, while this production was moving and powerful in its own way there was something missing from a play which, even in reading it, packs a significant punch. This was partly to do with direction of the text but this was not significantly radical to deny the visceral nature of the violence in the piece, Ian still forced himself on Cate, was still raped by the Soldier and had is eyes sucked out. The impact was lost not in the interpretation but more by the fact that the audience was so far removed from the action and the performers. The play was staged in the roofless ruins of a cavernous old church, denying the audience any sense of intimacy with the performance and even in the second row, as I was, the stage was some considerable distance away. Gone were the sounds of bodies under exertion, the sense of collective experience and the feeling of reality so palpable in the Warwick production.[1]

These two productions varied greatly in their interpretation of the play; both were effective and interesting for different reasons but only the first held any sense of the felt/embodied "experience" Kane suggests she was looking for when she wrote the piece (Kane qtd in Sierz 98). The performance dynamic and the establishment of a kinaesthetic connection between the audience and performers, it would appear from these examples, is central to an embodied and experiential reception of the performance, and, as I will discuss shortly, to the visceral experience of traumatic memory.

On 7 April 2007 I had the unsettling and moving "pleasure" of going to see Kira O'Reilly's performance *Untitled (Syncope)*, at the Shunt Vaults, as part of the

[1] The only exception to this was during the final moments of the production when I finally felt the weight of the play. While the "trauma" of the action had had little experiential impact the loneliness and relentless despair of Ian's failure to die, the trauma of his living, hung in the air. During these moments there was a stillness in the audience that seemed to signal a shared empathy for Ian, a desire for relief from the grind of life.

SPILL Festival 2007. It was one of the clearest experiences of kinaesthetically embodying a performance I have had, not only because I felt a connection to the body of the artist but also because I was physically moved (both around the space and in my muscular reaction to the performance). Before the performance proper begins, the audience is led through the damp, musty and dark labyrinth of arches and chambers that makes up the Shunt Vaults until we are standing at one end of the main concourse, staring into the blackness at the other end. Looking through the sequential railway arches into the darkness I am struck by the stillness and silence of the audience; there is an aura of reverence and anticipation amongst my fellow spectators that I assume is due both to the knowledge, amongst some, of O'Reilly's previous work and in part to the surroundings.

I suddenly see something move. There is a figure moving slowly towards us; she is naked, walking backwards. I think I see a baby looking over her shoulder towards us. As she gets closer I see she is wearing a burlesque "showgirl" headdress and bright red high heels, which we can now hear clipping the floor. I realise the face looking at us is not that of a baby but the artist's face reflected in a small circular mirror, she is watching us watch her. When she is only about five metres away a slow knocking sound begins, it is somewhere between a clock ticking and a hammer hitting a block of wood. I cannot locate its source. As the woman draws ever closer the audience position themselves in a horse shoe shape around her. She is so close it is possible to see every contour and muscle in her body.

Her skin is littered with the traces of past wounds, small, neat scars all over her body from ankle to neck. She now stands amongst the audience, catching our gaze in the mirror. She holds my eye for what seems like an age, I notice her crimson lipstick mirroring the colour of her shoes, and then her eyes move past mine around

the semi-circle and back again. Her gaze returns to mine, she reaches out and takes my hand leading me away from the rest of the audience. My heart quickens as the security blanket of being part of the group evaporates and I am suddenly aware of their gaze on my back. I feel very alone and exposed. I notice the scalpel she clamps to the face of the mirror; it looks like a sinister clock. I am led through two arches into one of the chambers, the audience following. And then I am released.

The woman places the mirror on the floor, the scalpel now in full view. She stands straight, raises her right arm above her head, points two fingers to the sky and breaths in. She breaths in and in and in and in. There is no exhalation. The sound changes to a faster clicking, like a metronome counting out the beats of her inhalations and movements. Her elongated body starts to tremble under the strain of her breathing, her face reddens, her abdominal muscles contract and some of the scars on her body seem to flash angrily. Her body suddenly relaxes, her arm drops and her muscles go limp as she finally breaths out. She repeats this process, once more with her right arm raised but this time only exhaling, out and out and out and out. And then twice more (one in, one out) with her left arm raised. With each repetition her muscles tense more, the veins in her neck bulge and her body shakes under the strain. She goes limp as she finally exhales after the fourth action.

After a moment's rest she steps forward, picks up the scalpel, stretches down to her right calf and cuts. She turns to her left calf next where I have a clearer line of sight, as she stretches the skin on her calf I see the purple trace of a previous cut. Unconsciously I tense my calf muscles, half expecting to feel the impending incision myself. In an action that echoes the cyclical/repetitive nature of traumatic experience, she draws the blade along the purple scar line, slicing into her flesh and reopening the three inch wound. Blood oozes out slowly and as it collects along the cut it tumbles

down towards her ankle puddling between the skin of her foot and the edge of her red shoe.

These opening moments give way to a series of repetitive, strenuous and visceral movements, her body (and ours) in perpetual motion through the space. The metronome's pace quickens and grows louder as she tries to keep her taught automaton style movements up with the pace set by the mechanical ticking, all the while teetering in her high heels. She never speaks.

Throughout the forty minute performance I could not help but think back to the glances and touch I shared with the artist. The experience of physically being led away from the audience group circled in my mind constantly, the sense of her hand on mine palpable throughout. The performance was both beautiful and incredibly difficult to be part of; I found myself desperate to watch and desperate to hide at the same time. For me the experience was a deeply visceral and connected one, I very clearly felt the musculature of my own body and its relation to the performer's physicality. And while this was a very individual experience, the audience as a whole was made to move around the space, we were directed and manipulated by the performer's movement through the arches and tunnels of the vaults, constantly jostling for a better viewpoint and occasionally finding ourselves bumping into each other and the ever moving performer. We were a community of individual spectators, physically in motion with the performer and within touching distance of her every movement.

This was, as Anna Fenemore has termed it, a "visceral-visual performance" (110). The performance space was shared, unbounded, desegregated and through this there was the possibility of generating a sense of being more fully present at the performance. The performance was received through the body/ies of the audience; the

performance dynamic was such that the audience was unlikely to be engaged in a process of self objectification/elimination or distancing from the performance and so might more fully experience the performance and ourselves within in it. The experience of watching someone willingly slice into their flesh connected on a bodily level in the anticipation of pain I expected to feel, a sensation that was undeniably shared by others in the audience as they variously winced, gasped, tensed muscles, or looked away holding hands to mouths. I felt strangely culpable, as though I should have stopped her. I became, as Hand and Wilson put it in their examination of the theatre of Grand-Guignol, a "willing witness."[2]

It is the physical connection between bodies in a space that gives any theatrical experience its power; being part of the live event, watching bodies move in front of you, places you in a direct corporeal/phenomenological relationship with the performers and with the representations/images being presented in the piece. Stanton B. Garner argues that the experience of the theatre is registered through the body, that "[t]he embodied *I* of theatrical spectatorship is grounded, one might say, in an embodied *eye*" (4). Theatre's capacity to question constructions of self is bound to the live nature of the event and the kinaesthetic connection between bodies in a shared space, making it the ideal site for traumatic exploration. Shepherd asserts that, "effects are produced in the spectator simply as a result of materially sharing the space with the performance. Many of these effects, bypassing the intellect, are felt in the body and work powerfully to shape a spectator's sense of the performance" and therefore "[t]here is a kinaesthetic empathy between the spectators' musculature and the performers" (36-37; 46). Both Shepherd and Garner point towards the unique quality of theatre/performance as a *felt* experience, an experience in which we are viscerally

[2] "By a simple acknowledgement of the audience … [they] become accessories to the act and, most critically, willing witnesses" (Hand 36).

connected to the work presented to us. But, as the above examples suggest, in order to be kinaesthetically connected to the performance, to truly feel the experience, we need, especially when thinking about the reception/remembering of traumatic experience, to be close enough to the action that we can palpably feel the movements and hear the sounds of the performer's body. In such a situation, unlike film or painting (or even the Avignon production of *Blasted*), the audience is not removed from the action by a screen or canvas (or distance), we can hear, see, touch and even smell the performers; this connection places us in a frame of both responsibility for, and complicity in, the action. It seems to me that this is especially true of work in which we are not positioned in a darkened auditorium in comfy seats where we can convince ourselves that we are simply individual spectators. In all of the productions where I have had a more fully embodied experience of the performance, be it "traumatic" or not, I have also had a sense of the community of the audience, a sense that while it is a subjective and individual experience there is a body of spectators engaged in a similar encounter.

As I have already noted, trauma is, to use the Lacanian term, beyond the symbolic. But traumatic remembering can be triggered and engaged through performance. For me the process of remembering is most apparent when encountering a sense of experiential spectatorship, such as the experience I had at *Untitled (Syncope)*. Central to the re-living/remembering of traumatic memory is the establishment of a performance dynamic which is physically engaging for the audience. It seems to me that while plays such as *Blasted,* and many others too numerous to analyse here, can engage their audience experientially crucially it is through a connection to the action rather than the language that a felt quality of the performance can be stimulated. Traumatic events may be beyond the symbolic,

especially language, but through a kinaesthetic empathy with the bodies of the performers an embodied and experiential experience of performance can give the effect of trauma's presence.

By constantly drawing the audience through the space, O'Reilly created a kinaesthetic bond between performer and audience, a bond which was both physically and emotionally experienced. The connection I felt to Kira O'Reilly's body kept drawing me to make associations in my memory, it put me in a space where I began to reconnect with past moments of traumatic experience – my first memory of pain, the image of watching a friend's forehead split open on a curb, and the sickening experience of guilt and helplessness when a loved one tried to commit suicide. I did not want to remember. The performance placed me in a position of remembering and re-experiencing my own personal traumas. It is in this kinaesthetic/visceral connection between performer and audience member, between body A and body B, that theatre/performance connects with trauma and where it has the capacity to act as a catalyst to re-embodying traumatic experience, or, returning to Lehmann, to destabilise our constructions of identity and place within the world in which we move (5).

