STAGING ALTERITY: THE ETHICS OF PERFORMING DIFFERENCE(S)

by

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Abstract

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by

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This dissertation proposes that contemporary theatre should be read through the lens of ethical philosophy. By juxtaposing a variety of recent theatrical performances with the philosophy of Emmanuel Lévinas, it frames a consideration of the theatre as the paradigmatic instance of the ethical relation. Looking at the notion of "the encounter" within Lévinas's philosophy and "the event" in recent work by Alain Badiou, I propose that theatre lies at the base of new models of social relations. In the encounter between audience member and performer, the individual faces the imperative challenge of "being-for-the-other." Within this dissertation, I argue that the theatre instantiates "ethotopos," the space of ethics, as a laboratory in which the personal relationship can be viewed and in which society can begin to imagine a new foundation for justice.

Through examining performances that have been historically read through lenses of identity politics, I demonstrate the ways in which reading them instead with relation to their establishment of an ethical relation changes an understanding of their production of meaning. The works that I examine include

the plays of Tony Kushner and performances by Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Anna Deavere Smith, Sarah Jones, John Leguizamo, Tim Miller, and Kiki and Herb. I argue that the formal relationships present within these performances produce a relationship with the audience that demands fidelity, and propose this as the starting point for developing a concept of ethical subjectivity in the contemporary world. I develop these readings through interrogating Lévinas's notions of ethical language, the face-to-face, and the caress. These works begin to allow us to imagine a new universal subject, one who is defined in substitution, in the prostration of the self at the foot of the Other; this is a subject defined theatrically in obligation to another who appears before her/him.

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INTRODUCTION: WHY ETHICS? WHY THEATRE? WHY NOW?

[The theatre's] power comes from the fact that the person performing in front of you is dying in front of your eyes . . . ineluctably but invisibly, existential fact, and if you think of it for a moment, theatre will have appeared.

—Herbert Blau[1]

The other man's death calls me into question, as if, by my possible future indifference, I had become the accomplice of the death to which the other, who cannot see it, is exposed; and as if, even before vowing myself to him, I had to answer for this death of the other, and to accompany the Other in his mortal solitude. The Other becomes my neighbor precisely through the way the face summons me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question.

—Emmanuel Lévinas[2]

Since Plato's call to banish the poets and performers from the just republic, the theatre and the notion of an ethics have had a fraught relation. The theatre is often entangled in relations of justice, from Antigone and Creon's onstage dispute over the nature of "right," to Brecht's call for plays that teach, to debates in both the academy and the popular press over the use of intercultural performance modes by Hélène Cixous, Peter Brook, and Ariane Mnouchkine. In

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[1] Herbert Blau, *Sails of the Herring Fleet : Essays on Beckett*, Theater--Theory/Text/Performance (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 168.

[2] Emmanuel Levinas, "Ethics as First Philosophy," in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Sean Hand (New York, NY: B. Blackwell, 1989), 83.

this dissertation, I seek to explore the role of the theatre in the establishment of a contemporary ethics and the role of ethics in establishing the centrality of the theatre to the contemporary world. I contend here first that theatre and ethics begin from the same origins and are concerned with similar ends: the framing of a code that marks the responsibility of human behavior towards an "other." I then examine the ways in which the theatrical moment models the ethical relation and how a shift in focus back towards the uniqueness of theatrical presence can allow society to move beyond the static dilemmas of identity politics. I then turn to explore three particular cases of theatrical performance that have been marked as political, in order to demonstrate how this turn to ethics opens up the view of performance to argue for the centrality of the theatrical frame to the contemporary world.

This project begins from the so-called performance turn in recent and contemporary thought. I read this turn as anti-theatrical in its replacement of the theatre as a particularly located institution by metaphors of performance and theatricality. I propose within this dissertation returning *the theatre itself* to the heart of the performance turn in contemporary thought. In the current moment, as Jon McKenzie argues, culture is dominated by a performative mode.[3] While I agree with the central conceit in McKenzie's turn from Foucauldian disciplinarity to performance, I feel that there is a crucial misstep in his turn away from the theatrical, a turn that constrains his argument. McKenzie expresses concern about

[3] Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else : From Discipline to Performance* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2001).

the "liminal norm" of performance studies,[4] and uses this at the base of his argument, yet if we recall Turner's focus on the liminoid[5] as the *modus operandi* of the theatre, might we, by focusing on the theatrical event itself, return to an exploration of the advantages of liminality? The Schechnerian concept of the efficacy/entertainment dyad grants an agency to non-theatrically framed performance, an anti-theatrical turn that has largely been taken up by scholars of theatre and performance.[6] Theatrically framed performance is always limited in its political efficacy because the audience for such theatre is a self-selected group, generally aware of and often in agreement with the "politics" of the particular performers.[7] As Holly Hughes notes, we are most often "preaching to the perverted." Meanwhile, society in large part acknowledges politics itself as performance and the popular press analyzes world leaders as if they are actors. The world has embraced the theatrical today in ways that at the same time erase the presence of actual theatre. If the current moment sees performance

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[4] McKenzie, "Genre Trouble: The Butler Did It" in Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane, *The Ends of Performance* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

[5] Victor Witter Turner and Richard Schechner, *The Anthropology of Performance*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: PAJ Publications, 1986).

[6] For a full discussion of this concept, see Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory*, Rev. and expanded ed. (New York: Routledge, 1988), For a reading of the antitheatrical prejudice in the turn to Performance Studies, see Stephen J. Bottoms, "The Efficacy/Effeminacy Braid: Unpicking the Performance Studies/Theatre Studies Dichotomy," *Theatre Topics* 13, no. 2 (2003).

[7] It is important to note here that by the term "theatrically framed performance," I seek to ground the notion of theatre in that which the audience is consciously receiving as theatre. While for some this may be marked by a particular performance space or building, I seek to allow a more open definition, yet one which is grounded in the work of reception theory and places the decision of theatrical framing in the agreed upon recognition by both performers and audience. For the purposes of this dissertation, I do not consider activities such as Boal's Invisible Theatre or public argument as "theatrically framed."

everywhere and uses performance as its frame of reference, then how might turning back to the conceit of the theatre and focusing on affect and the irruption of the relation within the theatre prove the most provocative and productive intervention into the question of contemporary articulations of power? By arguing instead for a focus on the very liminality of theatre as the basis of an ethical understanding rather than the pairing of politics and efficacy, I hope to redefine the terms of evaluation of the "power" of the theatrical.

Politics, the so-called art of the possible, while frequently couched in terms of morality, relies at least as frequently on the compromise of an ethics as it does on the truly ethical relation. This is in large part due to the necessary linkage of "political" and "efficacious," where the political is controlled by the necessity to achieve a fixed, definable goal. Politics is the attempt to ground questions of the ethical relation (between and among humans) within an historically grounded framework, placing efficacy at its apex. The core concerns of political life are thus about compromise with the practical and achievable; politics is concerned with categorization and definition of classification structures.[8] These taxonomies almost always break down on a level of "I"/Not I. Philosopher Ewa Ziarek suggests that the notion of alterity is too often a politicized label:

In postmodern political vocabularies, the category of the Other, most

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[8] Indeed, although much of this dissertation relies on the philosophy of Emmanuel Lévinas, it is crucial to note that in his later work, he often ran into problems when asked to ground his thought in terms of realpolitik. Issues such as the oft-cited assertion that "the Palestinian has no face" are the unfortunate and indefensible result of such a desire for poltical primacy. See, for instance Raoul Mortley and Emmanuel Levinas, *French Philosophers in Conversation : Levinas, Schneider, Serres, Irigaray, Le Doeuff, Derrida* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1991).

> frequently associated with women and people of color, is synonymous with objectification, exclusion, and domination. It is either a negative foil for the identity of those who count as political subjects or a fetishistic screen for the projection of social antagonisms.[9]

This political objectification of the Other serves to frame it categorically and reify the existing power structures, even in the expressed desire of subverting these structures.

Much contemporary scholarship in theatre studies that purports to focus on issues of ethics is predicated on the structures of identity politics and area studies—classification schemes that arose over the past three decades in an attempt to shatter the monolithic (and metanarrative) discourse of Western white male hegemony. As Wendy Brown notes in her analysis of "power and freedom in late modernity," this is the natural outgrowth of the discourses of liberalism that were themselves created by enlightenment rationalisms and all mask an unspoken narrative of class. "[T]he latent conflict in liberalism between universal representation and individualism remains latent, remains unpoliticized, as long as differential powers in civil society remain naturalized, as long as the 'I' remains politically unarticulated, as long as it is willing to have its freedom represented abstractly . . ."[10] Late twentieth century political discourses that attempted to frame individual rights based on generic categorizations found themselves

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[9] Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, *An Ethics of Dissensus : Postmodernity, Feminism, and the Politics of Radical Democracy* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001), 5.

[10] Wendy Brown, *States of Injury : Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 56.

reproducing the historically mediated structurings of otherness.[11] The "natural" differentials of access to freedoms that are the basis of power in the contemporary [Western] world limit the potential political gain from identity/identificatory-based movements to that which is always-already containable and implied within the hegemonic constructions.[12] These schema themselves are often reduced to the service of polarizing political discourse—the coalitional drive of identity politics arises from the marking out of particular "Others" as different and non-integrable into a particular discourse; readings of double consciousness under oppression assume an innate cultural distinction between "classes" and thus do not articulate a political strategy. (It is important to note that the original intent of "identity politics" as framed by the Combahee River Collective in 1977, was to call for an ethical approach to humanity, while claiming that "the most radical politics come directly out of our own identity."[13]) However, I believe that the ways in which identity politics has been reproduced, by both the political left and right, results in a polarizing and paradoxical shift: the content of this gesture seeks to present the notion of alterity as containable through classification and categorization. It is

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[11] Thus feminism, for instance, produced feminisms and multiple waves and backlashes, each of which sought to redefine the category of "woman" in response to hegemonic discourses. These were then further inflected by questions of gender, race, class, etc, such that each moment of feminism itself constructs notions of self and other for whom the movement speaks. For an analysis of this in relation to theatrical performance, see Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991). and Sue-Ellen Case, *Performing Feminisms : Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

[12] Diana Fuss, *Identification Papers*.

[13] "The Combahee River Collective Statement," in Barbara Smith, *Home Girls : A Black Feminist Anthology*, 1st ed. (New York: Kitchen Table--Women of Color Press, 1983), 11.

from within this framework that the (political) right is able to reframe human rights as "special rights"; or conversely, it is this production of a potentially endless list of self-definition(s) with which the subject/author of contemporary scholarship must frame the subject position from which she or he speaks, which can then be read to privilege or delegitimize the *opinions* expressed. Both of these alternatives demonstrate the problematics of a politics grounded in notions of *my relations to* alterity, thus implicitly questioning whether politics *qua* politics can be truly shaped by an ethical framework. This static dilemma (oscillatory between binary poles) is what I attempt to reframe through the notion of the ethical and its grounding in the theatrical.

I ground my argument largely on the notions of ethics posited by Emmanuel Lévinas and Alain Badiou. Lévinas is arguably the preeminent continental ethical philosopher of the 20th century. His work over the fifty years after the second world war has provided the groundwork for much of the discussions of the nature of ethics in a broad variety of fields and disciplines. Lévinas's philosophy develops out of the phenomenological philosophy of Edmund Husserl and the ontologies of Martin Heidegger, but he proposes that the relationship with the other person surpasses comprehension and thus must be treated as the basic structuring device of Being.[14] He argues that the history of Western philosophical thought is a history of ontology (in which he further

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[14] I am using Being in this sentence in the Heideggerian notion of *Dasein*. As I will explicate further in this dissertation, Lévinas breaks radically from the fixity contained in this notion. Lévinas had been a student of Heidegger's in the 1920s, but broke very sharply from the Heideggerian arguments that he read as ultimately productive of National Socialism.

defines epistemology as subject to ontology), and attempts to counter this history by proposing that the relation with the Other, the ethical relation, *must* come prior to knowledge of the Other. This relation occurs in the simple act of coming into contact with another individual, which lies at the heart of sociality. "I" am responsible for that person and cannot subsume my responsibility to an attempted epistemological understanding of that Other. The undefinability of the otherness of this "other" is crucial to his argument, yet it is also this which has left his work most open to critique, particularly in the insightful arguments of Luce Irigaray's *The Ethics of Sexual Difference*.[15] This sense of relation, of alterity that is realizable as alterity, but yet not (re-)cognizeable as a particular otherness, is also the precondition of theatre. In this state, the self (which is not yet definable as a self, as it has not yet faced the other) must figuratively lay itself prostrate before the presence of the other, its presence not yet a generosity, but a pure openness to encounter. In the theatre, both the performers and the audience surrender themselves to the whim of the other, acknowledging the position of the other (audience or performer) as prior to the self. In this moment, the alterity of each figure is based not on a sense of defined Being, but on a temporally instantiated role being played, an act being performed in the present moment—either that of performer or that of observer, either that of acting or that of watching. Lévinas argues that ethics is the primary mode of operation of the individual in the world; his notion of ethics as first philosophy, the unmediated exposure to an other in the moment before understanding when one confronts that other in its radical alterity,

[15] This is a distinction that I will explore more fully in the fourth chapter.

I read thus as a theatricalization of the ethical relation. In the ethical relation, as in the theatre, I come into being because an other appears, materially, out of the darkness before me, confronting me with "reality" and challenging me to understand it. (To return to Plato for a moment, and bring the weight of Lévinas's philosophy to bear on the *Republic*, one could in fact argue that the only just *polis* is one literally modeled on the relationship of performer to audience.)

Lévinas's thought depends further on inscribing a distinction between the "saying" and the "said." For him, the said is the ontological content of an utterance, its fixed content of Being, while the address of these words, the exposure of this utterance to the Other, constitutes the saying. The saying is then obviously aligned with performative action, and it is this supplement that opens up to the view of theatrical performance as a laboratory of ethical experimentation. His concern is the way in which language works within the face-to-face encounter, questioning the means by which the cultural encounter is the production of a bodied encounter. "Culture does not come along and add extra axiological attributes, which are already secondary and grounded, onto a prior, grounding representation of the thing. The cultural is essentially embodied thought expressing itself, the very life of flesh . . ."[16] It is in this production that I contend the theatre exists today.

Alain Badiou rereads Lévinas at the end of the 20th century, arguing for an ethics predicated in sameness rather than alterity, and positing that ethical action cannot be read from a series of universal maxims, but must be based on individual

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[16] Emmanuel Levinas, *Outside the Subject* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), 110.

events that demand fidelity from the individual. For Badiou, he claims that the problem in Lévinas's philosophy is that it is rooted in theology, so an a-theological removal of the figure of the absolute Other (named explicitly as God in the late writings) would render it a "hollow" philosophy. Lévinas argues that the face of the other (the neighbor) poses the injunction "Thou shalt not kill" by staging the reminder that there exists an absolute Other, whose very existence calls the Self into being. Badiou attempts to reframe Lévinas's writings through a return to the Greek root of philosophy as non-theological, contending that for the areligious (notably still Western) contemporary world, a philosophy that returns God to centrality is anachronistic, thus he concludes that "the One is not."[17] Invoking Benjamin's figure of the orchestra pit, "the abyss which separates the players from the audience as it does the dead from the living,"[18] I propose that the theatrical audience (re-)cognizes itself vis-à-vis the performance/performer. The irreconcilability of these two realms citationally performs the relation of the self to the figure of God in Lévinas's writings, (re-)producing the self in relation, a self which does not attempt to subsume the multiplicity of Others within a self or within rational discourse, but a self composed aporetically, one which creates gaps wherein the primal responsibility to allow the other to be heard may resound. This is not the self as discrete fixed Being, but as open vessel.

In his recent volume, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, Badiou proposes a radical intervention into the field of ethical philosophy. His

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[17] Badiou, 25.

[18] Walter Benjamin and Hannah Arendt, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 154.

assertion of an ethic of truths, and the provocative interplay between Lévinas and his re-reading of Lévinas lies crucially within my study. He argues that most of the ethical discussions that have arisen in recent years derive from what I would term a political ethos. Badiou contends that the so-called turn to ethics and this rhetoric of Otherness is in fact predicated on the epistemological creation of an acceptable Other: "For them [the contemporary ethicists], African customs are barbaric, Muslims are dreadful, the Chinese are totalitarian, and so on. As a matter of fact, this celebrated 'other' is acceptable only if he is a *good* other – which is to say what, exactly, if not *the same as us*?"[19] I believe that the argument that he raises here is a straightforward problematization of the politics of alterity; for Badiou, the problem with the recent "ethical turn" is that it begins from an assumed evil, which must be rectified or solved. In essence, he views the contemporary turn to ethics as a Kantian return, which he posits as a nihilistic gesture, proposing instead that

> Rather than link the word [ethics] to abstract categories (Man or Human, Right or Law, the Other . . .), it should be referred back to particular *situations*. Rather than reduce it to an aspect of pity for victims, it should become the enduring maxim of *singular processes*. Rather than make of it merely the province of conservatism with a good conscience, it should concern the destiny of *truths*, in the plural.[20]

As I will argue in the pages of this dissertation, Badiou's notion of a process

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[19] Alain Badiou, *Ethics : An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London ; New York: Verso, 2001), 24 ,emphasis added.

[20] Badiou, 2001, 3.

based ethics—which is not that distinct from Lévinas's encounter-driven ethics—concerned with notions of singularity opens up promisingly to a question of the space of the theatre as the basis for a notion of ethics.

Badiou's ethics asserts a fidelity to a particular "event" and its radicality. For Badiou, the event is that "which brings to pass 'something other' than the situation, opinions, instituted knowledges . . . [and] which vanishes as soon as it appears."[21] He cites examples such as "the French revolution of 1792, the meeting of Héloise and Abélard, Galileo's creation of physics . . . a personal amorous passion, the creation of Topos theory by the mathematician Grothendick, the invention of the twelve-tone scale by Schoenberg . . ."[22] In this thought, it is the Good that must come first—the event which establishes a truth condition and asks for fidelity to that truth—before the Evil becomes a risk.[23] He contends that an ethics deriving from notions of alterity (in which he reads alterity as a politically instantiated category) fundamentally reinscribes this difference at the heart of the intersubjective relation and thus dooms itself to failure. In other words, his notion of the contemporary ethical turn is one grounded in the attempt of identity politics to reframe binaries of power. He makes the argument instead for an ethic of truths, read as fidelity to the truth conditions set into being by an "event."

I contend that the theatrical performance can be read as *the* paradigmatic

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[21] Badiou, *Ethics : An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, 67.

[22] Ibid., 41.

[23] There are three risks in Badiou's thought: (1) the individual's betrayal of fidelity to the "event," (2) the misreading of a false "event" as a true one, and (3), the attempt to impose the truth on a larger community.

event and it is this that produces my conception of "ethotopos," a concept that I will outline later in this chapter. The theatre is present and open to any response, it "presents itself in an attitude of facing" between the actor and the audience, it generates a fidelity to its own existence, but one which is not dictated from within but from its intersubjectivity—from its very eventness. Badiou argues that,"[w]hat allows a genuine event to be at the origin of a truth . . . is precisely the fact that it relates to the particularity of a situation only from the bias of its void," which he distinguishes from a "simulacrum of truth."[24] The idea that the theatrical encounter is an event that is grounded in a void rather than re-presented as simulacra is one that needs to be unpacked further. I base this reading on the uniqueness of presence, referring to the theatrical event in the light of Peggy Phelan's work on notions of performance's unrepeatability.

The theatrical event is the moment of intersubjectivity where the void is instantiated by the primacy of the encounter between audience and performers. This theatrical encounter should be viewed not simply in the tradition of Platonic mimesis (and the contemporary notions of Baudrillardian simulacra), but rather as an originary call to witness, as a fundamental and foundational staging of the moment of subject formation. "Western philosophy coincides with the disclosure of the other where the other, in manifesting itself as a being, loses its alterity. From its infancy philosophy has been struck with a horror of the other that remains other—with an insurmountable allergy."[25] Within the space of the

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[24] Badiou, *Ethics : An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, 73.

[25] Emmanuel Levinas, "The Trace of the Other," in *Deconstruction in Context*, ed. Mark Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 346.

theatrical performance, both the spectator and the performer bear witness to the death of the Other; each is subjected to an ethical call to respond to the embodied presence of a being that exists within a distinct ontological level. This encounter that takes place over the orchestra pit (in the traditional proscenium theatre) brings together two, often discrete, groups of individuals, each defined by their participation in the temporally bounded event. This is the grounding for this work in large part because of the theatre's elitism and liminality. Unlike film, it recognizes its inability to simulate truth; it is recognizable always as unique event, which is generative of its own notions of truth. (There is an important connection here to Austin's notion of infelicitous performatives, which I will explore more fully in the following chapter.) Theatre is a privileged site for an exploration of the nature of ethics: here I propose an ethics of performance that I further contend is central to an understanding of contemporary subjectivity. It is this distinctiveness that allows for individuality and subjectivity to be reframed in terms of the self's underlying obligation to an other. As Ewa Ziarek argues in her highly persuasive *An Ethics of Dissensus*, "[A]lthough emphasis on the historical constitution of subjectivity contests the notion of freedom as an unquestionable attribute of the autonomous self, freedom is still presupposed, implicitly or explicitly, in all postmodern discussions of agency, resistance, and the transformation of the social forms of life beyond their present limitations. . . . I propose to redefine freedom in relational terms as an engagement in transformative praxis motivated by the obligation for the Other."[26] This

[26] Ziarek, *An Ethics of Dissensus : Postmodernity, Feminism, and the Politics of*

dissertation argues that the theatre lies at the base of this redefinition in modeling a new ethics for contemporary society.

This ethics is not grounded in political expediency, but in notions of the radicality of encounter and the theatre's existence as the primary staging of this moment. Lévinas writes, "Ethics is the breakup of the originary unity of transcendental apperception, that is, it is the beyond of experience."[27] For Lévinas, ethics is the unmediated exposure to an other in the moment before understanding when one "confronts" that other in its radical alterity. The ethical is marked by the infinite responsibility of the individual to each other individual. As I have argued, the ethical is the field in which the original encounter between self and other is staged, while the political is a field of negotiation that contains and balances between vectors of self-interest (by their inward focus, definitively unethical) and a finite number of other interest vectors. As Jon Erickson comments in an exploration of the relation between the political and the ethical in theatre, "politics is an instrumental means . . . by designating [projects] *merely* as 'political' one established a polarized battleground."[28] The ethical is ethical precisely because its universality is not subject to a particular conception of historicization. I recognize that this is an extremely tricky point, one which seems to threaten a return to an

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Radical Democracy, 2.

[27] Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being, or, Beyond Essence* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 148.

[28] Jon Erickson, "The Face and the Possibility of an Ethics of Performance," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* XIII, no. 2 (1999): 10.

enlightenment universalism that would obliterate the shifts in understandings of subjectivity brought on by the rise of deconstruction, yet I believe that, as I will attempt to explicate within the pages of this dissertation, performance can sound the ethical call within the specificity of an historical moment, building notions of contemporary intersubjectivity in a move outside of identity politics through a depersonalized gesture of inclusivity—the subject accepts the debt to the Other before any notice of who the other is. I turn to the notion of theatrical alterity, where the notion of otherness is based on temporally instantiated categories rather than distinctions drawn as categorical. In this I respond as well to the work of such scholars as Ewa Płonowska Ziarek, Rey Chow, Judith Butler, Saskia Sassen, and Homi Bhabha, authors who ground their notions of political responsibility in the moment-by-moment lived experience of the postcolonial subject, addressing the imbrication of race, gender, sexuality, and religion and the ways in which these can be addressed by a turn to ethics. I contend that in contemporary performance we can confront the philosophical shift from a depoliticized performance art/identity politics presentation of self to a broader examination of society's ethical construction. I turn to the works of these other authors and posit that theatre provides the ideal laboratory to envision their arguments. All theatre, as is frequently claimed of politics, is local. The space of production springs from an economy of liveness, but the onus of responsibility lands on the shoulders of the audience

member in the decision to attend and most crucially in the uniqueness of the moment of theatrical connectivity.

In framing this argument in the contemporary moment, it is crucial to acknowledge the recent work of Jill Dolan on the conception of the "utopian performative" and to propose my alternative coinage of ethotopos. In one of the earliest works of prescriptive utopian philosophy, Plato's *Republic*, the success of politics, the drive towards utopia, depends on banishing the poets and the artists from the polis. For Plato, this is a self-evident political necessity, an act predicated by questions of justice. With contemporary theorists exploring the theatre as a utopian space in itself, we've certainly come full circle. What happens in the theatre space and how it can impact the world outside its borders are crucial questions; in the 2500-year ongoing debate about the political roles of the aesthetic, the question of ethics and the responsibility of the artist (and of the audience) remains a crucial touchstone. Is there a political responsibility inherent in notions of aesthetics?

Interestingly, these two epistemological branches, political and aesthetic, are often read as having been banished from the scene of postmodern theory. Yet in their twinned marginalization, the two are often inextricably bound up together. Much of the critical work on art and performance of the past forty years has been driven by questions of coalitional politics and the political efficacy of performance. The importance of this shift cannot be underestimated; rather than depoliticizing theatre, these poststructural moves have disassembled the frameworks of modernism that read power into art and allowed art to claim

power. While Heidegger's thought and Speer/Riefenstahl's practice are the frightening climax of this epoch, they *must* be read alongside Benjamin, Adorno, and Brecht. Adorno, despite cautioning against art as the will to power, reminded us as well that "Art, however, is more than praxis because by its aversion to praxis it simultaneously denounces the narrow untruth of the practical world."[29] Yet, at precisely the moment that the political power of art became palpable, society tore down the foundation that granted its power. In recognizing the power of art at the height of modernism, the postmodern splintering of notions of the aesthetic paradoxically effaced this potential. The term ethics must be reintroduced as the mediating term between these two discursive frames.

It is in the particular liveness of the theatre event that the possibility of direct political *influence* exists, and yet this particular power of "aura" has often been foreclosed upon by the focus on the broad-ranging political *impact* of performance. While theatre and performance can attempt political impact, the elite and circumscribed nature of the theatrical audience makes the scope of its political efficacy far more limited than film or television, which is able to reach a broader audience. Yet, in focusing on political impact, theatre forgoes the uniqueness of its notions of presence. Indeed, the critical response provoked by Michael Moore's films far outstrips any mention of Tim Robbins's *Embedded* or Tricycle Theatre's *Guantanamo Bay—Honor Bound to Defend Freedom*. This is precisely why when looking at theatre, I contend that we should turn to questions

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[29] Theodor W. Adorno, Gretel Adorno, and Rolf Tiedemann, *Aesthetic Theory*, The International Library of Phenomenology and Moral Sciences (London ; Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1984), 241.

of ethics and the engendering of personal responsibility rather than questions of its possibilities for producing broad political change.

