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Evolving a Theatre of Truth

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EVOLVING A THEATRE OF TRUTH

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

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Major Director: Dr. Noreen C. Barnes
Director of Graduate Studies, Dept. of Theatre

This thesis explores the challenges of evolving a Theatre of Truth in the context of the immediate *zeitgeist*. The questions I address are the role of feminist theatre in a world dominated by global media and corporate omnipotence; the conflation of theatre and Realpolitick; the limitations of postmodern thought and critical theory, and the struggle not only of the marginalized, but of all of us to create an activist theatre in perilous times. After examining my response to directing a production of Mud by Maria Irene Fornes, this project will also suggest that a theatre of specialized singular interests, such as feminism, racism, or gender-based concerns, is no longer sufficient to impact the audience of today. Instead, the work suggests that a fresh, revised look at theory, feminism, and “reality,” as well as an attempt to unravel the psyche of the hegemonic political and social forces are

necessary to reconceive a theatre that serves the new world. Building on the artistry of several contemporary playwrights, this thesis explores a theatre of Truth in action and looks at possibilities to open new avenues to empathy, transformation and liberation.

Introduction

“The most important thing in life and art is to tell the truth.” -- Tolstoy

Mine has always been a decidedly feminist worldview. Not by choice. But by necessity. As an artist the question has been defense...or offense? Does one portray women as victims or as victorious? Does it matter? Is it the patriarchal structure we must endure? Politics? Religion? Or is it a struggle with men one on one? How does one contend with overt misogyny; the worship, indeed the preference for fantasy over reality; the contortion of the body to meet this fantasy; the effortless deception both of self and “loved” ones; the overt mockery of the concept of love, the greatest quality, so the wisdom traditions say, we can possess as humans; resignation to pretense, lying rather than authenticity, as though that’s all there is, so why bother?

It’s easy to pluck the word “misogynist” from the feminist vocabulary and apply it at will to someone whose behavior is sexist, entitled, arrogant and who clearly demonstrates abuse of power, generally over someone considered “weaker” than he/she. I’ve certainly done it. But I’ve also spent a lot of time thinking about the exact, precise meaning of this term. What does it mean to really “hate and distrust” women? What would be the response to such a core belief? I remember the moment that I read a quote from David H. Hwang: “Pleasure in giving pain to a woman is not that far removed I think, from a lot of male experiences” (Cody 24). It was as if I had to confront the untenable, the unthinkable, pure evil. The enjoyment of inflicting pain. That a brilliant male playwright writes from this awareness, admitting this misogynistic impulse, however consciously or

unconsciously it may exist in the culture, elicited a tremendous sigh of relief for me that someone else finally said it, that it came from a man, and validates my own experiences and observations of this unbelievable truth.

I have pondered malignant narcissism and how it provides a carnival of rationales for those it has seized: emotional and physical violence to women, pornography, commodifying and collecting women, prostitution--and then there's "fantasy" women (or men) to pick from, too. I also had gone so far as to consider, if they've sampled all of the above, then what's a true misogynist to do? What's left? What about then, the joy for the true narcissist potentially offered by cloning, allowing penetration of oneself forever? Where do they get this stuff? But don't they care about the poignant loss of never knowing the surrender and sweetness of love, I asked myself?

Refusing reconciliation, and understanding the equality of male and female, is a choice that our culture rejects outright, choosing instead pretense and fantasy, refusing a scrutiny of the social, political and media-created constructs of gender, race, age and class that distorts truth, creating a playground of gloomy power for the few and denial of dreams, and yes, survival, for the many.

While studying Medea in a class at VCU, someone remarked, "feminists condone murder." Stunned, I felt it prudent to offer a definition of feminism and realized that I had to struggle to come up with one. Finally I looked in Webster's: "the theory of political, social and economic equality of the sexes" (422). Sounds fair. But the torrential histrionics of contempt for those who support this "theory" is a loud and accepted voice in our culture and not only shapes my worldview but infuses everything I do, whether I want

it to or not. The multitude of masks people don in order to silence the reasoned call for human rights is impressively imaginative. Cunning. Deliberate. But this particular week, there arrived at my door a sudden onslaught of pithy quotes that denigrate the integrity of women: “Hell hath no fury...”(tell it to Nicole Simpson and all the dead wives who dared to dump someone); “women talk too much” (How many women have heard that line just before being bashed over the head, literally? Go to any battered women’s shelter and you’ll meet one.) Women are irrational, oh the mystery of women, you’re too emotional, indecisive, wishy-washy, etc. etc. etc. To live in a such a world of clichés and negative stereotypes—to hear them for a lifetime—and not be influenced consciously or otherwise by this voice, whether offered under the guise of a “joke” or with red-faced rage, simply isn’t possible. All of our prejudices are the filter through which everything must pass. My keenest interest is in looking at those who express an appalling lack of empathy and hold in contempt any human condition that they themselves have not experienced.

Then there were bizarre discussions of “powerful women.” Charlize Theron in the film Monster. Thelma and Louise. I know a number of powerful women and to my knowledge none of them are thieves or serial killers. They’re not even aggressive. Why is a woman perceived as powerful when she becomes a distorted version of an ugly male? Where did THIS come from? How about power with people rather power over people? To love and endure in spite of suffering is true power.

In thinking about women’s lives, I am reminded of Adrienne Kennedy’s thoughts about race relations—just substitute “women” for “blacks” and the point is the same. “It doesn’t matter that there are a few more doctors, a few more lawyers, a few more people

who become millionaires, all these athletes, whatever. To me that has nothing to do with that elemental attitude toward us. I feel that American blacks, we are group of people that white America still craves to stigmatize, to put in a category and keep in a category, and that is all I have to say. I feel that very strongly. I experience it every single day”

(Cummings 1). Me too. With every breath I take.

It was from this perspective that I enthusiastically suggested a project that was intended to promote the feminine voice and present an evening of theatre devoted to women. Many of my colleagues were quite interested in participating and thus The Force of Fornes: Staging Women’s Lives was born. Two one-acts by Maria Irene Fornes—Mud and Summer in Gossensass—an unusual pairing of Fornes plays, were staged in Newdick Theatre. The gritty bleakness of Mud and the frolicsome lightness of Gossensass offered a compelling sampling of Fornes’ unique genius and the talent of graduate students in the Theatre program.

I had no idea when I suggested this project that it would not only initiate a serious questioning of my own artistic lens as a director, but also would challenge my personal views of feminism, theatre, and truth. It also caused me to question my political and spiritual beliefs, and how dramatically the world had dared to change without my notice.

It was from this personal and creative paralysis that this project begins.

CHAPTER 1 Mud

Maria Irene Fornes states,

I don't think I'm writing about *women* deliberately. I'm not making a statement. But then, again, I'm making the supreme feminist statement in that a woman is usually the central character of my plays. When the main character is a man, you don't think that the play is about men, you think it's about humanity. The man represents the human being. Any relationship, say, between a man and a woman in the play is considered normal. But if a woman is the central character and has a relationship with a husband or lover, then it seems to be about a *woman* having a relationship. In my plays, the women take over. They are the human being. In Mud for example, people have said it's about a woman oppressed by two men. I was amazed the first time I heard that...(Interviews).

It was only in the midst of directing Mud that I realized the full impact of Fornes' notes. Delving deeper into the work as the process unfolded, I began to see that it was much more than a story about a woman and the oppression didn't come from the men in the play. Mae, Lloyd and Henry are, in common, starved – starved for more than just the meager material comforts they manage to scrape together, but more bitterly starved for a life beyond the limiting horizons of their bleak lives. Hence, Mae's passion to be filled by the sacred is all the more poignant, whenever she eagerly enjoins Henry to say “grace,” as

is her palpable thirst for knowledge and the wider, higher world books represent. Indeed, her plight is the plight of so many women, as Fornes also says, and the playwright honors that struggle by centralizing Mae in the play:

It says something about women's place in the world, not because she is good or a heroine, not because she is oppressed by men or because the men 'won't let her get away with it, but simply because she is the center of the play. It is her mind that wanders throughout the play, and the whole play exists because her little mind wants to see the light, not even to see it because she wants to be illuminated, but so she can reverse it (Fornes Interview 166).

The play, then, impelled by this one woman's yearning and that of the equally desperate men in her life, is about the starvation of the mind, the soul, the psyche. And that tragedy is a universal one. Stylistically and thematically, I'd been attracted to it from the beginning. As a director and writer, despite having worked on edgy projects about such difficult experiences as the struggle of Bosnian refugees and people living with AIDS, my own preference had been for working in comedy. Hence, I was drawn to the challenge of Mud's darkness – its intense ugliness, savage humor, the contrasting lyricism of its monologues, and the intriguing photographic freezes between scenes. But it took actually grappling with the play in rehearsal to realize the limitations of the feminist view. The psychic and physical poverty the play depicts isn't only that of the marginalized today; rather, all of us – and the planet itself - now are imperiled by the forces of greed, power, and ego. This expansion in perspective began my journey of rediscovery, reconceiving my

own feminism, as well as feminist politics, theory, and theatre in general. How could they be reinvented for the world right now?

The headlines were bleak while we rehearsed – the insanity of war in Iraq, the beheading of hostages there, pandemic disease in Africa, bitter polarization on the homefront. Our work absorbed us: bringing these animalistic and instinctual characters to life, developing the cadences of the steady beat of their ritualistic monotonous activities that interestingly counters their erratic changes in mood. The humor – potty-mouthed word-slinging a la Edith and Archie Bunker - sometimes relieved the intensity, but overall, the pathos prevailed: the sadness of lives fuelled by desire and attachment, but ultimately denied real love. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs informed my thinking: I saw these characters as stuck in the mire of merely satisfying their “deficiency needs” for bodily comfort and security. Only tentatively did they reach out for acceptance -- while Maslow’s “higher needs” of esteem, knowledge, beauty, self-actualization, and self-transcendence seemed painfully beyond their grasp (“Maslow’s”).

Why? This question animated not only my reflections on Mud but my quest to find out where we all are today politically, spiritually, and psychologically, why “ism” politics and art no longer serve us in an era of global crisis, why a new vision of theatre is necessary for a new time. Corporate scandals so abounded that it was impossible to view each one as an exception; the corporate system in its entirety must be scrutinized. I noted, too, a disheartening cross-over of public, corporate “me-above-all” thinking into private life, an observation that Fornes herself had made about the state of the world today. “The most alarming change is violence,” she first said. “The second is dishonesty, the belief that

it's all right to lie about anything just to grab a little more, to feel a little more on top of things, that you can violate anyone and anything to feel a little more powerful" (Speaking 112).

Against that prevailing dishonesty, I began imagining a Theatre of Truth. The insights of specifically feminist activists and artists, of course, are necessary to its development, as are the voices of all the oppressed. But as feminism's struggle has been subsumed, as have those of all the "isms," into a universal struggle first for survival and then for the higher needs of beauty, self-actualization, and transcendence, attachment to any self-serving form of identity politics has become self-defeating.

CHAPTER 2 Rethinking and Redefining

Beyond Theory: Making Sense of Today

Introduction

Assessing the Mud experience entailed reconsidering the validity and efficacy of various critical approaches to a text like Fornes'. To what degree were they helpful in envisioning the play and the playwright's intention, to assisting an original interpretation of the work, to shaping its performance, and to facilitating a rich, exciting and transformative encounter of the audience with the work?

Certainly, feminist theory factored into the work on Mud. For years, it has been the bedrock of my political, spiritual and aesthetic vision. Despite, however, the remarkable insights it has provided, in what specific ways did it address the needs of audiences and theatre practitioners today, and how exactly did it serve the development of a Theatre of Truth? In what ways, too, did postmodernist critical theory as a whole address such needs?

For the last quarter-century, postmodern critical theory has pervasively influenced theatre practice and criticism. Exceptionally prominent in humanities departments in academia, it has also deeply penetrated popular culture. While its challenge to hegemonic politics and culture has been valuable, postmodernism's philosophical basis is highly questionable. Saussure's structuralist insistence that "the individual never encountered the

real world, only a version of it mediated by sign systems,” is contradicted, for example, by the world’s wisdom traditions, both Eastern and Western (Counsell and Wolf 1). Louis Althusser’s conception of the self as wholly a social construct and Jacques Derrida’s insistence that “all statements about truth and reality are linguistic constructs” deny power to both the individual self and to the search for meaning, a search that is one of the primary purposes of transformative, activist art and theatre (Brockett and Findlay 430).

Whereas feminist theory might have its limitations, its way of thinking suggests possibility and hope. Too much of postmodern critical theory, however, appears ultimately defeatist and despairing, based on a worldview that disallows the sacred, the effectiveness of personal action, the possibility of genuine ethical consensus and the fostering of community based on the assumption of all spiritual traditions that soul, not merely history or culture, is something we all share.

In the following, a select number of feminist theoretical insights are affirmed that continue to encourage the development of vital contemporary political theory. The considerable wisdom in the intersection of feminist theory and postmodern critical theory is also discussed. Finally, by delineating the weaknesses of postmodernism as an all-embracing critical tool, it is understood that a new form of theatre can be fostered only by re-conceiving the world in ways it has failed to do.

Examining Feminist Theory

At its core, feminist theory, in all of its many permutations, serves a single end: the demand for full equality voiced originally in 1792 by Mary Wollstonecraft in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. Critiquing the central texts of hegemonic culture and decoding paternalist thinking and ways of seeing, it both challenges patriarchy and suggests ways to subvert it, as well as offering suggestions for chronicling and celebrating women's experience outside patriarchy. It ranges from Kate Millett's analysis of sexual politics to Mary Daly's gyn/ecological spirituality to Sheila Rowbothan's study of how "capitalism and patriarchy interlock" (qtd. in Davis 61). And, with Laura Mulvey's central observation that conventional image-making always regards the female as "an objectified other," its analysis of aesthetics has uncovered the essentially sexist, dehumanizing and alienating thinking that lies at the root of most mainstream art (186).

When it comes to drama, Tracy C. Davis locates feminist criticism of theatrical tropes as rooted in a strong realization that Aristotelian theatre, the theatre from which all subsequent Western theatre would flow, has little to say to or about women. Instead, it's about highborn male individuals assailing gods and Fate. She goes on to say that most theatre perpetuates the stereotype that it's males who inhabit the public sphere, females the private one and that in most cases "there seems to be agreement that representations of sexuality and gender are and have been male constructions (representations of, but not by, women)" (60). Marie-Claire Pasquier then asks the fundamental questions: "Who is theatre for?" and "Who makes it and defines its terms?" (qtd. in Davis 64). Obviously, theatre that

aims to represent reality as it is must incorporate the voices of the majority of the world's population, and yet, says Rachel Koenig, hegemonic ideology, either overt or internalized, relentlessly operates to silence those voices. As she writes,

The censor, operant in self and in society, was both attracted to and compelled to silence those elements of [artworks] which were most deeply connected to female sentience and experience, those elements which either criticized or questioned male power and authority, and those elements which truthfully revealed male vulnerability (qtd. in Davis 66).