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The Reception of Oscar Wilde and Bernard Shaw in the Light of Early Twentieth-Century Austrian Censorship

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Introduction

In an article that appeared in the Viennese newspaper *Neue Freie Presse* on 23 April 1905, Bernard Shaw wrote of his own and his Irish compatriot and fellow dramatist Oscar Wilde's reception in Vienna:

> There are three European capitals that have not yet advanced beyond the first quarter of the 19th century. […] In Vienna, I will not be understood for at least another hundred years, because I am part of the 20th century […]. But Vienna will more easily get used to the style of Oscar Wilde, for not only did Oscar Wilde embody the artistic culture of the 18th century, but he also showed a very mundane inclination towards wealth, luxury, and elegance. […] Seeing that Vienna, apart from Paris, is the most regressive city in Europe, though it still considers itself an 'enfant de son siècle par excellence', it ought to appreciate Oscar Wilde far more greatly than he will ever be appreciated anywhere in Germany or England.

In this context, Jacques Le Rider has argued that certain cultural aspects of Vienna Modernism between 1890 and 1910 can be attributed to the movement's essentially pre-modern socio-economic and political environment, where the urban modernisation process set in at a later stage than in other Western European countries ("Between Modernism" 1). Throughout Europe, these modernising developments entailed far-reaching changes of the social structure, and an accelerated pace of social differentiation within urban milieus, which characteristically led to a "loss of familiar patterns of orientation and subjective individual fragmentation" (Csáky, Feichtinger, Karoshi, and Munz 14). However, in Central Europe, the larger region historically and politically united by the state entity of the Habsburg Monarchy, the consequences of commonly experienced vertical differentiation of society and its implied disruption of individual and collective consciousness were multiplied by horizontal ethnic-cultural diversification (ibid. 17; Stachel 18-19).

As the capital of the k.u.k. Monarchy, Vienna, the majority of whose population was made up by migrants from the periphery of the Austro-Hungarian crown lands, presented a

microcosm of the entire ethnic, linguistic and cultural plurality of the Habsburg multi-nation state (Kokorz and Mitterbauer 401). It appears worth considering whether this exceptionally high degree of "internationality," reflected in the cultural networking activities and pronouncedly cosmopolitan outlook assumed by Viennese artists and intellectuals (397), finds its expression in the local literary and theatrical reception of foreign cultural elements.

In this respect, cultural transfer research becomes particularly relevant in view of the cultural scene of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Its heterogeneous structure particularly invited processes of cultural transfer, which rely on the context change of cultural elements within and between hybrid cultures, resulting in their modification and/or appropriation (399). As cultures are "inherently unstable, mediatory modes of fashioning experience" (Greenblatt 121), the stability of a culture can only be ensured by means of recontextualising or even excluding foreign cultural elements, thus regulating their otherwise unrestricted circulation (Suppanz 28). This process of "cultural blockage" (Greenblatt 121) involves a careful selection and standardisation of texts, primarily being carried out by officially authorised institutions such as censorship offices. According to Pierre Bourdieu, censorship plays a particularly important role in times of political and social upheaval, when restrictive rules and laws are enforced by those who dominate in order to preserve the prevailing discourse (91, 227; Merkle 15). Considering the growing instability in the Habsburg empire with its ethnic and cultural heterogeneity, the regulating mechanisms employed by the censorship authorities not only served to convey a certain conception of a homogeneous national culture on the surface, but also functioned as a means of "legitimation and de-legitimation in the process of cultural consecration[1] within a plural society" (Suppanz 31).

[1] Suppanz uses the German term 'Deutungsmacht', which corresponds with the term coined by Pierre Bourdieu.

Principles and Practice of Early Twentieth-Century Austrian Stage Censorship

Censorship regulations in early twentieth-century Austria-Hungary were essentially based on the 1850 Theatre Act, which contained a catalogue of prohibited forms of stage representations. This covered anything that might constitute an offence against penal law, public peace and order, the Habsburg imperial dynasty, the constitution, public decency, religion or the privacy of living individuals (*Theaterordnung* 1976-1980). Moreover, the provisions required organizers of any public theatre performance to apply to the governor of the respective crown land for a production licence, in the process of which two copies of the textbook were to be delivered to the authorities, who returned one of them, containing potential textual amendments. In case of rejection, the theatre management could launch an appeal to the Ministry of the Interior, while works giving rise to partial objection could become subject to revision. However, even if a production licence was granted, the authorities maintained the right to attend not only the public performances, but the dress rehearsals as well, to forestall any possible infringement of the legal provisions (Spitaler 32-33).

A reformed and modified ordinance "pertaining to the administration of theatre censorship" was issued in 1903, allowing for greater freedom in the dramatic depiction of contemporary social and political questions, and generally recommending a liberal implementation of censorship regulations (*Erlass* 82-83). In case of a violation of the principles set down in the Theatre Act, the play was to be submitted to a censorship advisory board, which remained subject to public appointment by the governors of the crown lands, and consisted of three members, among them an administrative and a judicial officer, and a representative of the literary and theatrical scene. Their statement as to whether, or under which conditions, a production licence could be issued, was to form the basis of the governor's final decision (82-83.).

When Censors Disagree, the Artist Perseveres[2]: Blockage Averted in the Viennese premiere of Oscar Wilde's *Salome*

When, in June 1892, the Lord Chamberlain imposed a ban on Oscar Wilde's symbolist one-act tragedy *Salome*, it marked only the beginning of censors' repeated preoccupation with the play on both sides of the Channel. Characterising the play as "half Biblical, half pornographic" (qtd. in Donohue 118), the Lord Chamberlain's Examiner of Plays, Edward F. Smyth Pigott – once acidly described by Bernard Shaw as a "walking compendium of vulgar insular prejudice" (qtd. in Holland and Hart-Davis 98) – officially refused a licence on account of traditional Protestant law that prohibited the depiction of Biblical subjects on stage (Ellmann 351), which sparked Wilde's boundless fury and indignation. "The whole affair is a great triumph for the Philistine, but only a momentary one," Wilde wrote to the theatre critic William Archer, adding firmly: "We must abolish the censure. I think we can do it" (Holland and Hart-Davis 534).

However, Wilde's essentially "unEnglish" play, a "continental work, realizable only in Paris or Germany or Moscow" (Raby 330), whose suggestive moral and sexual ambiguity fed on a toxic cocktail of eroticism, blasphemy and necrophilia, decidedly overtaxed English audiences' indulgence of artistic licence. It remained confined to a handful of largely indifferently received private London productions for almost four decades until the suspension of the censor's ban in 1930. In England, *Salome* was mainly, in the wake of Wilde's high-profile public court-case and subsequent social downfall, perceived to reflect and highlight the moral and sexual depravity its author had come to stand for. But, according to Wilde's literary executor Robert Ross, it was this play which effectively remade his literary reputation "wherever the English language is not spoken" (qtd. in Donohue 119). There was substantial public interest in the work, life and persona of Oscar Wilde in Germany and Austria, generated by the astonishingly broad coverage in the local press of the author's court

[2] "When critics disagree the artist is in accord with himself" (Wilde 22).

case and death. The following brief analysis of the commentaries by the Austrian censorship authorities prior to the Vienna premiere of *Salome* in December 1903 reveals a dominant sense of inseparable interdependence of the author's life and work.

Of all Wilde's dramatic works, *Salome* suffered most poignantly from its originator's social ostracism, since it was considered highly reflective of Wilde's personal lifestyle, making the play the epitome of morbid decadence and moral depravity. In the first statement issued by the police official in charge of censorship on 14 March 1903 (after the Deutsches Volkstheater in Vienna had applied for a production licence of *Salome*), the argument against the play's approval included factors such as its stark emphasis on "the sensuous moment," and the representation of Biblical characters, which were likely to "cause offence to religious sentiments." Moreover, "the Englishman [sic] Oskar Wilde was publicly named sexually perverted, and therefore traces of his morbid inclinations could be detected in his work" (NOELA [Lower Austrian Archives], censorship records, 1582 ex 1903).

Similarly, upon the theatre's submission of the revised textbook, the literary historian and censorship advisory board member Dr Carl Glossy regarded the play as essentially indicative of Wilde's public image of moral degeneracy. *Salome*'s author, he elaborates in his recommendation to the Lower Austrian governor, is known as the main representative of Decadence, a "poet whose dialogue is dazzling, whose imagination is fuelled by wild passion. Here [in the play], [his] morbid, deviant disposition […] is crudely expressed." Essentially, Glossy harbours considerable reservations about the "product of [Wilde's] diseased mind," by whose stage representation parts of the audience could be "offended in their sense of decency" (18 October 1903, NOELA 1184 ex 1907).

Whereas Glossy's objections remain centred on the moral implications of the play, the former First Crown Prosecutor of Vienna, Franz-Josef Ritter von Cischini, in his function as legal advisor to the board, expresses grave doubts about the reception of its religious aspects, expecting "a storm of protest" to emanate from the enraged Catholic clergy. Surprisingly,

Cischini believes that "the erotic parts do not appear likely to offend the sense of decency and cause public nuisance, since they are always attended by a sense of horror, which reaches its climax with the play's concluding scene" (1 November 1903, NOELA 1184 ex 1907). Additional weight is given to the fact that the core audience of the Volkstheater, which had indeed earned a reputation for its artistically ambitious repertory and the production of progressive, slightly "risqué" contemporary European plays (Höslinger 300), would be expected to be familiar with modern drama and its contents (1 November 1903, NOELA 1184 ex 1907).

