

Praxis: An Editorial Statement

Kent Neely

John Paul Filo provided a quintessential historic moment with his photograph of the 4 May 1970 Kent State shooting aftermath—a high school girl screaming over the body of a fallen student protester. It was not the only horrific image of that troubled and chaotic time but more than any other it crystallized a generation's sense of loss and disillusionment. A quarter of a century has passed and the nation has had another rupture in its idyl, the 19 April 1995 bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City. Completely unrelated events that serve as macabre bookends to decades often characterized by violence rather than discourse.

It is useful to reflect upon theatre commentary within that context. Prior to the civil rights protests of the late 50s and 60s, the Viet Nam War and the class struggles that have dotted the political landscape since, theatre occasionally provided productions meant to articulate a political position, fewer still meant to change social situations. But the 60s and 70s brought transformation to scholarship and to performance. Events, domestic and foreign, provoked new productions and inquiry into their meaning. For example, see the 1971 volume of *Educational Theatre Journal*. Gil Lazier's "Living Newspaper 1970: Obituary for a Gentle Agit-Prop Play" (May, p. 135-51) tells of a play presentation done in response to the Kent State shootings and the bombing of Cambodia. Jarka M. Burian's "Art and Relevance: The Small Theatres of Prague, 1958-1970," (October, p. 229-57) documents the "malé divadla" (small theatres) of Prague that Burian notes were "still active, despite the events of 1968."

This issue of PRAXIS presents current samples of performance and critical scholarship that continue to push conceptions of theatre in a social/political context that remains violent and no less contentious than 25 years past. The contributors share a common trait. They are currently pursuing or have recently completed doctoral studies. They represent the next generation of theatre performance and scholarship and provide what may be a milepost for future reflection.

Maurya Wickstrom is in the Ph.D. program at The Graduate Center, City University of New York. She has an M.F.A. in Directing from Tulane University and is co-founder of Zone West Theater Company in New York. Her writing has appeared in *Rethinking Marxism*. Ms. Wickstrom's "Margin, Center and a Murderous Cult of Secretaries" studies a recent presentation of The Five Lesbian Brothers, *The Secretaries*, and provides provocative ideas about inclusion and exclusion within a dark satire.

Anne Davis Basting is a playwright and scholar in theatre studies. She completed the Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota, Department of Theatre Arts and Dance in May. Currently she is a Rockefeller Fellow at the Center for 20th

Century Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Ms. Basting's essay, "Of Contentious Collaborators and Postmodern Martyrs: Staging The Frida Kahlo Retrospective," revisits her involvement in a cross cultural production.

David Callaghan is also in the Ph.D. program CUNY. His work has been published in *Theatre Journal* and *SEEP*. His "Bringing Back the 1960s: The Living Theatre's Mysteries and Smaller Pieces," provides a new perspective for viewing one of the most iconoclastic groups from the Woodstock era.

The final entry is from Milan Pribisic. Mr. Pribisic is a doctoral candidate at the School of Theatre and Dance, Kent State University and is currently working on his dissertation, "Camp as a Signifying System in American Theatre, 1964-1994." His essay, "Ziggy Goes to War," offers a glimpse into the little known world of theatre performance in Belgrade during a hideous civil war.

Margin, Center and a Murderous Cult of Secretaries

The Secretaries, New York Theatre Workshop, September 1994

The Five Lesbian Brothers performed a new play, *The Secretaries*, at New York Theater Workshop, in September and October of 1994. The Brothers, Maureen Angelos, Babs Davy, Dominique Dibbell, Peg Healey and Lisa Kron, worked together for many years at WOW Cafe Theater and became a collaborative performance company in 1989. *The Secretaries*, a comedy about an office full of female serial killers, locates the Brothers as resounding postmodernists who are also in revolt against the late capitalism of which postmodernism is an expression. They enact their revolt in a number of ways. Using parody as their central performative strategy, they fundamentally revise the relation between insider/outsider, margin and center—terms which bear a complex and constitutive relationship to late capitalism. They also engage, playfully and astutely, with the slasher film, rescuing from this gory genre part of their liberatory vision. Finally, they enact a kind of motion through and in social positions which I name displacement.

These strategies are welcome innovations, especially since the familiar opposition between the marginal and mainstream is continually reproduced and relied upon even in sophisticated discourse theorizing social change. As subjects saturated with postmodernism, many of us still stand with one foot in high modernism. We are still faithful to the promise of the margin; that we will be able to create resistant social organizations and cultural products which will remain fringe and, therefore, dangerous.

Several features of late capitalism and its cultural correlate, postmodernism, problematize this position. As Frederick Jameson points out, one of the signature characteristics of postmodernism/late capitalism is that it has changed the content of modernism to such an extent that marginal cultural production is no longer, as it was during the modernist period, dangerous or subversive (49).

While capitalism does maintain and institutionalize the separation between powerful and marginal people, it does not respect the boundary between margin and center which it establishes. Instead it is dependent for its reproduction on the way in which it invades, appropriates, assimilates, disappears or renders visible, people or practices it has marked as marginal. Capital accumulation is dependent on moving people back and forth between categories in accordance with capital's needs and in accordance with the resistance it encounters.

If all this is indeed true, then progressive people can no longer cling to the belief that change will arise from the opposition between margin and mainstream. Too often the results of resistant efforts based on simple oppositions are appropriated, purchased, disappeared or invalidated. We need new and different strategies for contesting dominant ideologies. The strategy of The Five Lesbian

Brothers is to think of the bleak and totalizing landscape of postmodernism dialectically. Like theorists Diana Fuss, bell hooks, Teresa de Lauretis and Gayatri Spivak, they find ways to contest dominant culture in those very terms made possible by it—the permeability and dissolution of boundaries between margin and center.

bell hooks, writing about growing up in the segregated South, describes inhabiting marginal and mainstream identities simultaneously.

We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. Our survival depended on an ongoing public awareness of the separation between margin and center and on ongoing private acknowledgment that we were a necessary, vital part of that whole. . . . This sense of wholeness . . . provided us with an oppositional world-view. (149)

Diana Fuss also suggests that most people are both insiders and outsiders. She advocates turning the figure of insider/outsider inside out. By doing so the operations by which that figure assigns (in this case sexual) identity become visible and provoke questions like these:

How do insides and outsides come about? What philosophical and critical operations or modes produce the specious distinction between a pure and natural homosexual inside and an impure and unnatural homosexual outside? Where exactly, in this borderline sexual economy, does the one identity leave off and the other begin? (2)

The Secretaries plays with all these questions and takes as its radical position the insideness of outsideness and the continual movement between them.

In the play, exemplary "good girl" Patty Johnson is hired as a secretary at the Cooney Lumber Mill, in Big Bone, Oregon. The world to which Patty is introduced is a Foucaultian nightmare of surveillance and regulation of the body, deployed through a diet made up exclusively of Slim Fast shakes and work-out regimes at The Cooney Recreational Center (the work-outs reduce the premiums Cooney employees pay to Cooney Comprehensive Care). The regulatory practices are played out in the context of a company town: employees can use their Cooney Gold Cards to make purchases at the Big Bone Mall (an updated version of the company store) and they read *The Cooney Chronicle* for news. Cooney workers comply with work incentive programs like the performance bonus plan; after a year with no absences they may choose between a toaster oven, a six-month subscription to *The Cooney Chronicle*, five shares of the Consolidated Cooney Corporation or a Cooney .45 automatic from the firearms collection. But at the heart of this oppressive system, indistinguishable and derived from it, is a marginal cult of secretaries from whom none of the male members of this mostly male company town are safe.

Patty is hired as the fifth member of this group of secretaries, who staff a single office. Abundantly naive and credulous, Patty discovers, through increasingly strange incongruities, that the secretaries murder a lumberjack each month and use a chain saw to hack his body to pieces. Clean-up is organized through BOW, or The Big Bone Organization for Women, of which Patty becomes a member. At the end of the play, Patty murders her first victim, Buzz Benikee—the polite lumberjack who's been her boyfriend throughout the play—and is initiated into the murderous secretarial cult as a full contributing member.

The play is full of blood and gore and deliberately excessive scatological humor and violence, all of which refer to the slasher movie genre of the 1970s and 1980s. The Brothers do not so much parody this genre as complicate it, contradict it and use it. The genre immediately offers possibilities outside of the ideological parameters of realism. Carol Clover, in her book on gender in the new horror movies, cites Tania Modelski's observation that the slasher film, unlike realism, "does not promote a spurious harmony; does not promote the 'specious good' (but indeed often exposes and attacks it); does not ply the mechanisms of identification, narrative continuity, and closure to provide the sort of narrative pleasure constitutive of the dominant ideology" (37). The genre, then, allows the Brothers to move outside of and around in previously established categories. Clover also describes the ambivalence of response upon which slasher movies thrive. Producing "something like 'real' horror on the one hand and a camp, self-parodying horror on the other" (41), the movies disrupt conventional reception based on identification and empathy. *The Secretaries* replaces conventional response with a defamiliarized mixture of horror and distance grounded in the postmodernist delight many of us take in irony and parody and in watching forms play off one another, watching boundaries dissolve.