I believe that a similar curious paradox lies at the center of the utopian turn in contemporary performance criticism. Theatre can be read as utopian only when it is removed from the practice of daily life—it is the elitism of the theatre that grants it the safe liminality of the utopic space, yet in reading notions of utopia as productive of political impact, there is a tendency to override this removal. There is crucial work being done though the application of Jill Dolan's ideas of the "utopian performative," yet I feel that the shift must be made from the atemporal futurity of utopia to the more presentist conception of ethotopos. Dolan cites Richard Dyer to describe her concept, "My concern here is with how utopia can be imagined or experienced affectively, through feelings, in small, incremental moments that performance can provide . . . 'Entertainment does not . . . present models of utopian worlds. . . . Rather the utopianism is contained in the feelings it embodies'. . . . These feelings and sensibilities, in performance, give rise to what I'm calling the 'utopian performative.'"[30] Dolan's project, along with the work of several other performance scholars—particularly Sue-Ellen Case, Janelle Reinelt, David Román, David Savran, and Maurya Wickstrom—is crucial to imagining new conceptions of the possibilities for theatrical performance's extending into the ethical sphere, but I seek to ground this work not in the temporal possibilities of utopia, but what I have called ethotopos—the always already present theatrical relationship as the space of ethics. This is a shift of the

[30] Jill Dolan, "Performance, Utopia, and the Utopian Performative," *tHEATRE jOURNAL* 53, no. 3 (2001): 460.

direction of the relationship between performance and the ethical from Dolan's model. While the conception of a utopia implies, as Dolan acknowledges, a sense of futurity and the imagination of change, ethotopos already exists—it is always the live space that the theatrical performance instantiates, a place filled with not simply utopian possibilities, but crucially with dystopic potentials as well. I contend that this is a space which exists within and surrounding all theatrically framed performance, that it is a place engendered by the event of the theatrical performance itself and a site within which synchronic and diachronic time fold in on each other. I argue within my work that ethotopos is a concept which can potentially allow us to reimagine the being/becoming binary, moving forwards to a new notion of subjectivity. This is to say more than simply that "performance—not just drama—is one of the few places where a live experience, as well as an expression, through content, of utopia might be possible."[31] Yes, performance can be a utopian space, but it is within the ethical challenge of this space that its power resides; it is from the necessity within the theatre of opening oneself up to the challenge of the Other, in the bilateral relationship between performer and audience. What is crucial to this proposal is that theatre does generate a response—whether this response is what was intended or desired is irrelevant, what is important is that the spatial relations create this attitude of responsiveness. It is from the possibility of (figuratively) "prostrating the self at the foot of the Other," in the bilateral relationship between performer and audience. In this space, ethics comes first; relation and feeling are primary—ethotopos is the space

[31] Ibid.: 456.

that allows the human body to appear.

To illustrate the importance of openness to response, I cite a recent example of Richard Maxwell's production of *Henry IV* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Maxwell is a New York City based playwright and director whose work is marked by a flatness that attempts to strip away artifice. Actors in a Maxwell production speak largely in relentless monotones, suddenly breaking into song or frenzied expression and then dropping back to the baseline flatness. This production was Maxwell's first foray into Shakespeare as well as a shift to the large BAM Harvey Theatre from much smaller venues. I quote at length from Michael Feingold's review in the *Village Voice*:

> The good part of Maxwell's approach is that he has thrown away all the interpretative clutter. Aside from simple painted drops to indicate changes of place, his *Henry IV* contained nothing but people in crudely appropriate costumes (by Kaye Voyce), mostly standing still and saying the words to each other conversationally. There was no attempt to "interpret," and only occasional attempts even to inflect or color the speeches. The physical staging was minimal: no blocking, virtually no comic business, and precious few props except swords. Most of the cast spoke clearly, if uninterestingly; you could receive the play without any intrusive actorial or directorial shenanigans, fancy lighting, or sound effects. . . . to strip everything away is to leave nothing, and audiences don't want to sit through nothing. This was proved by the slow steady trickle of ticket holders to the exit doors all evening long. The house lights, left on,

> encouraged restlessness; there were large gusts of contemptuous laughter at the more deeply inept moments.[32]

I was there on the opening night of this production; the BAM audience, accustomed to RSC-type Shakespearean productions responded by leaving in droves. A friend in the back of the house counted 103 people leaving in the first hour of this two-hour production—he himself became number 104. I offer that this production, which attempted to lay bare the words through the simplicity of its staging, returns attention to the ethical moment engendered by the act of Saying, a moment of real encounter between audience and performer. Removing the political layerings of most contemporary Shakespearean productions (it is far too easy to imagine a production in which young Hal's Falstaffian antics included a stint in the Texas Air National Guard) Maxwell asks the audience to hear the text and to encounter the performance. Many of the audience members departed with snide remarks, and some of those who stayed made similar comments; several people clapped loudly when two-thirds of the way through the evening a character commented "No more, no more." Certainly this is no utopia. The action of leaving exemplifies the openness of the ethical gesture of the performers, who prostrate themselves at the feet of the audience, as well as demonstrating the ways in which subjectivity is created through the ethical relation. Adriaan Peperzak reads Lévinas's ethics, "your entering into my dwelling place interrupts the coherence of my economy; you disarrange my order

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[32] Michael Feingold, "Henry IV, Square One," *Village Voice*, 8 October, 2003

in which all things familiar to me have their proper place, function, and time."[33] The departures of the many audience members frame just as legitimate a response as standing to clap.

For those who stayed, the play took on further meaning through the confluence of the performance and the mass exodus; this was theatre that truly offended the audience, but in that offense we may see the seed of a theatre which can once again begin to mean, perhaps in the shaking up of an otherwise complacent audience, one can begin to see a way beyond the political stalemate of the contemporary moment. Theatre is a site marked by the intersubjective relation. It is the site of an ethics that returns to the individual. The placing in real space of this event in this present moment, in front of this audience, gives it the power to spill over the safe edges. Maybe ethics can provide a way to see beyond the categorical blinders that identity politics instantiates. Davis and Womack argue that "[e]thical critics, like cartographers, do not necessarily discover or make a territory but, instead, describe and give shape to what has already existed."[34] I contend that the theatre is that place, the *platea* of ethics; theatre always produces a localized map of a larger space. The theatre may then allow for a redefinition of freedom, not one instantiated by democratic politics, but one formed through the theatrical model in terms of unconditional obligation to the other. This is an ethics of liveness, a reading of the space of performance

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[33] Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, *Beyond : The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology & Existential Philosophy (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 66.

[34] Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack, *Mapping the Ethical Turn : A Reader in Ethics, Culture, and Literary Theory* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), ix.

as it is constituted in the moment of presence to provoke responsibility. It is in this shift from utopia to ethotopos that I believe that theatre can be construed as central to the formation of a contemporary ethics because of the implicit contract between self and other; although predicated on a choice to attend, each individual finds her- or himself in a situation of responsibility to another, a situation which acknowledges that other's radical difference, but does not attempt to name/define that other with a limiting political gesture. It is within the ethical charge of the theatrical space that its power resides, not within the politics of the performance, but within the very form itself. As Adorno suggested, perhaps "Real denunciation [of social institutions] is . . . only a capacity of form, which is overlooked by a social aesthetic that believes in themes."[35] By drawing focus to the theatrical event and its instantiation, rather than the political content and intent, I hope to show that ethics should be read at the base of the theatre and that this may be the most productive interjection of the theatre into contemporary cultural forms.

In delineating an ethics of performance, I attempt to move beyond the ontological underpinnings of much theatrical theory, which, whether it focuses on the audience or the performer, often tends to underplay relationality or subjugate it to epistemology. Recent attempts to explore performance's ethical construction are largely predicated on a psychoanalytic view of subject formation. I refer here particularly to the debate between Peggy Phelan and Philip Auslander over "liveness," which follows from his responses to her oft-quoted statement that

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[35] Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 230.

"[p]erformance's only life is in the present,"[36] and her argument that performance is the potential site of a resistance to commodification. He first articulated his responses in a presentation in 1994.[37] Phelan's work builds on a Lacanian view of lack and its centrality to identity-based development. Theatrical performance is often read, following Phelan, through a lens similar to that of trauma studies, where as Freud says, "[t]he finding of an object is in fact a refinding of it."[38] By proposing instead a view of performance and identification based on ethics as first philosophy, I attempt to articulate contemporary American performance as a space in which the encounter with alterity is staged repeatedly, not in the now-classic sense of performance as restored behavior (as claimed by Richard Schechner), but fresh each time.

Jon McKenzie's recent book *Perform, or Else*, refigures the Foucauldian disciplinarity of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in what he terms the performance stratum of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. As I have stated earlier, I return from his wide-ranging conjectures to remain within the realm of "aesthetic" theatrical performance, claiming that his argument for the necessity of performance in contemporary society is in fact an ethical call. I explore here how the challenge to Perform or Else must be taken up with regard to the twinned questions of identification and subjectivity in the collision between

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[36] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked : The Politics of Performance* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1993), 146. For Auslander's response see Philip Auslander, *Liveness : Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1999).

[37] Philip Auslander, "Liveness" ATHE Conference 1994

[38] Sigmund Freud and James Strachey, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, International Psycho-Analytical Library ; (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 88.

performer and audience in the age of late capitalism. If the theatre is indeed ethotopos, then there is, following Lévinas, a need for theatrical performance, a need for this space to imagine the possibilities; to not perform "after Auschwitz" would indeed, then be barbaric.

My dissertation is set up along three vectors of identification. Each of the following three chapters will begin with the notion of Lévinasian ethics—moving from language, the expression of openness to the contact with alterity; to the face, the exposure to the trace of the Other revealing her/him as unknowable and particular and commanding me to acknowledge this individual; and finally to the caress, the attempt to reach out across this gap between other and self—and juxtapose to each of these formulations a vector along which Western, particularly American, conceptions of alterity have historically been formulated. The three are class (which I posit through a postcolonial framing of global relations), race, and the twinned vectors of sexuality and gender—unless otherwise specifically noted, the universalist subject of the pre-identity politics era was presumed to be white, male, heterosexual, and (upwardly-mobile) middle class. Within American culture and Western discourse these categories are all imbricated with each other in a complex relation that renders them difficult to disentangle. By exploring each of these trajectories within the purview of contemporary theatrical practices, I posit the move beyond identity politics to an ethics of subjectivity, a spatial reconfiguration of the theoretical terrain of the contemporary wherein the I is pre-faced by the not-I, allowing a place for all subjects to claim subjectivity, a claim grounded in difference and appearance, in the space between performer and

audience. In contrast to Lévinas, I contend that theatrical performance (perhaps paradoxically) presents the originary encounter—an encounter in which we recognize the "I" and observe and remark on the separate and non-assimilable presences of the not-I.

The move from deconstruction to political discourse in the humanities is being largely followed by a return to ethics. Two recent anthologies titularly acknowledge this shift: Beatrice Hanssen, Rebecca L. Walkowitz, and Marjorie Garber's *The Turn to Ethics*, and Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack's *Mapping the Ethical Turn*.[39] Yet these anthologies largely ignore theatre and performance, which I believe provides a privileged site for understanding and modeling ethics, predicated as it is in the face-to-face relation. In grounding my argument in questions of ethics, I recognize that there is a potentially problematic return to discourses of universality, which I articulate in the conclusion. As I have stated above, this is a turn to ethics from within the historicity of the present moment. I triangulate the historical bases of this project in relation to the distinct senses of temporality that define the present moment—all of the performances at which I look situate themselves within the intersections of postcolonial and post-cold-war time frames while the event of their productions straddles the seminal event in American neoimperialism—the September 11th attacks. It is in the interplay between these time frames that the world now finds itself. Through the first chapter in particular, I explore the framework of these temporalities, questioning

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[39] Marjorie B. Garber, Beatrice Hanssen, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, *The Turn to Ethics*, *Culture Work* (New York: Routledge, 2000). and Davis and Womack, *Mapping the Ethical Turn : A Reader in Ethics, Culture, and Literary Theory*.

how American time is constructed in the present moment. "New figures of struggle and new subjectivities are produced in the conjuncture of events, in the universal nomadism, in the general mixture and miscegenation of individuals and populations, and in the technological metamorphoses of the imperial biopolitical machine."[40] As the world shifted in the aftermath of World War II, new political structures arose in the vacuums formed when colonizers returned countries to local power structures. All colonization became, in a sense, local as the colonial frameworks were absorbed into new models of governance worldwide.[41] In the shift that occurred with decolonization and the formation of new national identities (the creation of "subaltern nations,") the process reiterated the colonialism of the earlier era, but with the added complexities of the collapse into one of two senses of historical time—colonial and pre-colonial. The shift now, as was the central conceit of Hardt and Negri's timely work, ventures beyond this simple reframing of nationalism to produce individual subjectivities in a complex matrix of border crossings. Their argument repositions the contemporary moment as one in which the structures of power and resistance must be examined from the substructure up (the "multitudes"), rather than as has been the case with most previous studies of globalization, a "trickle-down" globalism. Their argument has been widely critiqued for its stance on the failure of traditional institutions to provide the means for political change and its wholesale shift to a "netocracy" in

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[40] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 61.

[41] This was explicitly addressed in England's leaving India by partition, in other instances (including recently Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia) it led to a rise in ethnic cleansing and political imbalances.

which power is non-discrete.[42] I agree largely with these reservations, but I believe that the periodization they lay out is not radically different from that of Saskia Sassen's now canonical work on global cities and is useful for an exploration of the ways in which temporality works in the current world order.[43] (I will explore these distinctions in much greater depth in the chapter that follows.) The shift that they lay out in this work is a gesture of utopian futurity, but the focal change from political entities to ethical individuals can potentially provide a new basis for these political coalitions. I contend that the solution to these dilemmas of the political realm is potentially implicit within the exploration of this new world order—a turn away from politics and back to the ethical, which will ultimately allow a "differanced" return to the political. In the intersection of the three temporalities that frame my discussion, the multi-national corporations of the current era and the flows of capital in the contemporary moment rewrite the American model of intertwined capitalism and democracy on a global scale. The new military of the contemporary moment is the coexistent armies of capital, conscripting from the developing world, and the martial powers which police the opening of geographic borders for capital flow. Both of these militaries unite to paradoxically sell belief in the rights of the individual through the might and production power of the masses. I argue here that theatre might help to imagine, in its modes of production, ethical alternatives.

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[42] See for example: Timothy Brennan, "The Empire's New Clothes," *Critical Inquiry* 29, no. 2 (Winter 2003), Stanley Aronowitz, "The New World Order (They Mean It)," *The Nation*, July 17, 2000 2000.

[43] Saskia Sassen, *Cities in a World Economy*, *Sociology for a New Century* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Pine Forge Press, 1994).

In *The Theory of the Novel*, Georg Lukács posits that the novel served the same purpose for modernity that the epic served for ancient Greece. He defines "The novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality."[44] For Lukács, the epic is the form of discourse associated with historical understanding; it is the modality by which the Hellenic world both represented itself and presents itself to posterity. He distinguishes between what he terms the pre-modern "integrated civilization" (which he marks as possessing a lack of interior subjectivity due to a lack of exteriority, claiming that within this sphere, there is no distinction between history and philosophy) and the fragmenting world, but singular subjectivity of modernity. While I recognize that his "idealization" of the Hellenic world is highly problematic, I wish provisionally to accept the ends of his argument and to extend this exploration by proposing that performance[45] is the epic form of postcoloniality, as I will argue in my concluding chapter. J.M. Bernstein persuasively argues that for Lukács, modernity should be read as the "post-feudal."[46] In the postcolonial re-fracturing of subjectivity, I recall Badiou's ethical hesitation along with the philosophy of Lévinas, placing cultural primacy

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[44] George Lukacs, *The Theory of the Novel; a Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.,: M.I.T. Press, 1971), 56.

[45] Note here that I am using Performance, as Joe Roach develops the notion of surrogation—behavior which attempts to "stand in for an elusive entity that it is not but that it must vainly aspire both to embody and to replace." Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 3.

[46] J. M. Bernstein, *The Philosophy of the Novel : Lukacs, Marxism, and the Dialectics of Form* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

on the Other in the self-Other relation. This hierarchicization places a priority on exteriority, and within philosophic discourse it offers to trouble the traditional Western primacy of the self by its invocation of the ethical call to accept the Other (and the self's inability to fully comprehend the Other) in all "his" glory.[47] This produces, in the breaking open of philosophic discourse, a highly problematic blurring between interiority and exteriority, which was Lukács's demarcation of the "integrated world" of Greece. After the novel of modernity, live theatrically framed performance can provide a space within which the multiplicitous voicings of postcoloniality may resonate, an ethics of narration.[48] Though there is intentionality on both sides, meaning is clearly created in the space between the performer and the receiver and in the ways in which the audience member accepts the primacy of the actor within the performance. The echo is the figure that I invoke here as it destabilizes the question of origin (already troubled in the contemporary moment).[49] Performance, by its very being,

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[47] I use the masculine pronoun here cautiously, in order to acknowledge the problematic use of gendered pronouns within Western philosophy and to attempt to leave aside for the purposes of this introduction the problems which Luce Irigaray notes that Lévinas borders on in *Totality and Infinity* of the simplistic concept of the feminine as the Other to discourse. I will address this issue directly in my chapter on sex and gender.

[48] Although outside the scope of this dissertation, another provocative reading here might be offered by examining the notion of blogging and the various notions of democratization that some cultural critics are proposing as the crucial frame of Web 2.0. See for instance Richard Davis, *Politics Online : Blogs, Chatrooms, and Discussion Groups in American Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 2005), Viviane Serfaty, *The Mirror and the Veil : An Overview of American Online Diaries and Blogs*, Amsterdam Monographs in American Studies ; (Amsterdam ; New York: Rodopi, 2004).

[49] For a provocative reading of the figure of the echo and its relation to questions of origin, see Joan Wallach Scott, "Fantasy Echo: History and the Construction of Identity," *Critical Inquiry* 27, no. 2 (2001).

stages dialogues of encounter. It is these dialogues, which I argue, instantiate the ethotopos to demonstrate the primacy of the ethical relation within the world, the calling into being of the self through the face of the Other.

Bernstein notes that in Lukács, unlike in the work of Walter Benjamin, plurality does not imply the perfection of origin: "Lukács's point is not about a past unity which is forever lost to us, but about a present of separation which needs to be seen *as* fragmented in order to be understood correctly."[50] For Benjamin, the end of storytelling is a loss to be mourned, for Lukács, it signifies a movement on to a more temporally connected mode of discourse. Performance exemplifies the always already split subject(s) of postcoloniality's double consciousness.[51] This is particularly true in the contemporary foregrounding of the gesture of passing, and in the ways that this performance marks itself as performance—the onstage pass relies on a form of performative irony to simultaneously code and decipher the act of passing; this is a contemporary refiguring of the classic "not-but" grounded in relationality. I will explore the notion of onstage passing in much greater detail within the third chapter. My argument builds here on Amy Robinson's provocative work on passing; she argues that a pass must involve three parties—the passer, the dupe, and a third

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[50] J. M. Bernstein, *Adorno : Disenchantment and Ethics*, Modern European Philosophy (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 75.

[51] This duplicity arises often from the ways in which the postcolonial individual is subject to the reification of the colonial impulse by local elites. See, for instance, the work of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o.

party, an "in-group reader" who recognizes the pass as performance.[52] For the onstage pass, the audience is asked to simultaneously perform both the dupe and the reader. The body in performance, through its phenomenological presence as en-fleshed object, and the voice in performance as testimonial echo to "history" serve a dialectical function, embodying the increasing emphasis on a poetics of borders and liminality in the globalized world. The echo, as it overlays the individual voice and the disembodied repetition, helps to reframe a psychoanalytic understanding of character by rendering unclear the distinction between "original" and "copy," between self and Other, between colonized subject and colonizer.

Recognizing the audience's awareness of itself as distinctly other to the performer, the onstage performative utterances[53] must ethically be taken up by an audience in the contemporary postcolonial moment—it is the primacy of the Lévinasian saying rather than the constative said which emerges from ethics. Performance is by nature both constative and performative, creating culture through its citationality, even with a message content that often appears to be simply (a) constative narration. Performance is instrumental in the development of culture, setting it into being through the utterance itself: through this, Performance *becomes* the epic of postcoloniality.

Surprisingly, there is a very limited body of work directly engaging ethical

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[52] Amy Robinson, "It Takes One to Know One: Passing and Communities of Common Interest," *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 4 (1994).

[53] I acknowledge here that the onstage performative is often considered to be "hollow." Part of my contention that I will lay out in the second chapter is a dispute of this claim.

discourse and theatre. Alan Read's 1993 *Theatre and Everyday Life: An Ethics of Performance*, despite its titular assertion, in fact deals primarily with the distinction between daily life, architectural practices, theatrical practice and theory, arguing for a critical framework that is more malleable than our standard understandings.[54] One of the most exciting attempts to engage ethical philosophy is in the current work of Jon Erickson, whose exploration of the self and the Other in theatre, as put forth in a brief article, builds from colliding the work of Lévinas with that of Deleuze and Guattari. He ultimately argues for a heteronomous self, claiming that the theatrical other "always points most directly to the Other within, something with more exteriority to it than we may realize."[55] Erickson's choice of the face as the central metaphor through which he questions what an ethics of performance might look like is central to his exploration and promises to open up to a much wider frame of inquiry. Although my analysis begins with the question of the ethical nature of language, arguing for the relation between the saying and the said as the basis for articulating an ethics of performance, I then move as well to the face as the figuration of Lévinas's architecture of encounter—the model of the encounter between self and other that theatre performs. As Erickson comments, "What is the face to face in performance? Clearly the vast majority of performance historically and cross-culturally has presented itself to the audience in an attitude of facing, a presentational attitude . . . . Is the face involved here literally the face of the performer, or is it indicated in the very architectural

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[54] Alan Read, *Theatre and Everyday Life : An Ethics of Performance* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1993).

[55] Erickson, "The Face and the Possibility of an Ethics of Performance," 20.

relation?"[56] The other recent work to explore the notion of the face-to-face in theatre largely attempts to move beyond Lévinas's work; Nicholas Ridout claims in his 2006 *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems*, that his notion of the face-to-face differs from Lévinas's as he attempts to seek something more political than that which "the purity of an ethics that is grounded in a recognition of the singularity of the other would appear to generate."[57]

In designing this project to articulate that theatre is the ideal model of ethotopos, and exploring this within the context of contemporary American performance, I frame my study with three deceptively simple questions. Why theatre? Why ethics? Why American? I have thus far addressed the first two questions and will shortly address the crucial third. With regard to the first, as I have stated above, I have limited this to theatrical/aesthetic performance because theatre is a site which is rendered "safe" and "sanitized"—the audience is produced as witness to an encounter, to an event which is always both Event and re-presentation as event. Crucially the theatre is the place in which a body is made to appear—"Who's there?," as the first line of *Hamlet* reminds us. (As is widely noted, the Greek roots of theatre and seeing/witnessing are strongly connected.) Yet, the space of "this event" in the present moment, in front of this audience gives it the power to spill over the safe edges and be present in the ethotopic moment. As Alan Read remarks in his study of the ethics of performance, the theatre is always a space of a double encounter—of performer

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[56] Ibid.: 13.

[57] Nick Ridout, *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems*, Theatre and Performance Theory (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 30.

and audience member and of audience member to each other audience member. Theatre thus provides a site marked by intersections of all possible intersubjective relations. Why ethics? Ethics returns to the individual, yet within the frame of intersubjectivity. As I have argued earlier, ethics provides a way to see beyond the categorical blinders that identity politics instantiates. The theatre is that place, the *platea* of ethics; theatre produces a localized map of a larger space.

I turn now to the third and perhaps most problematic question, why American theatre? This is a crucial imposition of limits, which I propose as a preliminary foray, but one that will open the field for further scholarship. What is relatively unique to the imperialistic trajectory of the current moment is the development of a cultural domination that diffuses on a global scale from extra-governmental, but American-centric power structures. The contemporary replays the "American Dream" writ large, on a global scale, as nations are pressured from the US government and US-driven institutions to follow an American model of capitalism.[58] Hardt and Negri suggest that "[t]he apparatus of command has no access to the local spaces and the determinate temporal sequence of life where the administration functions; it does not manage to put its hands on the singularities and their activities. What imperial command seeks substantially to invest and protect, and what it guarantees for capitalist development, are rather the general equilibria of the global system."[59] Theatre circulates in the global economy, but with the difference that it originates from within and redefines local spaces;

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[58] The practical failure of communism in 1989 has elided the differences between democracy and capitalism.

[59] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 345.

performance is commodified and presented as a mapping of another location. As humankind transitions, if we provisionally accept the contentions of Hardt and Negri, from international to global, we must recognize the position of the United States as the sole remaining superpower in the nation-state model. The Empire which Hardt and Negri imagine is an Empire recast in the American model,[60] but derived from the decentered power of globalism. Yet in the remolding of this model of empire, saleable theatrical production still originates from a limited cultural sphere. American theatre must, perhaps paradoxically, serve as a placeholder for this reimagined theatre, for it is this theatre that originates from within the seat of "imperial" power, recognizing these imbalances that can most directly speak to them. In an age of increasing deterritorialization and disappearing importance of national borders, current US politics seem to demonstrate a desire to adhere to understood power structures. I focus this study on work that has been coded as politically engaged, in order to explore the limits of politics and ethics, recognizing that perhaps this is not the theatre most representative of the generic American condition. While Broadway or the regional theatre circuit would be more directly translatable in its relation to the expanded sense of manifest destiny which seems to guide American policy today, by exploring work that is already read as political, I believe I can more clearly demonstrate the necessity of a shift to a language of ethics. I limit this argument not to American borders, but to readings of these three politically instantiated

[60] I want to acknowledge the fine distinction here between claims of an American neo-imperialism, which in the aftermath of 9/11 under the Bush administration becomes harder to deny, and Hardt and Negri's subtler articulation of a non-nationalistic Empire.

categories—class, race, sex and gender—through American-based lenses. I argue that American theatre has both a unique ability and a particular responsibility to question the "realities" of the political moment in this age of worldwide domination by global capitalism in an American model. I argue as well that in this lies a response to Badiou's ninth thesis on contemporary art from his keynote speech delivered at CivicCentre in 2004, "The only maxim of contemporary art is: do not be imperial. This also means: do not be democratic, if democracy implies conformity with the imperial idea of political liberty."[61] American art today, if we take it as a category, by definition tends towards Imperial. How then, might exploring the ethical relation that lies at the heart of American theatre in particular, allow us to question the notions of responsibility in the act of staging?

As the nature of this project is not explicitly concerned with the political, but the ethical grounding which precedes the political, I feel that by defining a "fixed" political universe, and by beginning with explicitly political work, I can demonstrate the ways in which this shift regrounds political readings and the drive for justice.[62] A contemporary ethics, as read through Lévinas, can allow us to reimagine the importance of justice, a justice interpreted through a neo-Marxism, which is not coalitional from the base to the superstructure, but which begins in the site of art production—Bourdieu's "dominated fraction of a dominant class."[63]

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[61] Alain Badiou, "Fifteen Theses on Contemporary Art," *Performance Research* 9, no. 4 (December 2004): 86.

[62] This work must crucially be extended to look at mainstream US theatre and its complicity within the model of US capitalism on display in the world today.

[63] I recognize the danger of a conservatism in this distinction, a proposition of a "trickle-down" cultural effect that I do not seek to impose.

Class is the vector of identity that stands at the base of the entirety of this study, more particularly class in the age after the pinnacle of nation-state supremacy. I read class in the contemporary through the lens of what might be considered a post-cold war Marxist viewpoint and I contend that the theatre, perhaps ironically, provides the paradigmatic site wherein this notion of class may be explored.

In the three chapters that follow, I interrogate the notion of justice through its imbrication within three of the most widely explored political vectors of the contemporary world—class, race, and the pair of gender and sexuality. In these chapters, the case studies that I use as starting points for my discussions are all American. I choose these performances because of this contemporary model of neoliberal capitalism. As I write this, I wish to recognize that the theatre I am discussing attempts to pose itself as a resistant site of "production" within the contemporary, one that is neither dominated by nor draws predominantly from the American model of capitalism. Theatre within the "first world" today is an elitist institution; without resorting to a discussion of activist practices, I contend that it is from within this sphere that questions of responsibility and ethics must be raised in the contemporary. In the conclusion, I turn briefly to the ideas of refugeeism and nomadology that are so central to discourses of justice today in order to propose the ways in which ethotopos may be read as a productive site.