In the past twenty years, feminist theory has joined deconstruction in fruitful ways. Janelle Reinelt is among the critics who have pointed out the similarities, for example, between feminist theatre and deconstruction in their attempts to unravel hegemony and deconstruct performance codes of the prevailing (male) culture (100). Postmodernist feminist Luce Irigaray has illuminated the endless ways in which men commodify women and Hélène Cixous has offered the critical insight that masculinity and femininity are generally – and ultimately falsely – perceived as binary oppositions (Counsell and Wolf 58). Their peer, Judith Butler, has exposed the fact that “disciplinary production of gender effects a false stabilization of gender in the interests of the heterosexual construction and regulation of sexuality within the reproductive domain.” (73).

And yet Reinelt finally insists that feminism is incompatible with “the truth-denying aspects of deconstruction” (103). In fact, she says, feminism opposes deconstruction in significant ways, insisting that history actually exists, but must be changed, that truth can be arrived at (through political consciousness and change), and that

the individual *does* exist, and isn't, as deconstruction holds, wholly a socially-produced construct.

The inadequacies of feminist theory are essentially those of any “special interest” theory, any way of thinking that insists on an “identity politics” that may preclude taking a larger view. Its occasional myopia about other forms of oppression than those caused by gender bias, oppression specifically caused by economic scarcity, and ethnic or religious bias, emphasizes its insufficiency as an exclusive critical method. And yet it remains a powerful tool for critiquing hierarchy and hegemony. The same, however, may not necessarily be said about postmodern critical theory.

Why Postmodern Critical Theory No Longer Works

Postmodern critical theory is outdated. A primary analytical tool of theatre practitioners, critics and academics, it is no longer adequate to grapple with the complexities of a global situation that has radically changed since its advent nearly 30 years ago. Its essentially destructive impulse foreclosing too many possibilities for sociopolitical and aesthetic change, its analysis has proved too narrow to encourage a Theatre of Truth that aims to reflect current reality and foster hope in a world imperiled by corporate dominance, rightwing politics, fundamentalism and economic scarcity. Like Marxism, with which it shares a materialist blindness about life's transcendent dimension, postmodern critical theory has proved itself another “god that failed,” to borrow Arthur

Koestler's poignant phrase. Scholar Virginia Scott has roundly and amusingly assailed the method's prose style, its Frenchifying of English and its contorted, hyphenated constructions (189). And Terry Eagleton, among others, has launched a trenchant critique of both its content and what it fails to address. Eagleton writes, "It has been shamefaced about morality and metaphysics, embarrassed about love, biology, religion and revolution, largely silent about evil, reticent about death and suffering, dogmatic about essences, universals and foundations, and superficial about truth, objectivity and disinterestedness" (101). Eagleton's critique is especially credible as the professor of cultural theory at Manchester University was one of postmodernism's leading lights, his 1985 Literary Theory: An Introduction required reading on any number of syllabi. "Critical theory as we have it promises to grapple with some fundamental problems," he now writes in his 2003 After Theory, "but on the whole fails to deliver" (77).

Originally, deconstruction, as practiced by Derrida and Michel Foucault, subversively attempted to dismantle "grand narratives," from literary and philosophical classics to political and psychoanalytical theories. Any product of human thought, from King Lear to the Mona Lisa to Ronald Reagan's inaugural address to Star Wars, came to be read as "texts" subject to rigorous deciphering. Postmodernism opposed the modernist criticism that preceded it, in that the latter, as developed primarily by T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, treated artworks as inviolably inspired. Great art, modernists held, was timeless and, in its rendering of universal truths, also ultimately impersonal. Hence examination of artists' intention, politics and psychology should play no part in any artwork's analysis.

Postmodernism, by contrast, scrutinized texts as examples of coded political and psychological assumptions. Employing a hermeneutics of radical doubt, it maintained that hardly anything is what it seems. No text can be read straightforwardly or on its own. Instead, each is a coded product of its creators' and audience's politics and psychology. Postmodernism's politics was leftist, in that its first target was the controlling narratives of the West; in his histories of madness, sexuality and punishment, Foucault was instrumental in claiming that traditional Western thought hardly reflects the disinterested truth it purports to report but instead facilitates power politics. In the end, it's propaganda. This analysis, feminist theater scholar Janelle Reinelt points out, mirrored Marxism's as a critique of power (100). As Eagleton writes, it "opposes what it sees as elitism in culture, tends toward cultural relativism, and celebrates pluralism, discontinuity and heterogeneity" (13).

Dismissive of any Platonic notion of eternal truth, it was impatient, too, with any philosophical concept of essential human nature. Althusser, in particular, asserted that there is no essential "self." Instead, each of us is an ideological construct, a product of the culture which shaped us. The material or economic determinants which make up culture-- basically class, race and gender--create us: there is no "us" beyond or outside them. And since culture is produced by what Althusser terms "ideological State apparatuses" -- everything from the family to the church to the media to the educational and legal system -- we are those force's pawns and puppets (35). We may hope to resist culture's coercion, but it's a losing proposition and finally a suicidal one. For if we are merely ideological

composites, there is no “we” that can resist. We’re shadow boxers, fighting only versions of ourselves.

Here, then, may be the fatal flaw in the philosophical bias which propels postmodern thought. If we have no autonomy, we can take no responsibility for our actions and ourselves. Since postmodernism argues against human freedom – either Sartre’s existentialist insistence on the challenge of freedom or traditional theology’s assumption of free will – we are free neither to change ourselves or our world. Mark Lilla asks in The Reckless Mind: Intellectuals in Politics,

What remains? If deconstruction throws doubt on every political principle of the Western philosophical tradition—Derrida mentions propriety, intentionality, liberty, will conscience, self-consciousness, the subject, the self, the person, and community—are judgments about political matters still possible? Can one still distinguish rights from wrongs, justice from injustice? Or are these terms, too, so infected with logocentrism that they must be abandoned? Can it really be that deconstruction condemns us to silence on political matters? (179).

If postmodernism can be seen as “the contemporary movement of thought which rejects totalities, universal values, grand historical narratives, solid foundations to human existence and the possibility of objective knowledge,” it leaves us very little to build on (Eagleton 13). By dismissing any form of essence it necessarily refuses to confront core questions about the spiritual or universal, about personal morality, the existence of evil or the possibility of truth. And this, as Eagleton admits, “is a rather large slice of human

existence to fall down on.” He goes further: “it is also... rather an awkward moment in history to find oneself with little or nothing to say about such fundamental questions” (102).

In an age when the forces of power, economic, political and religious, willfully eschew responsibility, insisting that their actions are the byproducts of forces beyond their control – either market pressures, the nation’s supposed will, or the whims of a patriarchal god – a sense of autonomy is the last thing we can afford to sacrifice. Instead of the autonomous person posited by the world’s perennial philosophies both East and West, a real person engaging in life-and-death struggles both moral and political, postmodernism posits a rootless consumer. As Eagleton writes: “The creature who emerges from postmodern thought is centerless, hedonistic, self-inventing, ceaselessly adaptive. He thus fares splendidly in the disco or supermarket, though not quite so well in the school, courtroom or chapel. He sounds more like a Los Angeles media executive than an Indonesian fisherman” (190).

Indeed. For all their romanticizing of the exotic, the “primitive” and the marginal, postmodernists tend to be leery exactly of those indigenous people they valorize: traditional peoples, after all, are hardly divorced in general from spirituality, from a constant awareness of such ultimate concerns as death and suffering, from nature both in the environmental and human sense, and from cultures that are less consumerist than ritualistic.

Perhaps Eagleton’s most trenchant observation may be his judgment that postmodern thought divorces us from the body. The human body – especially the

oppressed, overworked, decidedly mortal body – can be seen as a central locus of exactly that form of ethics that postmodernism rarely deals with. Ideology, not ethics, has been the focus of cultural theory – both because postmodernism finds specifically sexual morality the province of benighted conservatives and because of the ethereality of its over-intellectualizing method. And the theory's failure to address the realm of personal or individual ethics had had remarkably deleterious effects.

Not only, however, is the body a universal that unites us, so, too is the environment – and postmodernism's general silence about issues concerning the wholeness of the planet has been telling. Neither the body nor the environment is characteristic of the "Other" that so preoccupies postmodernism. When it comes to the body and the planet, there is no "Other." They can become the focus of a workable ethics spurred on by that sense of compassion that is also missing in postmodern thought.

Philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's wisdom that "I borrow myself from others," amplifies our understanding of the need for compassion as also expressed by the Buddhist sage Nagarjuna, "for whom the self has no essence because it is bound up with the lives of countless others, the product of their choices and conduct" (Eagleton 212). A notion of individual self, then, may not be necessary to ensure the development of a vibrant ethics, but a realization of community is. And for that community to make any sense, it must consist - even while postmodernism doesn't think it does - of human beings free to make choices beyond cultural constrictions and whose experience is actual, not merely ideological or theoretical.

Postmodernism no longer works because it fails to address perennial questions and because the world it originally deconstructed has significantly changed. It has not kept pace. For one thing, the “grand narrative” to which it was most closely aligned, Marxism, has essentially disappeared as a viable force. Like other forms of scientism, from the Enlightenment-derived belief in unchecked technological progress to the materialism undergirding Freudian analysis, Marxism seems like a holdover from a discredited age. Then again, the grand narrative of fundamentalism that prevails from the White House to Bosnia to Baghdad has been largely ignored by postmodernism, a remarkable post-9/11 oversight but an understandable one given the theory’s historical incapacity to analyze religious matters in any significant way. Finally, the grand narrative of capitalism has so triumphed that postmodernism’s attempts to deconstruct it now seem like the gnawing of gnats on an elephant’s leg, or the ineffectual blowing of hot air.

Reality In The New World

Introduction

Envisioning a new approach to theatre means understanding a new world. I was struck at the superabundance of studies that either analyze the contemporary zeitgeist or attempt to redefine reality in ways appropriate to our current moment. From Thomas Friedman’s The World is Flat: A Brief Look at the Twenty-first Century to Benjamin Barber’s Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism are Reshaping the World to Robert Wright’s Nonzero: The Logic of Human Evolution, such commentaries underscore

our urgent need to come to terms with an increasingly complex world, driven as it is by contending and often confused ideologies, economic crisis, a sort of millennial panic, and a general sense of things falling apart. There was recently even a surprise hit film called What The Bleep Do We Know? that consisted largely of interviews with theologians and scientists about redefining reality through quantum physics and spirituality. I can't speak to the validity of its findings, but the interest in redefining reality seems rampant.

The way that world looks is largely a mediated, artificial construct. Thomas de Zengotita's Mediated helped me understand not only the aesthetics of virtual reality, but also the philosophical malaise that pervades it. As against that reality, one that at root panders to the narcissistic, desiccated self – a passive, lethargic self that is alienated from nature, authentic experience and embodied, in-the-moment life - Mary Settegast's Mona Lisa's Mustache and Ken Wilber's extraordinarily wide-ranging body of work offer an integral vision. Fusing the discrete realms of science and spirituality, right- and left-brain thinking, perennial philosophy and futurist politics, the integral vision sees the fragmented world that deconstruction analyzes as a locus of possibility and hope. Its motivating energy a synthesis of Eastern and Western thought, the integral vision might offer us, I believe, our best chance against the force that now prevails globally against all forms of life.

Here I examine ways in which the world that has changed in the twenty-five years since deconstruction began.

The Mediated World

Lacking a metaphysical dimension or compelling ethical vision, postmodernist theory can no longer analyze current reality fully nor help us to transform ourselves in a changing world. Nor are special interest “ism’s” - particular, doctrinaire ideologies, whether feminist or Marxist or classically liberal - sufficient to challenge hegemonic forces that threaten *all* of us - people of color, women, gay rights advocates, the marginalized, the poor, the oppressed, and the planet itself. Corporate power and the political structures that serve it have become not only pathological forces but also self-destructive ones. Unchecked power inevitably savages the powerless, but its ways of acting and thinking ultimately damage even the powerful themselves. We need, then, new analyses, descriptive and prescriptive.

With his 2005 study, Mediated: How the Media Shapes Your World and the Way You Live in It, anthropologist and Harper’s Magazine contributing editor Thomas De Zengotita offers one such analysis. Updating Christopher Lasch’s The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations of 1979 and Marshall McLuhan’s Sixties study of television, the “cool” medium that, along with its myriad audiovideo spin-offs, has become to the industrialized world what the Bible was to the Reformation, Zengotita asserts that our cradle-to-grave absorption in broadcast waves has created a new kind of human being, a “flattered self.” That self is wholly acclimated to and unconsciously dependent upon ceaseless artificial stimulation. As Zengotita writes, “The flattered self is a mediated self, and the alchemy of mediation, the osmotic process through

which reality and reproduction fuse, gets carried into our psyches by the irresistible flattery that goes with being endlessly addressed” (7). It’s as though the witty anti-Aristotelian insistence of such fin-de-siècle aesthetes as Oscar Wilde and Huysmans has come true: that rather than art imitating life, it’s the other way around. Even our autobiographies have become artificial. Snatches of television memories, of old pop songs and stylized cinematic behavior, of film stock and videotape, make up a post-Jungian collective unconscious for citizens of the fully mediated First World. Basically, Zengotita maintains, mediated “means dealing with reality through something else” (8). He adds that, “mediation refers to arts and artifacts that represent, that communicate – but also to their effects on the way we experience the world, and ourselves in it.”

Conceptually, mediation and its analyses aren’t altogether new. Henry Adams in his Mont Saint Michel and Chartres of 1904 and Johan Huizinga in his 1919 The Waning of the Middle Ages describe the medieval cosmos as a construct of symbols, liturgy and the veneration of saints: people saw reality through a sacramental lens. And in 1970 Louis Althusser insisted in Essays on Ideology that citizens of the late twentieth century and beyond are essentially constructs, “social subjects” of ideological apparatuses engineered by the controlling State. The values and ideology of mediation circa 2006, however, aren’t as immediately apparent. Today’s mediation serves profit, the corporation, and the perpetuation of media themselves, but often seems on the surface user-friendly and value-free. Mediation, at its root, is a state of being. As Zengotita queries, “Ask yourself, is there any thing you do that isn’t essentially mediated, anything you don’t experience reflexively through some commodified experience of it?” (9)

In a mediated world, behavior becomes performance, from the spiking of the ball in the NFL that appears spontaneous but mimics another televised athlete's celebration, to pandemic celebrity imitation, to the against-your-will apathy that descends whenever you hear "statistics about AIDS in Africa for the 349th time, or see your 927th picture of a weeping fireman or an oil-drenched seabird..." (23). As with the 500 cable-TV channels Bruce Springsteen spoofs, mediaworld offers a groaning smorgasbord of options. It thus realizes the "anything goes" aesthetic that Jean-Francois Lyotard detected in 1979 and reinforces the consumerist ethos that qualifies as the closest thing denizens of the developed world have to a sense of personal identity. Our response to such a dizzying plethora of choices? A shrug, generally. As Zengotita puts it, "The slang expression 'whatever' distills the situation into a single gesture." (15).