One of the liberating characteristics of this play, however, is that The Brothers leave nothing uncontested, including the slasher genre upon which the play is built. The genre is not simply received (or parodied to the point of laughable extinction), but also transformed. Patty, for instance, is like the Final Girl that Carol Clover describes, the heroine of the slasher film, the good girl, strong, smart and resourceful.

The Final Girl of the slasher film is presented from the outset as the main character. She is the Girl Scout, the bookworm, the mechanic. Above all, she is intelligent and resourceful in a pinch. Finally, although she is always smaller and weaker than the killer, she grapples with him energetically and convincingly. (39)

But the Final Girl has evolved since the 1970s when she was simply able, unlike any of her less fortunate friends, to flee with her life from the still living serial killer. By the 1980s she herself murders the killer and escapes triumphantly, waving her chain saw over her head. Patty, reminiscent of the 1980s Final Girl,

is, however, not only not a victim, but is herself the serial killer. Patty is both the good girl/Final Girl and the bad girl/serial killer. This motion, between good girl and bad girl, insider and outsider, margin and center, is central to the play.

The Brothers' use of parody enables the motion between margin and center. The Brothers perform what critic Linda Hutcheon might call a "parodic transgression of many levels of iconic norms" (12). The iconic norms used to signify secretary include "big hair," salon nails, clothes from "the moderate dress market,"¹ pitifully limited longings and the ways in which many women, including secretaries, discipline their bodies—especially through diet plans like Slim Fast. They also parody a parlance of gesture, voice and language derived from the valley girl cliché.²

Parody, according to Hutcheon, works through a critical distance which marks out difference. As applied to *The Secretaries* this means that, as a spectator, I see the new representation of "secretaries" in the same moment that I see the old iconic formulation of "secretaries." The difference between the two creates an ironic distance which unmoors the sign "secretary" and sets it into motion. In other words, the actor's double representation, this parodic form of acting, releases my expectation of fixed identity positions and gives me pleasure. It creates the possibility of being in two positions at once. Once I'm released from the expectation of fixed identity positions I am, theoretically, free to move between these positions. Hutcheon says, "The pleasure of parody's irony comes not from humor in particular but from the degree of engagement of the reader in the intertextual bouncing between complicity and distance" (45).

As I watched the play I was at first a little dismayed at what I took to be its authors' derisive representation of secretaries.³ But I took increasingly transgressive pleasure through the way in which the play unfixed me from that location in the ideologically determined "real" through their parodic representation of a signifier—"secretary"—which gradually became more and more elusive and unnamable. Nor was this a single process which happened once and then was over. Throughout the course of the play, I was complicit in creating readings of the sign "secretary" based both on my cultural experience of that sign and on the actor's production of it, and then continually bounced away from those readings into a position of critical distance in relation to them.

Patty deliberately enacts this parodic doubleness, as do the other secretaries. But there is an additional doubleness to her character since she narrates the events of the play as her flashback. She tells the spectator at the beginning of the play that she and the other secretaries kill lumberjacks. But even as she announces this, she sets herself up as the narrator protagonist, the reliable point of intelligibility for the spectator, the guide, the voice of reason. The spectator thus begins the play in a radically destabilized position, knowing that she is relying on a self-described serial killer for coherence and intelligibility.

The spectator watches a parodic representation of Patty, which is also a dialogue with another genre, performed by a Patty whose identity is never clear, and who has no intelligible foundation. These kind of "slips" from the known,

the established, the categorized and identified, slips that are enabled by genre intertextuality and parodic distancing, constitute gaps in the dominant discourse, in this case the totalizing effects of the Cooney Corporation.

Teresa de Lauretis defines the margin in terms of these slips, or gaps. For her "the interstices of institutions and . . . the chinks and cracks of the power-knowledge apparatus " (25) are the marginal spaces in which subversion becomes possible. In the play these gaps occur because the marginal cult identity of Susan (office manager), Peaches, Dawn and Ashley, is brazenly embedded in and expressed through their mainstream identity, in which they are secretaries conforming to the mandates of the Cooney Corporation. As the play proceeds, these gaps, these open contradictions, increasingly fracture the landscape through which Patty must navigate and in which the categories of margin and center eventually dissolve for her as well.

After the introduction—a deadpan chant accompanied by sinister keyboard tapping, during which all five secretaries inform the audience that they are murderers—the narrative (as flashback) begins. The lights go out and come up again on Patty, sitting at her desk. She's wearing her nice, form-fitting rayon dress, pantyhose, high heels and shining, well groomed blunt cut with bangs. She says,

I guess the question I have to ask myself is, 'How did a decent girl like me get involved with a cult of murderous secretaries?' . . . I mean, I come from a good family. I have an excellent education most girls would envy, attending one of the finest institutions in the nation with an advanced degree in secretarial sciences with an emphasis on foreign study and international keyboards. That must have been why Susan Curtis hired me. . . . (2)

This self-description, received by the spectator from an already established critical distance, as parody, is understood as an ideologically formulated position which cannot cohere or maintain itself. The spectator knows already that it will not cohere, that something happens, that the surface is cracked.

Almost immediately the original four secretaries set out to draw Patty into their cult. More cracks begin appearing as the marginal and mainstream identities of the original secretarial pool collide and disrupt Patty's expectations of her co-workers. Susan, Dawn, Peaches and Ashley speak in an indecipherable language of clicks and giggles which occurs as naturally as breathing in the midst of their ordinary language. At the local Cooney Bar, the Breezy Barn, where the secretaries take Patty to celebrate her promotion from receptionist to secretary, Ashley pulls a gun from her handbag.

Dawn: One year of work with no absences and you get to choose one gift from the list. . . . A Cooney .45 automatic from the firearms collection?

All: Yes! (*Ashley pulls out her giant six-shooter and waves it around as the other girls whoop and holler*)

Patty: I was wondering why you had that pistol in your bag, Ashley.

Ashley: I only need 18 more months of an unblemished attendance record for the assault rifle, fully automatic. (6)

In this passage the discourse of the marginal cult is openly embedded in mainstream discourse. The secretaries collect guns while they aspire to be employees with excellent attendance records. Or, they aspire to excellent attendance records in order to collect guns. Cooney is unwittingly supplying the tools for its own demise. (This secretarial gun fetish is also a play on the widespread deployment of weapons in America, supported by such powerful and mainstream organizations as The National Rifle Association). Later, Patty finds chain saws in the office supply cabinet.

The habits of the secretaries are ominously homogenous. Equally as strange as their alternative language is their diet: they seem to eat nothing but Slim Fast shakes, black coffee and herbal teas, and they are required to submit to Susan monthly Xeroxes of their backsides and breasts. (This is one of Susan's routine employee supervision techniques which, in this case, helps her monitor how well each secretary is adhering to a body modification plan at the gym.) They all wear lumberjack jackets and hats. Later, Patty is introduced to the "service organization," BOW, the means by which the secretaries organize the murders and the ensuing clean-up. During their meetings, they engage in such indecorous acts as collectively extracting bloody tampons from their vaginas and handing them over to Susan, who is collecting their menstrual blood, for unknown reasons. Patty discovers, with her hands pinned behind her back by Susan, that in order to belong to BOW, she must take a vow of celibacy.

The vow is complicated by the ambiguous, constantly shifting and very active sexuality of the secretaries—Patty is inevitably drawn into this ever present tension in which sexual preference and identity is continually called into question. Patty has sex with Buzz and then Dawn. The spectator reads Patty sleeping with Buzz through the awareness that Buzz is being played by the same actor who plays Dawn. For the audience, if not for Patty, the only visible and overt heterosexuality in the play is displaced through its performance by two lesbians actors, both of whose identities refuse to stay in place. Susan begins seducing Patty and, later, Dawn, explaining first that she's not "that way." She initiates oral sex with Dawn and then bites her. The sexuality turns out, for that moment at least, to have been assumed only as a method of punishing Dawn for having sex with Patty and violating the BOW celibacy contract. Dawn is clearly identified (by an initially scandalized Patty) as "a gay," but in all the others, too, there is the constant suggestion of movement through the boundaries of homo (marginal) sexuality and hetero (mainstream) sexuality, as well as fear of the homo (marginal). Fuss points out the potency of these sexual boundaries and of their disintegration. She says, "The fear of the homo, which continually rubs up

against the hetero . . . , concentrates and codifies the very real possibility and ever-present threat of a collapse of boundaries, an effacing of limits, and a radical confusion of identities" (6). These threats, are, indeed, very present in this play, both in the form of sexuality and in the other forms of margin and center.

Even in the midst of all the defamiliarized features of this office, Patty is able to continue to behave, at least for awhile, as though it were an ordinary environment. This is possible because the other secretaries are simultaneously model employees, seemingly ordinary in their interests, pursuits and occupations. What is so liberating about the play, on this one level alone, is that there is never any indication that it is a contradiction or a rupture for any secretary to adopt one or another of these positions; secretary/cult murderer, mainstream/marginal. They slip seamlessly, in the course of something as little as one exchange, between and among center and margin. For instance, the following exchange embeds the activity and language of the marginal cult in the activity and language of "ordinary" secretaries celebrating a promotion:

Patty: Oh my God! Oh my God, you won't believe it! They made me a secretary!