As one of the more notable works of modern drama, "it cannot be denied that alongside many paradoxes [*Salome*] contains poetic beauty […] and is, in any case, the work of a 'poet'": thus Court Counsellor Ludwig Tils, government representative in the Lower Austrian parliament, pleads in favour of the play's approval (18 November 1903, NOELA 1184 ex 1907). Not surprisingly, Tils's brief introductory summary of Wilde's career and eventual public disgrace establishes an automatic link between the scandalous revelations of Wilde's sexual orientation and the play in question, demonstratively testifying to the common observation that the interest in the author's biographical details repeatedly intruded upon the critical reception of his works. However, even though "*Salome* too shows traces of perverted inclinations," the princess's sexual advances do not imply a sacrilege or defamation of John the Baptist, since "[t]he poet lets Salome perish, slain like a beast, while John gloriously dies a martyr's death. Thereby the balance between poetic and moral justice is established and spelt out clearly in whose favour it is" (ibid.) It seems to Tils that the play cannot be denied to the Viennese audience, since *Salome's* objectionable parts can be attributed to ulterior "poetic motives (even if their source emanates from a poisoned imagination)", merely proposing a number of cuts and that the Baptist's head be covered with a piece of cloth (ibid.).

Despite the advisory board members' contradictory responses, *Salome* was approved by governor's decree on 20 November 1903, under the condition of further textual

eliminations, and that the audience be spared the gross sight of the Baptist's severed head as much as possible (20 November 1903, NOELA 1184 ex 1907). Eventually, the play experienced its first night at the Deutsches Volkstheater on 12 December, and, in tune with its scandal-tainted previous history, met with an essentially mixed reception, as the police report on the performance notes: "The violent protest, which, immediately after the curtains had closed, found its expression in an intense chorus of hissing, soon had to contend with roaring applause" (13 December 1903, NOELA 1184 ex 1907).

In contrast to the Berlin situation, where *Salome* had initially been banned, the Viennese authorities appeared to have no fundamental objections against the play, which was passed without major controversy. However, the Berlin example had shown that the censor's ban – widely covered in the Viennese press – had only promoted public interest and contributed to boosting the play's popularity (Davis 156). The approval of Wilde's controversial play was, even if the mechanisms of blockage could not be enforced entirely, connected with a host of recommended textual amendments and modifications, as well as moral and religious considerations.

"[D]ramatic Art as Unfit to Deal with Serious Questions"[3]: Blockage Enforced and the Reception of Bernard Shaw's *Press Cuttings* in Vienna

In a letter to his literary agent, translator and mediator, Siegfried Trebitsch, Bernard Shaw wrote on 28 June 1909:

> There has been a great fuss over here over the enclosed play Blanco Posnet [*The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet*], which was […] forbidden by the Lord Chamberlain (our Censor) on the ground that it is blasphemous. […] On the same day the Lord Chamberlain forbad [sic] the performance of another play of mine called Press Cuttings which I also enclose. This time the objection was that it contained political personalities. (Weiss, *Letters* 144)

[3] Bernard Shaw. "The Censorship of Plays (A letter to the Editor of *The Times*, London, 30 June 1909)." *The Bodley Head Bernard Shaw: Collected Plays with their Prefaces*. Vol. 3. Ed. Dan H. Laurence (London: Max Reinhardt, 1971, p. 890). Following the censor's objection to *Press Cuttings*, Shaw wrote a number of letters to various London newspapers.

As a matter of fact, Shaw had repeatedly protested against the fierce regulations of British stage censorship (Nicholson, 24-25); consequently, "there can be little doubt that he would have anticipated and relished the problems he would be causing" (42) by submitting these plays for licence at the Lord Chamberlain's Office.

Subtitled "A topical sketch compiled from the editorial and correspondence columns of the daily papers during the women's war in 1909", *Press Cuttings* was "obviously designed mainly to annoy a number of public figures" (Hynes 233). In the one-act play, two of the leading characters, a General Mitchener and a Prime Minister called Balsquith, find themselves confronted with militant suffragettes, and are eventually "converted to votes for women and civil rights for the Army" (233). The Lord Chamberlain, however, would only permit a performance of the play provided that the suggestive names were altered, "as they were too like Kitchener-and-Milner and Asquith-and-Balfour for his approval" (Mander and Mitchenson 130). After Shaw had agreed to make the changes, *Press Cuttings* was licensed and ultimately presented by the Civic and Dramatic Guild in a special private performance at the London Royal Court Theatre on July 9, 1909 (Laurence 843).

It appears that the publicity the *Press Cuttings* affair had attracted in Britain soon aroused the interest of both German and Austrian newspapers (Weiss, *Letters* 144). Apart from the fact that Shaw's dramatic works were widely known among German-speaking theatre audiences thanks to the incessant efforts of his Viennese translator Trebitsch, *Press Cuttings* had a strong appeal because of a passage dealing with the possibility of a German invasion of Britain. Actually, in the play General Mitchener contends that England rules the seas "by nature" and must prepare for a German invasion (145).

When *Press Cuttings* (or *Zeitungsausschnitte,* as the title was translated into German by Trebitsch) was submitted by the Theater in der Josefstadt in Vienna in 1910, it was instantly rejected by the Austrian stage censorship authorities. Shaw wrote a letter of protest to the Viennese newspaper *Neue Freie Presse*, which reported the affair in an article sharply

criticising the practice of stage censorship.[4] It suggested that the play had been disapproved of only because of the "war scare which certain people [in England] are fomenting" (Weiss, *Letters* 144). In reality, it was feared that a public performance in Austria would "severely harm international considerations" (19 March 1910, NOELA 1525 ex 1916), since the play had failed to obtain a licence from the Lord Chamberlain. Even though advisory board member Glossy maintained that the play's prohibition in London did not justify a suspension of the performance licence in Vienna, "considering that a non-British audience does not even show as much interest in the subject matter of the play as British theatregoers" (5 July 1910, NOELA 1525 ex 1916), he fully agreed with Cischini that the Josefstadt audience would immediately recognise Shaw's derision of the British military. According to Cischini, "it is a commonly accepted fact that the British are very easily offended if they find their superiority over other nations challenged. As a result, a performance in Austria could be understood as an hostile action towards Britain" (9 July 1910, NOELA 1525 ex 1916). In addition, the censorship advisory board pleaded for the deletion of certain passages from the dialogue between Mitchener and The Orderly. In accordance with censorship regulations, Glossy stated that "in any case, a degradation of the military must not be staged in Austria" (5 July 1910, NOELA 1525 ex 1916).[5] Consequently, the play was banned, despite Trebitsch's attempts to intervene with the censorship authorities by agreeing to make some major adjustments to the text, as is testified by a handwritten letter by the translator included in the *Press Cuttings* archive record (20 March 1911, NOELA 1525 ex 1916).

In Britain, after the publication of Shaw's highly controversial pamphlet *Common Sense about the War* just as the First World War was beginning, the playwright "turned almost overnight from a tolerated, popular provocateur into a national persona non grata" (Bertolini 128), due to his harsh condemnation "of British foreign policy, exposure of British

[4] The article appeared anonymously in the *Neue Freie Presse* on 10 September 1911.
[5] As Steven Beller puts it, "[t]he army held a central place in the Habsburg Monarchy; indeed, because of the constitutional structure of Austria-Hungary, it was, next to the emperor-king himself, the most important institution common to the empire's two halves" (129).

Pecksniffery, and sympathy for Germany's dilemmas" (Weiss, *Letters* 180). However, Trebitsch managed to re-establish Shaw's plays on the Viennese stage (Weiss, *Further Letters* 236). To do so, he followed Shaw's advice: "[I]f you are bent on the desperate enterprise of having my plays performed in Vienna […], you had better try *Press Cuttings*. It makes a British Commander in Chief sufficiently ridiculous to please the patriotic section of Vienna" (Weiss, *Letters* 189). Consequently, the Theater in der Josefstadt made a new attempt to obtain a licence of performance for *Press Cuttings* in 1916, arguing that circumstances had changed during the intervening six years (13 August 1916, NOELA 1525 ex 1916). Indeed, the police official responsible for censorship declared that "in view of the current state of war between the [Austro-Hungarian] monarchy and England no objections can be raised against the performance of the play, which at that time had been banned only out of political considerations" (ibid.) The governor of Lower Austria, however, gave instructions to change the name of the "English General Mitchener (Kitchener) […], who had recently died under tragic circumstances" (17 August 1916, NOELA 1525 ex 1916).[6] Nevertheless, the play never made its way onto the Viennese stages.[7]

Conclusion

An examination of early twentieth-century Viennese stage repertories reveals that both Oscar Wilde and Bernard Shaw, for very different reasons, produced a lasting and impressive imprint on Vienna's theatrical landscape. Even though the Anglo-Irish playwrights shared a similar background of satirical subversion aimed at the 'core values' of English society, they remained essentially divided in their conceptions of art, world view and lifestyle, which could

[6] General Kitchener drowned in June 1916 while embarking on a diplomatic mission to Russia.