Medialife alienates us not only from unpracticed expressions of joy or grief or empathy, but from Nature, as well. As a form of mediation, the cult of Nature as Innocent Beauty and quasi-religious sanctuary may have begun with Goethe and such Romantic poets as Wordsworth and Shelley. Now, however, life in the wild, unless packaged as a Grand Canyon tourist extravaganza or I-Max eye-feast, can seem merely strange to us. Zengotita imagines a befuddled captive of mediaglobe, his car broken down, stuck somewhere on the side of the road near a woods. "You have no radio, no cell phone, nothing to read, no gear to fiddle with. . . You are *so* not used to this," he writes (130). Bertolt Brecht once recommended employing the Alienation Effect to render the commonplace sufficiently strange so that we could study it afresh; now getting stuck anywhere without media support makes the very world of reality seem unreal and

curiously alien. In unmediated Nature, Zengotita holds, "...everything is very specifically exactly the way it is – and none of it is for you. Nothing here was designed to affect you" (130). There is no "spin," no ironic twist. It's neither presented, nor represented; it just is. Talk about an affront to the outraged, flattered self.

Uncommodified Nature, wherever it exists, can provide us a way out, however temporary, from mediaworld. Our experience of it, bracing, refreshing, if on occasion shocking, can provide us entry into reality "as it is." We can bathe in an ever-renewing, perennially appealing world whose grace is that it has nothing specific to do with our appetites. Corporations may see it as an unrefined factory; cinematographers as scenery; chambers of commerce as a marketing opportunity, but, in its essence, Nature isn't here in any utilitarian way to serve us. And that's why it can be celebrated, safeguarded, and nurtured -- as an avenue of transcendence and a connection to Truth.

The Great Outdoors as a place and a state of mind may help wean us from media dependency especially when the less-than-great indoors is now so compromised. With every wall-socket stuffed with cords connecting computers to the World Wide Web and TVs to satellites, mediaworld has taken up unbudgeable residence in that most sacrosanct of sites, the American home. And the quotidian family is now helmed by mediated creations. Ever since the Sixties, when a burgeoning counterculture dismissed moms and dads as unhip, nay-saying, authority figures, child-rearing has become what Zengotita terms "ironic parenting" (35). Rendered self-conscious by a million-dollar industry of instructional manuals and workshops, many of today's parents are radically uncomfortable about assuming parental roles tainted by their memories of their own remote or controlling

fathers and mothers. When called upon to do so they frequently respond to their puzzled children in a winking, we're-all-in-on-the-joke manner. Often, they're not so much dads as "dads." Emblematic of the unmoored family, Zengotita holds, are the dead-on caricatures of dead-end domesticity: Homer, Marge, and Bart in television's The Simpsons. As he writes,

adults in this show are weak, conniving, hypocritical, vain, confused, deluded – at best, they are well-meaning but inept. Political and cultural figures and ideas are constantly invoked, only to be relentlessly mocked. There is no guidance to be had, no meaningful future, nothing to aspire to, nothing to make you better than you were (63).

If most adults, then, have capitulated to mediamind, largely because they've lived so long and unthinkingly inside it that they can no longer develop immune responses against it, children can, like Nature, offer us another gateway to Truth. Part of the appeal of parenting is the delight in living afresh through children's eyes and, indeed, children, because of their relative lack of saturation in mediated reality, are able better to apprehend the world in unaccustomed ways. Granted, social forces militate against this freshness; Zengotita talks about an enforced cultivation of niceness starting in pre-school as an attempt to domesticate the id (72). He talks too of the prevalence of narcissism-inducing pedagogical methods, a "curriculum loaded with inherently self-flattering assignments that ask a child to represent herself" – her *self*, rather than the world and others. He assails, then, the self-esteem-at-all-costs ideology of an educational system that creates a culture of entitlement (75).

And yet children themselves, their eyes originally open to raw Nature, to the excitement of playing, to inventiveness as yet unshaped by convention, to states of unlearned feeling, can offer us guidance in reclaiming unmediated vision. Zengotita may not couch this insight in philosophical language, but it's an insight that's emphatically Platonic and in essence spiritual. Rousseau, for one, with his appreciation for the "noble savage," understood the pregnant power of the unspoiled mind, and Jesus reminds us that we must become as little children to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Prompting and protecting original vision demands real work and vigilance because, at least by the time of our teenaged years, we've become almost unalterably mediated. Zengotita points to language, and specifically the trademark adolescent usage of the omnipresent "like." "Adeptly employed," he writes, " 'like' acts as a kind of quotation mark in conversations that no longer work discursively, but work more like TV commercials or movie trailers. The word introduces a tiny performance rather than a description, a "clip" displaying a message in highly condensed gestural and intonational form" (85). As such, "like" functions as the farthest thing from a facilitator of individual expression; rather, it's the mantra of a tribal code, the ultimate monosyllabic in-joke among the favored and the brattish.

Engaging in such semiotic gamesmanship, Zengotita briefly resembles the postmodernists from whom he generally distances himself. He joins such thinkers as Jean Baudrillard in regarding life – medialogy, that is – as largely a series of dazzling surfaces (Simulacra). This leads to the Warholian switch that's occurred especially among the young -- the veneration no longer of heroes but celebrities. Heroes had to *do* something;

stars merely shine. And the cult of heroes drew power from the fact that Lincoln or Muhammad, Amelia Earhart or Admiral Nelson were by and large remote from us. They glimmered in the spotlight, then retreated into the mists of myth. They weren't victims of the familiarity that breeds contempt. We didn't know what they ate for breakfast or where they shopped. Celebrities, however, we see all the time. Their essential role is merely to be seen. And television, the primary medium which presents them, after a while flattens them.

The one genre of programming that does echo genuine hero worship, Zengotita points out, is sports. Athletes obviously demonstrate real skill, even if it's the faint shadow of a Greek warrior's daring. And NBA games and the Olympics occur *live*, in the moment. Instant replays can recycle such moments, but the actual homerun or touchdown happens in real time, unedited, for real. Ditto, for broadcasts of concerts. Something unexpected can occur – either Janet Jackson's "wardrobe malfunction" or a never-to-be-repeated tenor sax solo.

This brilliantly obvious observation – that *live* performance can provoke emotional investment and identification in ways canned events never can--is claimed by theatre as its basic edge in the jammed market of media options. Of its nature, theatre is up close and personal; the sweat on the actors' brows is actual, the onstage poetry of the performers is, like the music of the Philharmonic at Carnegie Hall, here and then gone. Its evanescence lends it urgency and poignancy. On a depth level, the fleeting quality of theatre reminds us of our own mortality - and that *memento mori* gives theatre a tonic, distinctive strength. Accidents, too, can happen - dropped lines or flubbed lighting cues – and it's only with

live performance that we can participate in unmediated inspiration, those rare moments when performers and audiences unite in exceptional experience.

The fact, too, that theatre often broadcasts its artifice paradoxically underscores its honesty. No one is tricked into believing that the dialogue is unrehearsed. No one, unlike the gulled audiences for Jerry Springer or World Wrestling Federation, thinks that plays take place spontaneously. Instead, theatre exists in its own realm of re-creation nightly created, of art made immediately real, of stories walking and talking, of deep thought revived and deep emotion freshly enacted.

At its core, Mediated's critique of the bedazzlement of surfaces can be read as an extended riff on the age-old Platonic suspicion of the manufacture of images. In Plato's cosmology, where embodied, mortal men and women are flawed copies of spiritual ideals in the same way that transitory earthly beauty only reflects immutable transcendent Beauty, it makes sense that characters in stories or images in visual art must be regarded warily. They are copies of copies, after all – pretty far removed from timeless Truth. And, too often the artist's ego, his flawed motivation and imperfect wisdom, can create copies that distract us from that Truth.

The Integral Vision

Hope In The Dissolving World

Now, more than hitherto, there occur shocks, surges, crossings, falls, and almost scrambles, creating thus a different space, a space scattered and unknown, space enclosing

spaces, superimposed, inserted, polyphonic perspectives. -- Henri Michaux, Emergences, resurgences (qtd. in Settegast 107).

In her study of the world as it now is, Mary Settegast agrees with the deconstructionists that reality now is fragmented and unmoored, but finds in that dissolution possibilities for growth, new vision, and hope. Like Thomas de Zengotita, she is sharply aware of the omnipresence of seductive, dazzling surfaces, but, looking beneath them, still finds deep verities that transcend appearances. A cultural historian whose Plato Prehistorian: 10,000 to 5000 BC in Myth, Religion, and Archaeology of 2000 first suggested the breadth of her thought, she combines economic, aesthetic, post-Freudian, and political analysis to redefine reality in her Mona Lisa's Mustache: Making Sense of a Dissolving World of 2001. Her title taken from Marcel Duchamp's notorious gesture, eighty years ago, to playfully desecrate a central icon of Western art, Settegast looks at the dissolution of forms from a kind of Cubist multi-faceted perspective, seeing evidence of the phenomenon in the breakdown of traditional social codes and mores, the erosion of gender distinctions, and in chaos theory and ecological crises. Her vision, though, ultimately is expansive, lacking either the airless ennui of postmodern critical theory or the defensive parochialism of identity politics.

Her comprehensiveness and freshness are due in large part to her capacity to think extremely broadly across time and space. While a subset of critical theory may indeed be postcolonial studies, the postmodernist method is generally myopic when considering cultures outside the developed world, not to mention woefully neglectful of spiritual

tradition. As such, it fails as a legitimately global theory. The same can be said for an analysis of reality as essentially mediated: it's an idea that hardly applies outside the privileged First World. By bringing to bear an awareness of primordial mythic consciousness and a learned familiarity with Eastern thought, Settegast's commentary is novel: truly multi-cultural and distinctly original.

She begins by acknowledging, with considerable concern, the exploded quality of modern life, as prophesied by W.B. Yeats in "The Second Coming" 85 years ago: "Things fall apart. The center cannot hold..." (36). As she writes, "Cultural historians have borrowed the term 'indeterminacy' from physicists to describe tendencies in our society toward heterodoxy, pluralism [and] randomness" (10). She then turns for a "wide-angle" view of where we are to comparative religious scholar Rene Guenon, who analyzed historical periods by means of the Hindu "world ages" or yugas. In The Holy Science, Swami Sri Yukteswar maintains that we are now in Dvapara Yuga, a time of rapid development in knowledge, but that vestiges cling to us from Kali Yuga, the darkest of ages, whose nadir occurred in the period immediately before Christ (7). According to the Vishnu Purana, in Kali Yuga there is "no one, anymore, in whom enlightening goodness prevails, no real wise man, no saint, no one uttering truth and standing by his sacred word. The seemingly holy brahmin is no better than the fool. Old people, destitute of the true wisdom, try to behave like the young, and the young lack the candor of youth" (qtd. in Settegast 64). Certainly, ours is a time when Orwellian "double-speak" seems all too common, exemplified by Vice President Dick Cheney's comment about the Guantanamo

Bay detainees: “They’re very well-treated down there. They’re living in the tropics. They’re well-fed” (Cheney “Interview”).

Confusion, dissolution and double-speak prevail today, however, because we may be in the throes of developing a new kind of consciousness. Here, Settegast discusses the implications of The Ever-Present Origin, a seminal 1949 work by philosopher Jean Gebser. For him, consciousness evolves in stages: magical, wherein events are seen as the work of uncanny forces; mythic, which finds meaning in stories of gods; and mental, our current consciousness, which looks for rational understanding. Privileging any of these forms of thinking leads to conflict; re-imagining their uses, however, can be a creative act. And we may be approaching a new, syncretistic consciousness: integral thinking, which allows the free expression of all stages without any single one seizing dominance (109).

Current examples of magical thinking include an interest in shamanism and the occult; mythical thinking still resides in organized religion; mental consciousness, emphasizing exclusively “the valueless facts, the material and rational,” rules science and drives capitalism (Settegast 110). And yet these forms of thinking are beginning to cross-pollinate. In quantum theory, the 20th century offspring of Newtonian mechanistic physics (historically a mental mode), the assumption now prevails that reality is indivisible – a way of thinking that harks back to magical and mythic modes. It recalls the motto of Hermes Trisgemistus, the legendary founder of Western magic, who bridged physics and metaphysics, “As above, so below.” Gebser writes: “Magic offered a blueprint of a unified world in which division – and therefore alienation – was impossible. This blueprint, which had no more substance than a dream, now has become a scientific aim” (qtd. in Settegast

109). We also see a return to mythic consciousness even in the West, the home of what Settegast terms “male reductionist rationality,” with a revival of interest in the Goddess, Jungian psychology, the wisdom of ritual, and Joseph Campbell’s myth studies (109).

Gebser found evidence that the individual mind thrives on a multiplicity of perspectives not only in Cubism, but quantum physics, T.S. Eliot’s use of mythic modes in contemporary expression, and Arnold Schoenberg’s freeing of the dissonance of Western music from its classical constraints. His insight is paralleled by postmodernist Walter Truett Anderson’s claim that the mind is “naturally predisposed to function in many modes” (qtd. in Settegast 110). All these advances, then, may herald the dawn of integral consciousness.

Settegast credits the 1960s counterculture and then postmodernism for raising, as Hans Bertens puts it, “revolutionary cries for liberation from the constraints – intellectual, social, and sexual - of a narrowly rationalist modernity” (qtd. in Settegast 110). Further she cites naturalist Gregory Bateson as exemplifying the integral model: one of his students described Bateson’s thought as based “on the lessons of myths, the wisdom of the ‘primitive,’ and the algorithms of the heart” (qtd. in Settegast 110). We may in time, then, be in for a reconciliation at last of Descartes’ “cogito ergo sum” and Pascal’s “the heart has reasons the mind knows not of.”

But change can be convulsive. Gebser warned “that it is not uncommon for the anxiety caused by the fragmenting of a given consciousness structure to generate reversions to earlier modes that promise salvation from the ravages of the dissolving structure” (qtd. in Settegast 111). Examples of this embattled regression include Islamist

fervor, Benedict XIV's reactionary papacy, the American Religious Right, academic mocking of anything deemed "New Age," the backlash against feminism, and the rationalist worship of the computer.

Such reactionary responses, indicative of the birth pangs of a new form of consciousness, may be inevitable. But the way that modern science has reconceived time itself may be, Gebser holds, the most significant indication of the possibility of a dawning integral age. Historically, the West has thought of time as linear, but Einstein reconfigured time and space as a continuum, and saw time as the "fundamental constituent of the world...immeasurable and not amenable to rational thought" (qtd. in Settegast 111). This "eruption of time" may be the primary challenge to rationalistic thinking, but the "courage to accept along with the mental time concept the efficacy of magic timelessness and irrational mythical temporicity makes possible the leap into a rational time freedom" (qtd. in Settegast 112). Gebser believed that we can come to "realize that the disruption of space by time does not lead to emptiness or nothingness but to transparency" – his term for seeing the self and world clearly and realistically and putting "man in a position to perceive the whole." (qtd. in Settegast 112). This integral way of seeing, of course, resolves opposites, much as Spinoza once did in insisting that there is only *one* substance: "*Deus sive Natura* – God and the cosmos are one and the same" (Osbourne 238).