Ethical Language and Class in the Global World

This first chapter applies the ideas of the saying and the said to Tony Kushner's work, focusing in particular on *Homebody/Kabul*, although exploring as well both *Angels in America* and *Caroline, or Change*. The play follows a

formalist dialectical structure; the first act remains within the confines of the residence of the British "Homebody" while the second and third shift ground to Kabul. The Homebody's hour-long monologue, in which she discourses on her fascination with Afghanistan, aided by an out-of-date guidebook and the rhizomatic meanderings of her mind, explores the ways in which Afghanistan (and the third world more generally) is imaginatively constructed by the first world consumer, Her imagined Kabul is represented by a pyramid of Afghan hats and an imagined affair with the Muslim shopkeeper, the Islamic world metonymized as a source of production to enliven a Western party. The physical shift to Kabul is predicated on the Homebody's absence, which may be due to death or to her subjugation of the Western self to an Islamic worldview. This more "real"-ized Afghanistan forces the audience to confront the materiality of the country, of the conditions of recent life in Afghanistan. Kushner's imagined Afghanistan of poets, subjugated women, and addicts echoes the Chicago and China of Brecht's historical materialist imaginings; Kushner further destabilizes its realness through his polyglossic script.

Careening from English to Pashtun, with dialogue in Farsi, French, German, Russian, and Esperanto, Kushner's writing attempts to develop a conception of an ethical language—a term that I borrow from Lévinas—of presentation within a representative art form. For Lévinas, language is the fundamental means by which the self and the Other come into contact. Two modes of historiography—synchronous and diachronous—are represented in the play through its dialectic structure: the first half presents the said of Western

missionary colonialism, the second the saying of varieties of "actual" non-Western religious experiences.

It is through the use of language within this play—from the rapid-fire colonialism of the Homebody in the first act to the multilingualism at the crossroads of history—that Kushner lays out his attempt to represent issues of Otherness. Beginning from Lévinas's contention that it is through language that the primal encounter occurs, that language is the basis of the ethical, I explore the role which global class distinctions play in the stage world of *Homebody/Kabul*. I explore Kushner's attempted construction of an ethical stage language—a heteroglossic vocality which expresses the Otherness to the Western society. The explosion of language thus becomes a site where the intersections between classes are implicit.

Involved in this discussion is an exploration in the way that religion as a marker of difference in an American idiom is a coded replacement of the ways in which the global class structure is lived today. I seek in this as well to find a way to explore the problematic linkages of religion, ethics, and discourses of morality in the American consciousness. This is, in some sense, the location that a discussion of ethics in contemporary American must begin; the constitutional separation between church and state, particularly in the face of the neoconservative movement and the questions of faith-based charity are the center of any political discussion of "right" today.

Playing Races and Faces

This chapter builds on the exploration of language in the previous

chapter—adding in Lévinas's conception of the face as the figuration of contact with the other—to explore the presentation of race in solo performance. Through examining contemporary theatrical performances of racial passing, focusing on Anna Deavere-Smith, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, John Leguizamo, and Sarah Jones, I explore the philosophical shift from a politicized performance art presentation of self to an examination of society's ethical construction. All of these performers trouble historical western binaries of self and other through their simultaneous embodiment of multiple positions. This chapter explores the implications of on-stage passing's need to mark itself as performance: to be recognized as passing, a performance must include the failure to pass.

Within these theatricalized "trans-"performances, the performer attempts and fails to embody both self and Other; the audience recognizes in the marked, raced face of the performer the need to bridge this gap and the simultaneous failure to surpass race. By its necessary dramatization of both passing and the failure to pass, the "trans-" performance calls into play for the audience the ethical relation as the primary relationship, destabilizing the traditional Western history of ontological primacy.

Postcoloniality is created through passing performances, which in their oscillation between subject positions ethically demonstrate the impact of colonialism and the continuing inhabitability of the position of the Other.

> Differences in culture and power are constituted through the social conditions of enunciation: the temporal caesura, *which is also the historically transformative moment*, when a lagged

> space opens up *in*-between the *inter*subjective 'reality of signs . . . deprived of subjectivity' and the historical development of the subject in the order of social symbols."[64]

The performers I examine here destabilize questions of origin, by elucidating the subject as one always in the process of becoming subject, one subject to the project of colonialism, one subject to linguistic imperialism. It is in performance that they can step out of time and mark the impact of time, that they can further the project of postcoloniality, by exploring the poetics of borders in the United States. Their bodies utter corporeal Austinian performatives that speak to and with the constative utterances of their voices and they matrix a positive future, but a future marked indelibly by the past and the present. Performance is the art of liveness; these artists stage an encounter between the dead and the live of performance, between memory and history, between remembering and memorializing, between the present and the past. These are revelatory encounters that offer an ethical response to postcoloniality. In the act of passing as "other," each foregrounds the ethical role of the audience, staging the complex relationship within the contemporary of self and other. The presence of the audience, despite Lévinas's assertions that the aesthetic is not prescribed by the ethical, provides a grounding through which the multiplicity of postcoloniality stages the ethical call. The notion of "trans-" performance creates a space within which the aporias of knowability can be re-presented; it is in the space that exists both in the staged passing and in the abyss between the performed and the audience that the ethical

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[64] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1994), 242.

call appears, and that one is faced with not simply a choice of accepting otherness, with not simply an explanation of the Other in the terms of the self, but with the radical alterity of otherness and with the challenge to view and accept the complexity of the Other in its complementarity and unre-cognize-ability, not because it may be posited as acceptable Other.

Gender, Sexuality, and the Caress

Building from the concept of the face to Lévinas's exploration of the caress, I move as well from race into an exploration of sexuality and gender. Recognizing the varied ways in which these terms simultaneously intersect and yet remain separate, I attempt to explore their imbrication through applying the direct notion of touch. I start the chapter with an exploration of the problematic history of Lévinas's interrogation of gender, arguing for a queering of his notion of the caress. Using this as a touchstone to focus on gender-driven solo performance and explore the economy of desire that is at stake in much solo performance work of artists such as Tim Miller to expand from the previous chapter, I move to the multiple roles and multiple histories within the contemporary drag performance of Kiki and Herb. Through this justaposition, I explore the ways in which multiple layerings of codes can be placed on one another. As well, I explore Kiki and Herb's use of music and aggression throughout their work, along with the onstage relationship to explore multiple modalities of the caress, looking at the notion of body-to body contact and the role of the voice. This returns as well to the distinction from the first chapter on the Saying and the Said, but expands outwards to look at the ways in which the

relation to music (and to some forms of language) can add a level of complexity to the Saying embodied by the "warmth" of a vocal expression. Lévinas claims that "the subject who is in contact with another goes beyond this contact . . . the caress does not know what it seeks."[65] I begin with the reliance on audience desire that Miller draws from, positing the caress as the interaction established in the breaking of the fourth wall that structures solo gender performance, but then focus on an exploration of how the means by which the simultaneous exploration of multiple gender roles and multiple sexualities on stage in the presentation of performed onstage interaction further deconstructs the notions of gender and sexuality and their intersections. I propose that the notion of the performed caress can provide the next step forward from the potential polarization of identity politics. Because solo performance often seeks to imbricate the audience's desirous imaginings and plays with questions of objectification, I argue that it stages a version of the caress that must be explored in the conjunction with the less literal caress.

In relating to this, I explore the notion of queer genealogies, as put forth by David Román and others. In the work of Kiki and Herb, for instance, the performers repeatedly cite an invented history of their recordings and an invented history of interactions with historical figures (i.e. Princess Grace). This reimagining of diachronous history is implicitly concerned with the touch of history, with the ways in which an alternate past produces the present. Thus the performance of the caress expands to encompass not solely the crossing of the

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[65] Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other and Additional Essays* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 89.

fourth wall and implication of desire, but the relation of the caress to generational transition.

Conclusion: Theatre and a New Humanism?

In my conclusion, I attempt to bring these views of ethics together to begin to examine how certain developments in theatre might further this exploration. Looking at the ways in which Lévinas's ethics might imagine a new subjectivity, I turn to Immanuel Wallerstein's framing of the contemporary moment to imagine a new humanism defined through the idea of substitution. I turn to Lévinas's figure of the third party—the person under whose gaze the self and other meet—and propose that productions such as Peter Sellars's *The Children of Herakles* might provide the space where the construction of ethics that I have developed extends beyond the space of the theatre, exploding the notions of ethotopos outward to society as a whole. While this production take place in a traditional theatre space, it repeatedly "violates" the divide of the fourth wall, through a variety of extra-theatrical techniques, thus challenging the audience with the notion of ethical responsibility. I briefly look at several productions that work similarly, articulating a notion of performance as the epic form of the present moment. I then briefly explore the notion of the intimate, discussing one-to-one performance and the need for the presence of the third party in order to begin to redefine justice.

In this dissertation, I attempt to extend the work done in ethical philosophy to theatre, arguing that the theatre provides a crucial laboratory to demonstrate the primacy of the ethical relation and the necessity of the

subjugation of the self and political gain within that relation, while simultaneously I attempt to explicate the innate ethics of theatre and locate it in performance scholarship. I seek to produce an ethics that is firmly grounded in the contemporary moment, which turns to theatre as an historical phenomenon to present the contestation of the ethical. I draw on theatre and its reliance on proximity to ground ethics in present time and real space, and to propose that this historical grounding can serve a productive purpose by stabilizing the utopian sense of futurity that often drives readings of theatre as political praxis. Politically driven theatre criticism often relies upon theories of communitas and the sense of a longed for future; the questions of ethics that I propose here interrupts this by troubling the notion of teleology and looking at theatrical time as messianic. I do this by bringing together the work of philosophers and theatre scholars and arguing that there is a fertile ground to be found at the intersections of these two discourses, a site that I articulate as ethotopos, the space of ethics and the space of theatre. In so doing, I build on the conceptions of ethical philosophy and alterity developed by Emmanuel Lévinas and Alain Badiou. Through an exploration of the ethical relation of theatre, I examine the nature of contemporary theatre and the shift to an ethical relation necessitated by the act of observing the death of the Other within the ethotopic space of the theatre.

CHAPTER TWO: WHAT WE HAVE HERE IS A FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE: POLYGLOSSIA, VOLUMINOUS SILENCES, AND THEATRICAL DISAPPOINTMENT IN THE WORK OF TONY KUSHNER

The first of my substantive case studies begins from what has been framed by both the academy and the general public as the clear 'event' of the twenty-first century—the attacks of September 11, 2001. This is an explicit invocation of Badiou's use of the term "event" here, as discussed in the introduction, as the paradigm changing moment which in its aftermath can be read to produce a subject in fidelity to the truth processes set in motion by that occurrence. While this concept of the event has been widely developed and unpacked within contemporary philosophic thought, and Badiou's use of set theory to explore the notion of eventness[66] arguably demonstrates a useful confluence of mathematical precision and philosophical argumentation, I contend that there is little in the notion of the event *qua* event that could not be read through the Lévinasian notion of the encounter. That is to say, the event as Badiou frames can be read to be rarely drastically different from the face-to-face meeting. While Badiou uses some non-personal experiences—such as the development of the twelve-tone scale, this event could not exist as an event were it not taken up, that is to say were there not a face-to-face encounter (even if mediated by discourse). Indeed,

[66] Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (London ; New York: Continuum, 2005).

even this reliance on discursive mediation is anticipated by Lévinas's focus on language in his later analyses of the face.

The September 11 events, as I will unpack in this chapter, clearly articulated a new grammar for the encounter between east and west. While certainly there is precedent for this type of encounter—and it would be naïve to ignore France's history with Algeria or earlier attacks on American interests by Al Qaeda (and vice-versa)—this event immediately reframed a notion of fidelity to Western interests. While the early near-unanimous support for US interests clearly petered away in the face of ongoing American military engagement and falsely framed dichotomies, the function of this moment as a paradigm-shifting event remains clear. If we examine this event closely, something that has been widely done in the fields of political science, sociology, and international relations,[67] we can see that the aftermath of this event has played it as a pure encounter between the faces of west and east, between capital and faith, or as framed by US political interests, between good and evil. (In an over-literalization of this reading, there was a great deal of discussion and email circulation of a photo of the smoking World Trade Center which purported to show the "face of Satan" in the smoke.[68]) The encounter between western Christian militant capitalism and Eastern militant Islam is certainly a repeated history, but the events

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[67] This event has been studied and discussed ad infinitum, both in the scholarly press and in the general public. 2006 even saw several major films devoted to close examinations and re-imaginings of the day's events.

[68] For detail on this claim, see for instance , http://www.clickondetroit.com/news/962839/detail.html.

of September 11 were of a scale which recast them as never-before-encountered. The processes of globalization, often read as an acceleration of historical encounter by the media and the increased speed of travel/ease of access, produced scale then as a function of temporality.[69]

Given the contextualization of these events, in the late autumn of 2001, throughout downtown New York City, one play dominated the arts headlines. The first major play by Tony Kushner since the epic and much-lauded *Angels in America*, *Homebody/Kabul* was debated over intellectual dinner tables alongside Hardt and Negri's *Empire* as prescient prefigurations of the "new" state of emergency in the world.[70] The play premiered at the New York Theatre Workshop on 19 December, midway between the December 10 carpet bombing of Tora Bora and the December 22 establishment of an Afghan interim government under Pashtun royalist and US/Afghani loyalist Hamid Karzai. The local US press at the time was overwhelmed by discussions of Kushner's seeming prescience, the unlucky coincidence of his play's production appearing just as issues of Taliban rule in Afghanistan moved beyond leftist publications and into the public eye. However, once the reviewers got beyond this extra-theatrical frame, they ran into problems with the play. A certain disappointment in the

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[69] The determination of "globalisation" as better understood through a notion of speed figure both in the philosophical coinage of Paul Virilio's "hypermodernity" as well as in more political excurses by Malcolm Waters, Benjamin Barber, and Frank Lechner among others.

[70] In the use of the term "state of emergency," I wish to invoke the recent work of Giorgio Agamben, who in his unpacking of this term (in *Homo Sacer* and *State of Exception*) in the diametrically opposed writing of both Hannah Arendt and Carl Schmitt posits emergency as the defining state of existence of modernity and post-modernity, arguing for the need to escape this political (statist) overdefinition in order to return power to the individual.

bifurcated nature of the play—although this perhaps repeated, with a different conceit, the two-part structure of *Angels in America*—was obvious throughout the bulk of the reviews and discussions. Perhaps Kushner's historical "importance" as contemporary political dramatist overshadowed the dramatic construction, perhaps the play's position as jointly evental with, but in no way comparable to the events of September 11, foreclosed a space of theatrical critique, the impossibility of a critical discourse which was not already overdetermined by political discourse. There is a certain strand of American liberal thought, which sought in this production both the appropriate response to 9/11 and an understanding of the issues at stake. Yet by anticipating this all-too-neat desired solution, both audiences and critics predisposed themselves to an overemphasis on the first half's "success" and the "failure" of the plays later acts. Theatre's political clarity has, in recent years, become an all too often foregone conclusion—the left pays lip service to and uses the arts, the right (at least in the US) focuses instead on talk radio and sound bite culture. Much political theatre preaches to the converted, to a limited coterie audience ready to accept and embrace the message neatly contained within it.[71]

Indeed, the reason for the choice of Kushner as exemplar for this chapter is his framing as a mainstream leftist intellectual in America. Within the framing of the theatre as "liberal" (in a current US understanding of that term, rather than an historical derivation from Adam Smith), Kushner's theatre is the very edge of

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[71] For another recent response to this political overreliance, see David Román, *Performance in America : Contemporary U.S. Culture and the Performing Arts*, Perverse Modernities (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

mainstream. While not on the surface as challenging to a more conservative public as a playwright like Suzan-Lori Parks or some of the more determinedly "downtown" figures of the contemporary avant-garde, Kushner's work has been challenged by the religious right repeatedly. However, that has not stopped his work from penetrating into the American consciousness in a way that is atypical of a playwright with his provocative streak. The work that I explore within this chapter is pointedly not avant-garde. As I stated in the introduction, theatre is perhaps the perfect example of cultural production that today sits as the defining mark of erudition for mainstream society. Kushner's work sits at the juncture of high and mainstream cultures, his near-canonization within circles of academia and the "liberal elite" marks what is perhaps the exemplary locatedness of theatre in the contemporary. As David Savran has noted in a discussion of *Angels in America*:

> Because of its marginal position, both economically and culturally, theatre is a privileged portion of what Pierre Bourdieu designates as the literary and artistic field . . . As he explains, this field is contained within a larger field of economic and political power, while, at the same time, 'possessing a relative autonomy with respect to it. . . .' It is this *relative autonomy* that gives the literary and artistic field—and theatre in particular—both its high level of symbolic forms of capital and its low level of economic capital . . . The individual cultural producer (or theatre artist), insofar as he or she is a part of the bourgeoisie, represents a 'dominated fraction of the dominant class'. . . On the one hand, he or she is licensed to challenge hegemonic

> values insofar as it is a particularly effective way of accruing cultural capital. On the other hand, the more effective his or her challenge, the less economic capital he or she is likely to amass. Because of theatre's marginality in American culture, it seems to be held hostage to this double bind in a particularly unnerving way: the very disposition of the field guarantees that Broadway and regional theatres (unlike mass culture) are constantly in the process of having to negotiate this impossible position. What is perhaps most remarkable about *Angels in America* is that it has managed, against all odds, to amass significant levels of both cultural and economic capital.[72]

Kushner, then is the perfect case study with which to begin as his work has forced itself into the mainstream, perhaps by virtue of its apparent positioning outside of the ideological center, it has been read as the irruption of "culture" into the everyday middlebrow theatre. By examining his work, I posit that while his work seems to stage a cry for political engagement, it demonstrates as well the impossibility of theatre's producing true political change.[73] I believe that this conflict is physicalized most explicitly in *Homebody/Kabul*, but it also lies behind the debates in both *Angels in America* and *Caroline, or Change*.[74]

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[72] David Savran, "Ambivalence, Utopia, and a Queer Sort of Materialism: How *Angels in America* Reconstructs the Nation," *Theatre Journal* 47, no. 2 (May 1995): 222.

[73] For a political reading of *Homebody/Kabul*, see for instance the hopeful essays by Jacob Juntunen and James Fisher in James Fisher, *Tony Kushner: New Essays on the Art and Politics of the Plays* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2006).

[74] The bulk of the argument here will be made in relation to *Homebody/Kabul*, although the end of the chapter will discuss how Kushner sets out his project in *Angels in America.*

To begin with the most explicit example of theatre's need to be read through a lens of ethics, I argue that the stroke in Kushner's title *Homebody/Kabul* performs the shift from the political to the ethical; his embrace of the theatrical for its own sake implies and accepts a certain necessary messiness to liveness. The refusal of the play to accept containment: the repeated denials of knowability and translatability work within the theatrical structure to performatively examine the ethical relation within the/a post 9/11 world. One might ask how theatre that originates from within the United States, the sole contemporary world superpower, can ethically explore the imbalances of power between America and other parts of the world, yet it is precisely this appearance of the theatrical which raises the notions of an ethics. (The desire for such a question itself is particularly fraught issue as the national boundaries which delimit my project are themselves constructed political frameworks, which run the risk of overlimiting the notion of ethics, by a subsumation to the historically grounded notions of political efficacy.)[75]

Within the focus on Kushner's work, I begin with the notion of language within the theatre, relying on a primarily textually driven analysis, in order to explore the role of theatrical language in proposing a shift from a politically driven worldview to an ethical one. Kushner's play turns from the neatly liberal

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[75] It is crucial here to acknowledge as well current US concerns over borders, and in particular, recent US discussions of immigration legality. The shadow of these borders ghosts the writing throughout this dissertation, where a broad variety of American theatre that has been coded by critics and academics as political, the embodied work of performers such as Anna Deavere Smith, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, and Kiki and Herb relies on the acknowledgment of border cultures and border-crossing.

political discursive gestures of the Homebody to a distinctly illiberal, messy, exploration of the truth conditions of unknowability in the world. Kushner's use of language is consummately theatrical, all his plays rely on language to produce appearance and history. Kushner's major works all were written after 1989; while *Angels in America* explicitly deals with Marxism and the relation between communism and capitalism, set in the height of Reagan/cold-war-era America, all the plays exist in a political reality which is marked by apparent American hegemony.

The term "apparent" is crucial, since as much recent political theory argues, in reading the history of state domination throughout 500 years of capitalism, the US attempt at hegemonic domination never truly succeeded. The drive for American hegemony in the post-World War II era was first marked by the truncation of the world by a split into capitalist and communist, so while the US drive towards decolonization served to build American dominance, largely through limiting counter-hegemonic powers, rather than, as in previous eras, by building an externalized economy, it was always demarcated as a delimited project.[76] While the past thirty-five years have been marked culturally as a time of great political change, a time in which both discursive and organizational shifts have shaken long-standing political structures, current sociology argues largely that this is an overcited and undertheorized historical framing. As Immanuel Wallerstein argues in *After Liberalism*, the changes of the so-called revolutionary

[76] For a particularly erudite unpacking of this and the notion of World Stage Theory, see Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century : Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* (London ; New York: Verso, 1994).

eras of the past 200 years—1848, 1917, 1968—have largely been shifts within a world liberal consciousness that he dates to the French Revolution. While Wallerstein neatly frames his argument between that in 1789 and the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, I argue that in fact, a shift, if any, does not truly occur until September 11, 2001. The practical end of communism was still largely a shift within an ongoing liberal humanism controlled by capitalism. On a global western scale, the events of 9/11 brought into discussion and into question outside of academia, the relation of the individual to the corporate in a way that was largely foreclosed prior to that date. This castrating strike at the heart of the American consciousness broke through a veneer of superpower impermeability and drastically changed the ways in which both terrorism and American imperialism played out on the global scale. Perhaps not a material shift, it is a conceptual shift with material ramifications. Hardt and Negri's *Empire*, which despite being in many ways disproven empirically by the events of September 11, became the must-read book of the moment among the liberal elite. This book proposes a simplistic and yet crucial contention of a transition from an international worldview to a global worldview, articulating this through a call for the "multitudes" to rise up against the state. This shift, which can most clearly be articulated through the US need of coalition building is still framed from a Western discourse, is still defined linguistically. Far more successfully than Hardt and Negri's call for a turn to the political multitude, I contend that Kushner's play literally stages this transition, *Homebody/Kabul* acknowledging this shift in process. It does this through a linguistic fluidity which is pointedly

not a linguistic fluency. It does this through juxtaposing the polyglossic and the absent. Theatre, framed by its typical bourgeois trappings, contains, threatening sanitization and totalization. (Textually scripted performance with acknowledged playwrights—and I use this term to distinguish from devised or workshop-created performance because it is assumed to follow more formal structural codes, and plays to a different audience—rarely challenges received codes of theatrical exploration.) While notions of polyglossia are not in fact unusual within the theatre, within the contemporary moment they possess a particularly loaded resonance.[77] However, as Carlson notes in *Speaking in Tongues,* "The mainstream theatre, especially in the United States, does not yet reflect the increasingly heteroglossic community that surrounds it"[78] Indeed, much of Carlson's exploration of recent work within English-speaking cultures—I focus on these as English is the current *lingua franca* of hegemony—necessarily relies on performance decisions rather than scriptural ones. While in particular performances, directorial choice in recent years has often included the use of multiple languages, this is not usually (within English) a choice that comes prior to production. In Kushner's play, polyglossic language becomes crucially the language of the theatrical apparatus—written language dictating theatrical choice, controlling the appearance (and absence of the body). As well, while notions of absence and silence have become increasingly important in performance in recent years, this tends to be much more associated with performance art and dance than

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[77] For an analysis of polyglossic theatre throughout history, see Marvin A. Carlson, *Speaking in Tongues : Language at Play in the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

[78] Ibid., 213.

with a priori scripted theatre. For instance, while the absent voices that Sarah Gorman analyses from Janet Cardiff's *The Missing Voice*, also in fall 2001, are about theatricalising relationships with real individuals and the specificity of location, this is performance that at its heart is about challenging theatrical convention, rather than challenging received ideas through the theatrical frame, as I propose to argue through *Homebody/Kabul*.[79] It is precisely Kushner's use of the broad historical tradition of theatre and his position within a linear continuity of playwriting that is why his work may offer an argument for the centrality of theatre within debates about the contemporary moment. By reading Emmanuel Lévinas's ideas of the saying and the said through *Homebody/Kabul*, we can see how theatre stages a contemporary ethics that may allow us to re-imagine a justice that emanates ethically, rather than politically, from the site of art production—the previously mentioned "dominated fraction of a dominant class." It is perhaps easy to imagine the distinction between the Saying and the Said simplistically as a distinction between the written and the performed within the context of the theatre. The Saying is the action with which the theatre is concerned, it is the very essence of the theatre. When Lévinas first articulates this distinction, in *Otherwise than Being*, he claims that "Saying is not a game. Antecedent to the verbal signs it conjugates, to the linguistic systems and the semantic glimmerings, a foreword preceding languages, it is the proximity of one to the other, the commitment of an approach, the one for the other, the very signifyingness of

[79] Sarah Gorman, "Wandering and Wondering: Following Janet Cardiff's *Missing Voice*," *Performance Research* 8, no. 1 (2003).

signification"[80] Saying is thus the act of approach, it comes prior to the recognition of anything within a face (the one who is Saying is only acknowledged as "not me") or of the particular sense of meaning within the context itself. The language spoken does not matter, nor does the specific content. This is the act of theatre, a figure appears before me, speaking. Although I may have a history and a context, this appearance is not immediately about that context, but about the approach of this other towards me. The crucial unpacking which Lévinas presents for a notion of ethics through language is contained in the following, at first seemingly paradoxical statement, "The *otherwise than being* is stated in a saying that must also be unsaid in order to thus extract the *otherwise than being* from the said in which it already comes to signify but a *being otherwise*"[81] In his attempt to move beyond Heideggerian notions of being as ontologically self-contained, he points out that the act of saying *must* attempt to unravel the understanding contained within preexisting linguistic codes. Thus, the field of the ethical arises from the notion of the saying's simultaneously undermining the notion of understood/shared context—it is only through this that the encounter can truly move outside of the realm of the pre-figured and away from simple ontology. Within the context of the theatre, this seems to offer two possibilities, most obviously for non-playwright/script driven theatre, it proffers a question of presence (which I will explore in relation to the face and the caress in the two following chapters). However, within "traditional"

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[80] Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being : Or, Beyond Essence*, Martinus Nijhoff Philosophy Texts ; (Hague ; Boston; Hingham, MA: M. Nijhoff, 1981), 5.

[81] Ibid., 7.

text-based theatre, one might examine as well at the ways in which a script itself focuses on the undermining of obvious textual meaning. In examining the work of Kushner then, while it is necessary to use techniques of close reading—I will argue that Kushner's writing in the first half of the play teases this possibility of undermining itself through content—it is crucial as well to step outside of close reading to look at the ways in which his dramatic structure formally accomplishes this, through simultaneously exploring the ways in which the script makes claims on the nature of presentation. Lévinas continues, "[o]ne must show in saying, qua approach, the very de-posing or desituating of the subject, which nonetheless remains an irreplaceable uniqueness, and is thus the subjectivity of the subject."[82] *Homebody/Kabul* in particular both stages and allows to develop a unique situation, in which subjectivity is clearly presented to the audience, as a seemingly "recognizable" figure in the first act appears before the audience, challenging forth a notion of subjectivity, which he then further complicates through her disappearance in the later acts.

