

## Anna Deavere Smith: Perspectives on her Performance within the Context of Critical Theory

Charles R. Lyons and James C. Lyons

Anna Deavere Smith's performance of *Fires in the Mirror* captured the attention of New York and the national press in the summer of 1992, and in April, 1993, the television adaptation of this production expanded Smith's audience. To most of those witnessing her theatrical confrontation with the dynamics of the social crisis in Crown Heights, Smith's mode of performance seemed radically new. While *Fires* appeared, at this point, to be a timely, singular event, a dynamic theater piece inextricably linked to its moment in history, those who knew her previous work recognized that it also constituted the latest drama in Smith's series, *On the Road: A Search for American Character*, an endeavor begun ten years earlier. Each separate work in this extended project identifies itself as part of the ongoing enterprise. In the spring and early summer of 1993, Smith created the next work in the series, *Twilight*, in which she addresses the aftermath of the riots in Los Angeles that erupted after the announcement of the verdict in the Rodney King case.

Anna Deavere Smith's performances exercise a radically new mode of theatrical representation and demand a new approach to the practices of both acting and play writing. Smith identifies herself as a playwright, an actor, and a teacher of acting. As she analyzes and discusses these activities, she becomes, in consequence, a theorist. Her continuing project, *On the Road* works within an implied aesthetic that challenges both the artistic and ideological premises of orthodox "method" acting and the conventional forms of play writing. Smith interviews a selection of participants, observers, and victims of the particular critical moment she addresses. The text prepared for performance consists of segments of the interviews that she has recorded on tape. Smith builds the performance by appropriating language, inflection, and gesture from these encounters. She subtly interlaces segments from these individual discourses into

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a sequence. The intricately devised organization displays a range of predications, perceptions, and emotions. The resulting compound of statements provides the spectator with the sense that the performance confronts the social dynamics of the moment with some authenticity.

The performance does not represent the precipitating event directly. That is, *Fires in the Mirror* does not dramatize the situation in which Gavin Cato, an African American child, is fatally injured when hit by a car in a motorcade of the Lubavitch community, nor does it represent the killing of a visiting Australian Hasidic scholar, Yankel Rosenbaum, that followed. *Twilight* does not represent the riots in Los Angeles that came after the announcement of the verdict in the Rodney King case. These activating incidents remain prior to the moments represented in the performances themselves. Sandra Richards applies the phrase, "Enacted oral history," to Smith's performance strategy.<sup>1</sup> That cogent phrase provides a suggestive description of what her performances are like if one recognizes that the kind of history performed does not enclose events within a linear narrative based upon interpretations of causes and effects. In no sense are Smith's performances narratives of these prior events. They are, rather, fragmented and partial speeches which constitute representative or emblematic moments that, self-consciously, do not pretend to build a whole. They play out a series of discourses that do not feed into an obvious interpretative system, but suggest the operation of social dynamics that need to be addressed more fully in the world outside of the theater. The history enacted here is a history of the play of discursive practices in which the events and their reverberations are subjected to diverse configurations and reconfiguration in the immediate past of a critical event. That is, the performances represent various spoken *mediations* of these incidents and their consequences.

While Anna Deavere Smith's technique of building a performance text is decidedly innovative, she does employ one of the principal conventions of dramatic writing, the use of direct narration to build an image of the past as that image directly informs the present. As in Sophocles' *Oedipus* and the retrospective plays of Henrik Ibsen, narration in *Fires in the Mirror* and *Twilight* reconstructs a past through segments of dialogue that reveal its characters processing their vision and revision of prior events. The dramatized action or "enacted . . . history" is not the tragic deed but, rather, the narrative processing of those tragic acts after the fact, the characters' responses to the *pathoi* that occur before the performed moment. The clear difference in Smith's structure, of course, rests in the fact that the dramatic past of these performances is both immediate and historical, and the language of the individual narratives constitutes the performance as a whole. This narrative revelation is not, as in Sophocles or Ibsen, exposition that provides a context for a later deed that will, in the course

of the performance, be acted out. For example, the accumulating narratives of the past provide the motives for Oedipus's self-blinding and for Solness's fatal ascent of the tower. In *Fires in the Mirror* and *Twilight*, the narratives themselves provide the action. That action, of course, is the play of conflicting predications that, in themselves, embody the dynamics of power and powerlessness within the specific situation.

These performances are polyphonic, both in the sense of representing multiple voices and in their refusal to synthesize differences in any intervening personal statement, any *authorial* commentary. Anna Deavere Smith does not write any enclosing or unifying text to frame or position these segments. The fragments of language and gesture from those figures interviewed speak for themselves in a series of separate parts, whose beginning and ending remains unexplained, differentiated only with visual and acoustical clues. The only connecting tissue between the segments is provided by the audience's awareness that a minor change in costume, an adjustment of the set, a shift in projected title or projected image signals a change in persona. The absence of a conventional authorial text that would connect and relate the segments may well be the most radical aspect of Smith's performance text.

The fact that, as playwright, Smith provides no words of the text challenges our concept of dramatic writing. In some sense, our knowledge of Duchamp, who took ordinary objects and displayed them with his signature, our experience with the unique assemblages of Louise Nevelson, and the Cubist collages built by Braque, Picasso, and others allows us to see that creativity and originality may be embodied in the skillful organization and display of materials whose original nature is not transformed in the process of being included in an aesthetic composition that becomes more than the sum of its discrete components.<sup>2</sup> In Smith's work the scenic frame provided in the designed space provides the equivalent of the background on which these painters built their collages. Indeed, the absence of an authorial voice puts the emphasis upon the polyphonic display of voices and, as well, upon the presence of Anna Deavere Smith as both the original audience for these speeches and the physical instrument through whom these statements are *re-presented* to the audience. The phenomenon is, of course, paradoxical. Smith presents herself inhabiting these discourses, adapting her voice and body to them, articulating statements that she did not author, and she presents herself, as both the interviewer and the person interviewed, as the vehicle through which these relatively private statements become public. The statements themselves constitute performances in which the individual figures characterize themselves, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to Smith and before Smith; and—in the second tier of performance—Smith performs the statements to the audience, amplifying the delivery from the relative intimacy of the

interview to the more expansive register of the theater. The figures interviewed, in that sense, model themselves for Smith as they speak to her. Smith, as actor, represents that self-constituting act as she shows that process to the audience, casting the spectators into the role of witnesses. With varying degrees of reticence and deferral, each segment represents the desire for that self-presentation. The paradox derives from the ways in which these figures construct themselves through the language in which social, institutionalized power operates. Smith practices her authority and her authorship in the editing of the material and in the fact that her presence provides the ground of this array of multiple voices. While the performance is verbally polyphonic, it is acoustically and materially unified in the presence of Anna Deavere Smith whose voice assumes the characters of the other figures but retains her own unmistakable individuality and blends, curiously, the idiosyncrasies of her own voice and speech with that of the person interviewed.