Ashley: Good for you, Patty! (*in the production it's clear that this is an entirely hostile response*)

Peaches: Congratulations, Patty!

Dawn: Ashley better watch her back. It won't be long before you're Secretary of the Month. Forget that salad. (*the cucumber salad they were amazed Patty was allowing herself to eat*) We're taking you out to the "Sleazy Barn." Our treat! Hats and jackets, girls! (*they all put on hunting caps*)

Ashley: OW! My hair!

Patty: Where did you get all those gorgeous jackets?

Ashley: It wasn't easy.

Dawn: Yeah, just try getting a lumberjack to part with his jacket! (*They all giggle and click*)

Patty: Is this some secret secretarial tradition I need to learn about?

Dawn: It's hunting season, Patty. (4)

The text never quite allows Patty or the audience to grasp the secretaries' identities or positions. In the preceding exchange are they members of a murderous cult or are they ordinary secretaries or are they both? The text poses these questions and then quickly moves on into more shifting and eliding of identities.

In another horrifying and hilarious scene Patty walks into the Ladies Room where Peaches is on the toilet, probably as a result of diuretics. Peaches, very upset about the "fat pig boss," wails to Patty that she's is about to lose her job because she can't get down to a size 12. She tells Patty that Susan has asked Peaches to ask Patty to help her. All it means is a little slap on the face, should

Patty see Peaches with, for instance, a bear claw. Patty, still trying to adjust the behavior of the other secretaries so that it coheres within her system of known values, argues that employment laws would prevent Peaches from being fired for her appearance. She argues for Susan's power to protect Peaches and states her considered opinion that the secretaries shouldn't be living only on shakes anyway, all to no avail. As the short scene moves forward it's clear that Peaches craves being slapped and slapped hard. When Patty eventually gives in with a light tap to Peaches' cheek, Peaches begs for more until Patty hits her as hard as she can. Dominique Dibbell, as Patty, plays this as an extremely destabilizing moment. Later in the play, Patty will walk into the office, see Peaches with a bear claw, slap her hard, and go on with her work as though nothing had happened, much as the other secretaries continually perform both marginal and mainstream conduct in the same moment.

Inevitably, Patty's grip on her unified, mainstream, good girl identity continues to slip. Like the other secretaries, she covets Susan's attention and is transported by Susan's partial seductions. There is a scene in which she murmurs her love to Susan as Susan stands fondling Patty's breast, ostensibly to admire her new Victoria Secret lingerie. Even by wearing this underwear, Patty has taken a step toward membership in the cult. All the other secretaries, following Susan's lead, buy this ultimate in tacky, I-wanna-be-a-sex-goddess intimate wear. (But of course, in this play, the lingerie is worn to hack the bodies of lumberjacks to pieces).

By the last third of the play, Patty's (and the spectator's) world is visibly unmoored. The office is tense. All the latent hostilities of the secretaries are rising to the surface. Another month has almost passed which means it's almost time for another "kill-night." Since the "kill-night" corresponds with the menstruation of the secretaries (their cycles are all synchronized), all the secretaries are suffering from PMS. (Here, as in the scene with the tampons, The Lesbian Brothers shamelessly tease the audience with the deeply embedded cultural fear of and revulsion toward menstruating women, especially menstruating, possibly lesbian women who group together.) By this time Patty has had sex with Dawn. And she's been violating the BOW celibacy agreement by having sex with Buzz. After a sequence of increasingly chaotic events (including one mad midnight escapade where Susan takes Patty for a drive which culminates in Patty bludgeoning a wombat with a tire iron), Patty's known identity is on the verge of disintegration. When the whole situation erupts, Patty accuses the secretaries of murdering the lumberjacks and they tell her they're going to kill Buzz. They attack her and hold her down, and Susan presents Patty with her options.

Susan: What do you do now? Go back home? Back to mom and dad? Back to Piney Bluff, Oregon. Look—you can have your old room back. It's just how you left it—your pom poms on the bureau and a snapshot of you and your girlfriends at the Sadie Hawkins dance

tacked up on the wall. How sweet. Won't mom and dad be happy to see you. I guess dad was right after all. You should stick close to home so he can keep an eye on you. Then what'll you do? Date some of the local boys till you meet Mr. Good Enough after a long string of Saturday night blow jobs in the front seat? Oh, Patty Johnson is very popular. She's liberated. She's good for a blow job but she won't swallow—

Patty: Fuck you—you cunt whore bitch! (41)

With this exclamation, Patty's bridges are burned. Her previous identity ceases to be coherent, attainable, or in any way desirable. Susan's accusation works because it's "true." The parameters of mainstream identity are the trap Susan describes. It is infinitely more desirable to be able to escape fixed identity, the "old room." This moment opens the door for Patty to become also a "bad girl" using bad girl language with no option to go back to a wholly mainstream identity. This is one of the final moments of a process which will release Patty from a unitary and circumscribed conception of "self" as constituted by mainstream discourse, in which there is no motion, insight, or change. She becomes at risk of being re-made into a dually marginal and mainstream person, a mobile and elusive bad girl who is violently contesting dominant discourse.

Under pressure from Susan's continued goading, Patty admits to loathing and despising the other secretaries, and hating Susan and Buzz, who she calls "a lousy fuck." Susan and Patty make their peace:

Susan: That's all for now, Patty. Go home and get ready. (to go out and kill Buzz) I want you to look extra pretty for him tonight.

Patty: I know just what to wear. (43)

While Patty has more critically uncertain moments during the "kill" itself, she eventually performs admirably and emerges from her turn hacking at Buzz, dripping blood and gore, crazed, victorious, and speaking in the marginal language of clicks and giggles, fully initiated. She is like the Final Girl at the end of a slasher movie, like Stretch at the end of *Texas Chainsaw Massacre II*:

The final scene shows her [Stretch] in extreme long shot, in brilliant sunshine, waving the buzzing chain saw triumphantly overhead. (It is a scene we are invited to compare to the final scene of *Texas Chain Saw I*, in which the wounded Leatherface [the perverted male serial killer] is shown staggering after the pick-up on the highway and waving his chain saw crazily over his head.) (Clover 38).

Change has occurred and freedom of movement becomes possible. Patty is an articulation of the way in which "Chain Saw II," the film referent, is an evolution of the position of the Final Girl from victim to victor. But, simultaneously, she

articulates the way in which the dramatic text re-writes the film text, making the Final Girl not only the wily, courageous, self-freeing victor but also the serial killer. These movements between genres, and between categories of margin and center, construct a whole new kind of girl.

At one point during the kill when Patty is still resisting she says:

Patty: Why Buzz? Buzz never hurt anyone. Why not Hank or Sandy—the way he's always pawing at the girls—

Susan: We don't kill them because they're bad. We kill them because we're bad. (41)

This is a murderous, violent subject position which brazenly claims bad-girlness for itself. But while it is profoundly marginal in relation to the mainstream it is also situated right at its center. The secretaries presumably go back to work, as they have after each of their kill nights. Patty informs us that she eventually became the office manager. Yet they are without shame, remorse, or interest in conventional moral categories. In answer to an imaginary question posed to them at the very end of the play they respond, "Save? No. We're way beyond saving" (46).

The Five Lesbian Brothers are postmodern artists whose work is thoroughly saturated and suffused with the tendencies of late-capitalism. But they find a new, elusively resistant way to act even amidst the simulacrum, the culture of received images without depth, the culture of parody, non-reality, the corporate totality in which everything is a joke, a ruse, a commodity, a parody, a pastiche—the culture they themselves use for their artistic production. They act through continual motion across categories, an action which created gaps in dominant discourse.

Gayatri Spivak uses the word displacement for the movement between margin and center. Spivak believes, along with Fuss, hooks and de Lauretis, that the margin is already in the center. As part of a discussion of the way that the private (female) sphere is marginal and the public (male) sphere is mainstream, she writes, "For if the fabric of the so-called public sector is woven of the so-called private, the definition of the private is marked by a public potential, since it is the weave, or texture, of public activity. The opposition is not merely reversed; it is displaced" (377). Oppositional terms are thus deconstructed when elements previously defined only in opposition are articulated as constitutive of one another. Spivak says, "The deconstructivist can use herself (assuming one is at one's own disposal) as a shuttle between the center (inside) and the margin (outside) and thus narrate a displacement" (381).

What is unsafe and marginal seeps into what is dominant. The secretaries are narrating this kind of displacement, showing how a mainstream position is by no means fixed or homogeneous, containing as it does its violent opposite, containing the potentially liberatory dynamism of movement between identities.

It may be, as Jameson says, that postmodern culture does take violence, sex, shock, in stride, disarming resistance. It may be that artists themselves often help to make this possible, especially if their materials are received images which already function as commodities. The Five Lesbian Brothers recoup this postmodern stance by locating resistance right inside it: they use quoted and received and parodied imagery but, perhaps uniquely, they show the potential for resistant agency inside this culture of simulacra. At the end of the play all five secretaries turn to the more or less mainstream New York Theater Workshop audience and say,

We're at the end. We should provide a moral for this story. But this is not a moral tale or complex allegory. No, we prefer you think of this as purely cautionary. Remember, sitting next to you could be a secretary. (46)

Maurya Wickstrom

Notes

1. Susan Young, Costume Designer for *The Secretaries*, production program bio: "Ms. Young is pleased to introduce The Brothers to the moderate dress market."