How can the structure of a Western theatrical text allow it to escape the ghosts of cultural imperialism? One might also ask, particularly after the past several decades of political investment and discourse, if this is even a desired outcome; *should* theatre circulate within an acknowledgment of past political relations? Does the language of the theatre bear the potential to develop new modes of subjectivity and new constructions of individuality? There is a return here to the question that Gayatri Spivak asked now more than twenty years ago,

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[82] Ibid., 47-8.

"can the subaltern speak?" but a return with a difference—how might "Western" mainstream theatre provide the space where the subaltern can not only speak, but be heard? While an initial stab at this question might provocatively turn towards the legacy of "activist" theatre that is perhaps best represented today by a spate of performances addressing "the refugee question"—Peter Sellars's *The Children of Herakles*, Ariane Mnouchkine's *Le Dernier Caravanserail*, or Christoph Schlingensief's *Ausländer Raus* (*Container*) to name but a few from the past five years, the majority of these performances (including Sellars's adaptation of the Euripides text) are collaborative performances which draw their authority from the presence and participation of the community in question; they are thus pieces which rely on previously circulating notions of political economies and that as a result are necessarily preaching to the converted; these are productions which produce "success" through implication of affect.

Here, my focus on language and formal theatrical structure raises necessary questions about the linguistic framing of global relations, touching on both the multiplicitousness of languages as well as the textual performance of silence and absence within the scripted playtext. Can theatrical language frame (or indeed break the frame of) an ethics for the contemporary world? Kushner's writing attempts to open or stage a conception of an ethical language of presentation and confrontation within a representative art form. By presenting to the audience two competing modes of historicity within the play—synchronous and diachronous—and exploring these materially through their linguistic ramifications, Kushner explores the power of language(s) to redefine society. As

I noted in the introduction, theatre is fundamentally about appearance and the apparatuses that make appearance possible. In the introduction, I alluded to the opening query of *Hamlet*, perhaps the most discussed playtext in the world—"Who's there?" This query as well, or perhaps the related call, "where are you?" is at the center of *Homebody/Kabul*, the slash in the title acknowledging a dis-appearance. The second section of the play, as I argue below, is about a body that refuses the theatrical apparatus—it can only be made to appear through language, but description, *not* its own dialogue. This absent presence is the same body that appeared confrontationally throughout the first section of the play, resolute in its presence and in the language of its self-presentation.

Within Lévinas's thought, ethics is the truth condition of the world: it is the moment when I recognize my own fallibility through the presence of another who forever shatters my sense of originary and complete self. (One might argue that reading political subjectivity and western consciousness writ large, this is the event of 9/11 in a postcolonial global consciousness.[83]) Language is always already invested with power, the fracturing of colonialist dynamics into an exploration of the ethical relation here is the inverse of the moral investiture made in language by the architects of the US war on terrorism, those who politically frame a capitalist neocolonialism, the world of "you're either with us or with the terrorists" and "good versus evil." What is unique to the imperialistic trajectory

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[83] See, for instance, Bat-Ami Bar On, "Terrorism, Evil and Everyday Depravity," *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 18, no. 1 (Winter 2003). Judith Butler, *Precarious Life : The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London ; New York: Verso, 2004).

of the current moment is the development of a cultural domination that diffuses on a global scale from extra-governmental, but American-centric, power structures (NGO's and Quasi-NGO's). The contemporary replays the "American Dream" writ large, on a global scale, as nations are pressured from the US government and US-driven institutions to follow an American model of capitalism, as the distinctions between capitalism and democracy are elided through a slippage in the discourse of "markets." Theatre circulates in the global economy, but with the difference that it originates from within and redefines local spaces; performance is commodified and presented frequently as a mapping of another location. As humankind transitions from international to global, we recognize the current position of the United States as the sole superpower in the national model. The Empire that the contemporary imagines is an Empire recast in the American model,[84] but derived from the decentered power of globalism. Yet in the remolding of this model, *saleable* theatrical production still originates from a limited cultural sphere.[85] American theatre must serve, perhaps paradoxically, as a placeholder for this reimagined theatre, for it is this theatre that originates from within the seat of "imperial" power and recognizes these imbalances that can most directly speak to them. Theatre, in its imagination of new worlds, possesses the best possibility of shattering old ones. I contend here

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[84] I want to note the fine distinction here between claims of an American neo-imperialism, which in the aftermath of 9/11 under the Bush administration becomes harder to deny, and Hardt and Negri's subtler articulation of a non-nationalistic Empire.

[85] One might look here at work by Maurya Wickstrom, Susan Bennett and forthcoming work from Dan Rebellato, as well as Jen Harvie, *Staging the Uk* (Manchester, UK ; New York, New York: Manchester University Press ; Distributed exclusively in the USA by Palgrave, 2005).

that Kushner uses language in this play to frame the shift from a political world understanding to an ethical one. I believe that this play can allow us to see the ways in which American production (and I use this word cautiously here, but to convey a sense of both capitalist and theatrical production) bears a particular responsibility in this moment to pose, without imposing, new forms of justice.

Returning then to Kushner's "unlucky coincidence," he comments in a statement that he prepared for the press that

> I didn't imagine, when I was working on the play, that by the time we produced it the United States would be at war with Afghanistan. My play is not a polemic; it was written before September 11, before we began bombing, and I haven't changed anything in the play to make it more or less relevant to current events . . . My greatest hope for a play is always that it might prove generative of thought, contemplation, discussion—important components of what I think we want from our entertainments.[86]

Indeed, his play is not a political exploration of Afghanistan, not the neatly desired performance package of pundits on either the left or the right, but an attempt to reframe the situation and open the site as redolent of an ethical consideration. This play fails if we read it as a political exploration of the world situation, rather it must be messily left open, as an attempt to reframe the situation and allow the site for an ethical consideration. The first act succeeds theatrically, while the second and third more wholeheartedly embrace and question the condition of theatricality, opening us up to a potentially new reading of "theatrical

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[86] Tony Kushner, *Homebody/Kabul* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2002), 144.

success" in offering the audience, both in the space of the theatre, and on leaving the theatre the occasion to wring sense from a string of complexities, linguistic confusions, and silences. (It's interesting to note here that Kushner himself refuses to leave the script alone, although the changes he has made since the initial production are largely structural and not about simplification or bringing together the tone of the two halves of the play. In performance, the two halves of the play are completely distinct, although the interval has been placed at different moments in different versions and productions.)

I begin with a close reading and formalist exploration of the play, exploring how it may work to explode language and art as a site with the potential to imagine a new ethics. *Homebody/Kabul* follows a formal dialectical structure: the first act remains within the confines of the residence of the British "Homebody," while the second and third shift ground to Kabul and then finally return to London.[87]

For Lévinas, it can be argued that the question of ethics itself, is a question of the notion of translation and translatability. His corpus has been read, *pace* Derrida, as the interrelation of Greek and Hebrew, or Athens to Jerusalem—politics and faith.[88] While he certainly brings these two together, I think that it is

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[87] In the discussion which follows, I rely on the structure of the play as it was presented at New York Theatre Workshop in a production which ran from December 19th 2001 to February 10th 2002, in which the first act consisted solely of the monologue and the second and third acts contained the shift to Afghanistan. For subsequent productions and the printed text, the first scene of the second act (in Afghanistan) was shifted to be the final scene of the first act.

[88] A disciple of Lévinas's for a time, Derrida's main argument is laid out in "Violence and Metaphysics" from early in Derrida's career and the eulogy which he delivered at Lévinas's funeral, later published as *A-dieu to Emmanuel Lévinas*

a misreading of Lévinas to view these as binary distinctions. To posit these as flip sides of one coin necessitates the possibility of a mapping of one onto the other. As Lévinas himself said of his work in a late interview with Raoul Mortley, "I often say, although it is a dangerous thing to say publicly, that [Western] humanity consists of the Bible and the Greeks. All the rest can be translated: all the rest—all the exotic—is dance."[89] So while these are key languages for his work, there is a crucial third term, the performed as destabilizing influence. However, this oversimplification of his reading of Western philosophical history—of Heidegger par excellence—can be framed as a conception of possession, of belonging (to), constructing a philosophical binary between Athens and Jerusalem, which forces the assumption that a location must construct a locution, that the polis MUST exist as constructor of language in order that it can be translated, or read. This construction of philosophical history as the interpretive practice of translation between these two poles is the underlying condition of language in the first half of *Homebody*.

However, for Lévinas, as for Benjamin, in "The Task of the Translator," I believe that languages must be read as "fragments of a greater language." For Benjamin, this is a pre-Babel language, a language lost and to be pined for. He describes it as the language of God.[90] (In this construction, we are still within the notion of clarity and explication that frames the Homebody's monologue.) For Lévinas, the construction of this greater language is far less explicitly theological,

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[89] Mortley and Levinas, *French Philosophers in Conversation : Levinas, Schneider, Serres, Irigaray, Le Doeuff, Derrida*.

[90] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, [1st ed. (New York,: Harcourt, 1968).

although no less religious. For him, this is an experiential language; the language of relation between humans—this is the process of Saying. It is this language and this acknowledgment of the impossibility of the task of translation which constructs religion—with a lower case r—as the framework of a Lévinasian ethics: "We propose to call 'religion' the bond that is established between the same and the other without constituting a totality."[91] It is here then, that I begin, with the encounter of Otherness as understood historically in religiously based frames. The distinction between East and West, rereads the historical distance between Islam and Christianity; however, I contend that today this distinction is in fact a smoke screen for class difference. In order for the United States to hide its own class system, it must mask class through other vectors, particularly marking out notions of first and third world constructions of "us" versus "them." Kushner's play reframes religion as central through the disappearance between the first and second halves of the play.

The attempt to translate, to render language legible within another code system, then is an attempt at comprehension, which subsumes ethical responsibility to ownership. The act of translation then poses a paradox, it reduces the other into comprehensibility, reframing the neighbour within one's own language effaces that neighbour's individuality and uniqueness. The act of translation is a totalizing act, it is the expression of the said rather than the saying of processual unknowability. The second half of this play, to which I will not—

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[91] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity; an Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh,: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 40.

by the very claims of my argument *cannot*—do justice in my reading, resists translation, resists commodification, by reveling in these processes themselves.

The first half of the play is an hourlong monologue delivered by the titular "Homebody." This rambling discourse, based on the out-of-date *An Historical Guidebook to Kabul* written by Nancy Hatch Dupree and first published in 1965, seems to recapitulate the difficulties of encounter between West and East. Dupree, who lived in Afghanistan for several years throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and continues to work in the region after the events of 2001 building and stocking libraries, writes in the introduction to the second edition of her guide, "Cities like Kabul change a little every day"[92] Interestingly, Kushner and most of the critics writing on the play refer to the guidebook as Dupree's, this ignores the book's own assignation of authorship to Dupree "in collaboration with Ahmad Ali Kohzad." A particularly odd omission, as Kohzad, the former President of the Historical Society of Afghanistan, wrote many books and articles on Afghanistan himself and was clearly crucial in the compilation of this volume. This erasure is repeated by the text itself, the Homebody' stories and imaginings erasing any true connection with the Other. The pyramid of (potentially) Afghan hats which she describes and removes from her shopping bag, "abbreviated fezlike pillboxy attenuated yarmulkite milinarisms . . . doodahs of a culture once aswarm with spirit matter, radiant with potent magic"[93] reference religions marked out as other by Western Christianity—both Judaism—yarmulkite—and Islam—fezlike—are

[92] The guidebook has recently been published online, at Nancy Hatch Dupree, "An Historical Guidebook to Kabul," http://www.aisk.org/aisk/NHDAHGTK04.php.

[93] Kushner, *Homebody/Kabul*, 16-7.

demarcated and contained by her description. Metonymically, she turns the third world into simply a source of production for her middle-class party. While within a political reading, this seems fairly straightforward, the writing of the text serves to both emphasize and undercut this reading. The homebody continually interrupts her own storytelling, breaking the frame of the narrative to recognize that theatrically she is in front of an audience, while also interrupting her own story with her imaginative meanderings and inventions. The Homebody's discourse repeats and frames a fantasist's notion of Western liberal Christianity. It does this largely through developing linguistic clues and codes that present this woman as a clearly well-educated woman with a surplus of free time. However, Kushner's use of language is more nuanced than this implies—he relies on a density of language in order to break language open and to allow the act of speech to unsay meaning.

Kushner attempts to create a linguistic materialism, in which language becomes the field wherein ethics can be explored, relying on twinned understandings of history, diachronic and synchronic, and the confluence of these opposing streams of thought. "Ours is a time of connection; the private, and we must accept this, and it's a hard thing to accept, the private is *gone*. All must be touched. All touch corrupts. All must be corrupted. And if you're thinking how awful these sentiments are, you are perfectly correct, these are awful times, but you must remember as well that *this* has always been the chiefest characteristic of The Present, to everyone living through it . . . "[94] Kushner's Homebody is

[94] Ibid., 11.

concerned with an understanding of history that is rooted in a temporally shifting present, where the teleological view of history, whether explicitly religious or nationalist, which generally provides the basis for imperialism, is brought into conflict with the synchronic question of "present-ness." Indeed, presentness is the condition of being of theatre, by its very nature it must stage synchrony. She collects and pores over the detritus of history, the cast-off volumes which at one point constituted the historical record, but which have been left behind by the incessant forward march of historical narrativization. The Homebody's reliance on out-of-date materials reflects and refracts an implicit but desired return to the imagined stability of empire. Indeed, while she claims to foreground the voice of the (presumed) Afghani shopkeeper, her assumption that he is Afghani and the imagined afternoon spent with him in fact undercut his ability to speak. The moment in which she reflects on the many ways in which his hand may have been disfigured serves to erase any importance in the individual specificity of his particular story. (This is a political erasure, a non-specific rendering of a particular encounter between individuals, through which any question of the Homebody's ethical responsibility to the other vanishes in the overcoded possibilities of the story). Through her linguistic fetishizing dominance she commodifies him, setting him up as no different in her imaginings that the hats which she "remembered in [her] mind's eye [as] quite remarkable hats . . . [which] had been sewn to dazzling premodern effect."[95] In her imagining of the potential of his story, she in effect re-presents the entire history of colonial

[95] Ibid., 14-5.

repression of Othered voices. Like the intrepid Victorian female explorers dramatized by Eric Overmyer in *On the Verge*, the nameless Homebody's language attempts to colonize temporality; however within the first act of this play, she remains firmly and physically embodied within the present, collecting and re-telling for the audience's delight the stories of Afghanistan, a maternal storyteller with a wistful romanticism, which echoes the gestures of empire-building. Over the course of the first act, she recounts the history of Kabul, from the "very dawn of history"[96] to a more personal understanding of the recent wars as conveyed to her in a dreamt conversation and imagined affair with the shopkeeper with the mutilated hand from whom she purchases the party hats, "I was with the Mujahideen, . . . I was with the Russians, . . . I was with the Babrak Karmal . . ."[97] yet she returns all of this to present day England through the third world's history in the production of "doodahs of a culture once aswarm with spirit matter . . . its magic now shriveled into the safe container of *aesthetic*, which is to say, *consumer* appeal."[98] The irony of this line in a monologue within the safe, aestheticized, production of a New York theatre—the late 2001 premiere production—is clear. The homebody herself reminds herself and that bourgeois audience that, like most of them, she is not a true risk-taker, redolent of Victoria herself she notes, "Where stands the Homebody, safe in her kitchen, on her culpable shore, suffering uselessly watching others perishing in the sea, wringing

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[96] Ibid., 9.

[97] Ibid., 23.

[98] Ibid., 17.

her plump little maternal hands, oh, oh. Never *joining* the drowning."[99] By foregrounding this recognition, Kushner offers to the audience the divergent picture of the Homebody in the first act and her palpable absence in the later acts, confronting the audience instead with a linguistic reality of Afghanistan in the latter part of the play. Her language is determinedly present, the stream-of-consciousness re-marking her presence and the Saying, while simultaneously erasing any true sense of validity to the content. "It is through the *already said* that words, elements of a historically constituted vocabulary, will come to function as signs and acquire a usage, and bring about the proliferation of all the possibilities of a vocabulary. . . . Saying states and thematizes the said, but signifies it to the other, a neighbor, with a signification that had to be distinguished from that borne by the words in the said."[100] In this use and reuse of language, the Homebody's focus on the history of words and the materiality of the language itself, constantly draws attention to the ways in which her act of communication attempts to go beyond the historically determinate meaning of the words, "forgotten words: 'Quizilbash.'"[101] In this bringing of attention, the Homebody makes an ethical demand of the audience, a demand that they must hear her, a demand that gets called upon in her absence throughout the latter portion of the play when the audience substitutes itself for her, her absence granting their presence as third party, as neighbor.

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[99] Ibid., 27-8.

[100] Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being : Or, Beyond Essence*, 37-46.

[101] Kushner, *Homebody/Kabul*, 27.

In the first act, the homebody speaks solely in English, albeit in highly elliptical and synchytic formulations. While her stories vary widely and she discourses on everything from her marriage to Afghani politics to antidepressants, she never actually cites anything outside of English. She twice makes explicit reference to othered languages, once simply commenting in her story about the shopkeeper, who may not even have been Afghani, she comments that she suddenly discovered that she was able to "speak perfect Pushtu."[102] The other moment is seemingly a comic bit, yet it reveals the crucial distinctions between the first and second parts of the script: "there is an old Afghan saying, which in rough translation from the Farsi, goes: 'The man who has patience has roses. The man who has no patience has no trousers.' *I am not fluent in Farsi, of course*, I read this and as I say it must be a rough translation."[103] English has a long history as a language of oppression, the language of imperial conquest and indeed within this play, a multiplicity of Western languages come to stand in for a diachronic history of colonization. Within this moment, the Homebody cites this history in an "of course" that echoes the positionality of the colonialist powers (in such writings as Macauley's 1835 "Minute on Indian Education.") Also in her insistence on the roughness of the translation, and in the ridiculousness of the phrase, she reenacts this gesture of Othering, bringing the present relation of these languages to the audience in startling configuration to their historical trajectories—she both references Farsi as a "poetic" Eastern language as opposed to a "productive" Western language as well as pointing to the blind spots or

[102] Ibid., 23.

[103] Ibid., 33.emphasis added

impossibilities of cultural translation. Her oblique language and the use of obscure terms which she has picked up through her incessant reading of the cast-off volumes of the historical record constantly re-cognizes English as a diachronous language, a language always inextricably bound up in its own political history. This performance of temporal and linguistic translation is a problematically totalizing one. The homebody contains and aestheticizes the eruption of otherness from within both a safe space and the safety of the theatre. Through her use of a variety of narrational conventions, the Homebody implicates the audience within her orbit, offering up an ethical demand that the audience member produce a new subjectivity in response to her appearance and her speech acts. However, this revelation never truly escapes the political framing; her Western embodied character and thematizing usages of language do not allow her to truly stage this challenge. She is unable to escape the overdetermined politics of the "converted," this can only be done through Kushner's refusal to end here, by her necessarily disappearance as an indicator of the ways in which historical narrativization does not open to ethical demand, but to political efficacy. As Framji Minwalla points out in his excellent analysis of the notions of history in the monologue,

> Kushner ends the monologue by refusing all three narrative strategies the Homebody employs—the positivist chronology, the personal memoir, the magical fantasy. The theatrical form of the monologue, however, suggests a different mode—storytelling. Because of its local specificity, storytelling reproduces history not as a given truth, but as a conditional way of

> representing the past to the present—conditional, and thus, in Brecht's sense, alterable. Further, it marks the meanings we extract from history as strange fictions always mediated by our present location. Using direct address to upset the naturalizing impulse of both positivist historiography and realist performance, Kushner calls attention, here, to the artificiality of all narrative. History becomes fluid, ours to self-consciously fracture and mend.[104]

In the end of the first act, all this history disappears to be replaced by the literary, as the Homebody turns to a citation of a citation, "In the seventeenth century the Persian poet Sa'ib-I-Tabrizi was summoned to the court of the Moghul emperors…and on his way he passed, as one does, Kabul… and he wrote a poem… (*She picks up the guidebook, but does not open it).*"[105] As she reads, it is neither the Homebody nor Kushner nor Dupree who is truly present on the page or the stage, all have vanished, made way for the lyrical voice of the seventeenth century Persian poet.

The later acts perform a physical shift to Kabul, predicated on the Homebody's disappearance. While clearly on both page and stage this is not a real journey, it is notable as the absence of the homebody inverts the usual processes theatrical substitution. Where the first act has developed or proposed an audience subjectivity that is based on the relation to the Homebody, the absence of this figure in the latter section of the play allows the audience a

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[104] Framji Minwalla, "Tony Kushner's Homebody/Kabul: Staging History in a Post-Colonial World," *Theater* 33, no. 1 (Winter 2003).

[105] Kushner, *Homebody/Kabul*, 29.

substitution where they can actually embody this absence.[106] By re-placing themselves into the absent figure's location, the audience takes up the call to engage with the more materially linguistic "real"-ized Afghanistan of the latter portion. The linguistic variety of the second act performatively actualizes the nexus of power and history in contemporary Afghanistan, confronting the audience with a complex situation not simply codified politically.

The second part of the play revels in linguistic fluidity and it is here that Kushner explores the realm of synchronous linguistics. Characters speak in Dari, Farsi, and Pashto, English, German, and French, Russian, Esperanto, and two codifications which are not usually thought of as languages, but which Kushner explicitly points out share the same need for communication—medical terminology and scientific terms. "It's an unforgiving place, science. If you don't speak its language it spits you out peremptorily."[107] While Kushner provides translations for all of the speeches in the printed edition of the play, in production, much of the text remains untranslated. The audience is reliant on extra-linguistic performances to negotiate the multiplicity of languages that stand in for the postcolonial vortex of Kabul, without a literal understanding of the spoken words. It is here that I contend that Kushner attempts to open up to problematically "authentic" voices; it is here that he experiments with the ethical dimensions of language within content. When the Afghan poet Khwaja discusses why he

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[106] In the next chapter, on race and solo performance, I examine in much more depth Lévinas's notion of substitution and the ethical relation. While I wish to note here the ways in which her absence allows for an audience notion of substitutability, this is not the ground on which the argument here lies.

[107] Kushner, *Homebody/Kabul*, 119.

learned Esperanto, he explains, "[i]t's a language that has no history, and hence no history of oppression. . . . It was created by a Polish Jew, Zamenhof. He believes that until we could speak to one another in a mother tongue which draws from us our common humanity, peace will never be attained." The blurring of languages that occurs throughout the latter part of this play is an exploration of the synchronic properties of language; the Homebody's language disappears within the seams of society at the crossroads of contemporary and world history that is Afghanistan. "Afghanistan! Armies, and, and, gas pipelines, licit and illicit markets, and even Islam, communism, tribes, the incommensurable interests of the West and the East, heroin, missiles, refugees, and each is a language, moving chaotically."[108] The later acts of this play produce a fractal discursivity, a language which constantly spills over, not within the neatly defined univocal stream-of-consciousness of the Homebody's monologue, but in an ethically driven attempt to restore to Afghanistan its own materiality (but one which despite being always already contained by performance explodes the moment in its very theatricality, in its very performed-ness). Lévinas, in his oft-cited 1948 "Reality and Its Shadow" disparages image, through a Platonic claim for art's existence as a "non-object" which obscures the real. "[T]ime, apparently introduced into images by the non-plastic arts such as music, literature, theatre and cinema, does not shatter the fixity of images. That the characters in a book are committed to the infinite repetition of the same acts and the same thoughts is not simply due to the contingent fact of the narrative, which is exterior to those

[108] Ibid., 127.

characters. They can be narrated because their being *resembles* itself, doubles itself and immobilizes. . . . By its reflection in a narrative, being has a non-dialectical fixity, stops dialectics and time."[109] I contend that theatre, in the bringing together of different notions of temporality, has the potential to actually shatter this notion of resemblance and produce a new form of subjectivity in relation. In *Homebody/Kabul* in particular, Kushner effaces resemblance through disappearance—there is no fixity of image since the image vanishes, the shadow the Homebody casts over the latter acts of the play voided by the material physicality of the linguistic performance. Language itself becomes the driving force of culture, as the historical record is replaced by a reimagining which must bear the weight of all the languages that have intersected in the continual struggle for power in the Hindu Kush mountains.

In the workings of *Homebody/Kabul*, Spivak's titular question *Can the Subaltern Speak?*[110] is turned on its head, as language becomes the defining marker of history. Language is granted a materiality by the writing, which asks the audience to question the nature of one's "having" language. Having first traveled within the circuitous routes of Western colonializing discourse, the first act performed the issues at stake in Spivak's 1983 essay , "that Western intellectual production is, in many ways, complicit with Western international

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[109] Emmanuel Lévinas and Seán Hand, *The Levinas Reader*, Blackwell Readers (Oxford, UK ; Cambridge, MA, USA: B. Blackwell, 1989), 139.

[110] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary and Grossberg Nelson, Lawrence (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

economic interests."[111] Yet in the shift to the second act, language is reimagined, not as a diachronic medium that maintains all of the past of its own historical materiality, but in the synchronic possibilities that germinate in the fractal collisions between multiplicitous languages. The "Queen's English" is replaced by a hybrid schizolinguistics which challenges the audience to rephrase Spivak's question not as "Can the subaltern speak?" but in an inculcated moment of individual responsibility, "How can I listen/hear?"

In the juxtaposition of two seemingly disparate plays, the homebody's monologue and a semi-traditional mystery plot in the daughter's search for her mother's missing body (and perhaps more crucially, a search for the mother tongue) in the second part, Kushner materializes the notion of language itself. (Here, I return to Butler and Kristeva's invocations of materiality as "mater-iality," that is the return to the mother, in this case a literal return.) The Homebody describes herself as maternal—clearly from the play the strongest familial connection was between her and Priscilla, her daughter with Milton and yet this is materialized solely linguistically—their encounter is never staged. When she flees to Afghanistan and then disappears, Priscilla, who had rejected her own stab at motherhood, (accidentally) aborting her fetus in a failed suicide attempt, takes on her mothers gift of gab. In the first scene set in Afghanistan, a bedsheet hides Priscilla from the audience's sight, the discourse produces the mother's absence. Priscilla decodes the doctor's absurd Latin, rendering the *"os*

[111] Ibid.: 271.

innominatum" as the "nameless bone"[112] and begins to embody her mother, "in fluency, in that sempiternal dyscrasic fluxion of logorrheic blatherskite."[113] The absented mother is replaced by her mirror image; the audience is later told that she (possibly) fled to marry a Muslim doctor with whom she fell in love, and as such she no longer wishes to see her family, but she wishes for her family to return to England with the doctor's ex-wife, a former librarian named Mahala. The Homebody, the audience is told, has taken on the *hejab*, refusing to speak until she can speak the lyrical language of the *Quran*. The refusal to speak becomes here as well a marker of the ethical nature of language, in this case it serves as her gesture of laying her "western" self down before the incalculable alterity of the "non-western," other, while not simply reifying or echoing the power dynamics of the colonialist relation. This is as well, more specifically, a denial of language, of the mother tongue, which contains and brackets off the potential for ethical interaction. Indeed, the mother's gesture might come directly from the pages of Lévinas, who cautions us that "I posit myself deposed of my sovereignty. Paradoxically it is *qua alienus*—foreigner and other—that man is not alienated."[114] It is this space of silence, this absence of expressivity within the multiply circulating language vectors of politics and capital, that I contend grants the play with a glimmer of what a pre-political ethics might look like. Theatre is

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[112] Kushner, *Homebody/Kabul*, 32, 40.