The invisibility of the playwright is, obviously, a convention of dramatic writing, a convention that marks one of the differences between the novel and the play. Smith pushes that convention to an extremity. Remember that towards the end of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce's protagonist urges that prose fiction assume the objectivity of drama in which the action is self-interpreting since the playwright has no vehicle for direct statement to the spectator. Joyce uses the metaphor of a detached god, paring his fingernails, to suggest that apparent aesthetic impartiality.<sup>3</sup> Smith extends that objectivity, withholding any language of her own, relying exclusively upon the statements of others to fabricate a performance out of the real rather than the fictional. Part of the appeal of Smith's work derives from the fact that it plays between the illusion of authenticity and the skillfulness of its artifice. The language, we know, is *authentic*; its arrangement and its performance are artful—the aesthetic product of Smith's talent, training, and experience. The performance does not convince on the level of illusion. As we stated earlier, the presence of Anna Deavere Smith does not entirely disappear; she articulates the language and employs the gesture of the other in some clear fusion in which her own persona does not recede entirely. The paradox here forms part of the fascination of Smith's work. While, on the one hand, she *does* push the convention of the invisible playwright to an extreme, avoiding any actual writing herself; her own presence—and our recognition that Anna Deavere Smith is the ground of the performance—provides the dominant signified within the *performance* text. As playwright, she is invisible; as performer of the text she has established, she provides the single dominating image of the theatrical event.

That simultaneity of the material presence of the performer and the theatricalized reference to the material presence of the figure performed provides

the real innovation of Smith's work. While Smith's performance technique connects to earlier theatrical practices, as an aesthetic phenomenon, it presents itself to us as something unfamiliar. This phenomenon is not quite impersonation, not parody, the shifts in gender are not transvestite performance. Rather, the stage persona of Anna Deavere Smith becomes a kind of visual and aural screen on which and through which different voices speak. Our inclination, confronting something fundamentally different to our previous experience in the theater, is to relate it to the known. We like to defuse the strangeness of the new by seeing it as an extension, continuation, transformation, metamorphosis of some earlier phenomenon. Our intention is not to do that, but, rather, to work through some critical questions that would allow us to think about Smith's work more clearly. That process, we hope, may reveal significant bridges between her work and current issues in critical theory. In other words, the aim of this immediate essay is to extend the project of positioning Smith's work by charting its particular worldliness.

1. *Does Anna Deavere Smith's approach to "building a character" from the surface phenomena of voice, inflection, and gesture participate in the rejection of the modern subject that characterizes Poststructuralism?*

In the first place, Smith's concept of acting rejects what has become the orthodox approach to the actor's work and acting training in the U.S., an approach we could legitimately call *modernist*. The Stanislavski method relates directly to the modern psychological subject, the image of the psyche as a field of interaction between an unconscious and a consciousness. Stanislavski's method aligns closely to the Freudian notion of character, and both, of course, develop and extend the growing complexity of concepts of the self, character, and subjectivity dominant at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. Both Freudian psychology and method acting interpret the surface of speech and gesture as material to be interpreted, to be analyzed and translated. The literal speech and action of a character become secondary, important only as points of access to the *real* substance of the figure: the unique psyche that exercises archetypal (or universal functions) in an individual, idiosyncratic variation that differentiates each psyche from all others. One consequence of this notion of the subject is a spatial image of character that sees the outside of a dramatic figure—body, gesture, voice, overt action—as the refracted manifestation of an interior dynamic that must be discovered by the actor and revealed in performance as the energy that drives speech and action. The method actor processes the text in order to make some connection between the fictional psyche of the character (which is actually a product of the actor's reading and mediation of the text as much as the playwright's) and his/her own psyche in order to find a way to fuel the representation with an artificially induced but

authentically experienced personal emotion. This approach to acting assumes a transaction between two unique subjects: the fictional subjectivity of the character and the actual subjectivity of the actor. This transaction produces a third subject: the virtual figure that combines the two others. The actor's strategy in building the *character* implements the concept that the unique individual and that individual's expression or manifestation of this highly differentiated self is the most significant and signifying unit of reality in the real world and the most important signified in the fictive world of the play. If the actor's work is "truthful", the individual spectator, like the actor himself or herself, can connect with the emotional life of the fictional character. Clearly the resulting performance constitutes an imposition of material on the language provided by the text (in the guise of excavating it); the performance consists of an active intervention and overlay. This system of acting assumes that the subjectivity of the fictional character can be embodied only through the subjectivity of the actor.

Foucault's effort to examine discourse without enclosing it within an idea of a unique or idiosyncratic subject demands a radical shift in the way in which literary analysis approaches an aesthetic text. We recognize that *The Archaeology of Knowledge* provides a conceptual ground for much of the work of the New Historicism, a critical strategy that considers dramatic speech less as the attempt to create idiosyncratic, unique images of subjects and more as statements that give voice to certain socio-economic formulations that themselves determine the nature of the speaking subject. Foucault, of course, did not address the phenomenon of dramatic writing, but his predications have been taken up by those who do. Foucault's notion that a discourse is not tied to an *originating* speaker/writer, but may be inhabited by a plurality of speakers shifts the emphasis from an analysis of the text as the expression of a speaking or writing subject to an examination of the ways a particular statement enacts a structure of authority that defines the social, economic, political status of the subject that voices it. This *subject*, of course, is not identical with the author of its formulation but is, rather, an instrument through which a particular statement may be voiced. A proposition, sentence, group of signs can be called a statement not because someone said or wrote these words, but, rather, because the position of the subject can be assigned. To describe a formulation as a statement is not to delineate or to analyze the relations between the author and what he says, what he wanted to say or said without wanting to. Rather, to describe a formulation as a statement is to propose what "position can and must be occupied by any individual if he is to be the subject of it."<sup>4</sup> Quite clearly, Foucault's *subject*, as *Archaeology of Knowledge* suggests it, is that entity that is subject to the operations of authority that provide the rules put into play by the statement. Anyone whose social conditions are defined by the statement may occupy that

statement as its speaker. The statement is not the expression of the subject; the subject is she or he whose position is predicated by the statement.