[7] On 27 October 1916, the Josefstadt staged Shaw's one-act plays *The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet*, *The Man of Destiny*, and *How He Lied to Her Husband*, with theatre manager and actor Josef Jarno starring in the leading roles of Blanco Posnet and Napoleon respectively. It appears that Jarno had originally intended *Press Cuttings* to be part of this production and thus applied for a production licence. However, the records are not conclusive about the reasons why he eventually decided against the performance.

be subsumed under the programmatic headlines Aestheticism vs. Asceticism, or, as Shaw himself phrased it so succinctly, Artist vs. Propagandist.[8]

In Vienna, as elsewhere, the early reception of Wilde and his works was distinctly characterised less by any serious interest in the merits of his literary achievements than by the scandalous nature of his court-case, subsequent prison-sentence and untimely death (Bridgwater 48), and became subject to mechanisms of public curiosity, lurid sensationalism and ideological instrumentalisation. However, it seems as if Wilde's aesthetic theories, influenced by French Symbolism, "found considerably more resonance in Francophile Vienna (and Munich) than in Francophobe Berlin" (47), more naturally harmonising with and fertilising the local artistic avant-garde milieu. There, Wilde's work had been introduced in the early 1890s, mainly due to the cultural mediation of Hermann Bahr, the main catalyst and agent of European Modernism within the "Young Vienna" movement (Daviau 13).[9] Thus, the Viennese fin-de-siècle affinity with Parisian Symbolism and basic orientation towards the aestheticism of French Dècadence certainly eased the transfer of *Salome*[10] into the Austrian theatrical context. Moreover, the comparatively unobstructed granting of a theatrical production licence to *Salome* could potentially be considered a symptom of deliberate contrast and distancing from Berlin and its aesthetic, theatrical and even political norms. The latter tendency found its most striking expression in Bahr's critical work *Die Überwindung des Naturalismus* [*Overcoming Naturalism*], which programmatically emphasised Vienna's independent cultural development, and, at the same time, proposed its artistic opposition to Berlin Naturalism (Kokorz and Mitterbauer 403).

[8] "Wilde wrote for the stage as an artist. I am simply a propagandist." (Laurence, *The Bodley Head Bernard Shaw* 127).

[9] As early as in November 1894, Bahr dedicated a lengthy essay to the Anglo-Irish writer in the liberal weekly *Die Zeit*, which, by suggesting that Wilde's fame to a greater extent rested on his notorious public persona than on the quality of his writings, laid the foundation of one of the major currents in the German and Austrian Wilde-reception (87-89). Due to its substantial coverage of foreign-language literature, the journal played an important role as a "journalistic expression of cultural hybridity in Vienna modernism" (Kokorz and Mitterbauer 407).

[10] *Salome* was, it is worth noting, written in French, and had its 1896 premiere in Paris.

To be sure, as the above-cited recommendations delivered by the censorship board members, and contemporary press reviews, imply, Wilde's play – and, by extension, even Richard Strauss's opera – were read and perceived in the context of disease, sexual aberration and pathological degeneration (Gilman 55). Nevertheless, parts of the censors' evaluations betray a startlingly open-minded awareness of the aesthetic and literary quality of Wilde's text, as *Salome* is repeatedly deemed the "work of a poet" (Glossy and Tils, NOELA 1184 ex 1907) and one of the more notable works of modern drama, containing "poetic beauty" (Tils) and "dazzling" dialogue (Glossy).

Despite the ostensibly liberal censorship policy employed by the authorities towards the play, it needs to be borne in mind that the proposed textual modifications constitute an attempt to regulate the circulation, and achieve at least a partial transformation of cultural artefacts (Greenblatt 121; Lüsebrink 28). Moreover, the available records suggest that the capacity for creative licence and artistic open-mindedness was contextually determined by the framework of the local theatre scene, which finds revealing expression in board member Cischini's reference to the progressively-oriented core audience of the Deutsches Volkstheater (NOELA 1184 ex 1907). It appears worth mentioning, therefore, that Richard Strauss's opera *Salome*, despite Gustav Mahler's persistent interventions, remained banned from production at Vienna's court opera house until 1918, and experienced its Austrian premiere by way of a German guest performance likewise at the Deutsches Volkstheater in 1907 (Höslinger 300-305).

Similarly to Wilde, the early reception of Shaw's works in Vienna, the theatrical centre of Austria, was profoundly influenced by the playwright's public image. Fostered by the extensive first-hand accounts of his "interpreter and apostle" (Weiss, *Letters* 4) Siegfried Trebitsch, which regularly appeared in local newspapers, the Viennese public soon perceived Shaw as scathing satirist of current political and social affairs. Though the critical impact of his dramatic works had been discussed in Vienna socialist circles (Schweiger 136), Shaw's

unusual dramatic conception and methods were met with mixed reception by the theatre-going public. Therefore, the adaptation – or, as regards *Press Cuttings*, the total cultural blockage – of Shaw's plays to "some uniquely Austrian traditions" (Le Rider, *Modernity* 11), which characterised the Habsburg Monarchy at the turn of the century, necessitated an activation of regulating mechanisms in order to preserve the perceived stability of a specific conception of Austrian culture. By eliminating the socio-critical and innovative aspect from Shaw's plays, the agencies in control of cultural transfer processes blocked the circulation of cultural elements representing the Other (Suppanz 31). These agencies, it should be noted, included the Irishman's translator, himself a member of the Viennese literary establishment, and central figures of Vienna fin-de-siècle culture such as Bahr, who argued that "it is crucial to render foreign plays such as Shaw's less foreign by adapting them to Austrian theatrical conventions" (qtd. in Schweiger 142).

Significantly, the failed cultural transfer of *Press Cuttings* can be attributed to the play being rooted in a certain cultural, historical, and socio-political situation.[11] This is particularly exemplified in the Austrian censorship records, as the authorities tried to wholly incorporate foreign elements by suggesting serious modifications to the play's setting and characters. In addition, cultural mediators facilitated the successful transfer of plays by Shaw that were more agreeable to the conservative Austrian theatrical tradition. When the prestigious Burgtheater considered the production of *Candida* at the very beginning of Trebitsch's ceaseless efforts to establish Shaw on the German-speaking stage, the translator expressed his delight (Weiss, *Further Letters* 222). Shaw, though, inimitably pointed out that the play, "this snivelling trash" (Shaw, *A Devil of a Fellow* 250) was "too sentimental" (Weiss, *Letters* 20) for the Burg: "I shudder to think of what will happen when all the German-speaking peoples of

[11] Interestingly enough, Shaw's discussion of women's suffrage was not examined by the censorship authorities, even though the dramatist had been established as a feminist writer in some Austrian and German newspapers (Schweiger 143).

Europe become acquainted with *Candida*. Hermann Bahr has already declared his infatuation" (Shaw, *A Devil of a Fellow* 251).

In the case of Bernard Shaw, the assimilation and representation of the cultural Other involved a process of play selection in accord with the prevailing dramatic concepts, as well as specific mechanisms of cultural blockage by means of disregarding the political aim of Shaw's plays. Oscar Wilde's society comedies quickly managed to establish themselves as periodically revived classics on the Viennese stage, where they were perceived as apolitical farces toying with social gesture and convention, and therefore appeared more in tune with Austrian comic tradition. In contrast, the author's Symbolist one-act-tragedy *Salome* did not generate much interest beyond its European-wide fin-de-siècle craze, and, eclipsed in fame and popularity by Strauss's operatic version, more or less disappeared from the Viennese theatre scene. The two plays considered in the context of this discussion therefore reveal censorship as crucial in the institutionalised regulation of processes of selection, transfer, creative adaptation and further reception, while remaining prone to the individual influence of cultural mediators, such as translators, agents, or theatre companies.

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Small Town Montréal: Critical Preconceptions and the (mis)Interpretation of Michel Tremblay's *Hosanna*

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In 1981, the Birmingham Repertory Theatre undertook the production of a play by French-Canadian dramatist Michel Tremblay as part of Birmingham's Canadian Days celebration.[1] It played in the Rep's Studio Theatre before transferring to the New Half Moon in Stepney Green and was, as some reviewers noted, a somewhat unusual choice (Chaillet). There were a number of other Canadian plays being performed in England at the time, most notably *Billy Bishop Goes to War*, but they largely emphasised Canada's rural mythology, and were universally written by Anglo-Canadian dramatists. Tremblay's *Hosanna*, however, provided a very different perspective on Canada. Translated from the original French – or more accurately, *Québécois* – it is the story of a transvestite hairdresser from Montréal's east end and her humiliation at the hands of her lover. The play turns its back resolutely on the archetypal conventions of both Anglo-Canadian and French-Canadian drama, foregrounding instead a section of society far removed from Mounties and maple syrup: urban, gay, working class *Québécois*.[2]

From a certain perspective, the Rep's choice made perfect sense. Since the production of his first play, *Les Belles-Soeurs*, at Montréal's Theatre du Rideau Vert on 28 August, 1968, Tremblay had been the most successful playwright in either French- or

[1] Although there is no doubt that the 1981 Canadian Days Festival took place, there is very little information available about its organization or purpose. While such information surely exists, it has not yet come to my attention and will require further research.

[2] Both Anglo- and Franco-Canadian drama had largely attempted to follow the theatrical structures of their European parents. The overwhelming thematic emphasis was on life in a rural setting, particularly in Québec, where French-Canadian identity was still very much attached to the pastoral roots of *Nouveau France*.