[113] Ibid., 38.

[114] Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being : Or, Beyond Essence*, 59.

the act of staging something *to be seen*. What happens when we acknowledge that what is seen is less important than *what is seen to be absent*?

Moving beyond the palpable absence at the center of the second act, Kushner's use of polyglossia attempts to explore notions of what an ethical language might be. Esperanto, which despite attempting to be a language outside of politics (as cited earlier) becomes exactly the language by which politics become problematic. Khwaja's attempt to have Priscilla bring papers to London, whether it is actually poetry, as he claims, or in fact activist espionage (the distinction is irrelevant to my point) demonstrates the failure of a politically guided linguistic invention such as Esperanto. Zamenhof's attempt with Esperanto was to efface difference through the creation of a common language. As I have shown from Lévinas's argument, one must encounter difference and acknowledge difference as that which grants me subjectivity in order to produce a truly ethical relation. Thus a language which simultaneously recognizes history and attempts to sidestep it, is impossible. We see instead in the play Kushner's attempt to experiment with the ethics of language through the encounter between Priscilla and Mahala, which is one of the most impassioned scenes in the play. Redolent of the first act monologue, Mahala slides among multiple languages as she pleads desperately to be rescued from her situation. As Marvin Carlson notes in his brief analysis of this play, "French-speaking audience members will recognize the phrase 'ethnic cleansers,' but it is not part of Khwaja's French vocabulary nor of Mahala's English, and so it is in their voices converted into a

phrase with a similar meaning but very different resonance"[115] As Carlson discusses, in the substitution of "They seek to… destroy all who are not Pashtun" for "Nettoyeurs ethniques," anyone in the audience with a knowledge of French will recognize the practice of translation as an activity and the difficulties of translation (even in this case when a purely literal translation would in fact be appropriate.

Mahala's plea is a refiguring of what is for Lévinas, the central speech act of the ethical relation, Abraham's *hinainu*—"Here I am" that is the place-holder for the encounter between self and other—it is in the speaking of this that one offers oneself up to the mercy of the other, and in the hearing of this that one bears witness to the integrity of the other. This is a mark of generosity, of openness to encounter and it is telling that in the theatricalization of this call here, the language must become polyglot. Mahala, having been rendered eliminatable by the Taliban, lays herself on the mercy of the Other. Priscilla, having lost her grounding, presents herself to this request, lays herself before the Islamic other. Language becomes the currency by which the maternal is re-membered (after the literal/literary dismembering that was described at the beginning of the second act) and the hearing of this self-presentation enables the shift in which Mahala returns to England with Milton and Priscilla (replacing the Homebody who either cannot or refuses to say "Here I am," acknowledging a need to lay herself bare before the Other).

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[115] Carlson, *Speaking in Tongues : Language at Play in the Theatre*, 184.

Mahala then takes on the role of go-between, not a literal translator, but a negotiator, as she first manages to explain Milton's work (which Milton tells the audience that the Homebody could never understand) in lay terms, then proceeds to help them successfully leave Afghanistan, and finally to replant the garden at the maternal home in England, turning from a linguistically alienated relationship to one which returns to a no-longer Edenic garden, marked as Kabul is by its historical possibility as the resting place of the biblical Cain.[116] (There is an oblique reference here as well to the Tower of Babel and its destruction, to a Benjaminian sense of an "original" loss of language). Within the world of this play, language circulates as materiality. At its base, textual theatre remains recognizable to its audience as a linguistic medium and the characters drawn here are enfleshed through their linguistic facility. The play opens with the Homebody's facility at neocolonial turns of phrase and her library of detritus. Through her being rendered voiceless, either in death or by choice in taking on the *hejab*, she is dis-membered, she gives up the semblance of linguistic power, only to be replaced by the librarian Mahala who was rendered expendable at the hands of the Taliban. Here the Homebody's absence replaces Blau's "someone dying in front of your eyes." It is clear that one cannot stand in for this absence, and yet it is this absence that calls into presence a new subjectivity. Mahala is fluent in several languages, having been historically subjugated as both colonized

[116] In his article in *Theatre Journal,* Peter Dickinson reads the question mark after the notation of "Grave of Cain?" as a marker for nomad subjectivity. While I agree with his use of Deleuze and Guattari's nomadology to examine the play, I feel that his argument does not allow the play to become productive, and mis-recognises the effect of the second half of the play. Peter Dickinson, "Travels with Tony Kushner and David Becham 2002-2004," *Theatre Journal* 57, no. 3 (2006).

and woman, yet this linguistic fluency can only go so far—she must sacrifice within the framework of the play in order to embrace this multilinguality. She bears this history in her body, in her language and returns to England, replanting the garden and thus reconnecting the diachronic and the synchronic, returning the specters of history actively to the present. She returns the global to the local and resists the nature of capitalist fetishization that existed within the Homebody's linguistic constructions throughout the first act. The structure of this play demonstrates the possibility of a movement from the political to the ethical, a movement made possible by a shift in the linguistic pressure of performance, a shift from a monolithic presentation in which all is clear or made clear to one in which silence and the non-linguistic are granted space and existence. This is a move in which the Saying of the play undoes the Said; in which the complexities and interweavings serve to break down the politically overcoded and challenge the audience to take up something new. Polyglossia on stage, with an active denial of literal translation, is not the typical condition of the textual bourgeois theatre; while other performance spaces revel in it. Bringing it to this space, to this audience, asks for something different than either the moments of disconnect and silence within contemporary performance or the Bakhtinian modernist polyphony of the narrative novel. Framed Theatre brings into bear extra-linguistic codes, which are predicated on a shared acknowledgment of humanity that extends beyond the traditional liberal humanist subjects. It is the confrontational presence of the untranslated and untranslateable that revels in the theatrical, which grants theatre the potential to explode notions of the political.

The space of the theatre is crucial for this, as its bracketing off as unreal allows for the paradoxical explosion of an ethical reality. In theatre's failure to translate for communicative clarity, it bears the potential to move beyond the political, to break the frame. In its potential to unbind language from subjectivity and individuality, it challenges Giorgio Agamben's assertion that, "We are the first human beings who have become completely conscious of language"[117] by asking us to confront language as material and as interactive process. Kushner's play has failed repeatedly as a piece of theatre because the audience recognizes itself in the first act and denies its absence in the second, but it is this theatrical failure that a space of ethics is opened it is precisely in this impossibility of politics that lies its potential beyond the theatre.

In this moment of impossibility, I turn back briefly to Kushner's magnum opus, the Pulitzer Prize winning *Angels in America*. By any measure, *Angels in America* was a success, yet I wish to demonstrate how the possibilities for this same notion of a pre-political ethics lie within this script. Although it possesses a similar two-part structure, *Angels in America* has become known to students primarily through its first part: *Millennium Approaches.*[118] In this separation, I believe one can view the same complex history that more distinctly problematizes *Homebody/Kabul*; the second half is the more complex philosophical work and

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[117] Giorgio Agamben and Daniel Heller-Roazen, *Potentialities : Collected Essays in Philosophy* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999).

[118] Although I have no statistical evidence on this, I wish to point to the inclusion of the text in both *The Harcourt Anthology of Drama* and *The Longman Anthology of Drama*, as well as informal discussions with a variety of people from different institutions.

indeed the messier section. In this mess, Kushner leaves the audience with a glimmer of the complexity and confusion that overshadows *Homebody/Kabul*.[119]

Part Two of *Angels in America* ends with Prior, Louis, and Belize in front of the Bethesda Fountain in New York's Central Park in 1990, after the collapse of Communism. Louis suggests that "Whatever comes, what you have to admire in Gorbachev, in the Russians, is that they're making a leap into the unknown….That's what politics is. The world moving ahead."[120] Prior ends the play, while Belize and Louis debate the legend of the Fountain of Bethesda, the situation in Eastern Europe, and the Israel/Palestine debate, by saying, "I'm almost done. The fountain's not flowing now, they turn it off in the winter, ice in the pipes. But in the summer, it's a sight to see. . . . The time has come. Bye now. . . And I bless you: *More Life*. The Great Work Begins."[121] Although Kushner contends that the play is a political one, as do most commentators on it, I want to claim that Prior's notion of the Great Work steps beyond politics, or rather, *prior to* the political. The entire action of *Angels in America* is about watching people die before our eyes. The only literal death, that of Roy Cohn, occurs twice, first of disbarment, and then shortly following, of AIDS (or liver cancer, as Cohn claims). However, the (arguably) central figure in the plays, Prior Walter, spends the climax of the second play in Heaven (the first part of it

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[119] For Kushner's own political claims, see Tony Kushner, "In Praise of Contradiction and Conundrum (in Section How Do You Make Social Change)," *Theater* 31, no. 3 (Fall 2001).

[120] ———, *Angels in America Part 2: Perestroika*, 1st ed. (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1992), 146.

[121] Ibid., 148.

with Harper Pitt and the latter part with two minor characters from the beginning of the plays) debating with the Angels about the future of mankind; the Mormon Joe is doubled by a wax animatronic figure from beyond the grave and several key scenes, from the beginning of *Millennium Approaches* to the end of *Perestroika* take place at or around funerals. As well, like in *Homebody/Kabul*, there is an absence at the center of this play, here it is God who is missing, having literally "walked out" of heaven.

The audience is confronted with these deaths and this central absence, challenged by Prior at the very end of the play to begin "the great work." Given Kushner's political claims, it at first seems somewhat paradoxical, that all that is clear is what not to do. Unlike much socially activist work, there is no prescription here. While David Savran argues that this ambivalence is misleading, seeing this perception as a particular sign of its cultural placement (in a rather successful argument for the play's notion of a diverse public as foundational "American" idealism),[122] I wish to suggest that Savran's criticism of the play's address to theological transcendence would benefit from a turn to a Lévinasian notion of Otherness. I contend that in fact, there is a prescription here for a turn away from the political towards the ethical. There is a central debate in the play about stasis—the Angels contend that the way forward is through immobility, while Prior argues against this, claiming that all humanity ever desires is "more life." This debate framed here is truly about the nature of history; Kushner takes his title from Benjamin's Angel of History, "His face is

[122] Savran, 1995.

turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress."[123] The notion of historical progress is central to *Angels in America*, with its litany of references to manifest destiny, from the immigration of Sarah Ironson (and her ilk) from Europe to America, the Mormon march westward, the city on the hill myth of America (which culminates in San Francisco). However, raising a debate about progress offers an intervention into this inexorable march, a questioning of synchronic versus diachronic histories. As we saw with *Homebody/Kabul*, this debate over how history moves is key to the development of an ethical demand. Lévinas writes, "When one deprives the present of all anticipation, the future loses all co-naturalness with it. The future is not buried in the bowels of a pre-existent eternity where we would come to lay hold of it It is absolutely other and new. And it is thus that one can understand the very reality of time, the absolute impossibility of finding in the present the equivalent of the future, the lack of any hold upon the future."[124] This is precisely the issue at stake of *Angels in America*—along with the correlated question of how does one encounter the future without falling into what Lévinas terms the trap of Bergsonian duration—

[123] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 257-8.

[124] Lévinas and Hand, *The Levinas Reader*, 146.

the power of the present over the future through creation. To get beyond this, one must look into the possibilities of stasis offered by the Angels. Indeed, I would argue that this is where the play ends—Prior notes the differences between the theological/mythological Bethesda Fountain which will come on as a marker of the end of days and Central Park's version of the fountain, which simply is shut off for the winter so that the pipes don't freeze. There is a recognition in this of the possibilities of a Benjaminian messianic time (as Savran notes), but as well, there is an acknowledgment of time's not simply belonging to the self. Static develops an important presence here; while not the all-encompassing static for which the Continental Principalities hoped, there is a necessity of some static within movement, a notion of Otherness must be acknowledged.

While *Angels in America* proposes that "The Great Work" begins, it seems that it is still largely grounded in a political framing to truly escape it; however, there are hints throughout, particularly in the concluding act that this "work" must address something outside of the realm of politics. Through the use of the theatrical apparatus within *Homebody/Kabul*, Kushner explodes the possibilities of the contented liberal humanist subject, staging the encounter with otherness that is **not** pre-mediated, that is not pre-determined. He does this through a Saying which unpacks the Said, a form which undermines the content, through juxtaposing theatre's eternal present with competing notions of history, through erasing death before our eyes. It is this ethical challenge which the theatre, at its best, can offer; it is in this that we can begin to imagine a world outside of the political.

CHAPTER THREE: PLAYING RACES AND FACES

In *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, Marvin Carlson analyses the rise in solo identity performance in the recent past. He states that, "The performance of identity, often with the use of autobiographical material, became one of the most common forms of performance art from the early 1970s onward . . . As cross-cultural concerns gained increasing importance near the century's end, with growing interest in the tensions and the dynamics of multiculturalism and postcoloniality, this cultural context became more and more a central concern of performance." Carlson's analysis of the growing importance and centrality of identity performance throughout the latter part of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first provides a basis for the investigations of this chapter.

Indeed, while beginning with a focus on identity performance, it is crucial to look at what precisely constitutes identity.[125] The *Oxford English Dictionary*'s first two primary definitions of identity are, "1. a. The quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties, or in particular qualities under consideration; absolute or essential sameness; oneness . . . [and] 2.a. The sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else;

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[125] In the introduction, I discussed the development of identity politics and the reason why a shift to ethics frames a move beyond or beside such political framings. This chapter begins very literally with the performed dimensions of the turn to identity politics.

individuality, personality."[126] Certainly, identity is concerned with the production of the individual in a sameness or wholeness in relation to or in distinction from a class of others; one's identity is comprised of being an individual member drawn from a group (or groups); it both relies on this relation as well as attempting to mark out the degree of differentiation of the particular member. In many ways, this seems to echo Alain Badiou's notion of a philosophy of the event drawn from set theory, yet the question of the politicization of such "belongings" is where the distinction between identity politics and the Badiouian philosophy arises. (Badiou argues that identity politics, as it is fragmentary and particularist cannot be the basis of a liberatory or leftist politics, instead using set theory to articulate "the event" as the restructuring of the elements.) Identity as a subject for solo "political" performance is then dependent upon the recognition of the individual as both distinct individual and representative of a group for whom she speaks. Much scholarship and criticism of such work is dependent upon the acceptance of the performer as a placeholder for this larger group, with the individual as well responsible for declaring (and foregrounding) her or his condition of belonging.

In this chapter, I will turn to Lévinas's most basic articulation of ethics, the notion of the face-to-face, and look at the ways in which the face is developed in solo performance work, using brief examples from the work of four performance artists—Anna Deavere Smith, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Sarah Jones, and John Leguizamo. These four performers are all identified through their connections to identity performance, but all are marked as successful within the

[126] http://www.oed.com, accessed 10 October 2007

general US culture. Both Smith and Gómez-Peña are past winners of the Macarthur "genius" fellowship[127], filmed adaptations of Leguizamo's solo performances have aired on major television stations and won major awards as well as his having been twice nominated for Tony Awards, and Jones has been recognized with a variety of awards and appearances throughout the mainstream media, including a 2006 special Tony Award for her performance *Bridge and Tunnel.* As I have articulated in earlier chapters within this dissertation, given theatre's marginal location within contemporary culture, I focus on those performers and performances that maximize the "dominated fraction of the dominant class" to which they speak. Thus while identity-driven performance is often considered to have minor impact, despite its relative importance in terms of scholarly discussion, these performers maximize the impact and cultural awareness of their work within the broader purviews of society.

The practice of cultural identity-driven solo performance in the work of the performers examined here relies upon the theatrical attitude of facing, an individual performing a variety of "characters" from within one basic form of appearance. Unpacking Lévinas's notion of the face, which he develops in his early work, *Totality and Infinity*, I explore the ways in which the audience's encounter with the faciality of the solo performer, who both passes as *an other* and simultaneously frames this passing as performative act. The acts of solo performance stage and reframe the Lévinasian encounter with the face, the

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[127] The only other performers to win genius grants to date have been Luis Alfaro, Bill Irwin, Michael Moschen, Bill T. Jones, Elizabeth Streb, Eiko and Koma, and Twyla Tharp.

precursor to the ethical relation; rather than producing political change (even in these most broadly recognizable acts of solo performance), the response is always, as in all theatrical performance, individual and one of the establishment of a "personal" ethical relationship. The notion of this "attitude of facing" is the one place that Lévinas has been truly engaged with in the field of theatre studies, in Jon Erickson's "The Face and the Possibility of an Ethics of Performance," in which Erickson discusses Beckett's *Catastrophe* and Ntozake Shange's *Spell #7* with reference to their presentation before an audience.[128] He looks at the staging of the performer by the director's assistant in the Beckett play, while examining Shange's work largely with regard to the architectural framing of the space, but one which focuses on the face more as metaphoric than the actual presence of the face.

Section I: The Face in Lévinas

For Lévinas, the face of the other is that which confronts me and challenges me with the imperative, "Thou shalt not kill."[129] My encounter with the other is of "something" that is conjured into appearance in front of me, however, it is not simply a face. In his writings, the term "face" might perhaps more accurately be represented as "figure." In what follows, I will attempt to unpack this distinction, and to examine the notion of faciality in Lévinas's thought. It's also crucially the face that denies thematization, insisting on the radical individuality of the other which appears, which presents itself—as if on a stage—before me.

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[128] Erickson, "The Face and the Possibility of an Ethics of Performance," 10.

[129] The notion of "killing" here speaks to not simply a literal death, but the erasure of the other through my thematization/totalization of him or her.

In his introduction of the face as the "figuration" of ethics within the section of *Totality and Infinity* titled "Exteriority and the Face," Lévinas describes it, not through a sense of the aesthetic, but through its performative dimension—what the face *does*, rather than what it *is*:

> The face resists possession, resists my powers. In its epiphany, in expression, the sensible, still graspable, turns into total resistance to the grasp. This mutation can occur only by the opening of a new dimension. For the resistance to the grasp is not produced as an insurmountable resistance, like the hardness of the rock against which the effort of the hand comes to naught . . . The face, still a thing among things, breaks through the form that nevertheless delimits it. This means concretely, the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power exercised, be it enjoyment or knowledge[130]

This sense of the face as something which appears in action is crucial for the development of an ethics; while the political basis of identity is predicated on a face *qua* a representation, the emphasis on the non-representational qualities of the face shifts that away from notions of coalitional politics. In the previous quotation, Lévinas discusses the face as both an object and the radical appearance of that object. Were a face able to be "possessed" that would necessitate the simple defining of it as not a particular face, but a specific *type* of face, that is to say as a raced or gendered face—a white face, a black face, an Hispanic face, an Asian face, a male face, a female face, etc. In order for the face to refuse

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[130] Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity* (*TI*), Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969, 197-8. (*Totalite et Infini* in the original French)

thematization, it must always appear as both *this* and more, it must always be in action. The face as well here is also described as in relation to its appearance before me—in my desire to grasp it, to hold onto it, and in its frustration of that desire; in this quote the face resists through its malleability, it is not "an insurmountable resistance, like the hardness of the rock," but rather "the opening of a new dimension." The face then is marked by its appearance as a supplement to its object-ness.

The second way in which the face moves beyond its existence as a nominative object is through its ability to speak; although Lévinas uses this notion of speaking both literally and figuratively. The face speaks both through a turn to the discursive, through the introduction of language that can physically command me, and through its "speaking" through appearance, that is to say the ways in which the face's very act of appearing commands my acknowledgment of its existence. (In "Violence and Metaphysics," Derrida frames this speech solely as the actual act of speaking, thus delimiting Lévinas's actual claim and, in so doing, undercuts the notion of ethics as prior to epistemology, recognizing that a language cannot exist a priori.)[131] It is more crucially through the simple act of gazing (at me) that the face produces the ethical relation. In his earliest definition of the face, Lévinas states, "[t]he way in which the other presents himself, exceeding *the idea of the other in me*, we here name face."[132] Thus the face is defined by its ability to gaze back at me and challenge my notions of self and of

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[131] Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," in *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

[132] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity; an Essay on Exteriority*, 50.

otherness—the face only exists in the ability to appear as such. The language here presumes some form of proto- or full consciousness within the other, who is able to actively present himself [*sic*] as such. This sense of temporality in the relationship between self and other is crucial to the notion of ethics developed by Lévinas; the other (*Autrui*) is always temporally prior to any coherent notion of the self.

The appearance of this face introduces to "me" the possibility of infinity—the absolute alterity of an other to whom, by its appearance, I am responsible. (Lévinas describes the finite other as that which I can absorb into my being, which I can thematize through prior knowledge). Jill Robbins, in her excellent gloss on *Totality and Infinity*, articulates the notion of the face of the other succinctly, "[e]ncountered neither as a phenomenon nor as a being (something to be mastered or possessed), the other is encountered as a face. It is in the encounter with the face of the other *[le visage d'Autrui]* that the other's infinite alterity is revealed."[133] This idea of the face as a non-phenomenological appearance is crucial in rethinking the ways in which theatre scholarship has read political efficacy in the past thirty years.[134] Indeed, while the philosophy of

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[133] Jill Robbins, "Visage, Figure: Reading Levinas's *Totality and Infinity*," *Yale French Studies* 79 (1991).

[134] I refer here not solely to such explicit phenomenological studies as Stanton B. Garner, *Bodied Spaces : Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994), Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms : On the Phenomenology of Theater* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985)., both of which are excellent and extremely provocative works that greatly widened the fields of theatre and performance studies, but to the general development of these disciplines during this period.

Merleau-Ponty and Lévinas are derived from many of the same precursors—Heidegger and Husserl in particular—the primacy of ethics, the relationship of the other over, or prior to, the self, in Lévinas's work has been largely ignored, in favor of a more Merleau-Ponty-inspired phenomenological development in performance studies, which has tended to devolve largely into spectator studies, with a focus on the "reading" skills of the audience, predicated on such crucial and seminal work as Susan Bennett's oft-cited *Theatre Audiences*.[135] Such phenomenological based analyses tend to focus on the audience as productive of communitas, a view of "we're all breathing the same air"[136] that relies on (as well as producing) the disincorporate-ness of power within contemporary democracy.

What then, are the distinctions offered to a view of theatre informed by the primacy of the face, of appearance? "The face opens the primordial discourse whose first word is obligation, which no 'interiority' permits avoiding."[137] A notion of ethics as the eruption of an other who calls my subjectivity into question is the condition of theatricality, however, Lévinas's development of this condition goes further. This appearance offers a challenge to a comfortable, seated notion of subjectivity; I cannot maintain my own locatedness when confronted by another face. In the previous quote, "I" must grapple with what is presented to me, I cannot hide in the relative safety or obscurity of a darkened auditorium. The face presents itself as tender, that is to say, it is at my mercy, and yet it is this

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[135] Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences : A Theory of Production and Reception*, 2nd ed. (London ; New York: Routledge, 1997).

[136] Anne Bogart, Personal Communication while Working on *Cabin Pressure*, 1998-1999.

[137] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity; an Essay on Exteriority*, 201.

very act of generosity in its appearance that produces the ethical relation. "The epiphany of the face is ethical. The struggle this face can threaten *presupposes* the transcendence of expression. The face threatens the eventuality of a struggle, but this threat does not exhaust the epiphany of infinity, does not formulate its first word."[138] Thus the appearance of the face always already contains a gesture towards futurity, towards a possible relation between self and other; in the faces I will discuss in this chapter, this notion of infinity is expanded by the ways in which the first appearance of the face does not necessarily coincide with the eruption of the voice from within. "Infinity presents itself as a face in the ethical resistance that paralyses my powers and from the depths of defenceless eyes rises form and absolute in its nudity and destitution."[139] The face that appears onstage in these solo performances is marked as absolute—a blank actor's canvas that will both contain the actor's persona as well as many others; while Lévinas's infinity is usually measured in height—the absolutely Other in some ways linked to the figure of God in the Judaic tradition—the theatrical infinite is about the possibilities of meaning from within the nude face.

Coming forth from the face in the moment of its appearance, according to Lévinas, is the possibility of violence. This possibility of violence appears as a glimmer in the presentation of the face, crucially.

> Murder alone lays claim to total negation. . . . To kill is not to dominate but to annihilate; it is to renounce comprehension entirely. Murder expresses a power over what escapes power. . . . The alterity expressed in

[138] Ibid., 199.

[139] Ibid., 199-200.

> the face provides the unique 'matter' possible for total negation. I can wish to kill only an existent absolutely independent, which exceeds my powers infinitely, and therefore does not oppose them but paralyzes the very power of power. The Other is the sole being I can wish to kill[140]

In Lévinas's early thought, the bare nudity of a face, in an attitude of presentation, serves to remind me of "my ability for power"; this is not a face to which I have a predefined relationship—although much of Lévinas's thought is read in the aftermath of the camp, the violence here, while echoing that of the relations between guard and potential victim (in either direction)—is more appropriately an un-recognized and un-recognizable face, like that of an actor onstage. In response to this possibility of violence, Lévinas proposes that the face stages the ethical challenge, "Thou shalt not kill," articulating that in the very appearance of a face, the other "can oppose to me a struggle, that is, oppose to the force that strikes him not as a force of resistance, but the very unforeseeableness of his reaction . . . not some superlative of power, but precisely the infinity of his transcendence. This infinity, stronger than murder, already resists us in his face, is his face, is the primordial *expression*, is the first word: 'you shall not commit murder'."[141] In the act of appearing "as if" onstage before me then, the face cautions me to halt in my accession to power, reminds me of my responsibility to the other and the priority of this to my sense of self-preservation. Lévinas terms this exposure to otherness "the resistance of what has no resistance—the ethical resistance." In the choice to appear onstage, denuded of one's subjectivity, the actor in the performances that I

[140] Ibid., 198.

[141] Ibid., 199.

will discuss below, grants this primacy to the spectator, yet this is a primacy that is transitive, already (at least in the cases where there is a specific character being presented) having been the occasion of the interaction between the performer and her "subject."

The appearance of the face in opposition to me is that which produces social meaning; while this is not necessarily (in linkage to Heideggerian *dasein)* a meaning that is grounded in the ethical relation, in following Lévinas's thought, this meaning evokes the ethical potential of me as individual subject. "Meaning is not produced as an ideal essence; it is said and taught by presence . . . To give meaning to one's presence is an event irreducible to evidence. . . . This presence dominates him who welcomes it, comes from the heights, unforeseen, and consequently teaches its very novelty."[142] Theatrical meaning is produced in this same way, while Lévinas argues (particularly in "Reality and its Shadow") against the plasticity of the arts, the ways in which theatre creates and devolves meaning are predicated on these crucial notions of presence that appears unbidden.

Although most of the focus so far in this chapter has been on Lévinas's early notions of the face, this is a preoccupation which underlines the entirety of his philosophy. As he pushes this through the later work, largely in response to Derrida's critique in "Violence and Metaphysics," rearticulating the face as producing a notion of proxemics—the visual encounter evokes a multi-sensed encounter with the other. The face as concept, however, remains central to this development and his argumentation. That is because the face is the primary mode

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[142] Ibid., 66.

of engagement with the other; this chapter offers a focus on race and identity vectors that are "typically" judged through the encounter with the face. "The entire phenomenological thrust in *Otherwise than Being* is to 'ground' ethical subjectivity in sensibility and to describe sensibility as proximity to the Other, a proximity whose basis is found in substitution."[143] However, the notion of substitution plays a very crucial role within this chapter, as the work of the performers discussed is engaged with the notion of the substitutability of the [present] performer for the absent character.