Smith selects a range of figures to interview and from them selects which will be used in performance in order to put a group of discourses into play. While the individuals are keenly differentiated, the nature of the statement remains more significant than the characterization of the individual. Each *subject* that Smith represents is the subject that is positioned by a particular discourse. That position could only be occupied by a speaker who is subject to the rules that determine the structure of that discourse. In clearer terms, the significance of the subject in Smith's representation rests in the socio-economic dynamics that have determined the statements she or he make. If her work addressed the interior of the figure, the person's psyche, the representation would constitute the manifestation of idiosyncrasy, difference, subjectivity; and the discourse would be perceived as the consequence, the expression, of the individual psychological experience of the figure as that figure accommodated the experience.<sup>5</sup> Whereas the method actor attempts to make some alignment between the inner experience of the character and her or his own emotional biography, Anna Deavere Smith deliberately focuses upon the sensuous surface of the figure, voice, and gesture. Her preparation includes repetitive listening to the recorded voices in which she speaks with the tape, attempting to capture inflection and rhythm, attempting to inhabit the voice of the other. The difference between assimilating one's own psyche into the fictional experience of a character and inhabiting the discourse of the other is telling. Consider Foucault's criticism of the fictive interiority of modernism in his essay on Blanchot in reference to Anna Deavere Smith's rejection of interiority in her search for the other:

Any purely reflexive discourse runs the risk of leading the experience of the outside back to the dimension of interiority; reflection tends irresistibly to repatriate it to the side of consciousness and to develop it into a description of living that depicts the 'outside' as the experience of the body, space, the limits of the will, and the ineffable presence of the other. The vocabulary of fiction is equally perilous: due to the thickness of its images, sometimes merely by virtue of the transparency of the most neutral or hastiest figures, it risks setting down ready-made meanings that stitch the old fabric of interiority back together in the form of an imagined outside.<sup>6</sup>

Smith deliberately attempts to resist the temptation to internalize the other, as subject in the world external to her, and reconfigure that image as an aspect of her own interiority. That resistance to internalization marks the difference

between her mode of acting and the dominant subjective processes of most acting in the U.S.

The assumptions with which Smith works include the following: the important alignment is not a connection between the actor and her speculative reconstruction of the figure's inner life; the important alignment is between the actor and the conditions—the socio-economic dynamics—that make the other's statements necessary or, rather, the systems of power that position the speaker as the figure who can make those statements. The alignment between figure and actor comes through the actor's mimetic re-statement of the figure's words and gestures. The vocabularies of inflection and gesture, as well as the verbal language, position the speaker, because these physical embodiments also participate in a language that displays the speaker's power or powerlessness. The point of identification that she, as actor, makes with the figure, is not the connection between the inner, the private experience of the *character* that would manifest itself in these surface details and her private experience, but, rather, with the experience that she, as actor, realizes in the processes of inhabiting the discourse of the other and the place in which that discourse positions her as speaker. She positions herself as a speaking or performing subject, as that speaker who could appropriately voice these statements in the inflection of the speaker reinforced by the gestures that themselves, in alignment with the text, position the speaker. The signifying potential of that alignment, in the spectator's perception of the performance, is extremely complicated. Above all else, the speech performed represents the self-constitution of the speaker as a subject positioned by the degree of power or powerlessness they hold. Whereas the implied, prior listening presence of Smith and the immediate listening presence of the audience, do empower the speaker, none of them can operate or speak outside of the social dynamics that either invest them with authority or characterize them as helpless subjects who are *subject to* the ways in which their own religious institutions, peer groups, inter-ethnic systems of identification, professional positions, social status, economic resources, and cultural characterization of their ethnicity determine their self-modeling.

This approach to *character* rejects the notion of the modern subject in two critical ways. First of all, as the above discussion suggests, Smith focuses upon the speaker not as a unique subject but, rather, as a construction of the social dynamics of the discourse. Secondly, the processes in which she prepares the representation of a *character* do not depend upon an exploration of the actor's psyche. The training of the method actor demands the student probe her or his own psyche, seeking material that could be used to serve as stimulating analogies for the emotional life of the fictional figure. In this sense, the self-analytic nature of the actor's work in training and later in preparation for performance relates to

the reflexivity of much of modern fiction, the use of language to represent the self confronting the self. Smith finds that this approach to acting constitutes a social or communicative dead end, what she has called a "*spiritual deprivation*", because the work that is produced derives from an inward, solipsistic, narcissistic denial of the external world and the presence of others. Smith points out that this approach to acting grew out of and remains tied to a late nineteenth century sense of realism.<sup>7</sup>

Anna Deavere Smith describes her way of working as "looking at the other for a model" in clear antithesis to the process of "discovering" the character in a search through her own inner process. For Smith the *other* is not an imaginative construction of an internal psychic function, a Lacanian other; but, rather, the *other* is an actual figure in the world who is enmeshed in some critical way in the complex social event she addresses. The *other* is worldly, significant not as a unique phenomenon but as a component of a complex, interactive, social dynamic. At the beginning of her work in building a representation of character, the *other* is speaker in relationship to her as listener. At some level that speaker always remains separate, discrete, continually present as *other* both in memory and in the physical evidence of that externality, the tape recording. The performance acknowledges its origin in reference to the material fact of the tape recording. The performance is both a reenactment of that interview and, simultaneously, the manifestation of a process in which Smith has worked through and with the material artifact, the tape, to be able to perform the speech of the figure as though it were the *character* addressing both herself, Anna Deavere Smith, and the audience. Smith, the listener, establishes a kind of space—a discursive space—in which the speaker is free to develop a narrative. Her enabling listening must, clearly, present itself to the speaker as non-judgmental, as open to hear whatever the speaking subject feels inclined or compelled to say. While the *persona*, Anna Deavere Smith, remains present to us in these representations that are not impersonations, that *persona* manifests itself as non-judgmental of the figure whose language she hears *and* speaks.

The experience of seeing Anna Deavere Smith in the performance of one of her plays is an even more complex phenomenon than the paragraphs above suggest. We recognize that we perceive these self-constitutions of *character*, which implement the often hidden languages of power, through the presence of an African American woman who is, herself, subject to the obvious and the subtle, the overt and covert rules of discourse and social practice that position her in this society in general, in the theater as a social institution, and in the university. Our awareness of Smith's gender and color functions as a kind of matrix on which we see displayed *representations of gender and color*. One consequence of that complexity is our awareness of the degree to which

differences of gender, our perception of color as either value or difference, and our submission to or exploitation of systems of power are embodied in the language with which we characterize ourselves and others. Some members of the audience may recognize the differences among (1) the ways in which their response to Smith's skill and the significance of her work empowers her as performer and writer in ironic counterpart to many of the figures she represents; (2) the complexity with which the presence of Anna Deavere Smith as a Black woman comes to the foreground and yet often recedes as we focus on the self-construction of the speaker she represents;<sup>8</sup> (3) our recognition that identity in our social experience functions through the performance of discursive rules and is, in that sense, as much a *representation* as Smith's *representation of that representation*.