Settegast sees Gebser's insights as paralleling those of a diversity of thinkers from Rudolf Steiner to Aurobindo Ghose to Teilhard de Chardin. And she concedes that regarding the self and the world from a variety of perspectives has been a postmodern

tactic. But the integral consciousness she speaks of is emphatically not the solely socially constructed reality of postmodernism. She says:

From the times of Plato and the Hindu Vedanta to the present, the idea that the world of appearances is an illusion has been repeatedly affirmed by the mystics of every tradition. What they also affirmed, however, was the very unpostmodern idea that behind this illusory construct lies a hidden, implicit, and more fundamental reality (126).

Integral consciousness, then, is one that goes beyond appearances, but insists on a meaningful reality.

That meaningful reality is *now*. As the new century hurtles onward, with old structures disjointing, decomposing and disappearing, Settegast concludes by seeing the future as a place wherein absolute attention must be paid to the moment, to reality as it is. The paying of that attention, she believes, can become a spiritual, transforming action:

The collapse of personal identity markers, the postmodern image of ourselves as simply ‘intersections of competing discourses,’ could be facilitating the traditional spiritual practice of continually releasing whoever and whatever we think we are, in order to meet the next situation clean... if time is accelerating, and with it unpredictable change, the only secure place to be is clearly the present moment. The Zen master advises us to stop longing for some idealized time when everything will be secure and simple: ‘Life, change, movement, and insecurity are so many names for the same thing.’ The forms that we see dissolving have never been anything more

than patterns of movement, which must flow out – ‘die’ if the moment is to live, to keep flowing in (137).

Embracing the possibilities for change offered by the chaos of the present moment, exploring ways of thinking long repressed by the dominant rationalism of the industrialized West, reclaiming forms of ritual and indigenous wisdom discredited by First World hegemony, and returning to an awareness that creative thought, by its very nature, crosses borders, offers us real hope for prevailing in the truly multicultural twenty-first century. New times demand new insight, and an integral vision is the only one comprehensive enough to apprehend the true complexity of current reality – and then offer solutions to transform it.

Fostering Transformation

To produce viable contemporary theatre, we as its practitioners must wrestle toward an understanding of current reality as it is, an enterprise that requires research, study, an open mind and the constant paying of attention. Surviving and then prevailing in that reality requires transformation – first, the transformation of the self, and then, if we accept seriously our roles as agents of change, the transformation of current reality through activism. To do so we need a teleology, a goal, a workable vision. In more than a dozen books – The Spectrum of Consciousness, A Brief History of Everything, and The Marriage of Sense and Soul: Integrating Science and Religion chief among them – American

philosopher Ken Wilber delineates exactly one such vision, a vision comprehensive enough to serve as a blueprint for the kind of healing and action the world now demands.

Now termed “the integral vision,” this blueprint isn’t his alone. Rather, it is bolstered by a diversity of thinkers, from evolutionary biologist Rupert Sheldrake to Vietnamese astrophysicist Trinh Xuan Tuan to Matthieu Ricard, a molecular biologist-turned-Tibetan Buddhist monk. Drawing inspiration from Arthur Koestler’s pathfinding The Act of Creation, a sweeping 1964 synthesis of scientific, philosophical, and aesthetic theory, the integral vision aims at the redemptive reconciliation of apparently opposing ideologies. It aims to find common ground. For Sheldrake, it means exploring what he calls, “morphic resonance,” the theory that studies “the influence of like upon like through space and time,” and hence suggests that on a molecular level all life-forms are more connected than we once presumed (111). For Ricard and Tuan, it means stressing “the concept of interdependence that states that everything depends on everything else,” a concept shared by Buddhist spirituality and quantum physics (“Science”). For Wilber, the integral vision means uniting the strengths of what he sees as “Western Enlightenment,” a triumph in the material world of the scientific method and liberal democratic ideals, and “Eastern Enlightenment,” empirically proven metaphysical methods to facilitate internal change. From such a union, the integral vision holds, will come a workable worldview and political strategy that can strive to cut through apparent contradictions, challenge misunderstanding, and encourage global change.

The dysfunction of the modern West, Wilber holds, is the product of what philosopher Max Weber terms “the disenchantment of the world” (155). That world is

characterized by the death of God and goddess, capitalist brutality, the loss of meaning, the fragmentation of the ecosphere, and rampant materialism. And yet the modern West has given us, too, the ideals of equality, freedom, and justice, innovations in medicine, biology, physics, and chemistry, and “the end of slavery, the rise of feminism, and the universal rights of mankind” (Marriage 11). Accepting Western thinking part and parcel, as today’s conservatives largely do, denies the havoc it has wreaked; and yet dismissing it entirely – as do certain Islamists and various radical Western thinkers – means returning to a world of even greater hierarchy, ignorance, metaphysical despair, and violence.

By the same token, the Eastern achievement is also an ambiguous one: the triumph of Gandhi’s *satyagraha* in India cannot answer legitimate criticism of continuing Hindu-Muslim conflict and pandemic poverty in the subcontinent, nor can the spiritual achievement of Tibetan Buddhism excuse the country’s suicidal capitulation to Communist invasion. There must be a way, then, to consolidate the gains of Eastern and Western ways of thinking.

For Wilber, that means re-examining a model that Huston Smith, the world’s foremost authority on comparative religions, refers to as “The Great Chain of Being,” a model that characterizes all the world’s wisdom traditions in their search for truth. Simply put, it insists that “reality is a rich tapestry of interwoven levels, reaching from matter to body to mind to soul to spirit” (Marriage 6). In his famous treatise on the Great Chain of Being, Arthur Lovejoy maintains that this view of reality “has been the dominant official philosophy of the larger part of civilized humankind through most of its history” (Marriage 8). Materialist thinkers from Marx to Freud, of course, have countered it by insisting that

there is no soul or spirit. And flesh-denying religious extremists have broken the Chain by denying the importance of matter, body and mind. Postmodernists have ignored the possibilities of the model by questioning the very existence of truth, a self-contradictory position: “The difficulty is that, in its totalizing attack on truth (“There is no truth, only different interpretations), extreme postmodernism cannot itself be true” (Marriage 35). And yet ascending the Great Chain of Being is possible by exercising three ways of knowing that are innate to human beings: empiricism (the eye of flesh), rationalism (the eye of mind) and mysticism (the eye of contemplation) (Marriage 36).

Each of these modes of knowing has its own method. Each mode is humanly possible, and it’s in the confusion or denial of any of them that conflict begins. Empiricism is monological; when a scientist investigates, say, DNA or the data of the human senses, she doesn’t have to talk to the object under scrutiny. Rationalism is dialogical. Requiring two subjects talking *to* and *with*, it’s the realm of interpretation, hermeneutics, symbolic meaning, and mutual understanding. No one here can be treated as a object. Contemplation is translogical; beyond monological empiricism and dialogical rationalism, it opens directly to Truth itself. An essential problem of the modern world, then, is that “all higher modes of knowing have been brutally collapsed into monological and empirical science” (Marriage 38). This collapse forecloses rational dialogue and denies centuries of universal Truth arrived at through contemplation. Re-opening ourselves to these modes of thinking, then, can be both healing and liberating.

Individual transformation becomes possible when we clarify our practice of these modes of knowing: respecting and investigating empirical reality, accessing Truth through

contemplation and mediation, and rationally discussing our findings in both the material and metaphysical realms, as well as our experiences and perceptions of each other. Global change and the possibilities for global consensus can begin by uniting the translogical and dialogical modes. What's necessary in the religious realm is that we give up attachment to specific myths or rituals or stories and seek instead the bedrock *experience* contemplatives regardless of sect, century or geography have shared. Furthermore, translogical awareness:

accepts the general tenets of rational political liberalism (not prerational mythic reactionism), and, within those freedoms, pursues spiritual Enlightenment in its own case; and, through the powers of advocacy and example, encourages others to use their liberal freedom – the Enlightenment of the West – in order to pursue spiritual freedom – the Enlightenment of the East (Marriage 212).

The political implications of legitimately deploying both dialogical and translogical modes of knowing are seismic, indeed revolutionary. For it's in this practice that we can find a hope for reconciliation between East and West, the pre-scientific way of thinking of so many civilizations of the developing world and the post-mythic way of thinking that's common to the industrialized nations. We can even find hope of resolution between the best impulses of the political Right and Left. As Wilber concludes: "The result, we might say, is a liberal Spirit, a liberal God, a liberal Goddess. In common with traditional liberalism, this stance agrees that the state cannot legislate the Good Life. But with traditional conservatism, it places Spirit – and all its manifestations - at the very heart of the Good Life" (Marriage 212).

The integral vision, then, short-circuits the anomie of meaninglessness that deconstruction too often prompts. Its respect for the body and the earth acknowledges Zengotita's insight that finding a way beyond mediated reality means reclaiming authenticity by honoring our experience of the body, Nature, and live performance. The integral vision also heeds Zengotita's prescription for reclaiming authenticity by learning from children's fresher way of apprehending reality: contemplative practice encourages exactly that way of regarding reality. The integral vision, too, works toward transcending ideologies and special interest politics not only by insisting that Truth, universal and timeless, exists beyond ideology but by offering methods of accessing it. The "ism's," then – whether Marxism, capitalism, feminism, fundamentalism, scientism, or any other – meet their greatest challenge in facing the integral vision, one that offers the range and clarity to accept the legitimate core of their critiques, while steadfastly opposing each "ism's" violent claim to exclusive correctness. To paraphrase Karl Marx, the integral vision says to us, "Seekers of the new world, arise! You have nothing to lose but your 'isms!'"

The Rise of the Psychopathic Daddy: Profit, Patriarchy, Pathology and the Corporation

The hegemonic ideologies postmodern critical theory critiques and the virtual reality portrayed by the media are essentially products of a single force. The world's oppressed people and the planet itself are its victims. Political activists in the industrialized

and developing worlds contend against it. And the integral vision faces its greatest challenge in the face of that force. That force is a contemporary patriarchal construct that I will call The Psychopathic Daddy, and its instrument is The Corporation, the omnipresent weapon of globalized capitalism

Canadian legal theorist Joel Bakan, in his The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Power and Profit, a 2004 study accompanied by an illuminating documentary film, exposes today's multinational corporation as a predator whose legally defined mandate is to pursue self-interest at all costs. Governments, through deregulation and privatization, have bowed to that self-interest and the results have been disastrous, not only for the poor, the oppressed and the earth, but often also for the shareholders of corporations themselves. For the corporation, unchecked, is both a destructive and self-destructive entity, amoral and clinically pathological. Today's greatest threat to global harmony, global corporate capitalism operates exactly in a fashion that Thomas Hobbes, in his Leviathan of 1651, described as a "quest for power after power that ceaseth only in death" (qtd. in Barber 32).

In Jihad Vs. McWorld, Rutgers University political science professor Benjamin Barber sees the corporation as the essential element of that empire he calls "McWorld," a Macintosh/McDonald's/MTV ideology that, "tied together by communications, information, entertainment and commerce," is "pressing nations together into one global theme park" (4). And a not very fun theme park, either. Indeed, for Naomi Klein, whose 1999 manifesto, No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies, has become a kind of Declaration of Independence for the anti-globalization movement and its young activists, monitoring the corporation and its means, motivations, and ultimate madness is now the

political struggle that has subsumed all others. While in the mid-nineties, “campus politics was all about issues of discrimination and identity – race, gender, and sexuality, ‘the political correctness wars,’” in a scant five years, the socially conscious had begun “broadening out to include corporate power, labor rights, and a fairly developed analysis of the workings of the global economy” (xix).

The rise of the Psychopathic Daddy coincided with the modern world’s beginning, the 1712 invention of a steam pump produce coal more efficiently (Bakan, 9). The Machine Age, with its imperative to cut man hours and ultimately replace man power, was born, and with it, the corporation. A corporation – a group of individuals allied for a common purpose and chartered by a state – was a legal instrument formed to achieve an end that tended to benefit a community, raising a bridge over a river, for example. But with the passage after the Civil War of the 14th Amendment, the nature of the corporation began to change. The Amendment mandated that no state could deprive a person of life, liberty or property without due process of law. Thirty years after its passage, in hopes of expanding their companies’ power, corporate lawyers contrived to define the corporation legally as “a person” (16). Corporations, according to political philosopher Noam Chomsky, then “were given the rights of immortal persons, but a special kind of person designed by law to be concerned only for its stockholders,” not the community or workforce (Corporation).

By concentrating on their own profits to the exclusion of any other concern – a concentration that is legally binding – corporations have perpetrated lay-offs, union busting, toxic waste, harmful synthetic chemicals, habitat destruction, factory farming, and animal experimentation, as well as such other biosphere destruction as CO2 emissions,

forest clear-cutting, and nuclear pollution. And since the Psychopathic Daddy needs no passport, and corporate power now trumps political power, “when it comes to acid rain or oil spills or depleted fisheries or tainted groundwater or fluorocarbon propellants or radiation leaks or sexually transmitted diseases, national frontiers are irrelevant” (Barber 12).

Dr. Robert Hare, Ph.D., consultant to the FBI on psychopaths, believes that the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders can diagnose the corporation-as-person as afflicted with Antisocial Personality Disorder – in common parlance, the corporation-as-person is a psychopath. The symptoms listed are: callous unconcern for the feelings of others; incapacity to maintain enduring relationships; reckless disregard for the safety of others; deceitfulness; repeated lying and conning others for profit; incapacity to experience guilt; and failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behaviors (Bakan 56).

In terms of “disregard for the safety of others,” Samuel Epstein, Professor Emeritus of Environmental Medicine at the University of Illinois, notes that “I have no doubt that industry is largely responsible for an epidemic in which one in every two men gets cancer in his lifetime, and one of every three women gets cancer in hers.” The consumer-protectionist Multinational Monitor argues indeed that corporations flaunt “social norms with respect to lawful behaviors,” and as proof compiles extensive lists of corporations fined for legal infractions, fines in the millions written off as just another cost of doing business (Corporation).

Chomsky argues that while individuals who work for corporations may be

as upstanding as anyone else, just as individual antebellum slaveholders may have been decent church-goers, “in the institutional roles, they’re monsters, because the institution is monstrous.” Not only monstrous, maintains Dr. Vandana Shiva, a physicist and ecologist, but perpetrators of environmental suicide. She points to the development by biochemical firms of “terminator technologies,” seeds that, by means of a “suicide gene,” produce crops in one season only and then destroy themselves (Corporation).