Section 2: The Pass and the Failure to Pass

In the aftermath of the September 11 and July 7 bombings, the mass media has expressed a concern for the "recognizability" of the terrorist. Indeed, in the immediate aftermath of the events of September 11, explicit rhetoric of passing was plastered over the news, as comments from the Floridian former neighbors of the hijackers asserted the "Americanness" of the "family that lived next door." Early on, the papers carried a since largely ignored claim about one of the fundamental Islamist hijacker's "slamming back vodka" as he watched Monday Night Football, a gesture which reinforces the extent to which passing as the "generic American male" was envisioned as a necessary strategy for remaining unmarked. While America has always prided itself as a democracy in its theoretical acceptance of everyone, this has always been a custom more honored in the speech than in the observance. Indeed, the few weeks afterwards were particularly troubling from this standpoint, as vengeful "lynch mobs" took justice

[143] Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction : Derrida and Levinas*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Library, 1999), 170.

into their own hands, retaliating against those who pass for fundamentalist Muslims, whether they be Islamic, Sikh, or simply dark-skinned.[144] In London shortly after the July 7 transit bombings, police shot to death an unarmed Brazilian electrician, Jean Charles de Menezes, in what, were it not so tragic, would seem an unbelievably unlikely series of mis-recognitions.[145] The overwhelming sense of "othering" that took place in the West in response to these events highlights the issues of "passing." The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the notion of passing, in "*to pass for* (also *as*): to be taken for or to serve as (usually with the implication of being something else); to be accepted or received as equivalent to" with a specific mention of "[t]o be accepted as or believed to be, or to represent oneself successfully as, a member of an ethnic or religious group other than one's own, esp. one having higher social status; *spec.* (of a person of black ancestry in a racially segregated society) to be accepted as white. Later also: (of a transsexual) to be accepted as a member of a different sex."[146] Passing can be both a conscious and unconscious act, however, the key to passing is the relationship between the passer and the observer (or observers). Indeed, passing is an act of triangulation between the passer, a knowledgeable subject,

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[144] The *New York Times* printed a story of a Puerto Rican editor in New York who was accosted by police who had reportedly been told he was carrying a bomb—the reason, he supposed, was that he was dark-skinned and wearing a Sindhi hat.

[145] For specific detail of the police errors, see for instance, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/11/01/nmenezes401.xml

[146] *Oxford English Dictionary,* http://dictionary.oed.com.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/cgi/entry/50172388?query_type=word&queryword=pass&first=1&max_to_show=10&sort_type=alpha&result_place=6&search_id=R85a-PG7TfY-15584&hilite=50172388, Accessed 09 September 2007.

and an unknowing observer. The pass can appropriately be framed as the emergence of a face that in its unreadability shatters "my" understanding of self, fracturing any stability of (racial) identity.

In this chapter, I contend that passing's logic is based on the assumption that identity is recognizable through faciality and indeed this logic spins off from the notion that the face is the central performer in the establishment of the ethical relation. In her excellent analysis of Homer Plessy's "failure to pass," Amy Robinson notes that "the social practice of passing is tantamount to an abdication of the rights of ownership [of one's identity]"[147] and thus argues that passing is never a political act. Political passing, such as Adrian Piper's circulation of business cards or Nikki S. Lee's photography, contains a need to mark itself as performance; to be recognized as passing, a performance must contain the coded failure to pass.[148] I contend that in the dramatization of passing—the act that I will argue all four of these performers stage—the audience confronts the

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[147] Amy Robinson, "Forms of Appearance of Value: Homer Plessy and the Politics of Privacy," in *Performance and Cultural Politics*, ed. Elin Diamond (London ; New York: Routledge, 1996).

[148] Piper's work, as a light-skinned African-American woman, has included *My Calling (Card) #1* in which she printed up calling cards drawing attention to her racial history, stating "*Dear Friend, I am black. I am sure you did not realize this when you made/laughed at/agreed with that racist remark. In the past I have attempted to alert white people to my racial identity in advance. Unfortunately, this invariably caused them to react to me as pushy, manipulative, or socially inappropriate. Therefore, my policy is to assume that white people do not make these remarks, even when they believe there are not black people present, and to distribute this card when they do. I regret any discomfort my presence is causing you, just as I am sure you to regret the discomfort your racism is causing me. . . .*" to circulate whenever someone made a racist remark in her presence. Korean/American Lee's work is largely photography in which she takes on the style, dress, and mannerisms of particular subcultures and ethnicities, having acted as a participant-observer within and around the group.

philosophical shift from a depoliticized performance art presentation of self to a broader examination of society's ethical construction, the face is presented as a cipher.

The performers that I examine in this chapter explore and exploit the rhetorical and performative gestures of passing; they trouble historical western binaries of self and other through their simultaneous embodiment of dual positionalities, dramatizing the conflict which arises in binarizing narratives of Self and Other. Unlike Badiou's claim that "the "other" is acceptable only if he is a good other – which is to say what, exactly, if not the same as us?"[149], I contend here that it is in the instability marked by performances of passing that we can glimpse the ground of the ethical call in a Lévinasian sense. The face of the other appears to me, on stage, in an attitude of facing, denuded of its already decided meaning as a particular face, and yet always already particularized as an individual. It is in this encounter, that I as an individual, am challenged by the question of my personal ethical responsibility to this other. "The presentation of the face is not true, for the true refers to the non-true, its eternal contemporary, and ineluctably meets with the smile and silence of the skeptic. The presentation of being in the face does not leave any logical place for its contradictory"[150] The encounter here with the face fractures temporality, and contains all that must be known within the frame of the performed.

Within the theatricalized "trans-"performances, the performer attempts and fails to embody both self and other; the audience recognizes in this act the

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[149] Badiou, *Ethics : An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, 24 ,emphasis added.

[150] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity; an Essay on Exteriority*, 201..

need to bridge this gap and the simultaneous failure that it enacts. By its necessary dramatization of both passing and the failure to pass, the "trans" performance calls into play for the audience their ethical relation as the primary relationship, destabilizing the traditional Western history of ontological primacy. Reading in this encounter a turn towards ethics as a view of performance that allows a move away from psychoanalytic conceptions of selfhood predicated on lack, one may see towards a post-Lévinassian understanding of self based on the relation to others as primary. This relation must be troubled by Badiou's explorations into the rhetoric of ethics—in the shift into a world dominated by disembodiment, the very ability of the face to raise issues through passing is called into question, as the nature of "passing" relies on an essentialist assumption of identity which these performances both foreground and trouble. Indeed, the face then, as in the quote above, demonstrates the impossibility of the true. Then, in order to pose a productive conclusion from the realm of the encounter with the face, I step back to the notions of postcoloniality and the epic briefly addressed in the introduction. As I argued there, performance, particularly when read through the gesture of passing, exemplifies the a priori split subject(s) of postcoloniality. The appearance of the face in performance, through its eruption into the real, in conjunction with the testimonial echoes of the voice in performance in these explorations of "solo" histories serve a dialectical function, embodying the border poetics of postcoloniality. The echo helps to reframe a psychoanalytic understanding of character by rendering unclear the distinction between "original" and "copy," between self and other, between colonized subject and colonizer.

Recognizing the audience's awareness of itself as absolutely Other to the performer, the performative utterances must ethically be taken up by an audience in "the postcolonial"—as explored in the previous chapter with regard to language, it is the primacy of the Lévinassian Saying rather than the constative Said which emerges from ethics. Performance is by nature both constative and performative, creating culture through its citationality, even with a message content that often appears to be simply (a) constative narration. Performance is instrumental in the development of culture, setting it into being through the utterance itself: through this Performance *becomes* the epic of postcoloniality. Yet here, turning back from the language, returning to the nature of appearance, the question of the face's ability to pass for another evokes the very ground of the intrapersonal relation and the basis of an ethical grounding.

Section 3: Not Quite Solo, Not Quite Alone

In her masterful proposal for a new ethics in relation to gender and racial difference, Ewa Płonowska Ziarek argues that in the contemporary moment "[t]he assymetrical reciprocity mandates not only the inclusion of diverse perspectives into a decision-making process, but, as Patricia Williams argues, requires 'listening at a very deep level, to the uncensored voices of others' rather than imagining their point of view."[151] The work of the four artists discussed here attempts to do exactly this. Staging a variety of passings through the physical presence of one body on stage, these performers "contain multitudes." Jill Dolan's analysis of this performance form, in her recent *Utopia in Performance* is

[151] Ziarek, *An Ethics of Dissensus : Postmodernity, Feminism, and the Politics of Radical Democracy*, 77.

particularly provocative; terming them monopolylogues, she writes that this "form seems particularly suited for investigation as a site of utopian performatives because it models the fluidity of cultural identities and offers a method through which performers and spectators might experience them . . . multiple character solo performers . . . can stage various cultural identities on the same body in ways that highlight difference, but also perhaps point toward commonalities among people."[152] Dolan's work with regard to her notion of the potential utopias that are developed in the performances of the artists she examines—Anna Deavere Smith, Danny Hoch, and Lily Tomlin—is stimulating; however, her return to notions of communitas and the attempts to use this to reinvigorate notions of humanism *qua* humanism, are not truly forward-moving in their thought, but rather continually bound instead to the legacy of political theatre scholarship of the past thirty years. Indeed, the quotation from Carlson, with which this chapter began, seems to indicate a material shift in the nature of such performance towards the end of the twentieth century, a turn that is not expressly concerned with the notions of individual identity, but with the question of culture writ large, a major shift which seems to demand a new way of reading such performative gestures. I find this change in the turn from political efficacy to the individual ethical relation, a shift from the question of who and what specifically is being represented to the question of the apparatus of appearance and representation itself. Elin Diamond proposed that "[t]heater itself may be understood as drama's unruly body, its material other, a site where the performer's and the spectator's

[152] Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance : Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

desire may resignify elements of a constrictive social script. Theater may also be understood as a symptomatic cultural site that ruthlessly maps out normative spectatorial positions by occluding its own means of production."[153] The turn here to the appearance of the face within monopolylogue performance articulates the ways in which the eruption of the other can challenge me to action or to new modes of thought and understanding; it proposes that through such work, we can rearticulate notions of the human not through a priori constructions of humanism and political structure, but through challenge, provocation, and a reinvestment in the notion of alterity. I step away from Dolan's three figures, looking at four whom I believe represent both the American middle classes' ideas of otherness—all are complexly racialised figures who seem to stage themselves as outsiders—yet all have achieved a high degree of critical and professional success through their use of their recitations of these frames. This choice frames the notion of alterity as politically determined, and allows for a straightforward reading of alterity as already understood by the audience, but through theatre's production of alterity in the appearance of the performer before the audience, this argument extends to a much broader range of performance that does not necessarily rely upon political notions of alterity.

The work of Anna Deavere Smith is exemplary in exploring a dialectical archival performance of face and voice, and the relation of this to the ethical call. While Broadway appearances and television guest shots have made her an extremely recognizable celebrity figure, her appearance carries with it not only

[153] Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis : Essays on Feminism and Theater* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1997), iii.

these markers, but historical demarcations of powerlessness. Her blackness and femaleness invoke the cultural history of otherness within Western thought. Homi Bhabha argues that "It is not the Colonialist Self or the Colonized Other, but the disturbing distance in between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness—the White Man's artifice as inscribed on the Black Man's body."[154] Setting aside the limited gendering of Bhabha's phrase, Smith rehearses this distance within her own stage presence, both revealing it and attempting to step beyond this binary. The breadth of her work grants it an epic presence; her explorations conveying not only her edited perspective on the "historical" situations she explores—the Los Angeles riots, or the American Presidency—but the multiplicitous opinions of those whom she has interviewed. While her vocal utterances are crisply and succinctly edited, with her playwright-cum-journalist's ear for the dramaturgy of the soundbite, each time she opens her mouth with a new character, the immediateness of the character is conjured into appearance. These words "signify their author, but indirectly, in the third person. One can, to be sure, conceive of language as an act, as a gesture of behavior. But then one omits the essential of language: the coinciding of the revealer and the revealed in the face"[155] The third person and the second person then appear simultaneously, as the other becomes the neighbor in the moment of exposure. This multiplicity is then an approach to the Lévinasian notion of infinity, as the face immediately

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[154] Homi K. Bhabha, "Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory : A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 117.

[155] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity; an Essay on Exteriority*, 67.

presents not simply itself but the inaccessibility of the other, read through Lévinas as an unreachable height.

As a performer doubly marked as "colonized"—both female and African-American, Smith inhabits the DuBoisian realm of dual consciousness: the layering of additional characters into and onto her body further destabilizes any notions or conceptions of totalizing/thematized identity. Smith's body performs an archival function, evoking, while not embodying other absent "selves" in the present moment of performance, and restoring to them their subjectivity, made tangible through her presence. Already othered through racialised binaries, Smith's layerings add to the complexity of her appearance, as her characters and citations do not simply adrdress the black/white binary, but raise as well other conceptions of "otherness" that are believed to be recognizable through facial appearance—notably the Hasidic Jews in *Fires in the Mirror* and the Korean-Americans in *Twilight: Los Angeles*.[156] She constructs her theatrical performances by focusing on the moment of the "original" speaker's linguistic breakdown into vocal utterance; her hyper-awareness of the aural qualities of an individual's speech provides the basis for her mimetic activity; this focus brings to the fore the eruption of "faciality" from beneath or prior to the Said of linguistic content.

Central to Smith's methodology is the audience's narrativization of what has been termed a "documentary theatre" comprised of history and memory. Her

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[156] Indeed, the Hasidic habit and such customs as the wearing of payoth (uncut sideburns) among the men or the shaving of the head and wearing of wigs by women are explicitly discussed within the performance.

own 2000 New York production of *House Arrest*[157] is a unique production in her oeuvre because it "contains" the testimony of those unable to be present, people unable to dictate to her their own memory-stories. Her inclusion of written documents—poems by Walt Whitman and newspaper columns in particular—and previously monumentalized oral documents—a radio interview with Franklin Roosevelt's cook—restages the more traditionally accepted modes of historical transmission. By including these types of sources, Smith problematizes the notion of the face of the other—while her own interviews are subject to the same Lévinasian relation that she establishes with the audience, in her use of such varied source material, there is no face in relation. Yet the act of giving voice to these materials in essence grants them a form of agency that goes beyond their content as meaning and allows them to develop as testimony of a face—her own.

The explosion of the moment of linguistic breakdown into vocal utterance, one of the most praised aspects of Smith's theatre, opens up a psychoanalytic response to her work. She has stated that "The point is simply to repeat it [the interview text] until I begin to feel it and *what I feel is his song* and that helps me remember more about his body. For example, I remembered he [Leonard Jeffries] sat up but it wasn't until well into rehearsal that my body began to remember, not

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[157] For more detailed discussions of the previous two productions of this piece, viewed particularly with respect to their treatment of race, see Dorinne Kondo, "(Re)Visions of Race: Contemporary Race Theory and the Cultural Politics of Racial Crossover in Documentary Theatre," *Theatre Journal* 52, no. 1 (March 2000). It is important to note that both of these earlier productions were done with multiple-person casts, whereas the Public Theatre production was performed as a one-woman show.

me, my body began to remember."[158] While Smith's face is marked to a predominantly white middle-class audience as "other," through echoing vocal production, she produces gestural analogues, codes of a particular masculinity or whiteness. This masquerade contains and re-performs the "original" speaker's subtexts of performative gender and race—her or his face appears from within hers, both as contained and as supplement, again producing the effect of Lévinasian "height." This focus is extra-psychoanalytic, re-presenting the Saying as necessary while the contents of the Said may be radically altered through her editing process; indeed, this return of focus to the Lévinasian act of Saying in turn shifts the emphasis onto the appearance of the face as a mask of identity which is brought into existence through the utterance.

Within the performative space of Smith's theatrics, she allows the distinctions of racial and gendered binarisms to function as intertexts for each other; while neither individually allows a space for play, their juxtaposition destabilizes the ability to inscribe either as firm boundaries. *House Arrest* is, at least in part, about American uneasiness in the relationship between a black woman and a White House. Ann Pelligrini, in her psychoanalytic analysis of Smith's work, cites Smith's comment that "American character lives not in one place or the other, but in the gaps between the places, and in our struggle to be together in our differences. It lives not in what has been fully articulated, but in what is in the process of being articulated, not in the smooth-sounding words, but

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[158] Carol Martin, "Anna Deavere Smith: The Word Becomes You, an Interview by Carol Martin," *TDR* 37, no. 4 (T140 [Winter 1993]): 57.

in the very moment that the smooth-sounding words fail us."[159] Indeed, one might say that it lives in the eruption of (a) face. The entirety of *House Arrest* becomes a performative utterance, citationally echoing "life in these United States" while providing an interlinear testimonial to the truth of the American social racio-sexual construction.

The face-voice dualism made evident by Smith's mimetic practice performs the cultural work of postcoloniality that Bhabha associates with the practice of mimicry.

> What I have called mimicry is not the familiar exercise of *dependent* colonial relations through narcissistic identification so that, as Fanon has observed, the black man stops being an actional person for only the white man can represent his self-esteem. . . . The *menace* of mimicry is its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority. . . . A desire that, through the repetition of *partial presence*, which is the basis of mimicry, articulates those disturbances of cultural, racial and historical difference that menace the narcissistic demand of colonial authority. . . . *Almost the same but not white*.[160]

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[159] Pellegrini, Ann, Performance Anxieties: Staging Psychoanalysis, Staging Race. New York: Routledge, 1997, 74.

[160] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 88-89.

By allowing her body to stage multiple figurations of race (and to a lesser extent sex, although this will be explored with relation to the caress in the following chapter), Smith troubles the traditional binary distinctions; this ability is unique to performance because the audience is present to view the corporeal racial and sexual markers present within the appearing face, but Smith then echoes voices and corporeal presences which are distinctly coded. Her presence performs the hybridity of postcoloniality within America; the historicization of *House Arrest* places the testimony of Abraham Lincoln and nineteenth-century discourses of blackness alongside both linguistic and presence-driven contemporary explorations of power relations—many of which devolve on racial and sexual bases. American postcoloniality is predicated on a shifting power dynamic within a continual, but not continuous drive towards "equal rights." Smith's viewpoint is made evident through her careful editing of the interviews, yet the audience is allowed the space and, is indeed, implicitly asked to form their own individual opinion of the events. (For example, in *Fires in the Mirror*, the Jewish characters she presents are clearly problematic and not as "correct" as the African-American characters, but the subjectivity of an audience member figures into how each viewer receives the piece.) It is Smith's failure to pass as those she represents, along with the multiplicity of viewpoints which she presents, that re-calls to the audience the primacy of the ethical relation—she stages the encounter with the face which according to Lévinas prohibits the act of murder. The distanciation written on Smith's corporeality informs her performance as an embodied and anthropomorphic (gynomorphic) border poetry, a postmodern collage of textual

and bodily practices. The articulation of inarticulateness, of the points that cannot be stated by the interviewees, the unsayable, makes evident the "Saying" of a presentist historical epoch along with the "Said" contained within the constative interview text. She echoes the complexity of postcolonial discourse while producing cultural analysis and re-producing culture within her viewers/hearers. The multiplicitous voices evoked from within the singular appearing face produce an epic discourse, a performance that gestures towards an understanding of American postcoloniality.

Similar to Smith's work is the work of performance and musical artist Sarah Jones. Jones, who first made her name at the Nuyorican Poets Café, has developed four major pieces of solo performance work; the first, *Surface Transit*, was a surprise hit in the 1998 Hip Hop Theatre Festival. She has since developed work on women's rights—*Women can't Wait!*, immigration and American citizenship—*Waking the American Dream*, and the final—*Bridge and Tunnel*, which is a sometimes lighthearted look at immigration and the arts, set in a poetry club in Queens. *Bridge and Tunnel*, the piece on which I will focus here, played in downtown New York for seven months before transferring to Broadway, where it won a Special Tony Award. Jones began to gather notice in the national press with *Surface Transit* and made a large political splash with her hip hop song (drawn from the performance) "Your Revolution," a feminist response to gangsta rap and Gil-Scott Heron's "The Revolution will not be televised," which was

essentially banned by the FCC after they fined a radio station for playing it.[161] Jones's work in her performances, while similar to that of Smith in that it is based on close observation and a frequent movement between characters in the monopolylogue format, adds a hip hop spin to such work. Here as well, unlike in Smith's work, where the characters are all "real" interview subjects (or documents), Jones uses her imagination to construct a vivid world of characters who, while they become real-ized on stage, are not always explicitly based on direct source material. Jones does a wide variety of interviews, but she freely works with the source material, combining characters and developing her own sense of individuality through these mixes.

Bridge and Tunnel, based around a café hosting an open-microphone evening titled "I am a poet too," (an acronym actually, standing for "Immigrant and Multiculturalist American Poets or Enthusiasts Traveling Toward Optimistic Openness") moves through three generations of immigrant tradition in the sweep of fourteen characters over ninety minutes. From an elderly Jewish grandmother, Loraine Levine (who also appeared in *Surface Transit*), and a Chinese mother dealing with her lesbian daughter to a Mexican paraplegic, a Vietnamese man upset at the confusion among Asian stereotyping in Amrica, and a young

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[161] "your revolution will not happen between/these thighs. /The real revolution/ain't about booty size/and though we've lost Biggie Smalls/your Notorious revolution/will never allow you to lace no lyrical douche/in my bush. /Your revolution will not be you/smackin' it up, flippin' it, or rubbin' it down/nor will it take you downtown or/humpin' around. /You will not be touching your lips to /my triple dip of /french vanilla butter pecan chocolate deluxe /or having Akinyele's dream/a six-foot blowjob machine. /Your revolution will not happen between / these thighs . . . /because the revolution, when it/finally comes, is gon' be real. Sarah Jones, personal communication.

Jordanian woman to Pakistani host Muhammed Ali and the Haitian woman who "too sing[s] America," like Whitman in Smith's work, the characters here appear in slight changes of Jones's gait, clothing, and props. What Jones does is to attempt through her imaginings, to put a face to a particular idea: here the question of immigration. While Smith's project attempts to search for "American Character," Jones is content to develop characters who allow her to paint a picture in response to her queries. Not as explicitly political in her performance work, Jones draws attention to the slashes in her description as African/American/female/; in an interview in *Time* magazine in 2000, she described herself as "I'm Heinz 57 sauce . . . You get women's-history month, black history month, diversity week; I'm everything."[162] Jones's work is about the invention of faces; while her work in essence creates new characters from absence, her work with character type and development seems to offer a new way to imagine the appearance of the face. For her, these are not particular appearances—in Deavere Smith's work, there is a model for each face that appears, an absent "real," towards the condition of which her face aspires. Crucially in Jones's work, this absence of a particular model offers a face that is a model of the encounter. "Works signify their author, but indirectly, in the third person."[163] For Lévinas, the work that Jones is doing might offer a vision of the third person through the present figure, the neighbor. It is always Sarah Jones's face that appears before me, yet it is always not her face, but rather than—as might be argued, in Smith's work—an oscillation between two existing faces,

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[162] "People to Watch," *Time Magazine*, 15 May 2000, 67.

[163] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity; an Essay on Exteriority*, 67.

what appears here is not representation (a concept that I will explore in relation to Lévinas's concerns in the following chapter), but presentation; these are characters that appear, conjured up from the void, in order to challenge an audience. Jones's work plays with the borders of passing, relying much more on recognisability of stereotypes than does Smith, with her specific focus on individual characters. Here, however, her characters are all immigrants, all despite American lip service to the contrary seen as on the outside looking in; the humorously named Ali (the reference to the African American-turned Black Muslim boxer is referenced within the play) notes that his origin, despite his American training as an accountant and "American name" has resulted in his investigation by the Department of Homeland Security. Many of the characters are concerned specifically with notions of passing and their failure to pass from Levine's focus on her grandson's "hip hop culture" through Bao's angry delivery of "not your model minority poem." These characters each stage a failure to pass successfully into American culture; as David Román has suggested with reference to the work of Chay Yew, "these attempts at passing often remain tragically unsuccessful . . . [which] only underscores the stakes involved in transnational and diasporic crossings."[164] Jones produces these faces in their desires and failures, in their hopes and aspirations, but ultimately, in the impossibility of achieving these in the current state, perhaps challenging the audience with these revelations and this purity of expression. As Philippe Crignon writes of the Lévinasian concept of the face, "The face is pure expression. Expression is not

[164] Román, *Performance in America : Contemporary U.S. Culture and the Performing Arts*, 100.

signification; contrary to the latter, it does not succeed the form it animates, and does not presuppose the existence of an object that, moreover, would refer to another reality. Expression precedes language and the split between signifier and signified. Above all, expression leaves an impression on me. It does so first of all because it is inconceivable and unforeseeable, because none of my horizons makes it possible. Expression is therefore pure meaning."[165]

The third performer whom I will briefly discuss here is John Leguizamo. Perhaps in broad circles, the most "famous" of these performers, Leguizamo has written and performed four monopolylogues—*Mambo Mouth* (1990), *Spic-o-Rama* (1992), *Freak* (1998), and *Sexaholic* (2001). Unlike the other two performers discussed so far, and rather more like traditional stand-up comedy work, Leguizamo's work tends to revolve around his own life and what he has termed "semi-demi-quasi-pseudo-autobiography."[166] Leguizamo is, according to Román's excellent analysis of *Freak* in his recent *Performance in America*, able to suggest new modes of Latino genealogies through performance. As Román writes, Leguizamo's re-performance of his own fascination with the character Morales from *A Chorus Line* allows him to claim that "[t]he theatre. . . allows for this move from spectator to performer, from audience to stage. The theatre offers not simply a potential site for Latino community but a potential site of Latino

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[165] Philippe Crignon, Nicole Simek, and Zahi Zalloua, "Figuration: Emmanuel Levinas and the Image," *Yale French Studies*, no. 104 (2004): 103.

[166] John Leguizamo and David Bar Katz, *Freak : A Semi-Demi-Quasi-Pseudo Autobiography* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1997), xv.

continuity"[167] Indeed, I would contend that Román's analysis of this work is crucial and innately connected to the argument presented here. It is in the citation of Morales's failure to "pass" within Karp's class in the story told within *A Chorus Line*, that the Latino performer is marked as "unredeemably" other in American performance culture. Román cites author Román de la Campa, who claims that "[t]here is no pan-ethnic Latino identity as such and national origin will always remain crucial in any grouping of this so called 'minority.' But its presence as an identifiable entity in the United States does emerge in certain contexts, when its intrinsic diversity is fused together as a differential 'other.'"[168] The Latino individual does not (or cannot) pass as "American" within this genealogy, but he does pass within an American context as a "generic" Latino. The face in this instance is already marked as Latino, its exteriority and readability the defining characteristic within the frame of the performance. But it is, as Román suggests, in this very instable ability to be read that the face appears in performance—Leguizamo's recognizability is effaced, his specificity and celebrity disappear in order to offer a new form of connection. His presence in this chapter serves to point to the instability of the gaze, the problematics of thematization. Leguizamo's appearance, while marked out in advance as a "particular" (and famous) face serves to demonstrate that every face appearing in opposition appears as if unseen, calls "me" to account while shattering my own stable sense of self.

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[167] Román, *Performance in America : Contemporary U.S. Culture and the Performing Arts*, 131.

[168] Cited in Ibid., 135.