Patricia Hill Collins has developed a description of the special perspective "generated by Black women's location in the labor market." Collins marks the ways in which Black women have become implicated in the working of mainstream culture but who function, because of their marginality, as "outsiders-within." Collins asserts that this perspective gives them "a distinct view of the contradictions between the dominant group's actions and ideologies."<sup>9</sup> As her performances move rapidly among different representatives, different discourses of marginal and dominant groups, the implicit interplay exposes both the manifestations and the consequences of differences in the distribution of political power and economic resources. Whereas, the spectator's processing of this data is complicated, Smith's representation of marginalized figures gains a special kind of authority because of her own status as a Black woman in theatrical and academic institutions that, with some significant exceptions, remain in the hands of the dominant culture. As well, her performance of white males holds an antithetical authority because she performs them through her status as an *outsider*, representing an insider, but, at the same time, functioning herself *within* the institution of the theater and the academy as a figure celebrated by both institutions.

In a related connection to the critique of the subject, the *authority* of Smith's performance texts does not derive from a body of writing that expresses her subjectivity, but, rather, from the fact that the language used is *real* rather than fictional. This recognition encourages the spectators to focus more upon the language as quotation and diminishes their interest in interpreting the text as the manifestation of the playwright's psyche. This is not to say that the audience is not impressed with the expertise of the playwright/performer, but the skills involved in Smith's performance do not relate to the oblique manifestation of her inner experience. Whereas the tendency in interpreting the language of a conventional playwright is to see the individual text as a variation of paradigms

that recur throughout a sequence of plays, paradigms that suggest a particular psychic dynamic, the spectator does not interpret the language as the literal surface that would disclose an inner significance, but rather deals with the significance of the discourse itself. The sense of the individual statements as real speech blocks a hermeneutic interpretation of the performance text as the expression of Smith's psyche. What we see, instead, is Smith's engagement with the figures she interviews, her activity in the world, not her inner life displayed in a collection of dramatic texts.

2. *Dramatic criticism has come to focus increasingly upon historical performances as cultural transactions, as cultural exchanges. To what degree do Anna Deavere Smith's performances identify themselves as material projects that participate in some kind of cultural transaction?*

In 1978 the English version of Robert Weimann's *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater* described the Elizabethan theater in terms of a reciprocity: "The sensibilities and receptivity of the audience and consciousness and artistry of the drama were so mutually influential that a new historical synthesis seems conceivable only through an increased awareness of the dialectics of this interdependence."<sup>10</sup> Stephen Greenblatt speaks of that exchange in terms that emphasize the dialectic playing between collaborative performance and audience, not between the individual playwright and audience:

... the theater is manifestly the product of collective intentions. There may be a moment in which a solitary individual puts words on a page, but it is by no means clear that this moment is the heart of the mystery and that everything else is to be stripped away and discarded. Moreover, the moment of inscription, on closer analysis, is itself a social moment. This is particularly clear with Shakespeare, who does not conceal his indebtedness to literary sources, but it is also true for less obviously collaborative authors, all of whom depend upon collective genres, narrative patterns, and linguistic conventions. Secondly, the theater manifestly addresses its audience as a collectivity. The model is not, as with the nineteenth century novel, the individual reader . . . but the crowd that gathers together in a public play space. The Shakespearean theater depends upon a felt community: . . .

Greenblatt's claim that the production of the autograph manuscript, "*the moment of inscription*," is a "social moment" extends Foucault questioning of the subject as a unique psychic presence and brings the predications of culture to the forefront; that is, he reads the dramatic text, in terms of its performance, as a

product of social not psychological processes. The idiosyncrasy or transcendent individuality of the playwright is not significant; the degree to which the playwright gives voice to critical issues that confront the audience is. Greenblatt also suggests that the theater can function as a particularly free arena for cultural transactions because audiences and authorities perceive it as "nonuseful and hence nonpractical." He continues: "And this belief gives the theater an unusually broad license to conduct its negotiations and exchanges with surrounding institutions, authorities, discourses, and practices."<sup>11</sup> The kind of cultural analysis that Greenblatt undertakes directs him and other cultural materialists and new historicists to articulate the ways in which the Shakespearean text, in performance, gave voice to both the presence of the powerful and the powerless. For example, Phyllis Rackin writes about the Second Tetralogy: "Falstaff acts the king in Eastcheap, and Prince Harry acts the clown. Both step out of the places dictated by the doubly determined decorum of social and dramatic convention. Destabilizing dramatic representations by an increasing metadramatic self-consciousness, the last three plays in the second tetralogy exploit the subversive potential implicit in the very act of theatrical performance to expose the limitations of historical writing."<sup>12</sup> Rackin contrasts the "polyphonic theatrical scripts" with "univocal historical writing" and considers the wide range of speech extending from the elevated to the colloquial; and she discusses the ways in which the theater's appropriation of univocal history subjects it to complication and subversion.

The increased sensitivity to non-central voices in Shakespearean texts, the openness to read into them a polyphonic quality relates to the current academic effort to open up the canon and to the theater's increased willingness to embrace writers who have been, largely, excluded. In a sense, Smith's notion of theatrical performance implements a concept of the theater as a negotiation between performance and culture that is analogous to the idea of Shakespearean performance articulated by Weimann, Greenblatt, and Rackin. Greenblatt's technique often identifies and analyzes a non-theatrical document as the exemplification of a kind of discourse, moving between the document and a conception of a dramatic text in performance to show the interaction, not between the document and the dramatic text, but between the kind of discursive acts in which both participate. The fictional text, therefore, seems grounded in relation to a text that has a different and more consciously functional worldly status. Smith's performance texts gain an authority they could never achieve as theatrical fictions by appropriating *real* speech, building units of language that are not imaginative but which were actually spoken in a non-theatrical situation. And, significantly, the selection and performance of these texts displays the discourses of the individual figures as negotiations between the speakers and, in Greenblatt's

terms, "surrounding institutions, authorities, discourses, and practices." For example, in *Fires in the Mirror*, the confrontational rhetoric between Blacks and Hasidic Jews is complicated by the speakers' implication in institutionalized practices of religions, liberation and conservative politics, the speaker's construction of a personal identity that borrows systems of values from the public world they inhabit, whether that world be as large as that of the figure whose life attracts media attention or as restricted as those placed in a tightly circumscribed social group.