Sociologically, the corporation-as-person is not only a psychopath but an alien, estranged from contemporary demographic reality. Says activist filmmaker Michael Moore, “Most of these corporations are run by rich white men means [and] are out of touch with what majority reality is, because the majority of the planet are people of other colors, women, the poor, and the working poor” (Corporation). Given such a demographic, its unsurprising that, as Klein insists, of all the social movements that began in the Sixties and Seventies, “none was more anti-consumerist than the women’s movement” (288).

Maude Barlow, Chairperson of the Committee of Canadians, maintains that “there are those who intend that one day *everything* will be owned by somebody,” and that all of our relationships will ultimately be commercial ones. As evidence, we can look to the example of Chris Barrett and Luke McCabe, the first corporately sponsored college students: after spying the Nike logo on Tiger Woods’ cap, the pair solicited corporations for funding; First USA was happy to oblige. To borrow the slogan of Forbes.com, “Proliferate Capitalism,” then, may be the zeitgeist’s most obvious sentiment. Not only has the corporation invaded the most quotidian of family rituals, the children’s birthday party – an AoL/Time Warner subsidiary charges \$10,000 for the rights to use the song

“Happy Birthday” in a movie – but corporation mentality has become the world’s dominant philosophy. As Ira Jackson, Director of the Center for Business and Government of Harvard’s Kennedy School, says, “Capitalism is the global theology, but it’s a theology without morality. And, curiously, capitalism, a system driven by competition, has no competition itself.” Remember, as Chomsky and Moore hold, that such philosophy may bill itself as “value-free,” but its purposes are life-transforming. Chomsky, referring to standard business-school literature, talks of the corporation’s need to:

construct ‘created wants,’ to impose on people what’s called a ‘philosophy of futility,’ to focus them on the insignificant things of life such as fashionable consumption. The idea is to have individuals who are totally disassociated from one another, whose conception of themselves, the sense of value, is determined just by how many created wants they can satisfy (Corporation).

Driving the marketing of ‘created wants’ is high-tech “branding,” the goal, says Melanie Klein, of vanguard corporations, who “don’t produce products, they produce ‘brand meaning’” (Klein, 33). A successful brand can proliferate far beyond its original product. Klein points to Disney, which has evolved from Mickey Mouse manufacturing to the creation of its own “real world,” the Disney-brand town of Celebration, Florida, home to 5000 citizens. Advertising, always a form of corporate art, has now, become a form of street theatre. Joseph Reseler, CEO of Big Fat, Inc., specialists in “undercover marketing” maintains that New Yorkers might witness eight or nine daily examples: a couple walking

a downtown, gushing over a CD and mentioning that it's available at Amazon.com might actually be actors targeted to reach unsuspecting passersby (Corporation).

According to Jeremy Rifkin, President of the Foundation of Economic Needs, the corporation is moving to seize the very stuff of life itself. He cites a legal case wherein General Electric and a Professor Chakrabaty petitioned the U.S. Patent Office to patent a microbe helpful in cleaning up oil spills. The Office refused, claiming that the microbe was not a product, but a life-form. However, the U.S. Customs Court of Appeals disagreed. Finally, the Supreme Court ruled that biotech companies can patent any living thing except a full-birth human being. Rifkin maintains that "in less than 10 years, a handful of companies will own, directly or through license, the actual genes that make up the evolution of our species" (Corporation).

Politically, the corporation has been promiscuous in its choice of bed-fellows. Multinational Monitor keeps tabs on companies that yearly do business with governments whose ideologies we oppose, and Joel Bakan wonders, "Is it narcissism that compels corporations to seek their reflection in the regimented structures of fascist regimes?" (Corporation).

Perhaps the most notorious example, according to Edwin Black, author of IBM and the Holocaust, was the fiduciary relationship of "Big Blue" and the Third Reich. Historian Howard Zinn points out that Mussolini and Hitler both had American corporate clients because those regimes "kept workers under control and were good at getting rid of dangerous left-wing elements. Investment opportunities abounded" (Corporation). Concentration camps, Black holds, were rendered ultra-efficient by their use of IBM

punch-card data-processing, serviced monthly by IBM technicians who visited the camps (Bakan 88). Jungian psychologist James Hillman points to the camps as extremely effective death factories, and sees the efforts of camp commanders as examples of Aristotle's "efficient cause" gone psychopathic – the commanders doing a good job, even though the job was genocide (Hillman 42).

I identify the corporation with The Psychopathic Daddy not only because of the high demographic concentration of males in power positions and corporate boards, but because the entity operates in classically patriarchal fashion – exercising its urge toward dominance while simultaneously broadcasting its hypocritical benevolence. Like the Vatican, it presumes unilaterally to know what's best for us; like classic totalitarian regimes, it operates without consent of the governed. Dr. Hare astutely targets its psychopathic character; Ira Jackson names its way of thinking as a perverted theology. Chomsky's point that the corporation's bid to instill in consumers a "philosophy of futility" reminds us exactly of paternalist efforts to damage the self-esteem of children, only, in this case, the children are us (Corporation).

In the next chapter, I'll look at diverse responses from various female playwrights to the power that The Psychopathic Daddy attempts to wield. Those responses will help see ways to fight that power, and to create theatre guided by the integral vision that may be our best hope to prevail against The Psychopathic Daddy and instead nurture a world in keeping with a return to respect for Divine Mother.

CHAPTER 3 Theatre of Truth

Seeing the Light and Hoping: Adrienne Kennedy

With a path-finding canon of nearly twenty plays wherein “personal reflection becomes cultural collage,” along with her experimental autobiographical writing and lifelong commitment to political art grounded in personal transformation, Adrienne Kennedy offers a host of illuminating insights that can serve collectively as a significant map toward the development of a Theatre of Truth (Diamond 126).

A challenge to Settegast’s “male reductionist rationality” of the Psychopathic Daddy, a valorization of the wisdom of Body, Nature, and Childhood, a lyrical exemplifying of polyphonic expression that rescues magical and mythical consciousness, the work of this triple Obie Award-winning playwright embodies the Integral Vision in action. Impatient with identity politics while passionately voicing the concerns of the oppressed, honoring equally American, European, and African genius, critically aware of the mediated quality of modern-day experience, and rich in a reconciling exploration of

gender archetypes, Kennedy's vision is polyglot, heterogeneous, and comprehensive but firmly committed to the realization of universal truths.

Critic Elin Diamond summarizes the Kennedy aesthetic as "female consciousness as a collage of history and fictional biography; swiftly changing scenes marked by temporal and spatial distortion; terrifying surreal images, both verbal and material; an astonishing linguistic range, from self-descriptive prose to poetic incantation" (125). Kennedy herself terms her plays "states of mind," and critics have found in the oeuvre "an amalgamation of symbolism, absurdism, expressionism, and surrealism" ("Stretching"). Critic Werner Sollors, in The Adrienne Kennedy Reader, goes even further, seeing in Kennedy's drama affinities to such contemporary titans as Sam Shepard, Wole Soyinka, and Ntozake Shange, and lauding her "surrealistic dream plays" and "hauntingly fragmentary" dramas for their success in echoing "the entire dramatic tradition" (vii).

Encouraged by her mother, a teacher, to read at age three, Kennedy began exercising her expansive vision early. Born in 1931, she grew up in an integrated Cleveland neighborhood in a politically conscious family. They spent summers visiting her wealthy white grandfather in Montezuma, a primarily black, Georgia hamlet where she detected "a strange mesh of dark kinship between the races" (qtd. in Sollors viii). Fairy tales enraptured her; from them, she learned that "there was a journey in life that was dark and light, good and evil, and people were creatures of extreme love, hatred, fear, ambition, and vengefulness, but there was a reward if one kept seeing the light and hoping" (People 8). This awareness would serve as a template for her entire artistic enterprise. In church, she learned that "I belonged to a race of people who were in touch with a spirituality and

mystery beyond my visible sight” (People 14). While black pride was her keystone, it was the reading of English literature that enabled her to feel a human connection beyond ethnicity, geography and time. “I read Jane Eyre and learned that life was to be a great journey...that would be spelled out with love, loyalty, devotion, loneliness, madness, sacrifice, and happiness, and that very life had been experienced by an English girl one century before” (People 14). Her sense of the relatedness of all of life intensified in high school World History class, where her teacher “was the first person whom I ever heard say that every event was connected to every other event. And that there was a “universal unconscious... the most exciting class I’d ever had” (People 64).

If literature as identification and transcendence became part of her *mythos*, so did the lure of mediated experience and the hagiography of Hollywood. From Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire, she discovered that “the sublime could exist in your daily life,” but that “gracefulness must be sought” (People 26). Horror films like The Wolfman introduced her to the psychological and aesthetic possibilities of the ancient mythology of shape-shifting: “Metamorphosis and that change of identity would, twenty years later, become a theme that would dominate my writing. The characters in my plays and stories would also change personae at an alarming rate” (People 26). And from forms both literary and cinematic, the movie of Dickens’ A Christmas Carol, for example, she intuited the appeal of re-conceiving time and space. “Ebenezer Scrooge lived out different periods of his entire life in one night, a concept that was so appealing that it would haunt me twenty years later in my own writing, a concept I would work very hard at capturing, living through epochs of your life within an hour or an evening or a night” (People 31). In her plays, Kennedy

would later audaciously warp and conflate time and space, as in her setting for 1965's The Owl Answers: "The scene is a New York subway is the Tower of London is a Harlem Hotel Room in St. Peter's" (In 26). Such a strategy exactly captures that sense of "arational time freedom" that Gebser sees as presaging an age of integral thinking (Settegast 111).

Inspired first by the psychological intensity of Edward Albee and Tennessee Williams, she began, after moving to New York and then taking formative trips to Europe and Africa, searching for a freer stylistic approach. At the Museum of Modern Art, Picasso's *Guernica* provoked her awareness that "the concept of placing my characters in a dream domain seemed more and more real to me," while Jackson Pollock's abstract canvases caused her to think "continually of how to write (was it possible?) without a linear narrative" (People 100). And Federico Garcia Lorca provoked her playwriting. "After I read and saw Blood Wedding, I changed my ideas about what a play was. Ibsen, Chekhov, O'Neill and even Williams fell away. Never again would I try to set a play in a 'living room,' never again would I be afraid to have my characters talk in a nonrealistic way, and I would abandon the realist set for a greater dream setting. It was a turning point" (People 108). Lorca had a profound understanding of the distortions in humanity that result from oppressive religious and social rituals. Rather than focusing on the oppressed as heroine, he portrays the reality of cruel and despairing souls that the patriarchy creates.

Kennedy's aesthetic, spiritual, and political apprenticeship bore fruit with her 1962 debut, Funnyhouse of a Negro, which tells of a black college student, Sarah, and her birth into violence. Her light-skinned mother and her father, a dark-skinned revolutionary, travel to Africa. The father in a drunken rage one night rapes the mother, and Sarah is born. She

watches as her mother descends into madness and her father hallucinates. In the end, she rejects him; he commits suicide; and Sarah then kills herself, unable to come to terms with her past. The shocking story is compelling enough, but what helped Kennedy win her first Obie and announce her arrival as a force of whom critic Michael Feingold would later write, “with Beckett gone, Adrienne Kennedy is probably the boldest artist now writing for the theatre,” was her radical re-invention of character (qtd. in Sollors xv).

Sarah is presented as four aspects of a self – male and female, black and white, Western and African, mythic and historical, negative and positive. She becomes, by turns, the Congolese revolutionary Patrice Lumumba, a Christ, both sinister and redemptive, the imperialist Queen Victoria, and the Duchess of Hapsburg, whose husband was executed by Mexican revolutionaries (Sollors ix). Such a politically and stylistically innovative strategy, writes critic Herbert Blau, made Kennedy “one of the first playwrights to represent the self in multiple characters, an apt metaphor for her experiences as both an African American and woman in this society” (qtd. in Kolin 2).

But this strategy also has deeper, more universal implications. Sarah’s aspects “embody contradictions, black and white, male and female, colonialism and independence,” and her tragedy lies in not resolving them (Sollors ix). Sollors writes that the “dominant issue is the recognition of myself or paradoxically, the “recognition against myself,” and, yet, in spiritual terms, that recognition may not be a “paradoxical” challenge (ix). Instead, in psychologist Carl Jung’s eyes, it entails an interpreting of Jesus’ radical injunction to “Love your enemies” as a call first to reconcile the enmity among aspects of the self before attempting to transform outer conflict (Jung 109). The Sufis, too, insist that

the essential conflict of Islam's *jihad* or "holy war," is the war against the battling aspects of the self. By locating oppositions in a single character and seeing a universal tragedy in her failure to reconcile them, the play can be read as an urgent call for developing the integral vision that fosters such reconciliation.

Kennedy's debut also presents her astonishing symbolical imagination. Take, as a single instance, her use of bird imagery. Inspired by Psalm 55, Giotto's Holy Spirit, African bird masks, Poe's "The Raven," and the spiritual "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child," such imagery also alludes to the African-American traditional motif of the Flying African (Sollors ix). This syncretistic symbol-sense, magical, mythical, and proof of that "universal unconsciousness" she had discovered in high school, became a Kennedy hallmark, yet another of her prophetically global ways of thinking.

As far back as 1957, Kennedy was drawn to asserting the values of diverse cultures, yet sensed the limits of purely "mental" thinking: "I'd often stare at the statue of Beethoven I kept on the left-hand side of my desk. I felt it contained a 'secret.' I'd do the same with the photograph of Queen Hatshepsut on the wall. I did *not* then understand that I felt torn between these forces of my ancestry... European and African . . . a fact that would one day explode in my work" (People 96). This impulse parallels the integral vision's attempt to resolve "Western Enlightenment" and "Eastern Enlightenment" and also illustrates Gebser's modes of consciousness. In its trust in the uncanny, we find "magical" thinking, and in Kennedy's connection to African and Biblical sources we find "mythic" consciousness in abundance -- as critic Martin Duberman holds, "the dream, the myth, the poem are her domain" (qtd. in "Biography") Most significantly, the playwright's work

discloses evidence of what Wilber terms “translogical” consciousness, an ultimately mystical form of creativity that transcends the monological “eye of flesh” and the dialogical “eye of mind.” Her access to the perennial translogical method is suggested by Kennedy’s underlining, in the Fifties, of a key passage in a book on Socrates: “... there are means by which the soul can be restored to remembrance of her forgotten divine origin...” (People 92). And evidence that her way of working transcends the rational is confirmed by her notes to her 1987 collection of one-acts: “I am at the typewriter almost every waking moment and suddenly there is a play. It would be impossible to say I wrote them. Somehow under this spell they become written” (ix).