2. I should say that I read these particular sets of iconic norms as specifically generated inside white culture and as primarily readable through whiteness. Likewise, I see the forms and processes of marginality in the play as part of an operation of whiteness. Many elements of Kate Davy's article, "Outing Whiteness: A Feminist/Lesbian Project" (*Theatre Journal* 47 (1995): 189-205.), are useful here, particularly her analysis of the mobility of white women as it intersects with class privilege, and the politics of respectability, the "good girl" status that usually ensures white women "full access to the privileges of white womanhood." For anyone interested in further research I will note that Davy discusses an earlier play by The Five Lesbian Brothers called *Brave Smiles* which she directed in an attempt to "both queer white womanhood and expose it as racialized."

3. The Brothers have all had day jobs in offices and have performed the play for secretaries. "Asked about the inspiration for *The Secretaries*, Brother Maureen Angelos wryly comments, 'We've all lived under the tyranny of the workplace.' Brother Peg Healey continues, 'The best audience we've had so far has been a group of word processors—they recognized the fundamental truth of what we're saying'" (production program) 2.

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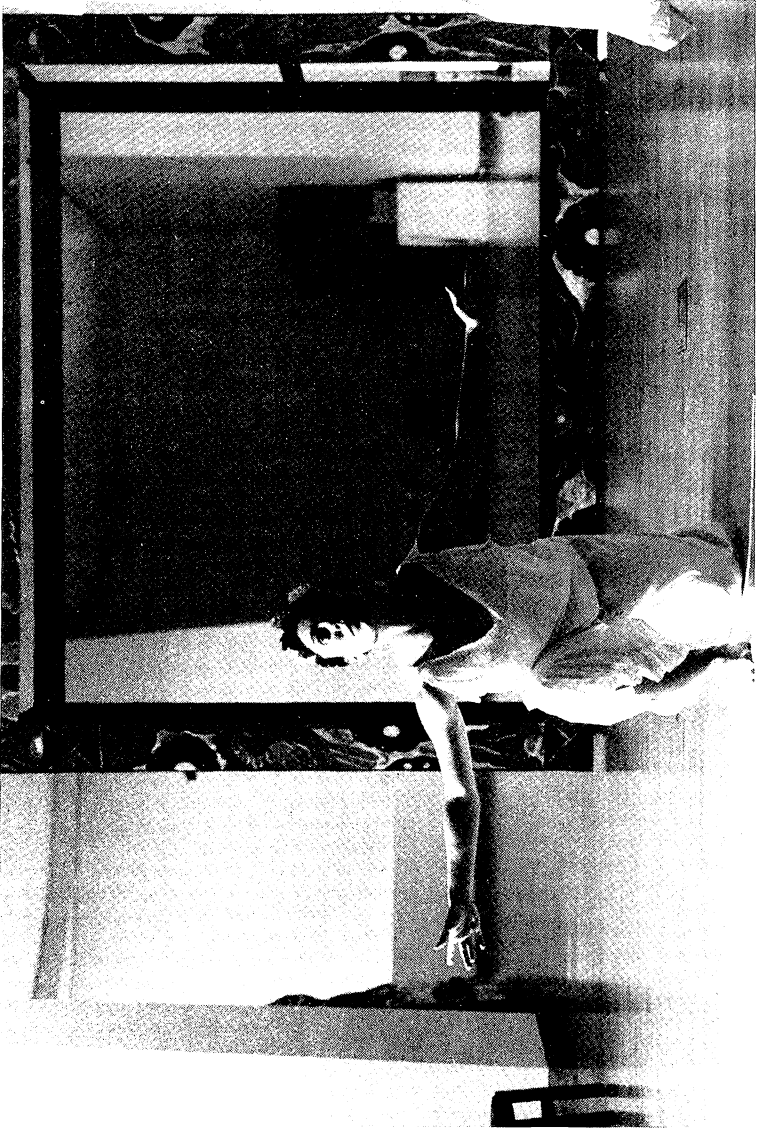
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A scene from *The Secretaries*. Pictured are Lisa Kron and Peg Healy. Photo courtesy of Joan Marcus.



Isis Estrada as Painted Frida in *The Frida Kahlo Retrospective: Beyond the Border*.

Of Contentious Collaborators and Postmodern Martyrs: Staging *The Frida Kahlo Retrospective*

The Frida Kahlo Retrospective: Beyond the Border. Frederick R. Weisman
Museum of the University of Minnesota. Minneapolis, May 1994

"Good evening and welcome to The Frida Kahlo Retrospective: Beyond the
Borders. Isn't that cute? (to The Critic) Did you make that up?"

Tour guide, Julie McCoy

The May 1994 staging of *The Frida Kahlo Retrospective: Beyond the Border* at the Frederick R. Weisman Museum in Minneapolis played fast and loose, on and with "borders." Borders of countries, of cultures, of sexualities. Borders of performance styles and of languages. Above all, the show's production team of director Gülgün Kayim and myself as writer, aimed to situate the play on the border of the debate within multi-culturalism in the arts over seemingly opposing issues of cultural authenticity and the postmodern porousness of identity.

Imagining ourselves as facilitators, Kayim and I set out to create a performance that would challenge and encourage the engagement of audiences in post-show discussions that followed each of the six scheduled shows. At times heated and compelling, the discussions also ranged toward the reverential and uninspired. We had aimed for what Homi Bhabha calls "a poetics of the open border"(64) in which cultural differences on one hand and cultural communities on the other, are "iconic rather than enunciatory" (68). I left the discussion sessions with a sense of artistic satisfaction (I thought we *had* opened borders, we *had* created challenging theatre). Yet, I also sensed the sour taste of innocuous praise for the newly built museum's efforts in cultural diversity, a museum whose holdings contain less than a handful of Latino artists.

A closer look at both the structure of the project, from the grant proposal for the Minnesota Humanities Council to the composition of advisory panels and cast, and the resistance that shaped the production itself, yields a glimpse beyond the borders of cultural authenticity and the postmodern death of the subject to a space in which multi-cultural performance might be reimagined. What follows is a deeper reading of the divisive issues at the core of the staging process of *The Retrospective*, not with the aim to sensationalize, but in the hopes of hearing the silences of the resisters to the project, many of whom dropped out for myriad reasons along the rocky year and a half journey toward the final production. Silences will persist undoubtedly, as I cannot pretend to, nor want to, speak for those who disagreed with *The Retrospective*. Instead I offer my journal entries in reaction to the advisory panel meetings and the various participant departures.

The Grant

In September of 1993, Colleen Sheehy, then Acting Director of Education at the Weisman, and Kayim, Public Art on Campus Coordinator at the museum, received a \$15,000 grant from the Minnesota Humanities Council in support of *The Retrospective*. The grant proposal featured a detailed description of the show as it had been developed and staged in the University of Minnesota Department of Theatre Arts and Dance two years previously (May 1992), as well as our plans for changes that included a more ethnically diverse cast (the first show had suffered from a lack of diversity), a more bilingual script, an extensive outreach program, an advisory panel representative of the communities the show aimed to reach (both on and off campus), and an increase in the number of post-show discussions (from one in the previous production, to a discussion each evening). The grant also painted the project as 1) building bridges between the museum and Chicano communities; 2) promoting interdisciplinary approaches to the arts; 3) increasing the awareness of Kahlo, 4) critically questioning the role of museums in the construction of the meaning of art; and, 5) addressing a growing interest in popular and cultural studies.

None of the members of the core production team were Latino. The Humanities Council identified that fact in an early version of the grant proposal, requesting that the final proposal include a more diverse advisory/planning committee. The planning committee came to include Sheehy, Kayim, and myself, along with several scholars and local Chicano community representatives. The final proposal featured some of their feedback to the project:

One important component of the audience for this project is, of course, the local Chicano/Latino community. We at the museum do not presume to speak for them about their "need" for this play. However, members of our planning committee have commented on what they see is important about this project for their community. According to Gil de la O, it is important for Chicanos to know more about Frida Kahlo. Many in the arts know her well, but others may know only her name or only her connection with her husband, Diego Rivera. In addition to specific knowledge on Frida Kahlo, he thinks a project like this could help more generally with increasing the knowledge among Chicanos about their cultural heritages. (6)

On 1 February 1994, the full advisory committee met for the first time. Until then, Sheehy had connected with them individually over the phone, describing the project and eliciting feedback. Sheehy arranged this first meeting for Kayim and me to describe the current status of the project, as we had been restructuring and rewriting the piece specifically for the museum space and to more fully address the goals of community outreach, awareness of Kahlo, and ideological questioning of her commodification. I prepared the following

description of the performance, and read it to the committee while Kayim showed slides and filled in details of staging concepts.

Project Description

The Frida Kahlo Retrospective is a play of positions and levels. On one level it is the story of Frida's life. Born in 1907 in Coyoacan, then a suburb of Mexico City, to a German father and a Mexican mother, Frida led a remarkable life of passionate personal relationships and equally passionate career as a painter. Frida's paintings challenged her contemporaries' notions of private and public distinctions by displaying her life openly, even combatively. All her works can be considered self-portraits; if not of her physical being, of her memories and emotional states. One level of the play follows the course of Frida's tempestuous life as reflected in her paintings.