*Fires in the Mirror* and *Twilight* provide a space in which these individually negotiated self constructions can display themselves, with a kind of equality of energy, space, and time that can only exist in the theater. That is, the Reverend Sharpton, Angela Davis, Daryl Gates, or Jessye Norman share the space with unknown figures. The fact that the performance gives equal weight to figures who, in the world outside of the theater, could not claim that space does make Smith's performances, like those of Rackin's Shakespeare, into "destabilizing dramatic representations."

In the seminal essay, "The Death of the Author," Roland Barthes cites Jean-Pierre Vernant's claim that the characters of Greek tragedy speak from unilateral perspectives and that the only site in which this multiplicity of discourses is focused is the auditor in the theater. Barthes uses this point to construct an idea of reading: "The reader is the space on which all of the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination."<sup>13</sup>

As the preceding paragraphs claim, in both *Fires* and *Twilight*, the performance text holds a collection of unilateral statements that displays difference and suppresses a narrative that would synthesize them. Despite the fact that these unilateral statements are, in one sense, *verbatim*, the re-statement of an original that can be tied to a specific person, their selection, specific editing, and arrangement are a product of the intervention of Anna Deavere Smith who reconstructs segments of the original or archival texts (which exist as tape recordings) and then embodies them in her own voice and person. In that sense, Anna Deavere Smith, the listener in the interviews, functions somewhat analogously to Barthes' reader (or Vernant's spectator) as the space in which the *writing*, the language of the *original* speaker is inscribed initially. Her presence on the stage, acting with our recognition that the words she speaks were addressed to her, provides a theatrical image of the original point of destination. And yet, because the interviews were conducted with a performance in mind, we recognize that, in some clear sense, we, as spectators, constituted a *potential* audience at the initial speaking and an *actual* audience at its representation. Smith's refusal to intervene with her own statement and her avoidance of overt

narrative strategies force the spectators to make the synthesis Vernant describes and Barthes cites and, thereby, provide the single point of unity in their own response.

What is artificial, contrived, or, in other words, *aesthetic* about this re-presentation of the interviews is that the performance does not collect and reproduce the statements completely. The complete archive exists as the collection of tapes that constitute the raw material of the finished work. While we may hold an image of the archive, we do not have access to it. To us, this collection of complete statements in the form of the tapes remains virtual, and the edited statement, while a fragment, functions during the performance as a complete unit that makes us forget, for the moment, the fact that most of the interview has been suppressed.<sup>14</sup> The finished work operates as an attempt to represent, somewhat metonymically, Smith's "search" and the building of an archive of the materials it collects. The performances assume a kind of authority and resonance because they indicate the existence of a wider inquiry, a more expansive project than the performances themselves can represent.

In Foucault's sense, these performances represent the *circulation* of the discourses Smith records. An important question for us to consider as Smith's work proceeds and her audiences increase is the process in which her work plays into the distribution systems of the commercial theater and public television, implementing her own power as a performer to open those systems to the disenfranchised voices that speak through her. The interaction between these performances and the media in which they circulate constitutes a difficult exchange to analyze since the performances constitute a kind of critique of the stereotypes, the cultural clichés that are intensified, reinforced, and distributed by these media themselves and which are, of course, subject to the systems of authority that provide the object of her critique.

3. *How do Smith's performances relate to feminist theory?* Here as in our tentative answers to the preceding questions, we deal with a subject that is beyond the scope of this paper. To relate Anna Deavere Smith's work to the various feminisms and feminist performances that mark the current scene is beyond the limits of a single essay, not to say a fraction of an essay. Perhaps the most significant point to make in this section is to mark the fact that Smith's performances foreground the idea that gender is a social construction and is performative. Smith's facile shifting between the representations of women and men emphasizes that what is significant about gender in the specific situations she addresses can be re-represented because in the original speaking it was a phenomenon performed in relation to the rules. That is, her *re*-performance of gender is convincing as it clarifies that the *original* subject performed his or her gender.

To continue this brief discussion of Smith's work in relation to feminisms, consider Griselda Pollock's definition of a feminist work of art:

To be feminist at all work must be conceived within the frame of a structural, economic, political and ideological critique of the power relations of society and with a commitment to collective action for their radical transformation. An art work is not feminist because it registers the ideas, politics or obsessions of its feminist maker. It has a political effect as a feminist intervention according to the way the work acts upon, makes demands of, and produces positions for its viewers. It is feminist when it subverts the normal ways in which we view art and are usually seduced into a complicity with the means of the dominant and oppressive culture.<sup>15</sup>

While earlier in this essay we remark on the absence of Smith's ostensible intervention, we need to point out that the performances themselves certainly constitute a kind of statement that attempts to disrupt or to intrude upon the thinking of their audience. Smith's works have often been commissioned, and in these cases she actively intervenes in the group by displaying the dynamics of their interrelationships to them. As well, performances of *Fires in the Mirror* have become part of the history of the original event which we reconstruct, in part, through our experience of Smith's performed array of its participants. As the section on the relationship of Smith's work to Foucauldian notions of discourse suggests, the individual speeches reveal the operation of structural, economic, and political realities in which the various figures position themselves. While the critique is performative rather than itself discursive and doesn't formulate solutions, the productions demand confrontation with the complexity of the issues they reveal. The sense of critique builds through the accumulation of evidence as segment follows segment.

The sense of sequence through accumulation rather than through the conventions of narrative marks an alignment between Smith's performances and feminist theory. Here it is appropriate to note Luce Irigaray's notion of ways in which the language of men and women differ. We could translate Irigaray's gendered discourse into a idea of performance and focus upon the multiplicity that is structural in Smith's performance texts, and the ways in which this achronological display of voices challenges the univocal, sequential discourse we identify as male, patriarchal and controlling.<sup>16</sup> Building upon Barthes' idea that discourse constitutes an extended sentence, we could relate the feminist differentiation between the male orientation of the sentence, equating the sentence to narrative, and the freedom of the fragment. Certain feminists define the

sentence as focussed, linear, closed, proceeding according to the organized logic of grammar within the system of syntax, and to "escape the sentence" is to move beyond the boundaries of formal syntax.<sup>17</sup> According to Kristeva, to use fragments, to exploit *non-sense* constitutes a means of multiplying sense. Fragments challenge the phallic stance of the sentence, the need for management and mastery that syntax fulfills. Consequently fragments allow different, unprivileged meanings to emerge.<sup>18</sup> Surely we could use this notion to identify the ways in which the absence of a controlling narrative in *Fires* and *Twilight* opens the space of performance to the multiple voices and, as well, displays them as equal. While each voice acts out its own version of the control to which it is subject, and a variety of positions of power and powerlessness reveal a clear sense of hierarchy, the performance itself operates without hierarchy, giving each figure a space to be heard and seen in a display of hegemony that is not, in itself, hegemonic.