If Funnyhouse of a Negro introduced some of Kennedy’s central concerns – the suffering caused by unreconciled cultural, ethnic, gender, and political opposition – as well as her use of the multi-faceted self, natural and supernatural imagery, and the theme of the shattered child, her third play, A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White, expands her vision in ways that also prefigure the development of a Theatre of Truth. Clara, the protagonist, is emphatically a product of the mediated world, both a celebrant and victim of Hollywood myth. As critic Philip A. Kolin writes: “Through Kennedy’s transformative drama, a black woman, Clara, enters the white world of the ‘sanitized spectacle of romance,’ recasting her selves through such prominent actors as Bette Davis, Jean Peters, and Shelley Winters” (102). As Kennedy says, “Clara lets her movie stars star in her life” (In 87). Marlon Brando, Montgomery Clift and Paul Henreid are also “characters,” their outsized dimensions underscored by Kennedy’s note that “supporting roles are played by the mother, the father, the husband” (Sollors xii). Within this mediated world, Kolin writes:

“identities in this Kennedy play, as in her others, leak into, melt into, merge with, collide with and assault one another. We are constantly asked to shift our views of identity, who, where, why, how, when” (101).

The drama begins in a hospital lobby where Clara waits to see her brother, mangled in a car wreck. Again, Kennedy’s autobiographical inspiration figures heavily, as her own brother, who died in 1972, was seriously injured in an automobile accident. Clara, “becoming” Bette Davis, embarks on an ocean-liner cruise with Paul Henreid. The shift is startling: the anxious family juxtaposed with the carefree silver screen idols. The journey motif, looming large in Kennedy’s psyche ever since her reading of fairy tales, is central, but this journey doesn’t conventionally progress. Rather, conflating Clara’s everyday domestic struggle with imagery from classic films about love and madness (Now, Voyager), rebellion (Viva Zapata), and love – like Clara’s – gone horribly wrong (A Place in the Sun), it plays out her imprisonment in a fantasyland that in real life is wholly denied her. In the end, Shelley Winters drowns, and the grand ship of the play’s beginning becomes a rickety, death-bearing rowboat. Clara is left with the news that her brother will live, but “brain-damaged and paralyzed,” and as she shares this news with her mother, Clara says that her mother “shook so that I thought both of us were going to fall headlong down the stairs” (In 103). But Clara, the real woman, survives; it’s the movie star, the fantasy figure, who dies.

The pathos here works on many levels. Driven into fantasy, a state she finds both entrancing and unbearable, Clara has assumed a “bit role” (In 81) in the play of dazzling images who “tries to escape but realizes she can coexist only by seeking herself through a

series of (re)presentations of actual stars playing parts in her life. But representation is not reality” (Kolin 102). There’s pathos, too, in the reality that the mediaworld in which her soul has long been drowned is that of the dominant, white culture. Hollywood can create its own reality, but people certainly cannot, not entirely. As playwright Suzan-Lori Parks says of one of Kennedy’s primary themes – the pathos of seeing oneself as misfit – Kennedy’s unraveling of the mediated myth of Hollywood also draws power from the fact that she doesn’t dismiss that myth’s allure. Hence Clara’s pathos is especially poignant as it reflects the sadness of falling “in love with something that didn’t include you” (qtd. in Kolin, 16).

Kennedy’s own sense of belonging has been precarious exactly because of her expansive vision. Transcending Lorraine Hansberry’s gentler social critique and Amiri Baraka’s rage, Kennedy never fit in the context of accepted black theatre. She entirely resists ideological labels. As critic Marc Robinson says, the “guardians of consistency,” found Kennedy insufficiently doctrinaire, as they spent their time disappointedly “wondering what ‘ism’ she fits into” (“Stretching”). Critic Linda Kintz tries to define her as “a feminist in a period of masculinist black nationalism, who was also a postmodern experimentalist in a period of realist political drama and a woman writing very specifically about the physicality of blackness and the bleeding, pregnant female body when theoretical discourse could not account for those differences; it still cannot” (“Stretching”). Her point that critical theory cannot account for the distinctiveness of Kennedy’s creativity is well-taken and confirms also Kennedy’s validity in a post-critical age. But Kintz’s definition itself may be too limiting. Diamond, for example, points out that Kennedy never sees

herself as a postmodernist (126). Other critics maintain that “Kennedy’s works were too black and female for the white avant-garde, too black for feminist theatre, and too avant-garde for the African-American Theatre” (“Stretching”). Certainly, Kennedy, the relentless shape-shifter, defies too limiting an identity by continuing to experiment: even in 1992, critic Nicole R. King commended Kennedy’s The Alexander Plays for introducing theatre “to something altogether new” (qtd. in “Biography”). And yet, this experimentalist respects the past; Kolin in fact argues that “her plays constitute a full-fledged modern attempt at rewriting Greek tragedy,” and her 1980s adaptations of Euripides emphasize her indebtedness to tradition (xii). That past – and that present – for Kennedy, however, isn’t just Western *or* African, it’s the entire world’s. And while Kolin is right to assert that “Kennedy’s plays mourn the tragedies of black women – really all vulnerable women – who are cast into a nightmare world because of racial and gender stereotypes,” the playwright’s advocacy isn’t only of women. (14). Indeed the inspiration of her powerful father figures, from Patrice Lumumba to the memory of Malcolm X in 1968’s Sun, stands as a heroic counterpoint to the belittling Psychopathic Daddy.

Kennedy, then, can serve as one of the chief guides toward a vital theatre for our age because of the essentially prophetic quality of her work – work written from proudly personal insight and then reaching out to embrace universal struggle.

The Wise Child, the Gender Rebel and the Body Politic: Naomi Wallace

In Naomi Wallace's work, such unsparing but life-affirming plays as In the Heart of America (1994), One Flea Spare (1995), Slaughter City (1996), and The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek (1998), gender identities blur and, in a bold reclaiming of magical consciousness, ghosts romance the living as history and the present collide. With issues of class, gender, and power animating her aesthetic, Wallace points to a new theatre of truth-telling, a countering voice to the Psychopathic Daddy and its monological thinking that treats living beings like things. Indeed, Wallace's activist plays can be seen exactly in Hans Bertens' terms, as "revolutionary cries for liberation from the constraints – intellectual, social and sexual – of a narrowly rationalist modernity" (qtd. in Settegast 110).

Against that stultifying rationalism, Wallace musters highly poetic non-linear drama that asserts a metaphysics of the physical. The Body, in fact, as commodity, gendered construct, vehicle for transcendence, and signifier for our common suffering, joy, and hope, is at the crux of her work. So, too, is the honoring of the intuition of children. Specifically, Wallace deploys the Wise Child archetype in her plays, the child who, seeing through sham and hypocrisy, acts as an agent of change.

Wallace, as one of the most unabashedly political of today's playwrights, attacks the Psychopathic Daddy head on. In Slaughter City, in fact, the very personification of domineering capitalism makes a star appearance. Wallace calls him "Sausage Man."

"Myself," he boasts, "I am an innovator. I make something from the refuse in this world."

And there will always be refuse in this world, so there will always be a place for me” (230). For Wallace, then, the exploitation of soul and body by The Corporation is our time’s central tragedy. As she says, “One might fall into total despair at the enormity of global economic and social injustice” (“Grist” 38). Yet activism offers hope. “Folks are finding out, in this world of corporate-sponsored nightmare and poverty,” she writes, “how to build relationships across difference in order to organize resistance” (“Grist” 38).

Organizing resistance requires understanding power’s “means of production,” and economic analysis fuels Wallace’s plays. As she says, “I write about capitalism, because... how we make our way or don’t make our way economically affects all aspects of our lives. That is usually at the base of anything I write” (Greene 451). Yet that analysis moves beyond intellectual understanding toward transformation: “I am interested in conflict, questions, contradictions, and the different possibilities for the transformation of ourselves and our communities” (*Staging* 426). Wallace’s enterprise, then, is to ground the political in the personal in the political, inspiring head and heart alike to action: “I love ideas, but I like trying to put issues of the heart onstage and seeing how those issues are affected by the world around us” (Cummings 346).

Born in 1960, Wallace grew up wealthy in poverty-stricken Kentucky. “I was definitely someone from a privileged background, so I was an outsider in a way,” she recalls (Julian 5). Her father, son of a pharmaceutical heiress, embraced rural life with his working-class Dutch wife and both parents prized political action. Both joined in Vietnam War protests; her mother’s family had hidden Jews in World War II, and Wallace’s father was a Civil Rights activist. Their daughter extended these family values: In the Heart of

America and The Retreating World (2003) are anti-war manifestos, and issues of race surface in both In the Heart of America and Things of Dry Hours (2004). As a girl, Wallace marched in picket lines, carrying a pet sheep bearing an anti-war banner (Cummings 346). Later, she adopted a tarantula, and her affinity for animals shows up in her indictment of Louisville's Fischer Meat-Packing Company in Slaughter City and the rain of pigeon feathers, symbolizing hope, that concludes The Retreating World (Lester 4).

With the 1993 production of The War Boys, about sadistic guards along the Texas/Mexico border, Wallace's meteoric rise began. By the end of the decade, her work had gained such praise as this from The Guardian's Lynn Gardner: "It has the driving political anger and entwining of the personal and political that marked some of the best British writing of the early seventies, the vigor and mystical overtones of raw Sam Shepard, and the grace and sensuality of a poet..." (3).

Her style a socially conscious "magic realism," Wallace is difficult to categorize. She rejects drab Social Realism and the linear plotting and preachiness of doctrinaire political drama, yet addresses the core concerns of political theatre – oppression, its causes, and the need for change. Critic Claudia Barnett terms her a "consummate Brechtian feminist," but she's distinctive, in a feminist context, for the preponderance of male characters in her plays and her specific insight into the male psyche (156). Says Dominick Dromgoole, artistic director of The Bush Theatre: "She presents male violence and aggression without proselytizing about it, but baldly, as it is. She depicts what is despicable with enthusiasm. She understands it better than a lot of men do" (qtd. in Barnett 156). In the Trestle at Pope Lick Creek, for instance, an impoverished father smashes plates to

prevent himself battering his family. And the patriarch of One Flea Spare who both neglects and dominates his wife tellingly illustrates playwright Kate Bornstein's insight that "male privilege is, in a word, violence" (108).

Yet while feminist concerns inspire Wallace, so do all struggles against power. If, as critic Jill Dolan maintains, theatre must now grapple not only with gender but race, ethnicity, and class, Wallace exemplifies today's activist playwright (Dolan 3). And for her, the imprisoning roles of class, gender and ageism, as well as the bravery of the "Other" find symbolic focus in the body. According to director Roy Daniel:

In Naomi's work, something is always being done to the body... It is always being touched, caressed, burned, perforated, poured on and spat on. It's standing in a river of life-and-death fluids, alive to blood, sweat, snot, running sores and oozing wounds. For Naomi, it has to do with making the body – for which read 'class' – burst its bounds. Now here's the catch: it's all in the name of change, hope, possibility (qtd. in Gornick 31).

Seeing the body as a locus of pathos and power, Wallace develops an integral vision that harks back to the image of the unified sexes in Plato's Symposium, the gender-blurring in Virginia Woolf's Orlando, and a line from Shelley that serves as an epigraph to The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek: "Nothing in the world is singular" (282). The body becomes her metaphor for the universal, and for possibility and change. She looks at it first through the lens of economics:

...the way that the body is so overused in this society in terms of selling it, or the way that it labors, or the way the body is used up, by capitalism you

could say, used up and thrown out the back door. How we're these incredible bodies, with this enormous capacity to feel and desire, and how that's destroyed or harnessed for other means, like channelling our desires into buying or consuming" (Julian 8).

While the body can be exploited as an instrument of labor or engine of consumption, it may also be traumatized, Wallace believes, in ways that parallel the insights of philosopher Elaine Scarry in The Body in Pain. The body throughout history suffers outrage at the hands of governmental, economic, racist and gender-constrictive power. In Slaughter City, animals are sacrificed in a holocaust-for-profit, and in the Gulf War drama, In the Heart of America, a Palestinian-American girl is maimed by Arab-bashing youths and a gay enlistee killed by his fellow soldiers, a re-working of the true-life tragedy of Allan Schindler, murdered in Tokyo by a fellow sailor (Clum 425). And yet how we use our bodies can offer us glimpses of deliverance. Two gay soldiers in In the Heart of America, an Arab-American and a "white trash" Kentuckian, violate class and ethnic barriers to find love in the midst of death. And in One Flea Spare, Darcy Snelgraves finds liberation during London's Great Plague through transgressive touch.

Quarantined, Darcy and William Snelgraves hide in their mansion with interlopers seeking shelter – Bunce, a wounded sailor, and Morse, a servant masquerading as her dead master's daughter. The corrupt Kabe stands guard. Her body maimed in a fire, Darcy, sexually alienated from William, is drawn to Bunce. She nurses him, and as he lifts her skirts, she inserts her finger into his wound: "It feels like I'm inside you" (53). The touch reverses gender roles: woman penetrates man. And Darcy reclaims her erotic self. Wallace

shows us “a woman on stage who is complex in her sexuality at a much older age, to show that at sixty-five you can be just as complicated as you are at twenty, if not perhaps more so” (qtd in Baley 249).

Darcy’s gesture parallels an interplay between Bunce and Snelgraves that highlights the use of the body as rebel instrument, a violator of class and status. The merchant needles him about he had employed his “foul and fleshful instrument” during long voyages (48). Bunce then grabs an orange and erupts in gestural outburst that critic John Lahr finds “electrifying” (87).

He takes Snelgraves finger, examines it a moment, then forces it through the rind of the orange. Bunce turns the orange on Snelgraves’ finger, slowly, sensually. Then he pulls the orange off Snelgraves’ finger.

Involuntarily, Snelgraves looks at his wet finger. Bunce raises the orange over his head, squeezes it and drinks from the hole in the rind (One 48).

Bunce’s outrageous action and Darcy’s touch realign power in the Snelgraves mansion. Where once Bunce had been compelled to mop floors, he now spearheads a revolt. As Laurie Stone puts it “The contest ends up four against one: a rich old white guy whose privilege can’t protect him, besieged by females and underclass men” (34).

Chief among those females is intrepid twelve-year-old Morse, who provokes the play’s climax with an assault of truth. Dropping her pretense that she’s a nobleman’s daughter, she curses Snelgrave: “My mother lives in your mouth, and one day she will choke you” (58). Taunting him with Bunce and Darcy’s erotic encounter, she smothers him. Just then, Darcy finds that the plague has seized her and begs Morse for deliverance.

After plunging a knife into Darcy's breast, Morse declaims: "Kabe once said to me, 'Our lives are just a splash of water on a stone. Nothing more.' Then I am the stone on which they fell. And they have marked me. So beware. Because I have loved them, and they have marked me" (74). Only a preternaturally wise child like Morse, the tough and tender boyish girl, can survive this marking and sense this love; only she can endure the paradox of love and loathing that forms the primal human connection.