Scholarly writing and commercial products with Frida's image have flooded the market in the last several years. On Santa Monica Boulevard in West Hollywood, the Little Frida Cafe hawks its gazpacho soup on the sidewalk sandwich board: "It's Kool as Kahlo, it's Fresh as Frida, and it's fat free too!" The second level of the production addresses this commodification of Frida's life by scholars, museums, restaurateurs, film makers, and other artists. Scenes of Frida's life are interrupted by phone calls from would-be art buyers or film producers. An art critic/museum docent leads the audience from scene to scene, giving detailed (often exaggerated) readings of her paintings.

A third level of the play addresses the cultural context in which Frida lived and in which the play itself is produced. Two characters serve as cultural guides and translators for the audience. Julie McCoy, modeled after the American television icon from the television series *The Love Boat*, frames Mexican culture with an obvious, pro-American propagandist bias. The figure of Frida's Nurse, from her painting *My Nurse and I*, interprets Frida's life through a political lens, always focusing on her revolutionary aspirations and ideals. The Nurse sees through Julie's manipulations and mistranslations, and their introductory comments to each scene reflect tensions between the two cultural guides. As the play evolves, these tensions blur and coalesce, subverting strict dualistic readings, and revealing both their stakes in the telling of Frida's story.

The fourth and final level of the play appears in the spaces of contradiction between the stories of Frida, and the battles between Julie, The Nurse and The Critic. The actors in the play have the opportunity to write and perform monologues on their own reactions to the process and content of the play. In the last production, these monologues focused on the pain of racism and the experience of coming from a racially mixed family. Delivered to a playfully ornate altar to Frida, complete with a neon halo and a moveable arm that pulls down like a slot machine, these monologues provide the closest thing to authenticity in the piece—albeit fictionalized and performed—that of the actors' reactions to Frida and the process of *The Retrospective* itself.

In the interplay of these four levels, we see Frida's paintings, episodes of her life, and ourselves, watching and sensing our complicity in the manipulation of these events in the context of a midwestern university art museum. Young Frida, Invalid Frida, and Painted Frida are three aspects of her character separated into different roles. Diego, The Nurse, Julie McCoy, Trotsky, Andre and Jacqueline Breton, The Critic, Christina Kahlo, and several musicians fill out this complex telling of Frida's story then, and as it continues today.

Actions/Reactions

As Kayim began to explain the environmental staging ideas and the reasons for multiple and cross-gender and cross-race casting, she was stopped short by an intense round of questioning. Guillermo Rojas, Associate Professor of Chicano Studies at the University of Minnesota, turned the discussion toward our portrayal of Frida. How would we portray Frida's communism? The fact that she supported native Mexicans? The fact that her last public appearance was in a communist march and that at her funeral, one of her students covered her casket with the communist flag? Playing layers was fine, but is it not an escape from addressing what the non-Latino creative team is unable to touch—experience in and of Chicano/Latino culture? What were our personal connections to Frida? Why were we, two non-Latinas, doing this project? Eden Torres, a graduate school fellow in American Studies also at the University of Minnesota asked pointedly about casting. Who would be cast? Where would we be advertising? What were our criteria for casting? How much of the script would be in Spanish? Who would play Frida? How much would tickets cost? Who would be the target audience? Why weren't there more Latinos on the creative end? Attempts at answers yielded more questions. Eden left the meeting early, Guillermo followed shortly after. Gil de la O, representing the Neighborhood House in St. Paul's Chicano community, and Alberto Justiano, artistic director of Teatro del Pueblo remained open to the project. RuthAnn Godeli, Assistant Professor of Art at Macalester College, offered suggestions for reading material we might include in an informational packet for preshow publicity. Joanna O'Connell, University of Minnesota Associate Professor of Spanish and Portuguese, pointed to the problems in the previous productions, but remained supportive of the changes already underway. Eva Lopez, playwright and Ph.D. candidate at the University of Minnesota, Department of Theatre Arts and Dance, never came to the meeting and withdrew from the project.

Journal entry: 2/1/94

Just survived our first advisory committee meeting. I remember now Chandra Mohanty's description of the ruptures and disharmony, even anger that this type of work produces. Harmony is a false goal, a dream. The arguments we just launched are the purpose of the whole project, and we can only hope that the discussion sessions bring out some of those feelings. Joanna and RuthAnn were allies, down the line. Suggestions for improvement, but allies to the project

itself. Interesting that they are two white women working in Spanish and the arts. Guillermo's comment on our avoidance of the national symbol that Frida created was right on. We need to address the idea that ultimately it doesn't matter what layers you're playing, it matters how you live your life. Eden ripped to the core of the whole debate, saying that Chicano students didn't come see the last play (a visible absence) because there were no Chicano/as in it. Fine, we know there were mistakes, but we want to work to better the project. Colleen kept asking HOW, but she seemed to want to give away artistic license which won't fly. Ideas? Have a few members of La Raza on the panel discussion, give them advance copies of the script. Have program notes be bilingual. Have suggestions for further research. Have post-show discussions to garner reactions, not lectures. Have *The Nurse* represent the political, public image of Frida. Have *Young Frida* and *Invalid Frida* represent this more as well. The Zapatista scene can be much more politically loaded. We can revisit this scene later too when Frida is an invalid. Ultimately, this is the direction we are going in anyway. We need clarity, more precise goals, to make it through some of these discussions.

- 1) to increase the awareness of Frida Kahlo as an artist, a powerful woman, a person of powerful political convictions, a Mexican.
- 2) To trouble the discovery and iconization of Frida by both American and Mexican culture on both levels of scholarly inquiry and material commodity (T-shirt, earrings, calendars . . .)
- 3) To highlight points of tension in both cultural ownership and cultural appropriation, such as A) in performance, who can play whom? B) in writing, who has a right to speak for whom? C) and does postmodern "play" disguise appropriation?
- 4) To bring together a diverse audience and to prompt a dialogue about the above issues.

Journal entry: 2/15/94

Meeting at The Neighborhood House on the West Side neighborhood in St. Paul. Gil (de la O) recommended that we come to it to describe our project to the community arts board, and to get suggestions for outreach. I picked up Gülgün at the museum; we were both anxious, and got there early, driving around the hilly neighborhood to get a feel for where we were. Members of the arts board rolled in late, but Colleen stumbled through an introduction anyway. She explained the museum. I handed out a bibliography. Gülgün and I dove-tailed about the description of the piece. I recited goals. "Will the cast be representative?" some one asked. The big question, asked matter of factly. Yes, we said. Then the meeting flowed, we showed pictures of her work, and asked for suggestions on publicity. Business cards and phone numbers flew across the table. Time was up, we stood in the hallway, stunned, talking about how to follow up on the positive feedback and suggestions. The first meeting taught us

how to frame the second in a more open, goal oriented way that speaks to the community, not to our theoretical staging ideas.

Journal entry: 2/16/94

Lara [Nielsen, dramaturg] called, she's worried about our follow through on the advisory board's suggestions, especially with Gülgün, who is adamant about artistic control. Authenticity and postmodern theory are in conflict, and both refuse compromise. I'm just hoping we can have enough confidence in our voices, visions, and connections to the piece, that we can have dialogues with people, come to the table with our contributions and hear theirs. We have to remain open or this project is a void.

Nielsen quit later that week, citing fundamental problems with the structure of the project that were too far gone to repair through open dialogue. The creative team and grant writers should have been representative of the Latino community. As a non-Latino, (a performer and graduate student in Comparative Literature, Nielsen was the Latin-American Bibliographer for the University of Minnesota Library) Nielsen left the project after five months, explaining to me over the phone that she did not feel she could continue to represent the Latino community.

Journal entry: 3/25/94

No one showed. After a long gathering process, collecting names of Spanish speaking actors from several local theaters and making repeated phone calls, the lack of response is almost paralyzing. Gülgün and I decided to postpone the auditions for another two weeks [spring break fell in between the audition times] and continue to make phone calls. It feels like we have to prove our intentions. We have to let the actors know we're committed. But Alberto [Justiano] says Teatro del Pueblo has the same problem, so maybe we are anticipating and creating conflict where there is none. The script came back from Juanita [Garciagodoy, an Adjunct Professor of Spanish at Macalester College from Mexico City], with corrections, suggestions, translations, and lots of support.

Auditions and casting took place during the first week of April, demanding a tightening of the rehearsal schedule. Several members from the original cast were recast in their roles. Edgar Davis, an African-American artist and actor would play Diego. Annie Piper, a white woman, would play Young Frida. Charles Campbell, a white man, would play Julie McCoy. Due to scheduling conflicts, Cuban-American Luli Santaballa would share the role of Invalid Frida with Monica Scott, an African-American woman. Isis Estrada, a dancer from Mexico City, would play Painted Frida. Sara Zwick-Tapley, a white woman would cross-dress to play the male Critic. Desire Barbeyto, a young Spanish actress would play The Nurse. Chorus members would include a Chicano man, an African-Mexican woman, a white woman, and a fifteen year old Chicana

woman. During the span of the rehearsal process, four performers dropped out, and one returned.