In the paragraphs above, we have related Anna Deavere Smith's aesthetic strategies to the kind of theorizing done by French feminists. While it is useful to make reference to people like Irigaray and Kristeva to define the ways in which Smith's performances work against traditional male-centered narrative strategies, her self-conscious efforts to make her work accessible aligns her more with the pragmatic Black feminism of bell hooks.<sup>19</sup> Gloria Watkins, as bell hooks, speaks directly about the role of Black women theorists in the academy, but it would be possible to think about Anna Deavere Smith's work in the theater as performed theory or, at least, as performances that make concrete and accessible certain important theoretical issues: the degree to which both race and gender are cultural constructions that operate through different kinds of discourse; the degree to which the construction of race, particularly the idea of being African-American, is itself a complex issue, subject to conflicting modes of self identification and the recovery of a past. The dramatization of race in both *Fires in the Mirror* and *Twilight* performs a range of theoretical notions of race, Afrocentrism, Pan-Africanism, various perspectives on colonization in a concrete demonstration that relates to the sophisticated awareness of the complexities of this issue contained in the conversation between Paul Gilroy and bell hooks published in Gilroy's *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures*.<sup>20</sup> Both bell hooks and Paul Gilroy argue against essentialist notions of black identity, and Anna Deavere Smith's demonstrated diversity of self-construction among blacks, particularly in *Fires in the Mirror*, illustrates the points raised in this sophisticated reconstructed theoretical conversation. As the writing of Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks demonstrates, the experience of being a Black woman complicates and intensifies the experience of both race and gender. The

polyphonic display of race and gender in the performances of Anna Deavere Smith embodies that complexity graphically.

4. *To what extent are Smith's political performances Brechtian?* Anna Deavere Smith's work, which is both seriously political and radically antithetical to conventional realism, plays itself out in theatrical conventions that clearly relate to Brechtian theatrical strategies and, at the same time, differ significantly from this powerful model. While only a certain percentage of her audiences may be aware of the relation her performance technique sustains to Brecht, to an important segment that relation is both apparent and important. Consider Brecht's description of acting that produces the 'alienation effect' in relation to Smith's representation of character:

In order to produce A-effects the actor has to discard whatever means he has learnt of getting the audience to identify itself with the characters which he plays. Aiming to put his audience into a trance, he must not go into a trance himself. . . . Even if he plays a man possessed he must not seem to be possessed himself, for how is the spectator to discover what possessed him if he does? At no moment must he go so far as to be wholly transformed into the character played. The verdict: 'he didn't act Lear, he was Lear' would be an annihilating blow to him. . . . his feelings must not at bottom be those of the character, so that the audience's may not at bottom be those of the character either. The audience must have complete freedom here. . . . This principle—that the actor appears on the stage in a double role, as Laughton and as Galileo; that the showman Laughton does not disappear in the Galileo whom he is showing; from which this way of acting get its name of 'epic'—comes to mean simply that the tangible, matter-of-fact process is no longer hidden behind a veil; that Laughton is actually there, standing on the stage and showing us what he imagines Galileo to have been.<sup>21</sup>

The following aesthetic tenets inform Brecht's description of epic acting: 1. The theatricality of the performance is brought to the foreground in order to disallow the possibility of establishing the action as a replica of the real, as a close simulation of *the real world*. 2. The performance enacts a historical or quasi-historical moment in order to display the socio-economic determinants that impelled the key player or players to act inhumanely toward others. The work attempts to establish an awareness of the material conditions or circumstances that determine behavior to the objective of generating an interest in correcting those conditions. 3. The performance builds upon a style of acting that presents

*character* not as a psyche, not as an idiosyncratic figure whose motivations are unconscious, but as a figure whose social position, whose place in the socio-economic hierarchy, directs her or his behavior. The mandate that Brecht imposes upon the actor is to incorporate into the performance an *attitude* toward the character's behavior, a *judgment* that plays upon a dialectic between imitation—the impersonation of the character—and the spectator's awareness of the actor's mind that provides a kind of context for that imitation. The process of impersonation, in Brecht, often builds from the actor's sense of abstracting or encapsulating the *persona* of the character in a telling, individualized but emblematically characteristic action, the *gestus* that signifies this abstraction. In the case of the Brechtian actor, of course, that signifying action is an invention, an extrapolation of the text.

Smith follows Brecht's example in rejecting the psychological coordinates that infuse realism in the theater. Anna Deavere Smith also works towards the signifying physical gesture but in this case that gesture is a re-enactment, a reification of the *gestus* she had observed and appropriated. Like Brecht, Smith focuses upon the external: gesture, voice, inflection as that which differentiates and *characterizes*. While she builds a connection with the figure through a processes of physical approximation and the appropriation of voice, inflection, and gesture, she does not attempt to relate to the *character* through an exploration of the ostensible interiority of the figure. She does not build a *subtext* that naturalizes the text the figure speaks by making it psychologically (rather than socially) plausible.

Whereas her performance of the figure's speech aims to bring its social determinants to the foreground, the performance does not reveal her judgment of that character as Brecht would demand. While performance texts of the individual units of *On the Road* give us a sense of a direct confrontation with the raw material Smith collected, at some critical level we recognize that they are finely wrought, subtly edited, carefully sequenced, intricately arranged units of language and enactment. However, they are displayed and enclosed within our awareness of the non-judgmental persona of Anna Deavere Smith the performance builds. Smith's projection of herself as a non-judgmental medium through which the discourse plays does not, of course, force the spectator into a judgmental position. Her selection of speeches and their editing, however, stimulates the spectator to judge the institutional practices, the economic structures, and the hierarchies that position the speakers according to race, gender, religion, income.