As Morse and Darcy exemplify, Wallace's female characters are catalytic agents. While indeed she often zeroes in on the male psyche, on "what she cannot know firsthand but seems, nonetheless, to know so well," women mold the contours of her major plays (Barnett 156). For Wallace, the mother of three daughters, girls especially serve as a revolutionary force, wise beyond their years. As the playwright says:

I often see in children a force for refusing to accept the notion that things cannot change, and while some people call it naïve I think there's a courage in the youth that our culture certainly doesn't not value and actively represses. We are an extremely anti-youth culture that sets out to pathologize being young. . . Especially young people who are not privileged, looking at them as a problem, a pathology to be taken care of, to be drugged, rather than a source of incredible energy, creativity and talent. . . (Julian 5).

In The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek, the tale of two thrill-seeking kids attempting to out-race a locomotive, Pace is another tough, boyish working-class girl. Her reluctant partner-in-risk is fifteen-year-old mama's boy Dalton. Their escapade will offer them brief

transcendence of a dead-end 1930's factory town. Eventually they'll be lovers, but their union will hardly be conformist. As Wallace says:

That's why a lot of folks have felt that it's a very queer play in that way. Because the sex that the boy and girl have is not your typical teenager sex when they finally get down to it. Because they are strangled by the norm, what they are allowed to do, what their choices are, which are so few. So it's a boy and a girl trying to break out of how they are meant to interact as young heterosexuals (Julian 8).

In Trestle, predatory capitalism incorporates misery, making the townsfolk cripples, ciphers, or vegetables. Shannon Baley comments:

The real tragedy. . . is not only the ravages of the Black Death or of the American Depression, but also of the crushing economic forces and class-based hierarchies attendant to laissez-faire capitalism that not only denies Pace and Dalton, Bunce and Darcy access to material ease, but cuts them off from themselves and, to paraphrase Terry Eagleton, their "sensual capacities (238).

While Dalton disavows Pace as a girlfriend he's drawn to her brash charisma. Earlier, she'd raced the train with another boy, but, checking on her, he'd tripped, falling to his death. Now, Pace wants to try with Dalton. Impatient at his timidity, she runs alone, but demands that he watch. She "longs to be looked at, but not fetishized" (Barnett 165). Nor is her desire just personal: it conveys the need to be "seen" on the part of the oppressed female whom capitalism renders well-nigh invisible and the patriarchal gaze sexualizes

into a dispirited object. Terrified, Dalton refuses: “No! No way! I won’t be your fucking witness” (337). When she does set out, he averts his head and she falls. Traumatized, he blames himself and is charged with murder. And Pace haunts him. For not only had she urged him toward risk, she’d uncannily – indeed, magically - awakened his body and psyche. Requiring him to strip while she watched, she’d insisted he accept her kiss, not on his mouth, but the back of his knee. And she’d flooded his reveries: “I could touch myself at night and I didn’t know if it was her hand or mine. . . I don’t know but sometimes I put my hand. Inside myself. . . I was wet. Just like a girl. It was. Yeah. Like I was touching her. Just to touch myself” (310). As, in a dream state, Pace and Dalton exchange or even fuse psychic and gender identities, Wallace employs the erotic to serve, in Baley’s words, “a didactic, utopian, and distinctly feminist purpose” (244).

In the end, Dalton communes with Pace’s ghost “in a place that is the both the past and the present” (340). She carries a dress on which she commands him to kneel. “I’m hard,” Pace says. “I want to be inside you.” She urges: “Tell me. Where can you feel me?” Climaxing, Dalton says, “Inside. Everywhere. Pace. (*Beat*) You’re inside me.” And Pace concludes: “There. We’re something else now. You see? We’re in another place” (342). This radical gender-reversal, Baley writes, allows them to “dissolve and escape the hetero-normative, capitalist system that attempts to yoke them irrevocably to singular bodies and a closed, monologic history” (245). And the lovers’ exchange suggests all kinds of union – male and female, living and dead, outsiders joined in transcendence. That union can be read ultimately as a spiritual state, as in St. Paul’s wisdom in Galatians 3:28 that, in the Divine, “there is no Jew or Gentile, no male or female, no slave or free.”

Indeed, as Baley insists, Trestle is a tragedy, but it's more than that. It holds out a translogical hope for "another place" of reconciliation that our dreams approach. This yearning, for wholeness, integrity, community and connections, allows us to see One Flea Spare and The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek a kind of diptych of desire. "Desire," Wallace says, "that's really what I'm talking about. I don't mean love. I'm not sure I know what that means. Desire serves the need to end one's singular state. It creates the space to re-imagine oneself. That alone ends loneliness" (qtd. in Gornick 31).

And in that space of re-imagining, change can begin. Perhaps her friend Tony Kushner best captures Naomi Wallace's achievement: "Most other recent attempts to make political theatre sink in games of Rashomon, navel-gazing, or perhaps, more honorably, grief. Naomi Wallace commits the unpardonable win of being partisan, and, the darkness and harshness of her work notwithstanding, outrageously optimistic. She seems to believe that the world can change. She certainly writes as if she intends to set it on fire" (quoted in Julian 3).

Karen Malpede: Empathy and Witnessing

"Susan Griffin's powerful phrase 'Every woman who writes is a survivor' comes to mind. For the woman playwright is a sturdy creature, one consummately dedicated to an art form which is entirely public, and to a vocation which requires absolute vulnerability" (Betsko 9). These words offer a moving and accurate tribute to Karen Malpede. Malpede sees herself as a playwright, activist, scholar and teacher who isn't primarily political, but

rather someone whose worldview is shaped by a number of themes. Malpede said when she asked Julian Beck, co-founder of the Living Theatre, about a book he was working on:

‘It’s a book with a very simple premise,’ he said, ‘which is that the purpose of the theater is to reveal the divine in man.’ That’s my tradition, you see, with its inherent contradiction, because in order for me to reveal the divine in ‘man,’ I had to come to feminism. There is no other way, I had to come to an understanding of the divine in women (Betsko 259).

Renouncing all violence, dispelling egocentric concepts of fate and destiny for the idea of collective self, insisting on the need for community and ritual, and merging deeply personal experiences with historical events are all themes that permeate Malpede’s work. She aims to lure her students and audience into an experience of healing and reconciliation, maintaining that twentieth century violence and genocide have shattered the human body and mind to the extent that we may no longer be capable of handling it.

Though an avid pacifist, she doesn’t run from violence. The Russian Revolution, the Gulf War and the Bosnian conflict are all presented in her work because it’s imperative not only to offer an alternative to war and violence, but also, she feels, to destroy the dualistic concept of victor versus victim. This telling awareness – that the zero-sum game of dualistic thinking is never peacefully resolved – allies Malpede with those creative minds who work to further the integral vision. Also, unlike the practitioners of postmodern theory, she is resolute in her belief in individual agency and in the possibilities for change.

Malpede says that exploring feminism gave her:

...a feeling that has never left me, that some great change for the good is possible, that our lives *are* a constant process of creation, and that whatever we can understand about ourselves, about the nature of our own victimization, our own oppression, our own fears and our own resistance can be transferred into social life so that we might actually be able to understand community... (Betsko 262).

Malpede also notes that plays by women that make it through the censorship of critics and the marketplace and are acknowledged with accolades and awards, are plays in which the female characters who protest violence or abuse always die—they are either murdered or commit suicide. She believes the message is obvious: “If you dare, you die. The women die a violent death when what they really wanted to do was to live a fulfilled life” (Betsko 266). It’s the kind of insight that parallels Rachel Koenig’s, who talks of societal censors “compelled to silence those elements of [artworks] which are most deeply connected to female sentience” (Davis 66). Mainstream drama accepts the female victim; it denies the female rebel, resister, sage or hero.

Questing for the divine in us, for the inner self, is a journey one takes with Malpede’s characters. Even at age 25, Malpede believed that conventional theatre wasn’t up to the task of revealing the highest yearnings of the human spirit. She was deeply inspired by Etty Hillesum’s diaries, An Interrupted Life, written in Auschwitz where she died. Hillesum had nowhere to turn but inside herself and ultimately her internal and external experience became a “sustained prayer” (Betsko 268). Whether, like Hillesum, they employ the translogical means of prayer or the dialogical means of protest and

political discourse, Malpede is interested in characters who make radical choices in order to elevate their consciousness.

In keeping with her commitment to the sacred feminine, Malpede's creativity ebbs and flows with the zeitgeist as effortlessly as the sea herself. Part Jewish, part Italian, she grew up claiming membership in what she later termed "two despised tribes" (*Speaking* 321). She was born in Wichita Falls, Texas in 1945 – "born with the bomb," as Hannah, one of her characters in *Us*, would say (Eisen 210). Of her father, she recalls, "He had left his religion which – as practiced by his family – was a brutal religion of punishment and fear, and his class, but carried with him the machismo and a certain astonishing mixture of brutality and passion which was the dominant emotional reality of my childhood" (Betsko 262). Later, she opened her play *Us* by echoing this pattern of domestic violence, explosive abuse followed by craven apologies.

An English major at The University of Wisconsin, Malpede was introduced to the work of the Irish Literary Revival. She was drawn to these playwrights because their work reflected something beyond themselves. "They wanted a theater which spoke of all that we might become" (Betsko 260).

Malpede says of Judith Malina and Julian Beck, cofounders of the Living theater:

They taught me that the artist is one who commits to that which is highest and best in the human spirit; who puts oneself with the victims of oppression in order to understand resistance; who deals in imagery which extends the boundaries of the known... and...who explores precisely those

areas which have been taboo in order to better understand our fears and our potential... (Betsko 26).

As Malpede, then, valorizes creativity that moves beyond the rational and accepted, so too, does she denounce conventional assumptions about theatre. If Tracy C. Davis asserts that traditional theater, with its emphasis on noblemen in conflict against fate or gods, rarely applies to the experience of any audience other than high-born males, Malpede dismisses the very notion that conflict itself is the essence of theater: "Conflict generates conflict, while contrast establishes the possibility of choice. An artist is a person who has recognized each separate moment of choice. The truest discipline moves us in this direction" (Three 12). She also expresses eloquently the need and longing for community because it functions as a total support during times of elevation and despair. "Theater has community as its essential form. The audience is the uninitiate, the desperate people, the lost and vulnerable. Without an audience, so are the actors. As the two groups meet they are both made whole" (Three 14). Her themes of duality are also explored here. She asks how we can focus on change except by exploring the inner and outer, presence and absence, community and patriarchy, ourselves and other and then finding the connection between them (Three 29).

When she became a mother, the future haunted Malpede, and the threat of global annihilation and the pervasive patriarchal obsession with controlling Mother Nature became the main concern of her play, A Monster Has Stolen the Sun. Set in the sixth century, rich in mythic consciousness and long before Max Weber's "disenchantment of the world," the play presents these themes in a Celtic pagan world at odds with the new

Christians; it also contrasts the theme of male domination with the feminine concept of the magic and power of birth. Malpede says that her experience of the world is that of male violence toward women, children, animals and other men (Speaking 136). She liberates the feminine through a potent speech by the character of Macha, a pregnant woman who comes down from the mountain:

Ach, you are a weak and stupid man, after all. Are all those of your sex who practice a gentle touch weak in the brain? I am no more beholden to you than the birds that fly free in the sky must freeze for the arrow or stone. You bartered your life for a lie (Monster 141).

A fight between the pregnant Macha and Owain, an ancient precursor of the Psychopathic Daddy, created quite a stir with audiences and critics. The feminine wins this battle and causes Owain to eventually denounce the beliefs and rituals of his system, though his learning process to accept new ideals is erratic and difficult.

As if scripted to support Malpede's message, New Yorker critic Brendan Gill literally kicked the seat in front of him in a fit of rage during the scene. Malpede speculates that though Gill had heard about the outrageous battle with the pregnant woman, he never dreamed she would actually win (Speaking 327). Her research concerning violence toward women indicates that pregnancy increases the likelihood of an occurrence, with most of the blows hurled at the abdomen. She wanted to denounce this sociological horror by defying convention and presenting this taboo topic.

Malpede explored relationships between women in Sappho & Aphrodite. With an emphasis on feminine rituals, the play presents a community of women praising Aphrodite

as the goddess of more than just love. She is celebrated also as the goddess of creativity and mortality. Even though this appears to be Malpede's most separatist play, she also includes bisexuality as she constructs her gynocentric myth (Speaking 331). Malpede maintains that all artists are bisexual, not in choice of partner but in the ability to connect with the masculine and feminine, in their ability, then, to overcome the perceived "binary opposition" between the sexes that Hélène Cixous finds so prevalent. This play emphasizes community as well as her belief in our interconnectedness—"where being seen by someone allowed you to become yourself" (Speaking 325), a sentiment that echoes Merleau-Ponty's idea that we must all borrow ourselves from others. Malpede interweaves some of the great, Greek poet Sappho's poems with the characters' dialog to unite both the spoken language and the poetic. She also unites Eros and Thanatos, love and death as one in part of the cycle of life rather than the Freudian view that they are opposites, which was her initial inspiration for the piece.

Us is her "memory play" about sexual trauma. Malpede writes, "historical shame resonates with a tale of domestic abuse about a battered mother and a daughter subjected to incest" ("Theater at 2000" 304). Unrelentingly intense, Us is certainly one of Malpede's darker works. She has said that, by contrast, most every other play of hers is leavened with humor (Speaking 329). So brutally effective was the incest scene as staged by Judith Malina for the Living Theatre, that Malpede says, it became "almost a part of the production" for audience members to leave the theater outraged. "They walked out in a particular way: the man pulled the woman out" (Speaking 328). Malpede comments: "It's not that Us dramatizes violence, it's the way in which Us dramatizes violence that's

upsetting—that it dramatizes violence from the point of view of the victim, that it shows the emotional upset of the perpetrator” (Speaking 329). Aware of the controversy her work engenders, and also of the fact that it owns no ideological labels and resists specific “isms,” she further states that:

Nobody is always right. It’s not so interesting to see a character who’s always right. I have never been touted by feminist critics, either. My plays don’t sit well with people who have a certain agenda; they only sit well with people who are open to the artistic experience. Art is more complex than an agenda (Speaking 331).

Her antiwar manifesto, based on an earlier monologue, “Baghdad Bunker,” became Blue Heaven, a multimedia work that draws parallels between Gulf War slaughter and the death of New York artist Ana Mendieta, who was allegedly pushed out of a window by her husband. Malpede highlighted connections between the anonymous deaths of the thousands of faraway war fatalities and the single murder of an artist living close to Malpede herself. The inspiration for Blue Heaven is a startling example of synchronicity. Malpede had been working on a play about East Village artists, when one day while taking a shower in her health club, she began to smell the horrific odor of burning flesh arising from her body. Turning on the radio, she heard that a Baghdad bunker had just been bombed: 400 women, children and civilian men had been burned alive. She then set to work on a play that conflated the East Village artist story and reflections on Gulf War atrocity. The work presents, in Aria, Malpede’s most complex character, a walking contradiction who is both an Israeli and a Palestinian, a mother and a wanderer, an artist

whose creativity is blocked, and a lover whose love also inadvertently brings death (she's the mistress of a man who kills his wife). Not only does so divided a character reflect Malpede's vision of such women artists as Mendieta ("...you are likely, if you are a woman artist, to be torn in about fifty or sixty directions."), she also embodies Malpede's idea of the true ambiguity of moral struggle (Speaking 325). Aria, "holding warring factions" inside herself, can't easily target anyone for unilateral blame (Speaking 322). "She can't hate the Israelis or the Palestinians, because she is half Israeli and half Palestinian, and she has to work it out somehow. This seemed to me a much more interesting dilemma than to decide that all people who were not me are bad—or that specific different people are bad" (Speaking 322). Again, the play reflects two of its creator's essential motivations: to refuse to accept the objectifying, demeaning differences that monological thinking sets up and to exhume traumatic memories for the sake of healing.