English Canada.[3] *Les Belles-Soeurs* is widely credited with beginning the era of authentically *Québécois* drama and was the first of his plays to be performed across North America to widespread successes. New productions of Tremblay's work were consistently the highlights of both the Montréal and Toronto seasons. That being said, the Rep was still taking a significant risk, as Tremblay remained largely unknown in Europe, and *Hosanna* was the first production of a Tremblay play by a non-Canadian performance company in the UK. While *La Compagnie des deux chaises* had toured Tremblay's *À toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou* (*Forever Yours, Marie-Lou*) successfully in 1979, they had had the advantage of significant government funding and the publicity that goes along with it.[4] The Rep's choice to perform Tremblay's work indicates a realization that Canada is an artistically – as well as politically and ethnically – diverse country, and that the elements which resonated with Tremblay's *Québécois* and Canadian followings (resistance to hegemony, the need to challenge repressive norms) were equally relevant to an English audience. This is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that on 10 July, 1981 (less than two weeks after the close of the play in Birmingham), the first of the Handsworth race riots broke out.[5]

In spite of this retroactively dramatic illustration of how topical Tremblay's choice of themes remained, the initial response to the Rep's gamble was mediocre at best

[3] The production of *Les Belles-Soeurs* at the Théâtre du Rideau Vert set off a firestorm of controversy. It challenged the dominant conceptions of dramatic art, of language, and the relationship of Québec to Canada, England and France. Separatist, populist, and relentlessly realist, *Belles-Soeurs* was one of the triggering events of Québéc's Quiet Revolution.

[4] *La Compagnie des deux chaises* was a Montréal-based company begun by Tremblay's agent, John Goodwin. The name alludes to the uncomfortable position of being between two chairs, on neither one nor the other; a metaphor for Québec's position between its French roots and its Canadian present.

[5] The Handsworth riot of 1981 (and those in 1985 and 2005) was ignited in no small part by discrimination similar to that faced by the *Québécois* (not to mention homosexuals). The violent reaction of the Birmingham public to a system that predetermined their options has parallels in Hosanna's reactions within the play.

in terms of critical attention. Reviewers, by and large (although with some notable exceptions dealt with below), viewed the play somewhat patronizingly as a technically well executed but ultimately outdated curiosity. Their analyses of the show tended to focus on the themes of homosexuality and relationships, rather than the more subtle commentary on identity politics which made the original performances of the play – in 1973 at Montréal's Théâtre du Quat'Sous in French and in 1974 at Toronto's Tarragon Theatre in English - so relevant to their audiences.[6] Birmingham's *Hosanna* crossed boundaries of language, culture, and nationality and it is with this in mind that I aim to examine the production and reception of the 1981 performance.

It is worth noting that the Rep's production was unfailingly faithful to Tremblay's stage directions as included in the 1974 English-language edition of the play published by Talonbooks. The playwright has stressed repeatedly that *Hosanna* is a political play designed to expose the danger of adopting socially constructed personas at the expense of one's own identity.[7] As he says,

> Hosanna is a man who always wanted to be a woman. This woman always wanted to be Elizabeth Taylor in Cleopatra. In other words this *Québécois* always wanted to be a woman who always wanted to be an English actress in an American movie about an Egyptian myth shot in Spain. In a way, this is a typically *Québécois* problem. For the past 300 years we were not taught that we were a people, so we were dreaming about being somebody else instead of ourselves. So *Hosanna* is a political play. (Tremblay qtd in Gilbert 263)

From a staging perspective, the 1981 production seems to have both represented this conflict and to have gone to great lengths to invite the audience to examine the relevance

[6] Both the Théâtre de Quat'Sous and the Tarragon are known for producing new work, but their audiences are nevertheless markedly different. The Quat'Sous is known for promoting specifically *Québécois* theatre while the Tarragon is aligned firmly with Toronto's Canadian Federalist sentiment. Both houses, however, have long associations with Tremblay's work.

[7] In the specific instance of the *Québécois* productions of the play, it is understood to be specifically directed at the French-Canadian population, although this aspect is of less importance in foreign adaptations.

the play held in relation to their own lives. From the very beginning, the auditorium was made a part of the stage through the heavy scent of perfume that was liberally sprayed throughout the seating area. Equally significant was the fact that *Hosanna* did not begin when the stage lights came up, but rather when the auditorium lights went down, leaving only the intermittent light of a neon sign from outside Hosanna's window to brighten the darkness. These relatively simple strategies ensured that from the moment it entered the auditorium, the audience was encouraged to identify closely with the play's protagonist. The shared sensory experiences of the heavily scented apartment/auditorium and the darkness that is alleviated both on stage and off when Hosanna turns on the apartment lights emphasise the fact that there is a direct link between the story being played out in performance and the lives of the individual audience members. These devices attempt to blur the line between the imaginary space of the playworld and the reality in which the audience members live. What the character sees and smells is not conveyed to the audience through representative action or expository dialogue, but through actual shared experience. Similarly, choosing to set Hosanna's entrance in almost total darkness made manifest one of the key elements of Tremblay's drama: the audience was quite literally unable to tell who was coming on to the stage. As the stage lights come up, this neutral figure is revealed to be a man dressed in the full garb of an Egyptian queen.[8] Through the course of the play, this costume is removed, leaving an ordinary man whom the audience is once again encouraged to identify with.

Following the logic of semiotics, the combination of these elements should have served to suggest a reading quite similar to that described by Tremblay above, and one that subsequent notes in the prompt script indicate director Bill Pryde intended to convey.

[8] Although, as Tremblay directs, "*infiniment plus cheap*" (Tremblay, "Hosanna" 144).

Both Tremblay's dialogue and Pryde's direction are littered with incongruous juxtapositions of personality and action which simultaneously go to dramatic extremes and touch the audience close to home. Perhaps the most obvious example of this is Cuirette, Hosanna's lover, a paunchy, leather-garbed biker whose arrival is heralded by the roar of his motorcycle, but who defaults to the role of homemaker, cleaning up after Hosanna as "her" Cleopatra outfit is slowly scattered across the stage. At one of the most significant moments of the play, in which Cuirette attempts to goad Hosanna into jealousy by defiantly claiming that he is going to find someone else to sleep with, Hosanna smashes a bottle of perfume on the stage. This brought Ian Gelder's Cuirette up short, and the prompt script indicates a pause as he struggled to decide whether or not to clean up the mess. In spite of the extreme stereotypes of gendered performance that both characters adopted – Cuirette the tough biker, Hosanna the extravagant queen – Pryde's staging emphasised the fact that those poses *were* adopted in response to the demands of the society the characters live in.

To this end, the production made extensive use of the mirror on Hosanna's dressing table. Under Pryde's direction, both characters are at various times captivated by their own images and struck by how odd those images seem to be. The climax of the play comes when both Hosanna and Cuirette come to recognize that their respective personas need to be laid aside. Hosanna takes off the last of "her" Cleopatra costume and declares simply, "I'm a man" and that Cuirette will have to get used to this (Tremblay, *Hosanna* 94). This does *not* indicate an end to Hosanna's days as a transvestite, however. Instead, he will cease to adopt an exotic persona while he does it. Hosanna's whole tragedy, after all, comes about because of his obsession with *being* Elizabeth Taylor. His dressing up

has been a way to escape who he is. At the climax of the play, he recognizes the need to acknowledge the fact that he is a man who likes to wear dresses and sleep with men. His adoption of the Taylor persona has been a denial of this.

All of this suggests that the 1981 production followed earlier Canadian productions of the play closely in its staging and use of theatrical devices. It differed markedly, however, in terms of its reception. As mentioned above, the critical response to the British premier was lukewarm at best. Nicholas de Jongh, writing for the *Guardian*, led the charge of those who panned the play by asking of the production's run at the New Half Moon: "is this a course of gay aversion therapy, disguised in the seducing form of a play and smuggled into East London from that country of compulsive dressing up and wearing of uniforms, prairie-land Canada?" (de Jongh). For him, as for several other reviewers (Francis King of the *Daily Telegraph*, Marion Ellis of the *Evening Standard* and Jim Hiley of *City Limits* are notable examples), Tremblay's play is "a chunk of gay *déjà- vu*, full of self-loathing and *deja-nu* in which a youngish male transvestite hairdresser and his lover, a paunchy and leather-garbed freak, clichéd and stereotyped to the last, engage in squabbling repartee" (de Jongh). King, Ellis, and Hiley join him in decrying Tremblay's treatment of gays and convey the vague impression that the play's conclusion is somehow a denial of gay identity. These reviewers, however, seem to be so concerned with the fact that the play portrays a flawed and (largely) unsympathetic gay couple that they fail to consider the broader issues that have created their problems. Hosanna and Cuirette are not unhappy because they are gay – they are unhappy because society has made it virtually impossible for them to be themselves.

The concerns that these reviewers express over the play's portrayal of gay domesticity are given weight by an overtly right-wing review by Jack Tinker, of the *Daily Mail*, who wrote that *Hosanna* "tells us very little that we do not know either about the tawdry world of mis-named Gays or about anyone who will spend three weeks getting ready for a party" (Tinker). Tinker interprets the play as a celebration of a gay lifestyle which he obviously finds abhorrent, and takes advantage of the dysfunctional aspects of Hosanna and Cuirette's relationships to confirm his preconceived notions. None of these writers mention the fact of Tremblay's own homosexuality, however, which raises the question of whether or not they were aware of it – or if it would have made a difference to their reviews. Certainly this knowledge should have encouraged a reading that at least considers possibilities beyond self-hating vitriol. I am doubly surprised that such possibilities were not raised by these critics given the reviews of Douglas Orgill (*Daily Express*) and Rosalind Carne (*Financial Times*). Orgill's review recognizes that the confrontation between the two lovers is "a moment of terrible truth, when what they are, and the hollowness of their fantasy lives, must be faced" (Orgill), and while Carne still emphasizes the homosexuality theme, she makes a point of discussing the ways in which the play "both explores and trashes destructive role-playing, without a hint of mockery or scorn" (Carne).