Whereas Brecht often dramatized distant historical moments whose dynamics aligned with the current political situation, Smith addresses the immediate moment directly.<sup>22</sup> And while Brecht's dramatic structure depends

upon the interaction of figures in conflict in a complex dispersal of episodes, Smith's structure is cumulative rather than episodic, moving from its attention on a single figure, to another single figure, slowly building an image of conflict. The politicized reconfiguration of distant *historical* action in Brecht produces a highly schematic organization in which each segment is obviously keyed to the over-riding structure. In Smith's structure, the interrelationship of segment to segment is not immediately obvious, and, from the spectator's perspective, the final sequencing of scenes seems to unfold naturally or logically but without an *apparent* design. In fact, in the preparation process, the sequence remains fluid for a long time. In the case of *Twilight*, the process of interviewing continued until the final stages of the rehearsal process; and the resulting performance, which exceeded the desired performance time, was subject to editing and condensing until the last minute. The New York productions of this play expanded the number of figures and reconfigured the sequence.

What differentiates Smith's performance strategy from a Brechtian model is precisely what relates it to the idea that Barthes borrows from Vernant: that the point of synthesis, both overt and implied, in performance is the auditor. Smith's performances display a wide range of opinions in a colloidal suspension. While Smith uses the technique of the individual scene that could be performed coherently as a unit in itself and often separates the scenes with the Brechtian device of the projected title, her performance does not arrange them, as Brecht's structure does, in a clearly defined didactic frame. The obvious traces of Brechtian epic strategies that remain, of course, do suggest to the spectator that this performance takes place within a tradition of political drama.

5. *Is Smith's mode of performance modernist or postmodernist?* This question is the most difficult of all because positioning Smith's work in the modernism/postmodernism debate remains dependent upon a definition of postmodernism when the various rhetorical uses of the term resist consensus. In any case, if we consider the modernism/postmodernism debate as a pointed dialogue between Lyotard and Habermas, it is possible to mark some connections between the terms of this debate and the theatrical phenomenon of Smith's performances and the texts they produce.

The Lyotard/Habermas debate focuses upon the interrelation of theory, history and politics. Following Nietzsche's rejection of the transcendental unity of truth, postmodernism would deny the validity of social theory. Truth becomes a function of power that writes itself in discourses that determine social practice.<sup>23</sup> The social arena is constituted by a plurality of claims for authority that cannot be arbitrated. *Postmodernism* and Poststructuralism reject the notion of a transcendental unity which assumes that the individual subject may potentially achieve an idea of truth, through the processes of reason, because rationality itself

has been complicit in the tragic abuses of power in the twentieth century, especially the Holocaust. The patriarchal and ethnocentric exercises of power that reinforce, solidify, and justify oppression through claims to reason have, in this sense, invalidated the "modernist project" and its positive teleology. The aesthetics of social liberation in modernism, therefore, constitutes either a failure or a fraud. As well, the *high modernist* retreat into the limits of consciousness imposes an artificial unity upon discourse that attempts to subsume heteroglossia into a single constructed voice. *Postmodernist* theory aggressively attacks the model of a subjective consciousness that would perceive, objectify, and—ultimately—incorporate otherness, be that *difference* perceived as an external or interior phenomenon. The *postmodernist* argument repudiates the totalizing narratives by which theory explained history, the subject, and the work of art: particularly the inclusive aesthetic analyses of Marxism and psychoanalysis.

Whereas Habermas himself develops a critique of the Enlightenment, his reconfiguration of rationalism, embodied in a theory of communication, assumes the continuity of a purposeful *modernism* in which an inter subjective interchange of ideas is possible. Habermas's revised notion of reason encompasses both instrumental rationality and communicative rationality. Instrumental rationality constitutes practices in which the "system" achieves solidarity, and Habermas agrees that these exercises of oppression and restriction are vulnerable to the poststructuralist critique of reason. Communicative rationality, on the other hand, operates in a democratic context in which any party may interrogate another's claim to validity. However, within this context, each individual or faction works toward consensus and agrees to concur with the claims that they cannot refute.<sup>24</sup> Lyotard, who celebrates the concatenation of competing voices, asserts the impossibility of consensus.<sup>25</sup> We would claim that the multiplicity of voices that sound in Anna Deavere Smith's performances provide a kind of Lyotardian heteroglossia, in which radical differences compete in a temporary freedom from hierarchy (although the fact of that hierarchy as an aspect of social reality remains intact). As well, Smith's refusal to enclose her investigations within a coherent explanatory narrative, and the disruptive gesture of this refusal, relate her work to the aesthetics of postmodernism. And yet, the implied teleology of her ongoing project, *On the Road: A Search for American Character*, and the strength of her desire to give these voices a place and a situation to be heard suggest that these performances hold out the objective of purposeful communication. And yet the achievement of the kind of consensus that Habermas predicates seems as distant at the conclusion of *Twilight* as Trofimov's vision of a social utopia in *The Cherry Orchard*. The performance does,

however, seem to position itself as a modest, but optimistic step that continues what Habermas defines as the modernist project.

Perhaps the appropriate way to close this discussion is to claim that Anna Deavere Smith's work plays into an idea of postmodernism that is closer to the sociological theories and practice of Anna Yeatman as she expresses them in *Postmodern Revisionings of the Political*. Unlike Lyotard, Yeatman does not see the absence of a universalist subject as the stimulus to reject notions of progress and purposeful political activity. Yeatman both expands and complicates Habermas's notion of consensus as an acceptance of difference and an intricate scheme of negotiation that does not legislate for groups with social needs but, rather, works with them in the articulation of need and the appropriate solutions. Yeatman's acceptance of the legitimacy of diversity and the formation of temporary, practical alliances, relates clearly to the ways in which both Paul Gilroy and bell hooks discuss black cultures. As we have emphasized, Smith rejects simplified narrative structures that would suppress the disparate schemes of self construction her discourses play out. Her performances validate difference and, simultaneously, expose the absence of the kind of negotiation among cultures that would work to solve the injustices that she encounters in her *Search for an American Character*. The implicit teleology of that search, of course, reveals the political base of her particular postmodernism as a validation of difference and a call for such a negotiation.

## Notes

1. Sandra L. Richards, "Caught in the Act of Social Definition: *On the Road* with Anna Deavere Smith," *Acting Out: Feminist Performances*, ed. Lynda Hart and Peggy Phelan (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1993) 35.

2. The analogy between the 20th century collages that we note works usefully only up to a point. Unlike the constructions of Duchamp, Picasso, Braque, or Nevelson, Smith's organization of discursive fragments is not abstract but, on the contrary, specifically and concretely referential. Each individual unit holds a material connection to a specific moment in our history; and the occasion of performance itself is worldly, reifying the perceptions, feelings, responses of these speakers in this complicated second discourse. That second discourse, of course, is the discourse of Anna Deavere Smith, articulated by her, in the guise of performing others, in a collection of their statements that, while not framed in another text, form an organized unit that hides its organizational schemes and, thereby, its authorship.