Journal entry: 4/19/94

Luli wanted to quit. I missed the fireworks, but Gülgün said she called her, complaining that we were giving parts to white actors where Chicano/Latino actors could play them. She added that having white, non-Spanish speaking people speaking Spanish was ridiculous. I agreed. But the part about actors not turning up to auditions and then complaining because there are no Chicano actors is so frustrating. She's staying, and I'm glad. Let's just get through this and never, ever, do it again.

Luli quit after the next rehearsal. In compliance with Luli's objections to casting choices, Kayim agreed to set aside part of the rehearsal for a discussion of the political issues in the show, from the content to directoral choices. Dissatisfied with the casts' reactions to the show's politics, Luli withdrew from the project, leaving Scott alone in the role of Invalid Frida. During the second week of rehearsal and without explanation, the fifteen year old Chicana stopped coming to rehearsal. Her foster mother suggested that the performance demanded too much time. Two weeks before opening, the African-Mexican woman dropped out of the project. She remained supportive of the project as a whole, but objected to a sexual scene in the play for religious reasons. With two weeks to opening, Isis Estrada submitted a letter of resignation from the project on the grounds that her role (Painted Frida) was still unformed and did not utilize her talents as a dancer. After several discussions, Isis rejoined the group.

Advisory Board member Professor Claudia Crawford withdrew from her role as post-show discussion leader one month before opening. After reading the script, Crawford felt strongly that the original goals voiced at the first Advisory Board meetings were not met by the script and were mocked by the play's tone and choice of focus. In a letter to Sheehy, Crawford detailed her problems with the script:

I feel that the tone of *The Retrospective* emphasizes shock value and sensationalism over a responsible presentation of Frida Kahlo's life and work and that it undermines the efforts, which I thought were genuine, of creating a working relationship between the project, the museum and the Latino and Chicano groups on campus and around the Cities. If one of the goals of the museum is to invite or encourage minority peoples to become museum goers by finding a comfortable, self-reconfirming, but not uncritical atmosphere in which their ethnic art and concerns are respectfully included, I feel that *The Retrospective* will be a serious step backward.

Eden Torres voiced similar concerns in a private meeting with Kayim and me after having read the script. The characters of The Critic and Julie McCoy

seemed to mock Frida's work, overpowering the episodes of Frida's life. Working with Torres, we emphasized the parodic aspects of both *The Critic* and Julie McCoy, and made it more clear that both characters disintegrate in the course of the play. *The Critic* is reduced to poetic half-sentences while, in a last ditch effort to retain control of the audience, Julie McCoy desperately repeats the airline safety mantra "please be sure all trays are in their upright position!" After the script discussion, however, Torres withdrew her support from the project. She did not attend the final production.

Beyond the Borders

Certainly not all the resistance to *The Retrospective* centered directly on issues of race and ethnicity. Difficulties with scheduling and time commitments may have been contributing factors in decisions to leave the production as well. The play's parodic and non-traditional form, including cross-race and gender casting, environmental staging, and the division of single roles among several actors, may also have contributed to the resistance. But certainly, resisters from myriad political and cultural positions questioned the structure of the grant, the faces, the practices, and the languages of those behind the project. With the original aim of encouraging dialogue on cultural ownership, commodification, and multi-cultural representation, such intense scrutiny was simultaneously the desired effect and bane of the production process. Such scrutiny prompted revisions in the script, the makeup of the cast, and the structure of the discussion sessions and the publicity and outreach programs. Such scrutiny also aggravated deeply felt political emotions until the only option available for several cast and Advisory Board members was to quit the project, leaving their silent mark on the final product—the performance itself. The absence of such scrutiny, however, would not have ensured a smooth production process or positive reception, but would have further buried issues of representation in silence or token and ineffective questions in discussion sessions. As Homi Bhabha suggests in "Beyond the Pale: Art in the Age of Multicultural Translation," resistance to multicultural representations disrupts tokenization:

To be recognized for my negating activity is to be valued for my power to "make" a difference rather than to reflect it; it is to be accepted for my contradictory, contentious collaboration, rather than my collusive, predictable presence. (72)

For Bhabha, the act of resistance, "the negating activity," demands that stabilized images of cultural authenticity be rethought as created or articulated in, and amidst, the political stakes of the present moment: "The negating activity is, indeed, the intervention of the 'beyond' that establishes a boundary, a bridge, where 'presencing' begins" (71).

The negating activity that pervaded so much of the staging process of *The Retrospective* did not fall neatly into polarized categories of museum/artist or

Hispanic/non-Hispanic. To reduce the resistance to these readings is to dismiss the complexities of cultural identities, and issues of gender, class (particularly in attempts to bridge the academic community with the local Chicano community) and of theatrical form, all clearly at play in the production process. Similarly, while the negating activity proved central to the project itself, not all of it ended in withdrawal from the project. Not everyone quit. The six performances of *The Retrospective* played to capacity crowds. Kayim's and my visions of a postmodern staging in which identities of characters seemed to float between bodies written and lived with different cultural experiences, and in which the audience was invited to consider the power and position of their own viewing, elicited both anger and excitement as a method of further tokenizing Frida and as a potential method of destabilizing cultural authenticity. These reactions became clear in the more dynamic post-show discussions. The process and product of *The Retrospective* suggests that the territory that lies beyond the border of institutional oppression, stabilized identities, and cultural authenticity, is by definition unmappable. It exists only in a present in which the act of negating enunciates rather than reflects difference. This is not to say that postmodern stagings and theory that Kayim and I carried to *The Retrospective* oppose, or act as a "solution" to performances or issues of cultural authenticity. Nor do they cloak my own enunciation of difference in the projects' present moments, from Advisory Board meetings to ticketed shows. Rather the space beyond the border of stabilized identity, in either the guise of authenticity or disembodied postmodern theory, is a space in which these two approaches interrogate each other (in direct conflict and in silences) to enunciate differences as well as construct bridges between them.

Anne Davis Basting

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The Living Theatre. *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces* 1994.

Bringing Back the 1960s: The Living Theatre's *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces*

Mysteries and Smaller Pieces. The Living Theatre, Theatre for the New City, New York, 10 September 1994

Like some kind of avant-garde Mother Courage, Judith Malina and her ever-resilient company The Living Theatre, are still battling the forces of militarism, capitalism, violence, and institutional authority as they move into their 48th year of existence. In 1989, the troupe experienced a rebirth of sorts with the founding of its first permanent home since 1961 on East Third Street in New York City. Until that theatre was closed for safety code violations in January 1992, the company engaged in a blizzard of activity involving new full-length productions, poetry readings, street theatre, workshops, and several European tours. Since then, under the leadership of Malina and executive director, Hanon Reznikov, they have maintained a steady presence on the New York experimental theatre scene. The company first presented a revival of their 1991 *Rules of Civility* at Theater for the New City in the East Village, and then a new production entitled *Anarchia* based on the writings of the nineteenth century anarchist Errico Malatesta at the same location. Following a tour of New Mexico, The Living Theatre most recently revived its seminal 1964 production of *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces* in a "thirtieth anniversary production," 10 September 1994, once again at Theatre for the New City.

Co-directed by Malina and former Living Theatre actor Steven Ben-Israel (who performed in the original cast of *Mysteries*), the production featured a predominantly youthful ensemble supplemented by several company veterans such as Malina, Reznikov, Tom Walker, and Rain House. The revival was particularly interesting in context of the recent media focus on the ideals of the 1960s raised by such high profile events as Woodstock II, which was condemned by many as a crass commercialization of both the original event and the counter-cultural spirit which spawned it. While individual icons from the 60s, such as Richard Schechner, continue to produce new work periodically, The Living Theatre is one of the few notable avant-garde ensembles from the period which still cling to the ideals and techniques of that tumultuous era. Thus, a new production of a pioneering 1960s work such as *Mysteries*, which was first presented in Paris during the company's legendary "exile" in Europe, seemed to present a rare opportunity to encounter a more authentic representation of the sensibility of the 1960s for audience members like myself who were too young to directly experience the watershed theatrical and cultural events of the period.

Interestingly enough, based on Saul Gottlieb's description of *Mysteries* in the Summer, 1966 *TDR* (Gottlieb 140-45) the company chose to recreate literally the original structure of the piece. This stands in contrast with the other Living

Theatre productions which I have seen in New York, which have employed techniques and forms from their work in the 1960s in service of new plays or adaptations. Thus, as with the original version, the revival of *Mysteries* opened on a bare stage with a solitary actor (Tom Walker) standing at attention in a pool of light, holding the position without expression or movement for approximately ten minutes. On the evening I attended, the audience sat politely for several minutes, then began to shift restlessly, and eventually started to chat among themselves. Most people seemed neither angry, provoked, or particularly interested, and no one called out for the actor to move or get on with the evening (although one spectator near me did quietly utter "blink!" to himself). Nonetheless, the excruciating intensity of Walker's almost trance-like concentration (I never did see him blink) held my attention until the moment was interrupted by several other male actors who proceeded to pantomime the "field-day clean-up" from The Living's production of *The Brig* (Gottlieb 140), all the while chanting a counterpoint of the words appearing on an American dollar. As a comment on the meaninglessness of institutionalized authority, the scene ended with the squad standing at attention, screaming a boot-camp like "yes, sir!" in unison in response to Walker's strident, nonsensical commands.