How can we account, then, for the discrepancy between these reviews and those of the other critics? It is simple (and fair) to point out that a dozen reviewers can come up with a dozen interpretations of any given performance – and indeed, often do. The striking similarity of the interpretations of Orgill and Carne to that suggested by Tremblay, though, and their marked difference in emphasis (on identity and performance,

not simply sexuality) from the other reviewers suggests that there is more at work here. This becomes even more apparent when one takes into account the fact that Orgill is the only reviewer (with the exception of John Elsom at the *Listener*, whom I will discuss below) to refer to Tremblay as a *French*-Canadian. The others, when they bother to mention the author's nationality at all, identify him simply as Canadian. Should this matter?

In most instances, the answer would be no. Tremblay's works carry well beyond the society of Québec because the specificity of his writing allows audiences to recognize situations which genuinely resonate with their own experience. If it were necessary to have a complete historical understanding of the *Québécois* socio-political position to appreciate the works, there would be little point in performing the play outside Tremblay's home province. But in this particular instance, it is clear that preconceptions of Canada have shaped the reviewers' responses.

The play takes place in Montréal, the second-largest French-speaking city in the world after Paris, second at the time it was written only to New York City as a gateway to North America, and with a population of 2.8 million at the time of this performance.[9] Nevertheless, the stereotypical conception of Canada as a country of small communities and sweeping wheat fields has clearly influenced the reading of some critics. De Jongh claims that "Tremblay [. . .] is writing of a small town milieu and that location's resonances are not altogether apparent in Geoffrey Scott's design […]" (de Jongh).

[9] And incidentally more than 2300 km from Manitoba, the nearest of the prairie provinces.

De Jongh himself has told us that he is reading against the grain of the set design[10] and he is not the only one to do so, as Ellis asserts that the play is set in "a seedy flat in a small town…" (Ellis). We can see then, that the reviewers' perceptions of the play are not being guided by what they actually see on stage, but rather by their impression of Canada, or in some cases of Québec, which may be even more troubling. John Elsom of the *Listener* wrote that Tremblay "is today's most imaginative and accomplished French-Canadian dramatist, *but he doesn't like his work translated into English*. This accounts for the long delay in bringing *Hosanna* to Britain, and explains the very dated treatment of a gay couple who work through their fantasies and disappointments to find true love" (Elsom, emphasis my own). Let us be clear that Tremblay has no problem with his plays being produced in English – indeed, this has been his bread and butter. This idea of Elsom's seems to have come from the fact that Tremblay refused to grant the rights for English-language productions *in Québec* until November 15, 1976 when the Parti Québécois won the provincial election and formed a government for the first time. His objection was not to having his plays produced in English, but to the way that Anglophone interests had dominated the province for so long.

In his brief comment on the topic, Elsom manages to suggest that Tremblay would object to the social makeup of his current audience, and that *Hosanna* is a play strictly about sexuality; passé and irrelevant to the current climate. What is more, it suggests that Tremblay objected to the play's translation and actively sought to stop it. In 1981, as today, Québec was little thought of in England; a forgotten corner of a country whose status within the rapidly dissolving empire was ambivalent, both closer to and

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[10] Which was "a tatty, cluttered, heavily perfumed boudoir, overshadowed by a painted Christ, one of Cuirette's early artistic efforts" (Carne) which "smells like a perfume factory" (Barber).

further from its English roots than many of the other countries of the Commonwealth. It is not difficult to see, then, how the clichéd image of Canada as a rural paradise covered with a liberal sprinkling of sled dogs, bears, and farmers who say "aboot" came to colour some of the reviewers' readings of the production. It is, however, worth considering *why*.

In his *Reading the Material Theatre*, Ric Knowles has outlined a theory of production and reception that takes systematic account of the material circumstances in which theatre is both created and performed, and the elements that he identifies can clearly be seen to have made an impact on the critical reception of *Hosanna*. According to Knowles, the experience of a production begins long before the actual performance. The promotional materials, the experience of buying tickets, and the trip to the theatre are all integral factors in the theatrical event and contribute to what Knowles describes as the "public discourse" of a production (Knowles 91). Clearly, these factors *did* impact the critical reception of *Hosanna*. After all, the one thing that the reviewers did unanimously mention was that the play is Canadian – in spite of the fact that the word Canada is not uttered once in the entire play, nor is the city in which Hosanna and Cuirette live identified as Montréal anywhere except in the programme. Indeed, the only significant changes to the text made by Pryde were the alteration of place names and turns of phrase that were specifically *Montréalais*, even though the actors spoke with French accents. For instance, the *jurons* and *sacres* (French-Canadian curses) were uniformly Anglicized – "*câlice*," became "Fucking Mary," (Prompt Script 25) "*sacrament*" became "Jesus," etc. (Prompt Script 35). It can only be from the programme then, or from the promotion of the play as part of the Canadian Days celebration in Birmingham, that Nicholas de Jongh drew his assumption that the play was set in the prairies. What is more, John Elsom

seems to have based his argument that Tremblay dislikes the translation of his plays into English on the playwright's blurb in the programme which says "Tremblay initially refused to allow his plays to be produced in English translation in Quebec [sic]" (Programme 4).

It is safe then, to acknowledge the fact that the readings made by these two influential critics, at least, were affected by the context in which the play was presented. What is unclear, however, is how the knowledge that the play was Canadian (or at least *Québécois*) equated to rigid declarations of setting and of the author's personal attitude towards translation. While we cannot know what, if any, experience the reviewers had of Canada or Canadian theatre before reviewing *Hosanna*, it is safe to say that they did have certain preconceptions about what to expect. Christopher Balme has argued that "first encounter or contact situations are located in a liminal space between *imprévu* and *déjà vu*, between wonder and recognition" (Balme 19). On the one hand, those involved are captivated by the otherness of an experience, but on the other, they attempt to "integrat[e] the foreign culture into pre-existing matrices of response" (19). This is a largely unconscious process, but one which has far-reaching implications, as it risks, in the theatre at least, reducing the performance to a signifier of itself. *Hosanna* becomes not a play written by a Canadian, but rather a play to be judged on its success in evoking *Canadian-ness*. What is more, the criteria for evaluating what is Canadian are established not by the author or the production company, but rather by the critic or audience member.

It is in this way that de Jongh comes to see the lack of small-town touches to be a failure on the part of the set designer, and also, I would argue, in this way that the play comes to be construed as a piece either for or against homosexuality. In attempting to

view the play not as a piece of contemporary theatre, but rather as a performance of a perceived Canadian identity, one also places an inevitable distance between oneself and the action on stage. The dramatic devices intended to create a sense of fellow-feeling between the audience and the characters are defeated, and a whole set of possible readings is shut down or severely limited. In objectifying the play, one also isolates it, divorcing it from its present surroundings and reducing it to a self-contained unit. What one is left with in the case of *Hosanna* is a play in which two gay men are extraordinarily nasty to one another. To de Jongh, this seemed to be an unrealistic and defamatory image of gay relationships which would reinforce negative opinion, while Elsom saw the play as being performed after its time thanks to the perceived antagonism between Canada's "two solitudes".[11]

This sort of fetishization of the play as Other was not inevitable, however, as shown by the reviews of Carne and Orgil. The fact that they found the play relevant and topical suggests that, to them at least, the Rep's staging was effective. In spite of the ways in which the production had been promoted, these reviewers were able to access and activate readings that transcended the play's Canadian origins and made them relevant to a British audience – not as a piece of British theatre, but as a play that dealt with issues relevant to both British and Canadian subjects.

The widely varied critical reactions to the 1981 production of *Hosanna* are, I would argue, the result of much more than simply different critical tastes. A play by a separatist *Québécois*, billed as Canadian and performed as a part of a Canadian cultural festival, it offers a remarkable opportunity for further study into the creation of meaning

[11] While there has been – and remains – significant tension between Canada's French-speaking minority and the rest of the Federation, this played little or no part in this production, as I have stated.

in the theatre. The peculiar mix of colonial condescension, defensive responses on behalf of both those for and against homosexuality, and thoughtful inquiry from the critics offers us an opportunity to gain a more complex understanding of the interaction between the performance company and their critical audience.

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Making a Performance: Devising Histories and Contemporary Practices by Emma Govan, Helen Nicholson and Katie Normington

London: Routledge, 2007, 215 pp. (paperback)

Joanna Bucknell (University of Winchester)

Despite the dominance of devising as an approach to the activity of making performance in our contemporary climate, the body of critical and theoretical literature published on the subject is oddly sparse, and the field is definitely wanting.

Alison Oddey was one of the first to attempt to address the lack of a substantial study of devising practices in 1994, with her book, *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*, in which she describes the gap in the literature as one of the main reasons for undertaking her project; she "felt that there was a lack of information on the subject of devising theatre."[1] Oddey's work has, to a certain extent, started to address this gap, but it did not, at the time, prompt an immediate or substantial response from either the academy or practitioners. Although certain practitioners and groups, such as Forced Entertainment[2] and Goat Island[3] have since published texts that illustrate their own devising practices, they are few and far between. In 2005, *Theatre Topics*[4] published a devising special issue, with a variety of papers, contributions coming from both the academy and practitioners. This extended Oddey's project "across the water," creating a platform for devising practices and theoretical formulations from outside of the UK. In *Devising Performance: a Critical History*, Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling explicitly locate their work as a response to Oddey's; picking up the project where she left off, bringing it up to date and taking it

[1] Alison Oddey, *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook* (London: Routledge, 1994) xi.
[2] Tim Etchells, *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment* (London: Routledge, 1999).
[3] Stephen Bottoms & Matthew Goulish, *Small Acts of Repair: Performance, Ecology, and Goat Island*, (London : Routledge, 2007).
[4] Jonathan Chambers & Joan Herrington, eds., *Theatre Topics: Devising Special Issue* (Michigan: John Hopkins UP, 2005).

on into the new Millennia, saying that "it is curious that the conversation Oddey hoped would result from her book has never really taken place […] this book sets out to demarcate and explore the parameters of devising."[5] Interestingly, the publication of Emma Govan, Helen Nicholson and Katie Normington's *Making a Performance: Devising Histories and Contemporary Practices* follows up so swiftly on *Devising Performance* that I would like to suggest that it might herald a renewed, more urgent critical interest in the arena of contemporary devising practices.