The final performer that I wish to discuss here is Guillermo Gómez-Peña. A Mexican-American performance artist, Gómez-Peña has developed a body of work that largely revolves around US-Mexico relations, although it generally speaks, as does that of Leguizamo, to the frequent US conflation of all Latino identity, and he has addressed issues of "nativism" as well (particularly in his 1992 performance with Coco Fusco, "Couple in a Cage"). In this chapter, I will examine Gómez-Peña's physical self-presentation in a series of performance installations that he has done with several other artists, including Roberto Sifuentes, Juan Ybarra, and Sara Shelton-Mann, and juxtapose this with an oral performance text. In *Dangerous Border Crossers: The Artist Talks Back*, he describes his tattoos:

> Like most visible scars, each of my tattoos reveals a dramatic shift in my accidental and nomadic biography. . . a huge tattoo on my right arms and shoulder: a detailed map of Mexamerica made up of intricate computer circuits. Migrant Aztec god Quetzalcóatl, the giver of culture and agriculture, is seen departing from the Yucatan peninsula on a lowrider motor boat. . . every tattoo becomes yet another act of defiance to pain, as well as a ritual affirmation of life on the edges of a dying western civilization.[169]

Gómez-Peña takes literally the suggestion that postcolonial culture is inscribed on the bodies of the "Other"—he performs his Mexican identity through the cultural visions of the Colonialist whites. His tattoo of Mexamerica embodies US

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[169] Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Dangerous Border Crossers: The Artist Talks Back* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2000), 77-78.

perceptions of Mexico—the Aztec god mixes with the Chicano lowrider image, producing a cultural mestizo—the computer circuits echo NAFTA labor divisions. Gómez-Peña has re-faced himself in the vision of the Latino/Chicano other to white "society"—a wide handlebar mustache, long black hair usually draping his shoulders, ever-present sunglasses, his arms frequently bare to reveal his tattoos. Through a performance installation of a temple and an online confessional, he has gathered the racial confessions of hundreds of people.[170] He uses these confessions to develop characters which he presents in performance installation, relying on mask-like presentations of Mexican-American-ness to stage the Other for an audience in proximity. At an installation at Penn State University (in conjunction with the October 2000 Performative Sites Conference), he had a rack of costumes in and out of which he changed frequently and with which he allowed the audience to use him as a Mexican dress-up doll.[171] Many of these costumes attempt to contain his body within highly feminized clothing—his blatant masculinity and Latino identity are contrasted to the (mostly Caucasian) audience's costuming him in corsets, micro-miniskirts, and high heels and braiding his hair as they see fit. Sequined vests which echo the "Indians" of New Orleans's Mardi Gras parades or biker costumes define his masculinity as non-

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[170] Since these are anonymous and many people are familiar with his work, there may be some attempt made by some of the confessors to play into what is perceived he wants to hear. However, one may assume that the breadth of these confessions and the (clearly less-guarded) audience responses in performance indicate the prevalence of the images on which he draws.

[171] At the same performance, Juan Ybarra presented a naked green "legal alien" and Roberto Sifuentes portrayed Cyber-Vato, a Mexican cyborg gangster. For further discussion of both of these characters, see Gómez-Peña, *Dangerous Border Crossers: The Artist Talks Back.*

white and excessive, yet the dog collar and leash which he puts on himself and hands to audience members imply that this masculinity is able to be made docile by "whiteness"—he comments that the conservative banker-types are often the most sadistic in their treatment of him. By presenting himself as a performance artist passing between whiteness and "Latino" he allows the hidden transcript of whiteness to reveal itself and presents himself as available to play out fantasies of colonialism. He comments on the rampant colonialism which he attempts to expose,

> I believe in the power of decorating and aestheticizing the body in order to exaggerate, challenge and problematize mythical notions of the Mexican Other. In the American imagination, Mexicans are allowed to occupy two different but strangely complementary spaces: we are either unnecessarily violent, hypersexual, cannibalistic, and highly infectious; or innocent, "natural," ritualistic and shamanic. Both stereotypes are equally colonializing.[172]

Because of the nature of his bodily performance, he exposes the interplay of gender and race within postcolonial America. His performances demonstrate the long shadow of racial relations in the United States and reveal the impossibility of e-race-sure.[173]

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[172] Ibid., 34.

[173] I use this term following Jennifer Gonzalez's use of it to refer to the problematics of the project of effacing racialisation.

Gómez-Peña is extremely well informed theoretically; he juxtaposes oral performances with the pure corporeality of his installation art. In a 2001 talk he gave in New York, he discussed the project of the online confessional, and the ways in which the internet attempts to erase corporeal markers of individuality.

> I'm tired of ex-changing identities on the net.
>
> This afternoon, I was a man, woman, and a he/she.
>
> I've been black, Asian, Mixteco, German and a multi hybrid-replicant
>
> I've been ten years old, twenty, forty-two, sixty-five, eighty.
>
> I've spoken seven *broken* languages.
>
> As you can see, I need a break real bad, I just want to be myself for a few minutes.[174]

He discusses the seeming fluidity of identity in his talks, yet always grounds himself and the audience with countless stories of his being stopped while going through customs, or holding the hand of his young blond biracial son, or for any reason simply because of his appearance. He returns again and again to the reality of the corporeal transmission, to the complicated borders which he can cross *only* in virtuality, he performs the policing of these boundaries, playing in turns, himself, border guards, and whomever else is involved, re-presenting his continued failure to pass "successfully." His voice takes on a heavy Mexican accent or drops it for a middle-American twang, yet he never "performs" without his "Mexican" costume, without the accoutrements that seem to say, "no matter

[174] Talk given at Book launch, Barnes and Noble, 6th Avenue and 22nd Street, 2001.

what my voice indicates, I am Chicano and a product of all the cultural stereotypes you have." In Gómez-Peña's work, he stages the literal confrontation between the face of the "other" and the audience member, challenging them through proximity and the recognition of perceived "danger" to break open the sense of self-stability. While theatre stages a somewhat sanitized space, and indeed, the appearance of the face in the previous three examples was constrained (contained, perhaps) by the demarcation between audience and performer, Gómez-Peña's work breaks the fourth wall to provoke response. In the immediate and the delayed response, the subject must grapple with the ethical call, the move outside of, or prior to politics. He takes literally Lévinas's suggestion that "Meaning is said and taught by presence. . . . This presence dominates him who welcomes it, comes from the heights, unforeseen, and consequently teaches its very novelty."[175]

These four highly different "performances"—Anna Deavere Smith's multivocal historical monopolylogues and singular presence, Sarah Jones's immigrant inventions, John Leguizamo's disappearance beneath the mask of genealogy, and Guillermo Gómez-Peña's self-styled Chicano-ery all indicate that America remains heavily under the shadow of a particular history of colonialism. The ethical challenge in the postcolonial is created primarily through these and other similar performances which trace histories of colonialism and othering as well as staging the continuing inhabitability of the position of the Other. All four performances rely on the sudden appearance of the human face before me, on its

[175] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity; an Essay on Exteriority*, 66.

invocation of me as individual, and on my relation to that face which calls me into being.

> Differences in culture and power are constituted through the social conditions of enunciation: the temporal caesura, *which is also the historically transformative moment*, when a lagged space opens up *in*-between the *inter*subjective 'reality of signs . . . deprived of subjectivity' and the historical development of the subject in the order of social symbols."[176]

These four performers destabilize questions of origin, by elucidating the subject as one always in the process of becoming subject, always subject to the project of colonialism, always subject to linguistic imperialism. Yet they also challenge the audience through appearing as a "whole" other, staged as a complete, contained face, but at the same time refusing a containable or thematizable subjectivity from without. In this appearance, the performer calls the audience member into being, as subject; ethics precedes ontology. It is in performance that the face appears out of time and marks the impact of time; in performance the breach between self and other can be read to explore the poetics of borders in the United States, by demonstrating the instability of categorization—Black, White, Latino, Male, Female, etc. Their faces appear from the void, standing before an audience denuded of meaning and evoke the ethics of response. From these mask-like faces—Austinian performatives—emerge the constative utterances of their voices, to matrix a positive future, a future which is marked indelibly by the past and the

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[176] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 242..

present, by the relationality of self to other. Performance is the art of liveness; these artists present the encounter between self and other, between memory and history, between remembering and memorializing, between present and past. These are revelatory encounters that constitute the ethical response to the appearance of the face. In the act of passing as "other," each foregrounds and "challenges forth" the ethical role of the audience, staging the complex development within the individual of the construction of subjectivity. The presence of the audience, despite Lévinas's assertions that the aesthetic is not prescribed by the ethical, provides a grounding through which the multiplicity of postcoloniality stages the ethical call. The notion of passing performance creates a space within which the aporias of knowability can be presented; it is in the space that exists both in the staged passing and in the abyss between the performed and the audience where the face lies that the ethical call appears. Through this encounter with the face of the Other, the audience member is faced not simply with a choice of accepting otherness, not simply with an explanation of the Other in the terms of the self, but with the radical alterity of otherness and with a challenge to view and accept the complexity of the Other in its complementarity and unre-cognize-ability.

CHAPTER FOUR: GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND THE CARESS: DESIRE AND THE THEATRICAL ETHIC OF THE FUTURE

While the previous chapter focused on notions of identity derived from group experience, the focus remained on the self brought into contact with the appearance of the face of an Other. While there are always implicit relational economies in such an encounter, this chapter examines these economies more explicitly, by focusing on the contact between the individual on stage and the individual in the audience. Through this focus, it serves to develop the notion of relationship by examining identity that is concerned with external desire(s). Desire is concerned with the temporality of encounter, a focus on the *à venir*, the yet-to-come of contact always a promise of humanity. Implicit in this notion of desire is a gesture of hope, what Lévinas terms the "caress" as the approach of contact between the one and the other. Key to the figuration of the caress in Lévinas's thought is the unreturned/unreturnable sense of the movement; it is conceived a non-totalizing eruption that proposes a connection between self and Other that does not attempt to overread the notion of alterity as contained by the self. "In Starting with *touching*, interpreted not as palpation, but as caress . . . we have tried to describe *proximity* as irreducible to consciousness."[177] This distinction, between these two notions of contact, is a crucial difference and one that speaks to the appropriateness of theatre as a mode of exploring the caress.

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[177] Emmanuel Lévinas et al., *Emmanuel Levinas : Basic Philosophical Writings*, Studies in Continental Thought (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 80.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines palpation as "[t] ouching, feeling by touch; gentle handling; *spec.* medical examination by feeling," while the caress is "[a]n action of endearment, a fondling touch or action, a blandishment."[178] This crucial distinction between a medical touch—one that seeks to symptomatize and contain in order to understand—and an erotic or personal one establishes a contrast between one seeking to express and to initiate contact; while the first poses a totalizing view, the latter is an approach and an offer. As the previous two chapters have explored, the notion of proximity is crucial to Lévinas's thought; the caress develops this beyond the approaches of language and the face, as articulated previously, to physical connection and the movement between the self and the other.

Through first examining Lévinas's articulation of the caress as "searching" rather than containing or overpowering, and applying this notion to the work of performance artists Tim Miller and Kiki and Herb, this chapter will explore the ways in which the figure of the caress reframes the relationship between performer and audience, further developing an investigation of the ethics of this relation. Through these two examples, the caress will be explored as both the direct reach across the "fourth wall" as well as a mode of historical contact that refigures notions of genealogy and temporality. In this move and in the choice of examples, I take up the suggestion offered by David Savran in his recent *A Queer Sort of Materialism,* in which he suggests that "Whether in its uptown or downtown guises, the, the new queer theatre has become a metonym for

[178] http://www.oed.com, accessed 5 August 2008

postnaturalistic performance in the United States. It thereby represents in a particularly clear and incisive form both the situation of theatre as a bastard art . . . and the necessary slippage (both on- and offstage) between self and Other."[179] I develop the notion of queer performance here from a variety of sources, reliant in particular on the developments of Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick and Judith Butler. Sedgwick defines queerness as "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender or anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't be* made) to signify monolithically."[180] Along similar lines, in *Disidentifications*, José Esteban Muñoz argues for the queer figure as one who "failed to turn around to the 'Hey, you there!' interpellating call of heteronormativity."[181] Queerness is then read as the notion of alterity to the heteronormative, to the alignment of codes that do "signify monolithically." In this way, queer performance may be seen to fill the location that Lévinas intended of the feminine, but with the crucial distinction that it is explicitly framed through disjuncture from the heteronormative, as an openness to possibilities of historical framing. While Lévinas's framing is explicitly heteronormative, I contend that the shift to queer performance is rendered possible by the reclaiming of the term queer "as a deeply utopian designation, a locus of refusal . . . an affront to the bipolar system of

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[179] David Savran, *A Queer Sort of Materialism : Recontextualizing American Theater*, Triangulations (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 68.

[180] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, Series Q (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 8.

[181] José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 33.

gender and sexuality; a way of transcending both assimilationist and anti-assimilationist politics; a privileged mode of subversion."[182] Queer performance then usefully maps onto Lévinas's (problematic) use of the feminine as both a pre-existent notion of alterity to heteronormative masculinity and as a specific challenge to that mode of categorization.

In the reading of Marga Gomez from which Muñoz's comments are drawn, he goes on to discuss her performance as "a look towards the past that critiques the future and helps us envision the present."[183] He terms this move a disidentificatory desire, "a desire to escape the claustrophobic confines of 'community,' a construct that often deploys rhetorics of normativity and normalization."[184] My turn to the caress then, in particular through the notion of queer performance, offers a way beyond the oft-cited notion of communitas, a trope that has largely figured identity-politics driven modes of performance over the past forty years. In this, the project is related as well to the work of Elizabeth Freeman, who coined the notion of "temporal drag" to examine the ways in which political subjectivities exert a pull across histories. She articulates her project as offering a move "beyond the parent-child relation that has structured psychoanalysis, and [one that] might therefore usefully transform a 'generational' model of politics."[185] She refigures Butler's notion of queer performativity to

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[182] Savran, *A Queer Sort of Materialism : Recontextualizing American Theater*, 57.

[183] Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*.

[184] Ibid., 34.

[185] Elizabeth Freeman, "Packing History, Count(Er)Ing Generations," *New Literary History* 31 (2000): 729.

modulate the idea of citationality, by arguing that any iteration of the past is both a new iteration and a "straight" repetition. Temporal drag then uses the Butlerian idea of heterosexual melancholy, Butler's re-reading of psychoanalytic formation of normative gender identity, to rearticulate the ways in which temporalities collide.[186] Freeman's work offers a way in which queer performance (she speaks of one film and a remake specifically) may serve to offer a new way of reading identities through acknowledging the contemporary "refus[al] to mourn properly and instead preserv[e] melancholic identifications [that] might propel us towards a barely imagined future."[187]

The caress then, as a mode of encounter that engages with temporality, that brings the past forward as an engagement in desire with an unknown future is perhaps particularly suited to exploration through queer performance, performance engaged in a non-reproductive notion of futurity. The caress as an exploration of temporal encounter in queer performance potentially offers "what the language of feminist 'waves' and queer 'generations' sometimes effaces: the mutually disruptive energy of moments that are not yet past and yet are not entirely present either."[188] Theatre enfleshes this encounter between temporalities; in the examples discussed, the caress stages an encounter with desire, with possibility, that seeks to move beyond the psychoanalytic

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[186] See in particular Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power : Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997). Also, this is discussed in "The Queerest Art" in Savran, *A Queer Sort of Materialism : Recontextualizing American Theater*, 56-81.

[187] Freeman, "Packing History, Count(Er)Ing Generations," 743.

[188] Ibid.: 742.

constructions of subjectivity based upon lack. Aligning this with Savran's claims as well, I contend that despite using examples solely drawn from queer performance,[189] this argument speaks to contemporary theatre in a broader outline, looking at the ways in which the framing of desire offers an ethics of theatre that must prefigure any attempt at politicization. Savran articulately states that "[i]n theatre, the possibility . . . of multiple identifications and desires in real time and real space—across genders, sexualities, races, and classes—renders it a particularly utopian medium."[190] Through this engagement with Lévinas's work, I demonstrate that the space of the contemporary theatre can most productively be read as a personal ethical challenge and as a framing of the individual relationship.

This chapter will first explore the notion of the caress in Lévinas's thought, analyzing its development in his early work, primarily the 1947 *Time and the Other* and the 1961 *Totality and Infinity*, examining it both as a literal touch or encounter, and as a figuration of theatrical appearance. The caress, through Lévinas's thought, articulates relationality in ways that open up to both the question of genealogy and historical transmission as well as the voluptuousness of theatricality. In particular with regard to the work of Kiki and Herb, the caress is

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[189] While I use the term "queer" here to acknowledge its openness and destabilization of nominative registers, in fact the performances that I discuss in detail might be more explicitly described as gay male performance. I frame these as queer performances because of their refusal to accept stable subject positioning. As such, these performances, like those discussed by Savran in "The Queerest Art" are queer in their collision of identification and desire. One might consider performances by such artists as Karen Finley and Deb Margolin who engage with similar articulations as well.

[190] Savran, *A Queer Sort of Materialism : Recontextualizing American Theater*, 74-75.

expressed not as a "loving touch" but as a gesture of aggressivity that reaches beyond and challenges the recipient. In the discussion of their work, I will examine how this violence reframes the caress—the touch that reaches into the unknown and attempts to engage with an unknown other—opening up an acknowledgment of desire that moves beyond a totalizing gesture. Through a triangulation of these three provocations of the caress within the theatrical space, the theatre opens up to a further development of the ethical relation, offering an ethical challenge through the displacement of desire in the interaction between self and other and avoiding the thematization that becomes problematic in many readings of theatre's political approach.

Before turning to Lévinas directly, it is crucial to note that this gesture of connectivity proposed in Lévinas's thought has been problematized by a variety of feminist responses to it, particularly developing from early responses to his work in both Simone de Beauvoir's seminal feminist text, *The Second Sex* and in Luce Irigaray's brief, yet oft-cited essay, "The Fecundity of the Caress."[191] Due in part to the gendered nature of Lévinas's language and the distinctions that he frames around gender, his work on the caress relies somewhat strongly on the historical masculinity of the universal subject, a recognition that is rendered problematic by much work on Lévinas. Perhaps it is largely due to this history that the caress does not play the central role in Lévinas's later work that it does in early articulations. Indeed, I would contend that Lévinas implicitly acknowledged his own blind spot with regard to feminism and the difficulty it posed for him

[191] Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 185-217.

largely by avoiding framing it as an a priori model of difference in his later work. In a discussion with Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger, he cautioned the French-Israeli artist/psychoanalyst "[b]est to make only a few allusions to the subject of the difference of the feminine."[192] While in his early work, the feminine is a marker of difference coded largely as the non-masculine (in much the way that Lacan reads the relation of these figures as absence), its relative disappearance in his later work as an ontological category potentially (and paradoxically perhaps) serves to propose re-opening its positionality within the history of Western philosophy.[193] In this chapter, I explore how his work foregrounds desire as a marker of alterity through developing the notion of the caress, as well as how the feminist critique of this work necessitates a shift in the focus on desire. Lévinas's female subject is initially the paradigmatic Other, but this ultimately appears to be reliant on an elision of the distinction between the notion of an empirical 'woman' and the metaphorical "feminine." His initial analysis of the figure of woman, in other words, poses the category of the feminine as the absence of the masculine (albeit a positive absence), while his later work attempts to reframe "woman" as man's altogether other, through examining particular women, running here headlong into the distinction between the universal and the particular.[194] The

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[192] Bracha and Emmanuel Levinas Lichtenberg-Ettinger, *What Would Eurydice Say? Emmanuel Levinas in Conversation with Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger (1991-1993)*, trans. J. Simas and C. Ducker (Paris: BLE Atelier, 1997).

[193] The latest sustained attempt to interrogate the position of the feminine within Lévinas's oeuvre is in his 1972 essay "And God created Woman," which examines both versions of the biblical creation story.

[194] For a particularly clear exploration of the role of the feminine in Lévinas' thought, see Stella Sandford, "Levinas, Feminism, and the Feminine," in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, ed. Simon and Robert Bernasconi Critchley

conundrum that this offers is one in which the feminine both derives from the masculine and exists fully alongside it, a reading where an emphasis on the former is clearly problematic to a feminist reading. Indeed, this is the problem that much of the scholarship has encountered, but the problematic reading of this is based on an ontological primacy that his work attempts to disavow in the argument for ethics as first philosophy.

Irigaray herself notes in the recent article, "What Other are We Talking about" from a special 2004 issue of *Yale French Studies* dedicated to "Encounters with Lévinas" that, "I have sought dialogue with Lévinas: through the reading of certain of his texts and through an invitation for exchange on the occasion of the publication of 'The Fecundity of the Caress.' Each time, it was a failure-perhaps the kind of which Lévinas speaks with regard to the difficult coexistence of two freedoms, and even the impossible communication between them?"[195] Although intended as critique of his work, I would argue that Lévinas's purported "refusal" to engage in dialogue is exemplary of his understanding of and articulations of the notions of an ethics of alterity and a respect for the arguments that Irigaray frames. In her critique of him, Irigaray seems implicitly to recognize this argument, noting that

> although our culture would certainly have benefited from a dialogue between our two perspectives, masculine and feminine, it stands only to

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(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). In this, Sandford eloquently unpacks much of Lévinas's use of the feminine, arguing eventually that his work potentially complicates the "binary presumptions" about "sex difference."

[195] Luce Irigaray, "What Other Are We Talking About," *Yale French Studies* 104, no. Encounters with Levinas (2004): 68.

> lose from their assimilation. The real of the other as other would again be annulled, submerged in a single discourse-a discourse that remains egocentric and monological even if it presents itself as anonymous or neuter, and that does not afford the other an irreducible existence, freedom, or speech. To conflate or even compare my words concerning the other with those of Lévinas means once again to reduce the duality of subjects and of their differences, to include my thinking in Lévinas's "virile" universe, where it cannot but lose its meaning and waste away.[196]

The point that she makes here is conditioned by the history of western philosophy, a frame from which Lévinas attempts to retreat, but it is a crucial structuring nonetheless. In response to her work, as well as that of de Beauvoir and others, it seems that Lévinas shifted his notion of the feminine, while not explicitly engaging with the critiques. Indeed, the notion of the feminine changes drastically in Lévinas's work, a shift that I would contend is predicated on his notions of alterity and his articulation of an interaction with alterity as impossible to mediate through language. This shift in his examples of alterity may provocatively be read as a response to these early feminist reactions. As is recognized by many of his feminist interlocutors, Lévinas's notion of femininity changes from the space of its being absolute alterity, as he attempts to define it within *Totality and Infinity* and *Time and the Other* to a less defined/definable

[196] Ibid.: 67-68.

location within the introduction to the 1979 edition of *Time and the Other* and works such as "And God Created Woman."[197]

In his 1963 Essay "Judaism and the Feminine," Lévinas writes of woman that, "If woman completes man, she does not complete him as a part completes another into a whole but, as it were, as two totalities complete one another—which is, after all, the miracle of social relations."[198] This article provides a basis for interrogating Lévinas's notion of the feminine as he seems to initially propose the feminine as the "truest" measure of alterity. For Lévinas, "The feminine is other for a masculine being not only because of a different nature, but also insamuch as alterity is in some way its nature . . . the feminine is described as the *of itself Other*, as the origin of the very concept of alterity."[199] In this early definition, it is difficult to tease out the feminine as an ontological condition, preexisting (or appearing alongside) masculinity and as the ethical relation

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[197] Although a full feminist unpacking of the work of Lévinas is outside the scope of this dissertation, it is worth noting that a plethora of feminist criticism of Lévinas has been developed over the past decade. See especially: Tina Chanter, *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas*, Re-Reading the Canon (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001); Chanter, *Time, Death, and the Feminine : Levinas with Heidegger* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Andrea Danielle Conque, "Heidegger, Levinas, and the Feminine" (Louisiana State University, 2002); Claire Elise Katz, *Levinas, Judaism, and the Feminine : The Silent Footsteps of Rebecca*, Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); Diane Perpich, *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008); Ziarek, *An Ethics of Dissensus : Postmodernity, Feminism, and the Politics of Radical Democracy*. (Stanford,: Stanford University Press, 2001).

[198] Emmanuel Lévinas, *Difficult Freedom : Essays on Judaism*, Johns Hopkins Jewish Studies (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 36.

[199] Emmanuel Lévinas and Philippe Nemo, *Ethics and Infinity*, 1st ed. (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 65-66.

appearing in encounter. As Diane Perpich argues of Lévinas's notions in *Time and the Other* in her essay "From the Caress to the Word," "This early account of the feminine contains two claims that Lévinas does not explicitly distinguish, but that can be usefully teased apart. First, the feminine is not defined in terms of its opposition to the masculine; it has its own positive essence. And second, this positive essence is alterity."[200] In his early work, Lévinas appears to try to develop a notion of gender that constructs masculinity and femininity as absolute alterity, but unlike many traditional western philosophical notions of the construction of gender, he attempts to define them as essentially separate. Tina Chanter proposes of Lévinas at the outset of the edited volume in which Perpich's essay appears that "his entire philosophical project, contrary to the tradition, seems to establish the imperative of alterity as formative of the urge for systematicity"[201] However, it is in precisely this attempt to distinguish these that the project threatens to collapse inward, blurring the boundaries between ontology and ethics. Indeed, one may read the engagement with, and development of, the notions of the feminine in Lévinas's work as an attempt to bring the feminine into centrality within the western philosophical tradition; he may be read as essentially framing a proto-feminist argument.

In constructing the space of the woman within his thought, Lévinas relies upon much Jewish thought, which relates the construction of the feminine to the second letter in the Hebrew alphabet, *bet*. Within Talmudic and midrashic constructions, this locatedness of femininity constructs the woman as positive

[200] Diane Perpich in Chanter, *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas*, 31.
[201] Ibid., 3.

difference, rather than Greek-derived views that posit the woman as lack.[202] The woman is located as the "dwelling" in comparison to the "masculine" out-of-doors, a reading that prefigures the problematic constructions of male and female spheres of influence as the public and private respectively. However, as Chanter discusses, Lévinas is attempting to frame a notion of *a priori* alterity, but is essentially constrained by the discursive histories that he tries to disrupt. In the recognition of this, and in the encounter with feminist critique, Lévinas turns more explicitly to the collision of Jewish theological thought and Greek philosophical tradition, necessitating that his notions of gender must shift from one in which he reads femininity as a paradigmatic alterity to a more concrete sense of particular women, primarily female biblical figures. The problem that requires this is the historical subjugation of ethics to ontology and epistemology and the impossibility of unraveling these bases that appears in these critiques of his early work. Thus the shift in his frames of reference speaks directly to his project to produce ethics as first philosophy. In and of itself, however, this shift causes other problems, as these particularized readings and their substitution for a generic categorization of the feminine—there is a slippage between the feminine and the woman—open up to a critique of Lévinas's constructions of particular women as opposed to a universal masculinity.

In justifying the place of the feminine figure within Lévinas's work, I return to Tina Chanter, whose crucial analysis underscores the role of the feminine within Lévinas by exploring the notions of temporality, a notion that I

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[202] This is unpacked very lucidly in Katz, *Levinas, Judaism, and the Feminine : The Silent Footsteps of Rebecca*.

will now turn to with regards to the caress as the figure that opens to the future. Chanter's work is perhaps the most sustained and lucid feminist reading of Lévinas's work, which attempts to take his project seriously and read beyond the trappings of Western philosophical language in order to consider how to balance the problematic status of the feminine in his work with the project that his work undertakes in rewriting philosophical history. Chanter writes of her project in *Time, Death, and the Feminine*:

> Women are therefore left with the dilemma that we either take Lévinas at his word . . . when he suggests that the feminine includes all the possibilities of the transcendent relation with the other, in which case we can identify with the ethical relation of the face-to-face as the mainstay of Lévinas's philosophy, which is nevertheless figured as masculine by Lévinas himself, and in doing so we erase the very significance of the feminine as alterity. Or we identify with the feminine as mysterious, ineffable other, bringing men to the brink of ethics, before retreating into hiding, as the feminine withdraws from the categories of things in the world, light, knowledge, and philosophy in which case we repeat the gestures of generosity that have been women's lot since time immemorial, and we rejoin a tradition that excludes women from the serious public realm of politics, which has always been a masculine affair, and confines us to the private, corporeal, domestic realm, to watch over the children, to take care of men's needs, to provide solace and love and sustenance, to give a break, interrupt the monotony, create a delightful lapse in being.