The production then went on to recreate the seven other scenes outlined in Gottlieb's article, omitting the optional "free jazz" session which was performed at some European performances of *Mysteries* in the 1960s (Gottlieb 144-45). What was most striking to me at the outset of the production was the failure of the opening image to provoke a verbalized audience response. As the evening progressed, a similar pattern seemed to emerge as the audience responded to the evocation of the company's past work with responses that ranged from polite interest to outright laughter (often in the wrong places). The most captivating aspects of the production were the moments which drew on the company's strength in creating striking visual images and sensory experiences. Thus, Joni Fritz's haunting improvisationally sung raga was followed by the company's lighting of incense sticks. The sticks were illuminated by pinpoints of light to create a dancing kaleidoscope of sight and smell as the ensemble slowly moved into the audience. As with Walker's lone stance on stage, such quiet moments provided an outlet for introspection within a distorted sense of time and space as one often experiences during the best work of Robert Wilson. The striking sounds and images of these sections also seemed to weave a sense of harmony over the actors and audience, bringing the collective body of people together in a celebration of presence and community (which has always been a major goal of The Living Theatre).

Less successful were other sections which I found to exclude the audience, as when the company gathered in a circle to perform its well-known "chord" exercise. The actors placed their arms around one another and hummed until the group apparently functioned as one entity. While Gottlieb noted that some audience members in the 1960s were "moved" to join the circle at various performances (Gottlieb 141), this time the only non-cast members to do so were

Ben-Israel and an audience member who I recognized from performances in several Living Theatre productions at the company's former Third Street Theatre. Most of the audience seemed distanced from the activity, and merely waited politely until the exercise was over.

After two other brief scenes the company divided itself, with the majority of the actors leaving the playing area to watch the remaining members of the group form two opposing lines. As in the original production of *Mysteries*, the actors on stage then participated in various sound and movement transformation exercises which The Living Theatre learned from Joe Chaikin in the 1960s (and which now, ironically, are a staple of most American acting classes). While the exercises allowed some of the Living Theatre actors to display their technical virtuosity, this section dragged on for well over thirty minutes. Consequently, what started as a lively and humorous exchange of gesture and nonsensical language eventually bogged down in a kind of sloppy self-indulgence which detracts from the company's work. The result of this repetition seemed to be an unintentional estrangement of the audience, with some actually choosing to leave the performance.

What they missed was The Living Theatre's recreation of their enactment of Antonin Artaud's legendary essay, *The Theatre and the Plague*. In this penultimate scene of the performance, the actors gradually became afflicted with the plague, ultimately exhibiting all sorts of horrific symptoms as they died agonizing, slow deaths. Unfortunately, many of the actors lacked the skills needed to convey the necessary intensity of their anguished emotional and physical states, with the result being a great deal of amateurish wailing, thrashing about, and "over-the-top" acting. As performed in the 1960s (especially within the context of the Vietnam War), Gottlieb characterized the Artaudian inspired scene as having a "most violent effect" on the spectators, with many of them rushing to help or hinder the final, gasping moments of the actors (Gottlieb 145). Sadly enough, the 1994 audience seemed to find the scene amusing, with many spectators laughing outright or even ignoring the proceedings to talk among themselves. Only the Living Theatre actor in the audience seemed immersed in the moment, letting loose with his own empathetic howl of anguish which only elicited further laughter from the majority of the onlookers.

Malina did manage to win back most of the audience in the final section of *Mysteries* following the "death" of the company. Several actors rose from the dead to ritualistically gather the "corpses" in a long, silent, vigil which resulted in a macabre yet visually striking "body pile." While no one volunteered to join the pile in solidarity as did some audience members in the 1960s (Gottlieb 145), the remaining spectators were appropriately contemplative during this moving section, which reminds us that such death and carnage has outlasted the end of the Vietnam War.

What then is the end result of this much ballyhooed revival (at least by The Living Theatre's own advertising campaign) of *Mysteries*? I think that Malina and Ben-Israel's decision to recreate the original structure of the piece in a literal

manner was an unfortunate one. Too much of the production relied on a number of dated strategies which are simply no longer provocative or cutting-edge. Seeing actors grab their crotches, blow their noses with toilet paper, and engage in stylized "tableau vivants" was undoubtedly shocking to an audience in 1964 used to "realistic" acting safely ensconced behind the proscenium arch. In 1994 it all seems decidedly tame—and often tiresome. And while we owe The Living Theatre a debt for breaking down a multiplicity of barriers since its inception, this production of *Mysteries* could not shake the dust of its museum-piece aura. While containing a moment or two of almost Zen-like transcendence, for the most part this revival of *Mysteries* was as much tired 60s nostalgia as the excesses of Woodstock II.

The Living Theatre has proven capable of reinventing itself many times in the past, and hopefully will recapture the humor, vigor, and freshness which characterized its earlier production of *Anarchia*, for example, instead of recycling stale strategies from its past history. But regardless of the various flaws of this production of *Mysteries*, it is inspiring to see the large numbers of young people who continually flock to the Theatre for the New City and discover The Living Theatre for themselves. The Living Theatre has repeatedly claimed that their ultimate goal is to convert the world to their relentless gospel of pacifist-anarchism. It remains to be seen if their future productions will be able to communicate that message effectively to a contemporary audience. Until then, they continue their struggle, as Judith Malina once stated, "to use the theatre then to fan the fiery vision of a world without hatred" (Malina).

David Callaghan

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Ziggy Goes to War

Zigi, zvezdana prasina/Ziggy Stardust, BITEF TEATAR,
Belgrade, Yugoslavia, 8 January 1995

That Ziggy Stardust is not dead, and that he will again show up somewhere and somehow, I knew for a long time. I have to admit, however, that I did not expect him in what is left of Yugoslavia, in a spatio-temporal configuration that exists between the real and the unimaginable with a tendency of sinking into a chronic absurd-itis. On the other hand, Ziggy's first lesson was about unpredictability and the "Etonnez-moi" strategy. Ziggy among the Balkan's warriors? Glam rocker in-between the South Slavs's haters? A paradox, yes; but then, without paradoxes there would be no Ziggies, no theatres, no wars.

Since the 1991 breakout of civil war in Yugoslavia, and particularly since the imposition of the UN sanctions against Belgrade (and what is left of Yugoslavia) in 1992, the horrible isolation of Belgrade government, meant as a form of its punishment and eventual breakdown, turned into a splendid isolation. Instead of Serb President Milosevic's downfall, this strategy of isolation gave him a boost. Yugoslavia itself became a prison, a concentration camp for those who could not go anywhere, nor do anything in a system without democratic traditions. With nowhere to go, with no access to the outside world, Yugoslavia and Yugoslavs, with their leader Milosevic, bravely turned to their glorious past rich with myths, legends and folklore tales, where brave Serbian men fight, and fight and fight again, against the enemies from the outside world. Those not willing to join this journey into the past became the enemies of the people.

Milosevic, thus, cemented his/his nation's path. His power is most obvious in the cultural sphere. Artists and intellectuals who did not want to follow him are either gone or silenced. The only voice one can now hear is the official voice of a nation. Instead of voices of difference and diversity, Milosevic, with a little help from his Western political enemies, produced unisonality, a voice that speaks language capable of "generating imagined communities, building in effect *particular solidarities*." Milosevic is building his particular solidarity using mass culture (TV, popular music, newspapers, movies, mainstream theatre). On the cultural market one can find products that sell fast and easy living, material and earthy pleasures, simultaneously offering an escape from a war that is going on ninety or so miles away, and from the isolation of actual Yugoslav existence. This cultural offer is locally known as *turbo folk*. It is a mixture of local versions of country, disco and rock'n'roll music; one can dance to it (it is part Travolta and part *kolo*, the traditional folk dance of Southern Slavs). The lyrics tell about the valets and the cars the loved ones have to have. The main stars are former prostitutes, strip dancers, or beauty pageant contestants who claim they can sing and dance (their stage names are Cakana/Sweetie; Lepa Brena/Beautiful

Brena, etc.). These ladies are the most visible, most heard and most popular people in Yugoslavia nowadays. They function as Milosevic's back dancers, and as the screen on which he projects his vision of the Serbian nation's future.

On the movie screen Milosevic projects his higher ambitions. If the television and entertainment industry are in his hands and immersed in escapism, the filmmakers are still trying to find independent space and funds for critical/artistic work about the present Yugoslav moment. Unfortunately, film is an expensive medium and private investors are still financially weak in comparison with the government. In the same way as Tito (Yugoslav President for forty years) had his filmmakers (see the opus of Veljko Bulajic, for example), Milosevic is going to have his. But, if Tito had victories to celebrate on the big screen, the question remains: what "glories" will Milosevic immortalize on the screen? As of now, it seems he will go the way Nazi film propaganda did it—the series of Serbian *Heimatfilme* is ready to hit the theatres.