Making a Performance is an attempt to "shed light on some of the moments and concepts that have informed devising, marking some of the major paradigm shifts and changing practices evident in the varied and highly complex strategies that constitute devised performance" (10). Unlike Oddey's survey of contemporary devising, *Making a Performance* is not only concerned with providing a critical analysis and commentary of particular British theatre practices from a narrow "aesthetic" perspective but, instead, throws its net farther a field. As well as including work from a wider geographical area, it, like *Devising Performance*, considers practices that fall outside of what we might understand as "theatre." *Making a Performance* adopts an approach that seeks to go beyond simply illustrating contemporary practices. It takes up a discourse which attempts to locate particular practices within their historical, social, cultural and ideological context; identifying and mapping key moments that represent a shift or significant change in conceptual, theoretical and practical approaches to making performance.

This approach is similar to that of Heddon and Milling. However, *Devising Performance* locates the origins of devising practices in Post-War experiments; *Making a Performance* challenges this perspective and asserts the origins of devising

[5] Deirdre Heddon & Jane Milling, *Devising Performance: a Critical History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 1.

as being located in the "high-modernist" and avant-garde experiments of the early twentieth century. Heddon and Milling make a point of omitting performance art and live art practices from their study, but *Making a Performance* does not make this distinction, in fact, the authors assert that devising is directly related to and informed by 'live art' and 'performance' art practices. The discourse of the book does not make an attempt at offering a complete history of devising, nor does it pin it down to a singular notion; instead, it seeks to contextualise a specific selection of varying manifestations, in their historical, theoretical and cultural moments of production. Govan, Nicholson and Normington focus on work that can be understood as innovative and radical, paying particular attention to practice that marks a resistance to and/or a shift from the dominant practices of its time. The discourse cites the historical avant-garde as a starting point and charts the development of devising through the post-war, neo avant-garde and non-textual experiments of the 1960's and 1970's. By tracing such a path, they inevitably place the dissolving of the boundaries between life and art, and the shift from theatre to performance, at the heart of the devising discourse.

Making a Performance, is divided into four sections: Genealogies and Histories, Shaping Narratives, Places and Spaces, and Performing Bodies. The chapters that explore the "Creative Performer" and "Virtual Bodies" are of particular note. There is currently a frenzy of debate being generated around the notion of the creative performer; both the industry and the academy are (re) considering approaches to the training and teaching of performance practice, specifically on "acting" courses. This chapter "Creative Performer" rigorously exercises and contributes to those current debates. The chapter titled "Virtual Bodies" is also topical, an area of much debate and critical discussion, of which it contributes an insightful and informative

entry, exploring the emerging relationship between digital technologies and live performance.

Making a Performance makes a strong, substantial and much needed contribution to the field of devised performance theory, and I hope that it will inspire others to enter into the discourse and disseminate their work. The text covers areas that will not only be of interest to students, practitioners and scholars. It is not a handbook or guide to producing devised performance, but a cultural and histrological review of contemporary devising practices and their conceptual and practical origins.

Film, Drama and the Break-Up of Britain **by Steve Blandford**

Chicago: Intellect Books, The University of Chicago Press, 2007, 200 pp. (paperback)

Bryce Lease (University of Kent at Canterbury)

"Berlin, Paris, Cardiff, Antwerp

It could be anywhere" (Ed Thomas qtd in Blandford 178)

Sound familiar? It should. In *Film, Drama and the Break-Up of Britain* what we find is a tattered nationalism roughly taped together with a longing to be anything *but* British. Despite a globalized identity (can we really extract America from anyone's national character these days? Aren't New York, Houston, Seattle implied in this list?), it is difficult to miss the inherent ingredient in Scottish, Irish and Welsh nationalism, namely, *not*-English; which is to say Hegelian antithetical determination is at work here. Otherness has always been a feature in the construction of nationhood, of course, so this shouldn't come as a surprise.

Blandford tends to be ambiguous about "fixing identity" for any of Britain's new nations post devolution, though he argues that an older notion of Britain needs to

be dismantled. The battleground for theatre artists ultimately lies in the question: What *is* Britishness anyway? Blandford asks us not to forget that the prime subject of "in-yer-face" theatre is the *consumer* in a society that enjoins enjoyment as its subject. It doesn't appear to matter too much these days whether that consumer should inhabit Berlin, Paris or Cardiff.

The problem is, even post devolution, "'British' remains synonymous with 'English'" (Blandford 19). Blandford suggests that although Richard Curtis' films represent a "theme park of Britain," the English are pretty much stuck with the likes of Hugh Grant as their national hero. Not too many English people recognise their lives in *Four Weddings and a Funeral* or *Notting Hill* (remember that characters in Curtis' films don't hold down serious jobs, and even if they do they don't *take* them seriously). Blandford points out that although this "self-effacing Englishness" (22) is a masquerade, it is also a big seller on the world market, and as the Scottish learned from *Braveheart*, that goes a long way in tourist pounds and inevitably affects our own perceptions of national character. This also opens the question: *who* decides on national identity? Do the English decide what it means to be English, or does the market decide for them? Perhaps the most interesting point in his chapter on English cinema concerns the male posturing we see in the fad for Guy-Richie-style gangster films.

There is no doubt that Blandford is correct in his assertion that Britain is struggling to come to terms with an Ireland that portrays itself outside of the narrow confines of postcolonial labels. But so is the rest of the world. Northern Ireland, and Belfast specifically, has been trying to recreate its reputation beyond the Troubles; the problem is that not too many audiences are interested in the attempts to portray a modern, likable, *European* Belfast. The burden of national representation has sat

heavily upon the shoulders of Irish playwrights. Alternatively, many dire American representations of Ireland have belied an agrarian hinterland rather than the thriving consumerist Mecca the country has become since the (huh-hum) Celtic Tiger. Blandford quotes Michael Higgins in his hope that film, beyond Sheridan and Jordan, will be a vital part of Irish cultural output so that "the country becomes [...] a 'maker' of images rather than simply a consumer" of them (63). Again the uncertainty of ownership of identity arises, both in its production and consumption.

The chapters concerning Scottish film and drama could be regarded as the focal points of the book. [6] There is a generation of talented playwrights in Scotland (Greig, Neilson, Greenhorn, Glover, McCartney, Harrower, Harris, Munro, Lochhead) and Blandford encounters all of them. Even prior to devolution, the mass of "new images about Scotland" in the 1990s "produced a sense of something altogether more concerted" (66) *vis-à-vis* a new Scottish aesthetic and political landscape. A space has been created, Blandford suggests, in the "crumbling of certainty" of British identity. If Blandford wishes to merely itemize the modes in which Scotland's self-representation looks to Europe, away from the colonial ties of England where "monolithic ideas of Britishness are breaking up" (18), then he has successfully done so. Ken Loach made a number of films that address the particularly Scottish problems of alcoholism, poverty and unemployment *(My Name is Joe*, *Riff-Raff*, *Raining Stones),* but much of what Blandford discusses reiterates the "bright European future" for the "new" Scotland. But one wonders – is this not ultimately an issue of globalization rather than

[6] Unless you are profoundly interested in Welsh film and theatre, there is little impetus to read the chapters that dive with such relish into the subject. Wales was naturally given significant airtime when one remembers that Blandford is a professor at the University of Glamorgan. Certainly the issues concerning the inauguration of a Welsh national theatre and the dilemma over the development of English-language work within such an institution are pertinent, but Blandford avoids any helpful suggestions. (What's more, I have no doubt that the confinement of the Welsh chapters to a footnote will be correctly construed as a reflection of the ongoing problem for Wales in Britain.)

of national identity? No doubt Blandford would argue these issues are indivisible. When Blandford discusses *Ae Fond Kiss* for example he makes the point that we ignore the changing identity of a multicultural post-9/11 society at our own peril. One wonders if this is a Scottish issue *per se*. This is perhaps a point at which the book fails to delve into cultural theory. Does Blandford feel that Scotland should tarry on the micro-level of Deleuzian identity politics, or is he on Žižek's side, hinting at Scotland's role in the greater problems of late-capitalism, which must avoid such out-dated Leftist guises?[7] Unfortunately, Blandford does not propose either.

If you are looking for a summary of film and drama's engagement with pre- and post-devolution in Britain this is the book for you. However, one can't help but notice an inherent faith in 'healthy' nationalism haunting the book. A deconstruction of this belief might perhaps have been a more informative platform for Blandford's work. An uncertainty regarding the future only seems to heighten our anxiety for a new national identity rather than deflating that desire. The question remains: is this desire really anything more than a basic fear and loathing of Otherness? Either way, it would be nice to know what Blandford thinks.

[7] I am not suggesting here that either Deleuze or Žižek need be representatives of Blandford's cultural theory; rather, I am calling attention to the very lack of any theoretical platform for a book that critiques ideology and nationalism, even if that position were to be "anti-theoretical."