3. "The dramatic form is reached when the vitality which has flowed and eddied round each person fills every person with such vital force that he or she assumes a proper and intangible esthetic life. The personality of the artist, at first a cry or a cadence or a mood and then a fluent and lambent narrative, finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalizes itself, so to speak. . . . The mystery of esthetic like that of material creation is accomplished. The artist, like the God of the creation, remains

within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails" (*The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* [New York: Viking Press, 1956 (originally published 1916)] 215).

4. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1972) 96. Originally published in France (1969).

5. In a sense the difference between Smith's approach and the Stanislavski method is somewhat analogous to the difference that Lukács perceived between the representation of type in the writers he celebrated and the solipsistic irrelevancies he found in the representations of subjectivity in Beckett's writing.

6. Michel Foucault, "Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside," trans. Brian Massumi, *Foucault/Blanchot* (New York: Zone Books, 1987) 21.

7. In "Addressing the American Theater," *American Literary History* 5 (Spring, 1993), pp. 159-171, C. R. Lyons discusses what he calls "the Reversion to Realism," the processes in which the commercial American theater perpetuates the out-dated conventions of late 19th century European realism that the *avant-garde* had abandoned by the first decade of this century.

8. Sandra Richards speaks very clearly about this phenomenon in the article previously cited. Here she discusses performances in 1988 and 1989 in which Smith represented women in the Women in Theatre Program (WTP). Writing about Smith's non psychological technique of acting and her emphatic presence as a woman of color, Jill Dolan has argued, as Richard quotes, that Smith's blackness "conveyed an editorial comment . . . Black, female performer's perspective on the preoccupations of a predominately white woman's organization" (48). Richards, on the other hand, writes: "Whereas Dolan apparently saw a performer whose race was always a sign of difference, I wonder whether the fact of race becomes immaterial at certain points in the text" (49). Richards goes on to argue, persuasively, that if Smith were playing in *The Three Sisters* as spectators we would focus initially on the difference between the race of the character and the race of the actor, but "as the performance progresses, that disbelief, along with a host of others, is suspended. . . ." We would claim that Smith's race does provide an encompassing frame for both *Fires* and *Twilight*, but that, at moments, the particular simultaneity of the persona of Anna Deavere Smith and the speaking presence of the other figure causes our consciousness of her race and even gender to recede to focus upon the figure's relationship to gender and race. When Smith represents a white man, she performs images of race and gender; when she represents a Black woman, she performs images of race and gender, she does not simply use her race and gender. However, whereas our awareness of Anna Deavere Smith as a Black woman may recede as we focus upon the discourse of a particular speaker, at some level of consciousness we remain aware that as a black woman playwright and actor, her presence challenges the structure of institutions, theatrical and academic, that have historically marginalized black women.

9. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991) 11.

10. Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater*, ed. Robert Schwarz (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978) xii.

11. Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1989) 18-19.

12. Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990) 221-222.

13. Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," *Image/Music/Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 148. Barthes cites Jean-Pierre Vernant (with Pierre Vidal-Naquet), *Mythe et tragédie en Grèce Ancien* (Paris: Librairie François Maspero, 1972). That work with *Mythe et tragédie en Grèce Ancien Deux* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 1986) is available in English as *Myth*

and *Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (New York: Zone Books, 1990). The point to which Barthes refers may be found on p. 43 of this English version.

14. It would be valuable, for example, for the published text to include both the performance text and an appendix that included the complete transcripts. What isn't apparent to the spectator is the fact that Smith's archive is not limited to the tape recordings but includes photographs and video tapes of the interviewed figures that aid Smith's preparation for their representation. Smith's appropriation of gesture and expression can be checked, therefore, by her and her collaborators, including choreographer or "physical dramaturg", Merry Conway. These visual records provided specific details to define the subject in *Twilight: the Bible* referred to by Harland Braun, Charles Duke's use of the baton, for example. The Mark Taper Forum production depended upon a variety of chairs, each linked to a specific subject and their narration. These critical props were chosen by the designer Robert Brill to align with the video images or photographs taken during the interviews.

15. Griselda Pollock, "Feminism and Modernism," *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970-85*, ed. R. Parker and G. Pollock (London: Pandora, 1987) 363.

16. Luce Irigaray, *je, tu, nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*, trans. Alison Martin (Routledge: New York and London, 1993) 29-36. Originally published as *ju, tu, nous* (Paris: Éditions Grasser & Fasquelle, 1990).

17. See, for example, Paula Treichler, "Escaping the Sentence: Diagnosis and Discourse in 'The Yellow Wallpaper,'" *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 3 (1984) 70.

18. Julia Kristeva, in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle Courtivron (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1980) 137-144. See also *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, Alice Jardine, and Thomas Gora (New York: Columbia UP, 1982).

19. Speaking of Kristeva and Irigaray, bell hooks writes: "Although this work honors the relationship between feminist discourse and political practice, it is often used within university settings to establish a select intellectual elite and to reinforce and perpetuate systems of domination, most obviously white Western cultural imperialism. When any feminist theory is employed in this way, feminist movement to end sexist domination is undermined" [*Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End Press, 1989) 40].

20. Paul Gilroy, *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1993) 208-236.

21. Bertolt Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre," (1947-1948), trans. John Willett, *Brecht on Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1964) 193-94.

22. Brecht, of course, works within the convention of confronting contemporary political issues through the dramatization of history. In that sense, *Mutter Courage, Leben des Galilei*, and even *Der kaukasische Kreiderkreis* share with *Oresteia*, *King Lear*, and *Egmont*, the exploration of immediate political concerns through the representation or configuration of an ostensible cultural past.

23. In *Postmodernist Revisionings of the Political* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), Anna Yeatman argues "The hallmark of a postmodern emancipatory politics is taken to be its insistence that meaning, truth, identity, right and community are all values that lie *within* a politics of representation. Thus these values do not precede representation—as classical theorists of representation would have it—but are constituted within the domain of representational praxis. They are thoroughly contestable concepts, and the distinguishing mark of postmodern politics concerns the acceptance and working of this point" (x).

24. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2: *Life World and System: A Critique of Functional Reason*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1987).

25. Lyotard states "Consensus has become an outmoded and suspect value. But justice as a value is neither outmoded nor suspect. We must thus arrive at an idea and practice of justice that is not linked to that of consensus" (*The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff

Bennington and Brian Massumi [Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 1984] 66). Lyotard argues for the recognition of the heteromorphous nature of language games. He advocates the idea of the "temporary contract" replacing the permanent institutions, stressing the significance of the local situation.