In the live theatre Milosevic's power web functions almost without obstacles. The largest theatres became a space for exercises in commercialism, kitsch, and nationalism; a perfect example of what Peter Brook calls the "deadly theatre."¹ At the (dead)end of this deadly path is a group of theatre "healers" baptized as the *Nova Srpska Drama* (New Serbian Drama) that claims as their postulates: "orthodox dogmatism, aesthetics of nationalistic pathos, folkloristic Camp, and subversive, panaesthetic exhibitionism." These new prophets of Serbian drama (and theatre), "addressing school youth, workers, peasants, clerks and administrators, and even perverted intellectuals," want to "persuade" the audience about "the meaninglessness of dramaturgy/dramatic arts and a necessity of liturgy."² After these lines, one should perceive Slobodan Milosevic as a very happy tyrant, and at the same time be very, very afraid.

Within this context, a project about Bowie's Ziggy Stardust sounded like yet another escapist, "panaesthetic exhibitionism." It originated in the Bitef Teatar, a kind of La Mama of Belgrade. The "mama" was the late Mira Trailovic, who, with Jovan Cirilov in 1967, established BITEF festival of new theatrical tendencies; Bitef Teatar got its space in an abandoned church close to the old part of the city, and opened its doors in 1989. With its young artistic director, Ivana Vujic, Bitef Teatar was a hope that "rough theater" could have its place on the Belgrade theatrical map. Luckily, despite Milosevic's regime, Bitef Teatar is still a "rough place" to go and see theatre in Belgrade.

It is, of course, a ghetto. A ghetto claims its right to territory, and its own rules (Isn't all rough theatre a ghetto in itself?). The rough theatre, as Brook reminds us, always looks for inspiration in the popular forms: circus, puppetry, freak shows, street theatre, social dramas and sports games. It is no surprise then that the young artists at the Bitef Teatar looked back for their inspiration at the pop heroes of the glamorous 70s. Bowie's persona, Ziggy Stardust, is pop eclecticism at its best. Part harlequin, part dandy from outer space, part man, part woman, Bowie's Ziggy is a pastiche whose major attraction is an endless possibility of combinations of its parts, paired with a wide range of contexts.

Ziggy got his gun and is off for the war in the Balkans? Yes. And what did we get?

Young playwright Marija Soldatovic brought together in *Zigi, zvezdana prasina* diverse cultural figures across time and space. Her master of ceremonies is Sex Pistol's Sid Vicious, a cult figure from London's punk scene. He struts and yells across the stage introducing other characters of the play, but is himself being mocked by getting a domesticated role of a "Kathie Lee-wanna be." Soldatovic uses parody to depict these "heroes just for one day" (as a line from one of Bowie's post-Ziggy songs would have it), who themselves also used it as their strategic device. This parody out of parody unfolds itself through gradual camping up.

The MC introduces the first couple of the play: Gala Dali, wife of surrealist Salvador, chitchats with Angela Bowie, another celebrity's housewife, in a huge, Magrittesque bathtub (the set is by Dejan Andjelkovic). Punk meets surrealism meets Glam rock in a context reminiscent of a Joan Rivers "gossip, gossip, gossip" show. A trivialization of these twentieth century avant-gardes is symptomatic for the whole project: no one is sacred here, and the role models are useful only as a source of inspiration for different strategies. If Bowie himself was accused of "intellectual shoplifting," Soldatovic and company shamelessly did the same: this is, after all, a recyclable (post)moment (Core, p. 40).

After the "girls talk," the legend him/herself is introduced. On platform shoes and in a tinsel outfit (costumes are by Linda Cavajda), young actor Bojan Dimitrijevic is a tall, slender, androgynous, young Bowie minus charisma. We follow him through a series of encounters with remarkable people: he pays homage to a first Glam Rock performer, Mark Bolan; he meets William Burroughs and they discuss wives, men, and bisexuality, and, in a wonderful scene taking place above the stage (like the angels above Berlin in a Wenders film), he flies over Berlin with fellow musician Brian Eno talking about art, revolution, exile and beauty.

Soldatovic's text is a series of exchanges of manifestos on great themes interrupted by musical numbers (everyone sings, everyone is a showman/girl on this stage). Connecting rhetorical fragments and musical numbers (pop versions of Bowie's Glam rock hits done by the band Babe), is Sid Vicious's stand-up comedian performing punk's menace and nihilism. Only at the end of the show Sid does what one expects of Sid. He takes his gun and goes ballistic. Gala is dead, Angela is dead, Burroughs is dead, and Eno, and Bolan, and Ziggy—everyone is dead as everyone should be dead at the end of a good tragedy. Then Sid sings Sinatra's *My Way*. Only corpses are left on the stage. Avant-garde is dead? Pop trash is gone? No more heroes just for one day? No more art in the Milosevic's system? All our bodies are inscribed on these corpses? Or, maybe, the answer to the puzzle is much easier: following the fifty minute show, on the same stage, the rock band Babe/Grannies (whose singer played Mark Bolan) gave a concert. With beer bottles and cigarette smoke, and even Harvey Keitel in the audience, the lofty question of artistic

meanings/intentions of the performance grounded itself onto the Yugoslav reality: to fight or not to fight, to forget or not to forget, to survive yet another night or not to survive it, that is the question.

Foregrounding androgyny and bisexuality, fashion and glamour, parody and transgression, shamelessness and irrelevance, as opposed to masculine/military propriety, patriotic self-sacrifice, pathos and poverty, Bitef Teatar's project *Ziggy Stardust*, directed by Milorad Milinkovic, posited in between Milosevic's mythical search for Serbian nation's survival through its ritualistic suicide, and the so-called New Serbian Drama's call for the extinction of theatre and omnipresence of liturgy, looks like a small (and short), though important, act. Its transgression manifests itself in the strategic use of parody, meaning in this context, primarily something "beside"³ the norm, or the dominant. There is no need of seeing the creators of Belgrade's *Ziggy* as warriors. They are aware that their *Ziggy* will not move Milosevic (or for that matter any other dictator) from power. Producing *Ziggy*, however, should be seen as their effort in making themselves visible in a geopolitical space where visibility is, literally, a matter of life and death, of "To Be or not To Be." Bitef Teatar's *Ziggy Stardust* is, probably, only a small step for the world theatre, but a giant leap (in the platform shoes) for the Balkans's "perverted intellectuals."

Milan Pribisic



Characters from *Zigi, zvezdana prasina/Ziggy Stardust*.

Notes

1. For the "deadly," "holy," "rough," and "immediate" theatre see Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Atheneum, 1968).

2. A pamphlet/manifesto distributed in the Belgrade theatres by supporters of the New Serbian Drama. Translation is mine.

3. For etymological/semantic interpretations of "parody" see Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York: Methuen, 1985), in particular page 32.

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Essays: Mainly Shakespearean. Anne Barton. Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

To say that Anne Barton is a major Shakespearean scholar is to err on the side of understatement rather than of hyperbole. A quick glance through the *MLA Bibliography* shows not only a steady stream of articles under her by-line, but a handful of essays in which other scholars seek to examine Barton's readings of Shakespeare, i.e. in which Barton herself is the object of scrutiny: this despite the fact that unlike, say, Stephen Greenblatt, Barton is not known primarily for her methodology. This book, a collection of essays dating from as early as 1953 (an article on *Love's Labour's Lost* published in *Shakespeare Quarterly* when Barton was still an undergraduate) and including two previously unpublished papers, provides plenty of scope for one of the most learned and well-read scholars of the English Renaissance stage.

Encountering Barton's breadth of knowledge is nothing if not humbling: just in the two previously unpublished essays in this book, Barton refers specifically to some fifty-seven different non-Shakespearean plays or masques from the period: even specialists are unlikely to be familiar with more than a fraction of these plays (*Loose Fantasies*, anyone? *Thracian Wonder?*). But the self-consciousness of the erudition is also limiting, deflecting the reader's attention from the quality of the author's insights to simply the quantity of her reading. Indeed, Barton notes in her preface that one reason that certain of her essays were excluded was "their address to a more popular audience" (xiii). This is curious, in that the purported reason for publishing this volume at all was to "[make] accessible to a wider public of students and scholars essays which have previously been available only in article form" (i): yet the essays were originally published in well-known journals and well-distributed *festschriften*, already available to the specialists who must represent this book's intended readership.

The book is divided into two sections. Part I concentrates on the comedies, the Roman plays, and the last plays, and includes nine essays, "'Wrying but a little': marriage, law and sexuality in the plays of Shakespeare," the aforementioned article on *Love's Labour's Lost*, "Shakespeare and the limits of language" (perhaps Barton's best-known essay), "Falstaff and the comic community," "*As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*: Shakespeare's 'sense of an ending'," "'Nature's piece 'gainst fancy': the divided catastrophe in *Antony and Cleopatra*," "Livy, Machiavelli and Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*," "Leontes and the spider: language and the speaker in Shakespeare's last plays," and "'Enter Mariners wet': realism in Shakespeare's last plays."

Part II, dealing with disguised kings, playwrights other than Shakespeare (especially Ford, and to a lesser extent Jonson), and the relationship of the city to Elizabethan and Stuart drama, includes some seven essays: "The king disguised: Shakespeare's *Henry V* and the comical history," "'He that plays the