***Staging Black Feminisms: Identity, Politics, Performance* by Lynette Goddard.**

Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2007, 229 pp. (Hardback)

Marissia Fragou (Royal Holloway, University of London)

What is it that constitutes a black feminist theatre aesthetic? How do black British women dramatists and performers define and express themselves within a white, middle-class, heterosexual matrix? Is there an outlet for a progressive black feminist performance? Is the feminist movement pertinent to black women or is it founded on white women's principles? These are some of the recurring questions that permeate Lynette Goddard's *Staging Black Feminisms*. In an era that considers feminism tainted and out-of-date and yet explores the deconstruction of identity categories contesting essentialist assumptions of subjectivity, her venture is timely and up-to-date.

Staging Black Feminisms is not simply aiming at mapping the theatrical practices of black women of African-Carribean descent in Britain since the 1980s; it critically attempts to trace the potential of black feminist subversion within a British multicultural framework. As its title suggests, black feminist theatre is alive and kicking, aligning itself with socio-political transformations that foster less rigid categorizations and enable black artists to break free from stereotypical assumptions regarding their identities. Goddard avoids falling into the facile assumption that every work by black women implies its adherence to feminist values. On the contrary, she provides a close reading of different kinds of performance art that has been produced by black women working in British theatre and critically assesses their feminist political agenda.

The book is conveniently divided into four parts; the first part examines the position of black women artists working in theatre in relation to the socio-political

formations that took place in Britain during the 1950s-2000s, underscoring the marginalization they have envisaged in both black and women's theatre companies and the difficulty to form independent companies. The second part focuses on specific texts and productions by black women dramatists such as Winsome Pinnock, Jacqueline Rudet, Jackie Kay and Valerie Mason-John. Here, Goddard explores the plays in terms of content and form, insisting on the representation of diasporic subjectivities and illustrating how the playwrights create a dialogue between black lesbian sexuality and mixed race. She also sheds light on quite unfamiliar – to the white reader – and important practices of black female identity, such as obeah rituals, othermothering and zami, dramatised by black women to negotiate their relation with the Carribean and the incorporation of their mixed race identity in a Western context.

Part three shifts the attention from playwrighting to live art and solo performance. There is a separate section devoted to the production history of Black Mime Theatre Women's Troop and its contribution to black women's theatre. The exploration of the Troop's insistence on social issues pertaining to black women in particular, ranging from alcoholism to single parenting and the fetishization of the female body in Hollywood action movies, offers an insight regarding the company's immense input to black theatre aesthetics through the mixture of devising theatre, physical performance, music, dance and mime. The documentation of solo performers' work is also worth mentioning. Drawing from autobiography and interrogating the relation between the audience and the performer, independent solo performers like SuAndi, Susan Lewis, Valerie Mason-John, Patience Agbabi, Dorothea Smartt and Adeola Agbebiyi offer their own piece of black feminist aesthetics and vindicate the black female body through performance aiming at reversing mainstream notions regarding female beauty.

As an alternative epilogue, Goddard has chosen to ponder on the future of black feminist theatre by assessing the work of debbie tucker green, a prominent, "in-yer-face black playwright," as the point of transition from the old to the new generation of black women and feminism. The question mark after the section's title "Black Feminist Futures?" which accurately reflects her concern about the future of black feminist theatre also reverberates with the concern of another book published in the same series *Performance Interventions* under the title *Feminist Futures?*[8] This convergence mirrors the growing concern for the general loss of feminist political perspective in the cultural sphere; it also stresses the need for theatre historians to probe the feminist continuity among generations of women playwrights and Goddard effectively establishes a link among three decades of black women's theatrical practices. She also boldly addresses key questions pertaining to feminist theatre; her discussion on black aesthetics is a pivotal point of particular interest complementing the feminist emphasis on breaking realist patterns of representation as a means of subverting dominant hegemonic ideologies.

Staging Black Feminisms has succeeded in establishing a discourse that counterbalances text and performance as well as theory and practice, offering the reader a critical lens through which to assess current theatrical practices of black women. What needs to be highlighted is that it is the first published monograph that focuses exclusively on African-Caribbean black British women's theatre and, hence, it certainly constitutes an intervention in the contemporary scholarly world working against the monolithic and crystallised representations of black women and significantly contributing to current debates on gender, mixed race, feminism, diaspora and theatre.

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[8] Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris, eds., *Feminist Futures? Theatre Performance, Theory* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave 2006).

***Ghosts: Death's Double and the Phenomena of Theatre* by Alice Rayner**

Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006, 205pp. (paperback)

Rachel Clements (Royal Holloway, University of London)

Alice Rayner's *Ghosts: Death's Double and the Phenomena of Theatre* attempts to illuminate the various ways in which the theatre makes ghosts visible, and to critically assess the notion that theatre and performance operate within structures of loss and memory. From the outset, Rayner locates her work amongst the varied and extensive multiplicity of works which have, over the past two decades, concerned themselves with the spectral and the haunted. From Derrida's *Specters of Marx* (1994), to Jonathan Roach's *Cities of the Dead* (1996), to Marvin Carlson's *The Haunted Stage: Theatre as Memory Machine* (2001), Rayner suggests that a ghostly framework acts as a "corrective to forms of thought that reduce the world to a series of oppositions" (xxvi). This framework provides the mainspring for Rayner's argument, which is that "theatre itself is a ghostly place in which the living and the dead come together in a productive encounter" (xii). Throughout *Ghosts*, images of doubling and repetition, memory and loss, presence and absence recur and reverberate, as Rayner seeks to articulate and address the ontological and epistemological problems which surround the discourses of the spectral.

Each chapter of *Ghosts* takes as its starting point "some overlooked aspect of theatre" (xxviii). So, the opening chapter considers the complex issue of our "appointment" with theatre (30), and its tricksy relationship to "real" time. Rayner argues that keeping an appointment with the theatrical constitutes an agreement to enter a space of repetition, in which the "present" is automatically doubled, fraught, and problematic (29). In her second chapter, she addresses the idea of memorial,

exploring the ways in which "repetition composes theatre's way to memorialize the dead" (34). Using an extended example of a performance of *Waiting for Godot*, and convincingly drawing attention to the gap between older "deadly monument[s]" (70), designed for forgetting, and recent memorials by artists such as Maya Lin, Rayner suggests that "[r]emembrance and repetition render very different forms of history" (36).

"Objects: Lost and Found" focuses on the "suspended" nature of the prop table (75), where the "uncanniness" of these objects anticipates "the death of the present," offering a kind of memorial, loading them with a ghostly quality. This chapter allows Rayner to deal with the complexities of the idea of ghosts and haunting in material terms, assessing the ways in which theatre can be seen "[g]iving flesh to the uncanny" (108). Continuing the theme of objects and memorial, Chapter 4 considers the place and meaning of chairs, and is chiefly concerned with the ways in which the stage "effectively double[s] the object" (112), transforming the specificity and materiality of chairs to create its own meanings. The Oklahoma City memorial by the Butzner Design Partnership is connected with Ionesco's *The Chairs*, and Kantor's posthumous *Today Is My Birthday* (1991). Rayner convincingly demonstrates the ways in which the empty chairs of these works act "as the sites of death's power and life's vulnerability" (136).

Chapter 5 also deals with a material phenomenon of the theatre: that of the curtain, which divides space, providing "a double perspective that both displays and hides, conceals and reveals" (139) and, according to Rayner, functions to break down epistemological dualities such as onstage and offstage, real and imitated, inside and outside. Rayner also discusses the boundaries between the "visible" stage and the

"invisible" stagehands,[9] and the ways in which the audience read – or refuse to read – the presence of the crew (in, for example, set changes).

The final chapter, "Ghosts Onscreen" shifts the focus of the book away from the "theatrical" and onto the cinematic. Rayner considers the use of light (particularly in relation to developments such as gaslight and electricity) and dark. Comparing the blackout with the filmic cut, she considers the technological apparatuses at work in the construction both of narrative and of haunting. Centring her discussion on the films *Gaslight* (1944), *The Sixth Sense* (1999), and *Vertigo* (1958), Rayner connects the ghosts of film – created through narrative elisions, jump-cuts, visual registers – with psychoanalytic and trauma theories. Arguing that death is "utterly unrepresentable," known "only by its fake double, the effigy that stands at a portal to identify what death is like but not what death is" (175), Rayner's work consistently illuminates the ways in which the spectral is bodied forth, made visible, via the "endless, stochastic repetition of imagination and reality" (182).

Ghosts is expansive and inclusive in its scope, moving from discussions of specifically "theatrical" moments to considerations of modern memorials and broader conceptions of "performance," limiting itself by the structure and aims of its discourse rather than with temporal or theoretical boundary markers. It is predominantly informed by psychoanalytic and trauma theory, although again, Rayner's approach is to select as appropriate, and there are a wealth of connections with and references to theorists from Heidegger and Derrida to Butler and Kristeva. The success of this approach is perhaps partially a matter of personal taste, and Rayner is explicitly aware of a number of her work's pitfalls and problems (as she says in her concluding

[9] She suggests, in fact, that where stagecrew are (intentionally) visible, this acts as a *further* doubling, which heightens awareness of the more normal practice of invisibility; the crew, in this way, become the visible ghosts of themselves. Furthermore, she locates such practice (which she associates, generally, with the "postmodern") as being politically or ideologically motivated; a playful calling to the fore of theatre's modes of operation which affects the audience's view of its materiality.

paragraph, *Ghosts* is "both repetitious and incomplete. Examples are scarce" (185)). Nevertheless, *Ghosts* is an engaging, intriguing work, full of surprising connections, confident in its ability to move in and out of a range of theoretical and theatrical discourses. Although it is, from the outset, located alongside a range of texts which are broadly concerned with the haunted and the spectral, Rayner's text, which consistently works in the realm of the theatrical, elegantly and eloquently demonstrates that "the ghost is not so much an essence of theatre as it is an inhabitant of all its elements" (xv).