Malpede then contrasted the "heaven of late twentieth century sexual and creative liberalism" with the hell of the Bosnian violence in The Beekeeper's Daughter ("Theater at 2000" 306). This play fully developed Malpede's notion of a "theater of witness" that would combine ritual, politics and healing ("Thoughts" 233). For The Beekeeper's Daughter (1994), Malpede chose as dramaturg psychiatrist Stevan M. Weine, who had worked extensively with Bosnian war survivors. Malpede says that, "I am always interested in juxtaposing sexual and political violence with the possibility of eros and liberating empathy" (Weine 172). She sees this as the central theme in all her work. Weine sees the play as proving "a perfect fundament for a theater of witness" (176).

Here, Rachel, a human rights activist, rescues the pregnant Admira, a victim of mass rape in Bosnia, and brings her to an idyllic Mediterranean island where her poet father, Robert, is enjoying his young male lover. The women are looking for Rachel's clairvoyant Aunt Sybil whose own violent past might help heal the shattered Admira. The play shows how the murderers have "crawled inside her flesh" and "dramatizes the ways in which genocidal violence bleeds into and infects the inner lives not only of its victims, but of all those who attempt to hear and heal" ("Theater at 2000" 306). Robert says of Admira, "She's brought death into the house," and against the backdrop of Admira's agony and Robert's sun-soaked oblivion, transformation occurs (Weine 175). Over time, Wine says, Admira conveys all the classic symptoms of a victim of trauma--damage, disassociation, vengefulness and rage (Weine 174).

Robert, Rachel and Sybil all join in helping Admira deliver her son. Robert says of the newborn: "I feel as though I am giving birth to him as a person, as a human being. I am giving birth to him by my act of looking" (Weine 175). Sybil and Admira, in a climactic scene, share stories of each other's traumas. Years earlier, Sybil had intentionally wrecked her car with her child in it, trying to save them both, through death, from the chronic domestic abuse they suffered. Her child died, but Sybil survived. "Eye to eye, exchanging line for line," Wine writes, "they are both giving and receiving, confessing and forgiving, producing testimony and bearing witness for one another" (176).

Malpede's theater of witness is "theater which veers away from violence because it recognizes trauma. It seeks to reverse trauma's debilitating effects on self and society by giving shape to the complex and cyclical stages of remembrance and recovery"

(“Thoughts” 233). Blue Heaven, The Beekeeper’s Daughter, and I Will Bear Witness are all examples of Malpede’s theater of witness, though the concept of sharing personal stories as a form of healing is in much of her work. She defines it thus: “These are plays that mature from the conjunction of the personal with the extremities of modern history and which make use of post-Freudian insights and strategies gained from testimony psychotherapies and trauma work with survivors of atrocity” (“Theatre” 266). Malpede’s transforming experience in the shower opened her to the exploration of empathy. Appalled by the extraordinary lack of empathy for victims of the Gulf War, she realized how “fragile our capacities for empathy are in the face of overwhelming force” (“Theatre” 267). Malpede believes that we should be mindful of that capacity in ourselves and “exercise” it so we can increase our empathetic strength and use this empathy to oppose atrocity (“Theatre” 267). All of this led her to what she calls the “witnessing imagination” which empathizes with the inner life of the trauma victim and in doing so, tries to reclaim the integrity of the inner life of the “despised other” which the violence sought to annihilate (“Theatre” 272). The victim is then able to be reborn through the empathetic witnessing imagination.

The precursor to Malpede’s theater of witness is Greek tragedy. It was the beginning of the drama of two insanely opposing worlds, that of the mother-right and the father-right (“Theater at 2000” 300). Discovering individuality seemed to necessitate subduing the other: nature/culture, instinct/mind, mother-centered tribe/friend-centered male society, the exact division that the integral vision seeks to heal. Greek tragedy, however, dramatizes the “makers of history” (kings and their families), while theater of

witness dramatizes those who, as Camus said, “suffer history” (“Theater at 2000” 301). It is the stories and experiences of those who suffer history that hold the key to reshaping history.

CHAPTER 4 Conclusions

Many artists and thinkers mystify the truth. But mystics don't. Theoreticians agonize over a striving to express the ineffable. Peaceful warriors don't. The mystic and the activist share a common, urgent knowledge: truth can and must be expressed; it is not ineffable. It is the Real. We find it in wisdom traditions that cross space and time. Call it the Jungian *Unus Mundus*, that intuitive certainty that a spiritual bond unites all of us and makes us, in fact, One World. Hear it in the Sanskrit "Tat Tvam Asi" – "I am That, Thou art That, All this is That." "That" is Divine. And it's realized in the human whenever we remember who we are, and act out of that remembrance. It's who we are whenever we're so essentially our truest selves that we transcend our egos, our artificial boundaries, our greed, our "I, Me, Mine." Theatre can be that Truth in action. A Theatre of empathy, illumination and the expression of the universal through the personal.

Today, theatre that merely focuses on rage no longer works. Not because the outrage of the oppressed is no longer justified. Now when it's even socially acceptable in some circles to publicly vilify the "Other," as we witness in the prevalence of hate speech on right-wing talk radio, the rage of the oppressed assuredly is merited. As W.H. Auden once wrote, "We must love one another or die" (qtd. in Lucas 162). And our bodies and spirits must dance.

Yet angry, embittering theatre now most certainly provokes only the very rage it

combats from crushing conservative power. Screaming just furthers screaming – and louder from the enemy. Empathy is foreclosed. Mere fighting and finger pointing only locks tighter the prison door. We must find other means. In our beleaguered time, the only place left for the marginalized oppressed is in recognizing and understanding the entire global community’s struggle for survival. Not flight only into oneself. Not escape, but redefining our world as it has mutated and encouraging a unified force—the cosmic Light that connects us all must actively resist the global Dark that exploits the individual into an impoverished commodity. The Sophia figure, the “Eternal Feminine,” in Goethe’s phrase, annihilated in our age, is an essential source of Truth. And Muslim mystics insist that the world will know no peace until Divine Mother is recognized again.

Before madness and the world overwhelmed him, Artaud wrote: “Where others want to produce works of art, I aspire to no more than to display my own spirit” (qtd. in Gerould 433). Spirit, not ego. And Caryl Churchill wrote of her play, Cloud 9, “For the first time I brought together two preoccupations of mine – people’s internal states of being and the external political structures which affect them, which make them insane.” Sanity can be sought only in Spirit (qtd. in Itzin 287).

If the theatre I aspire to is ultimately spiritual, it isn’t because it’s not political. It only understands that change doesn’t come merely from meditations on material conditions or from trying to counter the controlling social structures through traditional means. Along with Carol Lee Flinders, a professor of mystical literature, I find myself wondering: What if the structures that have silenced women and the oppressed are so deeply embedded in our consciousness that they resist ordinary political activism (124)? Is there another

way to serve those who “suffer history,” as Camus says (qtd. in Malpede “Theater” 301)? Gandhi realized that imperialism had so penetrated the consciousness of the conqueror – and had been so savagely internalized by the Indian – that no merely political approach could shake loose that oppression. Only Soul Force could work that revolution. And it is out of this belief that the Theatre of Truth can come to life. Through sense and sound, movement and stillness, tears and joy, it can open doors to deliverance. On any night, in a darkened theatre, the shared ritual will commence, and then will last only an hour or so. But transformation, the road to peace, can begin at any moment.

Desperation to be seen and heard, the clawing effort to maintain, to self-actualize – this madness is the struggle for Truth. Whether through music and dance, satire or drama, the internal and external efforts of the innocent, their spirits robbed or depleted by a structure that survives by standing on the heads of others, lead both theatre’s characters and its audience to truth. Empathy is the way to open us to that truth. Empathy is the motivating force behind Karen Malpede’s plays about women who wake up to the nightmare of history. Empathy can be the force that helps us toward healing a world torn apart by genocide and a population so anesthetized by media representations that its capacity to empathize is in peril of becoming exhausted. Truth telling can help move us beyond that de-sensitized paralysis. Blending powerful imagery, poetry, politics and healing, she presents the reality of the stories of the violated so that we get inside their lives, see their hurt and heroism and then share connection.

Empathy is a means of transformation. As psychology pioneer Carl Rogers has demonstrated, it’s an actual active force that resurrects alike the wounded and the healer.

And it's from this understanding that Malpede employs psychologists as dramaturgs – to help her to exhume, examine and empathize with the pain her protagonists and members of her audience share. Theater that elicits empathy is real theatre of transformation.

Empathy, too, animates Adrienne Kennedy's A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White. Here we witness the pathos of a black woman so disempowered, so longing for recognition and self-realization, that she embraces the inspired “madness” of becoming, as she says, “a spectator watching my life” projected through the archetypal images of white movie stars (In 99). To live it herself is too much, and is also denied her. It may be more human and more effective, perhaps, to *feel* this pain than to logically dissect it, and such empathy spurs compassion toward others while transforming us as well. I have again witnessed exactly such a transformation. After reading Kennedy's play, a conservative student in our playwriting class said that, for the first time in her life, she had some sense of what it means to be black. Kennedy's visceral and profound storytelling broke this student (this witness) open to empathy and truth. From Adrienne Kenney, we also learn that the objectifying rationality of the Psychopathic Daddy can be countered by mining the multi-cultural, multifaceted truths of the collective unconscious and by approaching universal truth through the avenue of individual experience – its stories of suffering, transformation, and transcendence.

From Naomi Wallace, we learn that unraveling the constructs of gender and class is necessary to find the common reality we all share, a reality grounded in the body, the unmediated wisdom of children, and an insistence that individual and communal political

action can truly change lives. She reminds us of the value of lives alienated from power, outside privilege, beyond the reach of mediated realities, false promises and fake allure. For her, the economically disenfranchized, the rebels against gender constriction, the scorned youth denied, by patriarchy, the possibilities of self-realization that is their human birthright – all these “outsiders” are just different faces of our own. And they are much more human faces, it could be argued, than those of the privileged world that Terry Eagleton sees as postmodernism’s products, “centerless, hedonistic, self-inventing, ceaselessly adaptive” (190). Wallace reminds us, too, that it’s the physical in all its pain and strength and beauty that unites us, as do those moments when we join together in acts of transformation. For Naomi Wallace, politics and theatre are revolutionary acts – acts of empathy, resistance, and possibility.

In envisioning the plight of the disempowered, whose struggle theatre can chronicle and whose lives it can affirm, I often think of cocoons, walled gardens, and the shadows cast by prison bars. And yet birth and freedom, beauty growing against the coldness of stone and light pours forth from those behind the bars. For, deeper, even inside the prison there is that “interior castle” that houses the soul, as Teresa of Avila tells us. “Clearly, one doesn’t have to enter it,” she writes, “since it is within oneself. But you must understand that there is a great difference in the ways that one may be inside the castle” (5). From inside the prison, the artist can shed light. And from the “interior castle,” that light, radiated, can connect to every one of the oppressed.

Each of the artists I’ve explored has valuable lessons to teach us about fostering a viable Theatre of Truth. And each of them, while deriving strength from specifically

political visions, goes beyond specific “isms.” That lesson is critical. While we prize the struggles and successes of activists who focused on particular goals – the early Suffragists’ crusade for the 19th Amendment, Dr. King’s clear original concentration on voting rights - we realize that oppression now must be fought by different means. Because, today, the adversary is global. The effects of racism, ethnic, tribal and gender conflict, whether in Africa, the Mid East or the United States, touch all of us. In particular, the Psychopathic Daddy and the Corporation not only wreak economic hardship, causing widespread poverty and ecosphere damage, but in practicing and attempting to instill in all of the globe’s citizens – their “market,” as it were - their own dehumanizing, myopic ways of thinking, they work to prompt in their targets a crisis of debilitating, inner lack. If the crisis is global, then, our response must be comprehensive.

These masterful playwrights can help guide us. But new questions and challenges remain. How will today’s playwrights contend face-to-face with the Psychopathic Daddy? Which tactics will be most effective? Is the practice of journalists, sociologists and others to insistently offer redefinitions of current reality something we can learn from – or might it cause us instead merely to retreat into the self?

We must address the Psychopathic Daddy by exposing his means – as do such guerilla-theatre media activists as the Yes Men, who go directly to corporate headquarters and international summits and enact dramatic exercises, subversive and often playful, that reveal The Corporation’s horror to itself. We can seek a better, more humane future by elevating our own Self-awareness in order to illuminate those truths inside all of us that

can provoke global change. We can represent on stage in ritualistic theatre a mythic consciousness that, in all of its universality, can reconcile opposition and transcend history.

Some of the components of a Theatre of Truth, then, are an insistence, against both the anomie of postmodernism and the soul-denying myopia of dialectical materialism, that a universal truth, beyond historical circumstance and located in the human spirit, does exist: across time and geography, the perennial philosophy of all original cultures is based in it. From that translogical consciousness can come a force of light inclusive enough to contend against the seemingly pervasive dark force of the Psychopathic Daddy and ultimately to maintain that such darkness can be illuminated by an awareness that there is, in the end, no “us vs. them,” no final division. Reclaiming the Body and the eye of the child, asserting the integral vision, moving past particular “truths,” we can work toward an all-embracing theatre that, unlike that of any special interest, neither preaches to a small number of the converted or invites backlash. Such a Theatre of Truth, however, isn’t a program; there aren’t specific guidelines or prescriptions; instead, it is a sensibility and a work in progress.

My experience of Mud and in working on this thesis has confirmed for me that there can never be an escape into self, into “isms,” into identity politics or separation. As I’ve shown, wisdom traditions, quantum physics, and the sense of compassion that must be resurrected in us, all insist on the interrelatedness not only of those whom Buddhism terms “all sentient beings,” but of ourselves and the planet. A Theatre of Truth, then, can employ a myriad of strategies that work toward the realization of that essential awareness. The exposing of evil, the witnessing of struggle, the emancipation of thought and language

from patriarchal control, the honoring of every culture's and every individual's search for meaning and "journey into light" to use Adrienne Kennedy's language, must be undertaken (People 9). And we can embrace that journey by, as the Gospels tell us, first casting the mote out of our own eyes. Realizing then, that finally, there is no opposition that a truly integral vision can not work to reconcile, we must relinquish control of provincial, doctrinaire, self-serving and ultimately suicidal "truths" and open ourselves up to translogical experience. From that common Source, we can begin.

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