> By focusing on the peculiar conditional status that the feminine has, I want to suggest a third alternative to these two positions, which seem to amount either to a return to the philosophy of recognition that Lévinas wants to put into question, or to a failure to take seriously how to read Lévinas as a feminist. I want to inflect Lévinas's notion of the feminine more rigorously in the direction of the temporal, and to suggest thereby that the feminine remains the privileged unthought in Lévinas's philosophy, aporetically organizing his philosophy in a way that throws into question the adequacy of transcendental modes of thinking what conditionally means.[203]

She argues here that the "status" of the feminine is in some ways unthinkable for Lévinas, as it offers an entirely different reading of conditionality. Throughout Chanter's work, she proposes that the Lévinasian feminine offers an interruption in masculine temporality, where, despite the caress in *Totality and Infinity* being a placeholder for a notion of a fecundity that is immediately read as paternity, the feminine plays a necessary role in the understanding of alterity and the development of a necessary affect. Chanter terms this, "the achievement of the saying despite the Said—in terms of the feminine's exceeding the paternal logic of Lévinas's texts, so that his texts catch sight of, or benefit from, an inspirational source that cannot quite be contained or disarmed even by the recuperation of its excess at the level of the said."[204] She argues provocatively here that the feminine *must* remain unexplicated in order that the texts move beyond a masculine

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[203] Chanter, *Time, Death, and the Feminine : Levinas with Heidegger*, 57-58.

[204] Ibid., 259.

totalization and gesture towards a future temporality, the *a-venir* of the caress. In the argument that follows, I offer a reading of the caress based on this temporally driven unpacking, but one which attempts to develop the notion of the erotic as Lévinas proposes in his early work and to argue for theatre as the space that offers up precisely this model of the ethical relation.

In turning to the theatre with regard to the notions of desire and temporality, I attempt to focus on theatre that already foregrounds the question of desire. This choice serves to simplify the move that caused Lévinas so much grief within his early articulations of the caress. With theatre that explicitly acknowledges a relational economy between the performer and the audience, each clearly exists as the altogether-Other for the other, but this is not a marker of ontological status within the theatrical frame. While certainly there is much theatre that explicitly focuses upon the construction of desire, I have chosen to limit myself to examples that rely upon same-sex notions of the erotic in which the "woman-as-such" disappears.[205] There are several reasons for this choice. Firstly, queer performance in its nomination establishes itself as operating within a realm of desire (or desirous imaginings). As articulated above, the notion of queer performance and performativity further serves to construct the notion of alterity for heteronormativity; thus queer performance, in its reiterations constantly reaffirms notions of desire and identification as imbricated and as markers of alterity. While I recognize the potentially highly problematic nature of this gesture, this decision is predicated on culturally determined understandings of

[205] Certainly, one could examine the work of Forced Entertainment or ecdysiast performances as explicitly engaging with notions of desire.

desire and the social construction of same sex desire as "other." As well, the absence of the female figure as such allows me to foreground the notions of genealogy and fecundity that are typically reliant upon biological factors; this follows from the work of Freeman discussed above, in providing a new reading of futurity not marked solely by the reproductive. Such a move risks the potential reinscription of problematic psychoanalytic tropes regarding drag performance and the absence of the female figure. However, the choice here does not seek to foreclose the exploration of the caress from either a more feminine or heteronormative perspective. This will be pointed to in the concluding chapter, but within the space of the dissertation, the imbrication of gender and sexuality will be "controlled" as a variable in order to more clearly frame the usefulness of the caress as a means of opening up an ethically driven, rather than political reading of the theatre.

In many ways, this project is similar to that undertaken by Judith Butler in her refiguring of the Lacanian phallus; she remarks that "it is important to underscore, however, the way in which the stability of both 'masculine' and 'feminine' morphologies is called into question by a lesbian resignification of the phallus which depends on the crossings of phantasmatic identification."[206] The caress, as the mode of encounter in Lévinas's work between masculine and feminine, is resignified within queer performance to be revelatory of the notion of encounter itself. While Butler's argument here relies on a psychoanalytic notion of subject formation, wherein the metonymic phallus both re-places and replaces

[206] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter : On the Discursive Limits Of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 87.

the penis, the notion of the caress is always already about the space between. This "is not to refer to an *imaginary* identification and/or desire that can be measured against a *real* one; on the contrary, it is simply to promote an alternative *imaginary* to a hegemonic imaginary."[207] As discussed above, the encounter in queer performance is always a negotiation between desire and identification; rather than the psychoanalytic construction of identity predicated upon a melancholic absence, the caress performs and produces desire through a desired notion of futurity. In this as well, there is a counterpoint to Lee Edelman's recent argument in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, where he argues for a new conception of the homosexual figure in fundamental opposition to reproductive futurism.[208] Because the caress serves to reimagine temporality, here the queer figure becomes a marker of fecundity, and a figure of hope between desire and identification.

The caress first appears in Lévinas's thought in *Time and the Other*, which was published in English in 1979, but first presented as a series of lectures in 1946/1947. As discussed in the second chapter, this sets out the argument that time is not "a degradation of eternity, but as the relationship to *that* which—of itself unassimilable, absolutely other—would not allow itself to be assimilated by experience; or to *that* which—of itself infinite—would not allow itself to be comprehended."[209] Through exploring the relationship of the diachronous and

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[207] Ibid., 91.

[208] Lee Edelman, *No Future : Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Series Q (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

[209] Emmanuel Lévinas, *Time and the Other and Additional Essays* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 32.

synchronous notions of temporality, Lévinas poses a notion of desire at the basis of ethical transcendence—"not merely a quality different from all others, but as the very quality of difference."[210] He introduces the caress in the fourth essay, under the section titled "Eros."[211] In this proposal, Lévinas begins to open up a notion of exposure to the other that has been previously defined through death, by shifting the terms of engagement from the Other as demonstrably unknowable only through [his] death to other modes of unknowability/unthematizability. The Other is explored as freedom: "[i]t is only by showing in what way eros differs from possession and power that I can acknowledge an communication in eros. It is neither a struggle, nor a fusion, nor a knowledge . . . It is a relationship with alterity, with mystery—that is to say, with the future . . . with what cannot be there when everything is there—not with a being that is not there, but with the very dimension of alterity."[212] While Lévinas's understanding of eros is heteronormative and masculinist, it is not limited to such, but is defined as a relationship with futurity and with temporality.[213] This coincides with much

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[210] Ibid., 36.

[211] It is this section to which Simone De Beauvoir responds explicitly in *The Second Sex*, writing that "his description, which is intended to be objective, is in fact an assertion of masculine privilege" Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York,: Vintage Books, 1989), xxviii, note 3. In addressing de Beauvoir's key points about this argument, I replace his use of "feminine" here with the notion of alterity, which for him at this point in his writing is a reasonable substitution, given his claim that "the absolute contrary contrary [*le contraire absolument contraire*]. . . that permits its terms to remain absolutely other, is the feminine." Lévinas, *Time and the Other and Additional Essays*, 85.

[212] Lévinas, *Time and the Other and Additional Essays*, 88.

[213] One might usefully look here at the work done on disidentificatory practices by José Esteban Muñoz in Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*.

recent argumentation about the nature of queerness on both sides of the debate surrounding Lee Edelman's recent work. Edelman himself states that "queerness marks the excess of something always unassimilable that troubles the relentlessly totalizing impulse informing normativity . . . We're never at one with our queerness; neither its time nor its subject is ours."[214] This notion of temporality is particularly theatrical, but is as well offered through the notion of the caress, which reaches towards, but does not claim ownership.

As I have argued in the previous chapters, theatre stages the very act of appearance within a temporally constrained frame. The theatrical notion of time is always multiple between the stage and the auditorium, the breaking of this boundary, which I read as a modality of the caress, builds on these competing temporalities to articulate the workings of desire and the ways in which the ethical relation is developed. Lévinas frames the caress as arising from within "a phenomenology of voluptuousness;"[215] it is a pleasure that cannot be solitary and cannot seek total fusion or the disappearance of the other into the self.

Lévinas defines the caress as a very particular criterion of being; it is the direct expression of a search for alterity. He crucially identifies it first by what it is not: "The caress is a mode of the subject's being, where the subject who is in contact with another goes beyond this contact. . . . But what is caressed is not touched, properly speaking. It is not the softness or warmth of the hand given in

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[214] "Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion," *GLQ* 13, no. 2-3: 188.

[215] Lévinas, *Time and the Other and Additional Essays*, 89.

contact that the caress seeks."[216] In this, the search for "softness or warmth" is ruled out as a too explicit attempt at knowing and possessing. The import of this distinction is to set the caress as something other than what it might be understood as within the predefined (erotic) relationship. (Indeed, this seems to undercut the problem that Irigaray finds in his writing of its rehearsal of masculinist tropes). The caress can not be conceived as either the touch of mastery—palpation—or as the touch of affection—a fondle or stroke—but as the touch of unknown desire. He continues:

> [t]he seeking of the caress constitutes its essence by the fact that the caress does not know what it seeks. This 'not knowing,' this fundamental disorder, is the essential. It is like a game with something slipping away, a game absolutely without project or plan, not with what can become ours or us, but with something other, always other, always inaccessible, and always still to come [*à venir*]. The caress is the anticipation of this pure future [*avenir*], without content. It is made up of the increase of hunger, of ever richer promises, opening new perspectives onto the ungraspable. It feeds on countless hungers.[217]

In this, the caress moves from being a literal instantiated touch to a more figurative contact across temporal junctures. The caress reaches into what Badiou might term the void, or across what might be read, vis-à-vis Benjamin as the orchestra pit "which separates the players from the audience as it does the dead

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[216] Ibid.

[217] Ibid.

from the living."[218] This is where the theatre has the potential to become a key space for articulating a new mode of ethics through understanding and staging the caress. Although breaking the fourth wall is a classically modernist trope responding to the naturalist articulation of theatre as laboratory, the directionality of the caress reinvests this connection with the economies of desire and identification, using the theatrical architecture and the erotic connection offers a way of posing an ethics arising out of theatricality. (This might be productively read as a response to the continued articulation of "gaze studies" within psychoanalytically driven film theory.)

In developing the notion of ethics through the caress then, I examine the ways in which desire is staged for the audience by the breaking of the fourth wall, and look at the ways in which history stages notions of generation (and the relation to fecundity). As Savran notes, "writing and performance always function to disarticulate and disrupt identity . . . The performer is the most obviously destabilized . . . insofar as he or she is always playing a role, always literally giving breath to an Other within the self"[219] The onstage figure, regardless of the definition of character, is always both performer and supplement.[220] (The two performers that I will discuss in this chapter demonstrate both a performance art version of self and a drag or theatrical sense of character overlaid on performer). The first proposal of a theatrical caress then is as near-

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[218] Benjamin and Arendt, *Illuminations*, 154.

[219] Savran, *A Queer Sort of Materialism : Recontextualizing American Theater*, 70.

[220] The notion of mimetic excess is unpacked most usefully by Elin Diamond in Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis : Essays on Feminism and Theater*.

perfect metaphor for performance itself, as the audience's return of the performed gesture—caress—towards an unknown other. Given this supplementarity of the performer, s/he is always more than the individual; the audience member figuratively reaches out towards this unknown other without an explicit knowledge "of what it seeks." As Lévinas writes in *Totality and Infinity*, "[t]he caress aims at neither a person nor a thing."[221]

Before turning fully to these theatrical examples however, it is necessary to further unpack the notions of fecundity and generation that Lévinas develops in the context of exploring the caress. He proposes the notion in answering the question, "How can the ego that I am remain myself in a you, without being nonetheless the ego that I am in my present—that is to say, an ego that inevitably returns to itself? How can the ego become other to itself?"[222] By determining (within a traditional masculinist frame) the response to this, he offers the son as the location of this solution—"paternity is the relationship with a stranger, who, entirely while being Other, is myself, the relationship of the ego with a myself who is nonetheless a stranger to me. . . . Neither the categories of power nor those of having can indicate the relationship with the child. Neither the notion of cause nor the notion of ownership permit one to grasp the notion of fecundity."[223] At first appearance, this relation seems to be overly particularized, and indeed, the notion of an ethics that appears only through the child seems to pose nothing new

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[221] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity; an Essay on Exteriority*, 259.

[222] Lévinas, *Time and the Other and Additional Essays*, 91.

[223] Ibid.

for Western thought. (It might perhaps trouble psychoanalytic discourse with its notion of directionality, but seems to offer nothing new to philosophy.)

Lévinas then goes on to articulate the notion of fecundity explicitly (rather than paternity) through relation to Bergson's *élan vital* (life force), defining fecundity as the merger of "artistic creation and generation in the same movement."[224] Although Lévinas largely omits art from his definitions of the realm of ethics, here it appears most vehemently, a mention that is largely overlooked by most of his interlocutors and critics. However, this is a crucial articulation of his philosophy, possibly the most succinct of his claims for a new reading of alterity; he concludes this essay: "I have been bent on emphasizing that alterity is not purely and simply the existence of another freedom next to mine. I have a power over such a freedom where it is absolutely foreign to me, without relation to me. The coexistence of several freedoms is a multiplicity that leaves the unity of each intact, or else this multiplicity unites into a general will."[225] As I have articulated through the pages of this dissertation, Lévinas's philosophy opens up perfectly to an exploration of the theatrical relation, the appearance of an absolutely other "Other" in front of a self who is interpellated by this moment of appearance. (An audience only becomes an audience in the presence of a performer.) The linkage of artistic creation and generation can be productively explored in furthering notions of genealogy that have been developed in queer

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[224] Ibid., 91-92. For a further unpacking of Bergson's notion of *élan vital* itself, see especially Henri Bergson and Arthur Mitchell, *Creative Evolution* (New York,: H. Holt and co., 1913). and Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 1990).

[225] Lévinas, *Time and the Other and Additional Essays*, 92.

theory. Post-Nietzschean readings of genealogy and its relation to history provide a useful way of exploring the notion of fecundity to propose an ethics of contact. Much of the work on queer genealogy focuses indeed on competing moments of interpellation—the rejection of the call by the heteronormative order and the acceptance of alternative models.[226] By reading the theatre as what I have termed an ethotopic space, the connections between theatrical performance and the interpellation of the subject appear to rely upon the development of the caress and the relation of an historical or genealogical model to an open sense of futurity. This rejects the psychoanalytic frame of identity formation, offering instead, as Freeman began to frame in her essay, a temporal drag that inflects a hopeful futurity through the collision between erotic and identificatory desires.

In turning then to queer performance models, I hope to demonstrate that theatre's staging of encounter bears the potential to redefine notions of desire and connection, posing a figurative caress that offers a new model for subject formation in the contemporary moment. As Savran makes explicit, "theatre spectatorship provides an almost irrestistible challenge to that law of Oedipus that would segregate identification (wanting to be someone) from desire (wanting to have someone)."[227] This imbrication of desire and identification might be drawn directly from the notion of Lévinas's phenomenology of eros. Within what has been read as a moment of neoliberal sexual politics, the theatrical examples of this

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[226] For a particularly useful reading of the notion of the queer subject's rejection of the interpellative call of heteronormative society, see Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*.

[227] Savran, *A Queer Sort of Materialism : Recontextualizing American Theater*, 73.

chapter are both other to heteronormative social constructions and central to the contemporary construction of social relations of the "dominated fraction of the dominant class" that produces theatre.[228] Queer performance in particular stages a focus on desire, articulating itself as a safe space for the exploration of desires that are still politically problematized; throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, as the works that this chapter focuses on were performed, the emphasis of queer theatre had moved beyond AIDS dramas to explore the very notion of desire.[229] In staging themselves as encounter with a mode of desire that is other to the heteronormative, these examples frame the theatre as the central space for the articulation of a representation that is not thematized and poses a model of "a collectivity that is not a communion. It is the face-to-face without intermediary, and is furnished for us in the eros where, in the other's proximity, distance is integrally maintained, and whose pathos with made of both this proximity and this duality."[230] Theatre's staging of desire is non-productive in the sense of reproductive generation, and yet, as I will demonstrate below, its very heart is the development of generation and the ethical relation. The centrality of desire to the

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[228] In exploring the centrality of queerness to contemporary neoliberal politics, Lisa Duggan proposes homonormativity as "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption. See Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? : Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 175.

[229] In beginning with queer theatre in the post-AIDS era, the argument could be made that this parallels Lévinas's own movement beyond the alterity of death to the alterity of eros and that responds as well to queer theory's psychoanalytic move beyond the "death drive."

[230] Lévinas, *Time and the Other and Additional Essays*, 94.

framing of such performance literalizes the erotic charge present in the theatre and the theatre's reliance upon the audience's "turn-ons."

Both of the performers that provide my examples in this chapter may be seen to stage questions about the relationship of gender and sexuality to contemporary notions of the political. Both, however, I would contend, articulate an individual and particular relationship with their audiences that moves beyond a political instantiation, one that offers possibilities of viewing the very basis of the ethical relation. In the aftermath of his recognition and notoriety of one of the NEA Four, Tim Miller's work has become central to many university syllabi and his tour schedule as both performer and workshop leader (as well as teacher of homiletics) covers much of the United States from big cities to small towns. While still a somewhat marginalised performer, compared at least to some of the works discussed in the two previous chapters, his work maintains a centrality within the current constructions of performances of desire. Kiki and Herb (characters played by Justin Bond and Kenny Mellman respectively) stage a relationship both onstage and with the audience that offers new modes of connection and desire, as well as a relationship to particular (false) histories that hint at new ways of understanding generation and thus futurity. They have moved from the fringes of the queer cabaret scene to recently staging performances at a variety of locations truly at the center of the "legitimate theatre," including the Cherry Lane Theatre in New York, the Helen Hayes Theatre on Broadway,

Carnegie Hall, and Queen Elizabeth Hall in London.[231] They were even nominated for a Tony Award for their Broadway performances. While both Miller and Kiki and Herb draw largely from a coterie audience, both have a cultural reach that is at the top of their respective arenas.

Betwixt and Between: Erotic Nudity and the Broken Fourth Wall

At the beginning of most of his solo performance works of the past twenty-five years, Tim Miller has unceremoniously crossed from what is typically a small stage into the audience, and directly addressed several individuals within that group. As well, in many of his pieces, Miller has become known for brief moments of nudity; so much so, that in the London performances of his most recent work, *1001 Beds*, he began by telling the audience that he was not going to disrobe in this performance, as it had become too expected of him.[232] These two actions are key in establishing a notion of proximity and desire, setting up the relation between self and Other as one both of identification and desire in such performance. (Although much of Miller's audience is queer, I contend that his explorations of sexuality and desire are more concerned with the universalizability of desire and connection, rather than a particularly queer-proscribed version).

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[231] The Cherry Lane Theatre has a long and illustrious history of performance dating back to the 1920s. See their website at http://www.cherrylanetheatre.org/history.htm for details. Queen Elizabeth Hall is one of the major performance venues on London's South Bank.

[232] The references to *1001 Beds* in this chapter are to the two performances on 10 and 16 June 2007 at Drill Hall in London. Discussion of *US* is in reference to performances seen at Drill Hall in November 2004 and April 2005.

In his 1994 performance *Naked Breath*, the stage directions describe the following opening:

> (*. . . Tim enters from the back of the house, breathing in and out very loudly. He checks to make sure the audience is breathing, too. He stomps on stage and the lights come up.*)
>
> I'm breathing. Are you? How about you? Everybody take a nice breath. Let me hear. . . . I need to do a spot check
>
> (*Tim approaches some audience member who is probably dreading just such an event.*)
>
> Would you breathe on my wrist? Would you breathe on my heart? . . .
>
> (Tim pulls a magic marker out of his pocket and sits on the lap of an audience member and asks him/her to draw on him.)
>
> Could you tattoo my arm, please? Just write "NAKED BREATH" in bold Virgo clear letters and then put a heart around it and an arrow through . . .[233]

The notion of and focus on breath here is a literalization of the caress as a mode of contact between Other and self. Miller allows the audience members to focus on their shared encounter in the space, but to remain aware of their own embodied presence. He draws attention to the ways in which the molecules of air each breathes are shared, not just by those in the space, but by others including Leonardo da Vinci, Attila the Hun, Mary Tyler Moore, and others.[234] Jill Dolan

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[233] Holly Hughes and David Román, *O Solo Homo : The New Queer Performance*, 1st ed. (New York: Grove Press, 1998), 54-55.

[234] Ibid., 55.

describes a similar moment in Peggy Shaw's work, "Her presence moved through the house like a current; she electrified the audience, bound her to us and brought us close to the complexities of her longings and our own . . . the generosity of the performer in sharing her hands, her heart, her desire, with an audience of friends and strangers. . . . In this moment, she makes herself attainable as the object of such desire and shares her own longings as a desiring subject."[235] While I agree with Dolan's reading of this type of moment, the focus on the performer's "generosity" in such moments is perhaps misleading. This sense of giving, while an oft-cited trope of performed intersubjectivity, neglects the possibilities of selfishness in performance; the performer is not performing simply for an audience or to produce political activation, but as well for the gratification of response. Dolan's explorations of the utopian performative in response to Shaw (as well as Deb Margolin and Holly Hughes in the same chapter) lead her back towards the notion of communitas, of producing an audience whose value is in the shared experience of a moment. Perhaps, however, it is not in the shared experiences among the audience, but in the particularity of the individual "caress" between performer and audience member, across that discursive divide of self/Other that one may read the ethical relation. Rather than love, which is the category to which one might connect this sense of generosity, this interaction provokes a phenomenology of the erotic, aimed not at thematizing the other as sameness, but as acknowledging in that other the impossibility of sameness and totalization.

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[235] Dolan, *Utopia in Performance : Finding Hope at the Theater*, 54.

This distinction between love and eros is predicated on the continued presence of an audience as a not uniform community. For Lévinas, the love relationship cannot be the beginning of an ethics since if "it excludes the third party, it remains intimacy, dual solitude, closed society, the supremely non-public."[236] Miller's work is concerned with staging these interactions, but recognizing the individuality of the audience as well in these moments. His work is not predicated on the presumption of a uniform sexuality among his audience members, but of a sense of distinctiveness and individuality. The caress in this interaction appears in the individual "interactions" between Miller and the spectators, the construction of Miller as intact, complete individual, and the ways in which the performance's "success" is dependent upon the construction of an unreturnable desire/identification from each audience member. "The caress . . . is not an intentionality of disclosure but of search: a movement unto the invisible. In a certain sense it *expresses* love, but suffers from an inability to tell it. It is hungry for this very expression, in an unremitting increase of hunger."[237] In the breaking of the fourth wall, this performance sets up a false contract in which the audience is engaged and brought into performance, but not allowed to perform publicly. While there may be some small visible individual responses, particularly in the moments of direct face-to-face contact, the performance depends upon the non-responsiveness within the space of the performance and of Miller's resultant "wholeness." The performer in this solo performance then becomes "[t]he Beloved, at once graspable but intact in her[sic] nudity, beyond

[236] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity; an Essay on Exteriority*, 265.

[237] Ibid., 258, italics original.

object and face and thus beyond the existent."[238] The desired but impossible (within the space of the theatre) connection thus becomes the perfect example of the caress, in which the individual audience member must (re-)construct his or her own subjectivity in relation to the appearance of this ungraspable individual.

The stagedness of the encounter as well allows Miller to exist as both individual and as "infinite." Next to the audience member, the performer bears what Lévinas would term as height. This infinite appears in Tim Miller, who is present not merely as the Whittier-born, queer subject Tim Miller, but as the essence of Tim Miller as performer, as member of the NEA Four, as performer who brings an embodied and public history onstage with him. "The Other thus presents itself as human Other; it shows a face and opens the dimension of *height*, that is to say, it *infinitely* overflows the bounds of knowledge."[239] This is to say that Miller's appearance and his importance within the theatrical space citationally performs a Lévinasian reference to both God and the Beloved, nakedly offering himself up to the audience, while his openness promises a notion of futurity and re-expresses the commandment "Thou shalt not kill"—figuratively speaking—here. As an audience member, I am reminded of my relationship to this appearance of being and my desire for connection to it (which while erotic and voluptuous is not necessarily sexual). In returning the breath and my responses, I offer the caress, which "loses itself in a being that dissipates as though into an impersonal dream."[240]

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[238] Ibid., 258.

[239] Lévinas et al., *Emmanuel Levinas : Basic Philosophical Writings*, 12.

[240] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity; an Essay on Exteriority*, 259.

Before turning to the notion of genealogy, I want to pause on the importance of nudity, both literally and figuratively within this reading. While, as I have discussed, in Lévinas's early writing and thus all of the writing on the caress, he framed the notion of Other as the feminine, I wish to argue that while his notion of the erotic is not necessarily a sexualized notion, it focuses on the question of desire and directionality. "Eros is not accomplished as a subject that fixes an object, nor as a projection, toward a possible. Its movement consists in going beyond the possible."[241] Indeed, Lévinas brackets off sexuality from his interrogation of ethics, exploring the notion of the anarchic body. As Ewa Ziarek notes, "what is remarkable in Lévinas's later work is that the possibility of ethical responsibility is located not in consciousnesss or free will but specifically in incarnation, defined as 'the extreme way of being exposed.'"[242] Much of Ziarek's project is concerned with rearticulating Lévinas's work to develop "an ethics of sexual difference;" she argues that "the constituting/constituted ambiguity of embodiment contests not only the desexualization of the body in Lévinas's ethics, but also its 'sexualization' according to sex/gender divide."[243] However, I contend that theatrical embodiment allows for a reading of Lévinas's work and the articulation of the ethical relation through exploring the ways in which theatre relies upon the construction of desire. In exploring performance that stages itself as explicitly "about" desire, Lévinas's concept of nudity appears as both the root

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[241] Ibid., 261.

[242] Ziarek, *An Ethics of Dissensus : Postmodernity, Feminism, and the Politics of Radical Democracy*, 49.

[243] Ibid., 53.

of desire and as the response to the caress. "The non-signifyingness of erotic nudity does not precede the signifyingness of the face as the obscurity of formless matter precedes the artist's forms. It already has forms behind it; it comes from the future, from a future situated beyond the future wherein possibles scintillate, for the chaste nudity of the face does not vanish in the exhibitionism of the erotic."[244] The theatrical appearance of the face, as discussed in the previous chapter, opens up a variety of possibilities for the ethical encounter. In the explicit engagement with the naked—both literally naked as well as in the space of performance beyond the fourth wall—body of the performer, the audience is both eroticized and exposed to alterity. This appearance of the Other is a gesture that demands my response in the shape of the caress and the openness to futurity.

Pasts , Presents, and Futures:

(Real and Fake) History and the Production of the Future

Tim Miller's work is concerned, at least on the surface, with notions of autobiography; it stages his personal history, over and over again. From his early performances, focusing on his coming-of-age as a gay teenager and man to his more recent works, which have explored his relationship with his lover Alastair and immigration issues pertaining to gay and lesbian rights, Miller's performances follow a pattern of storytelling. At the center of their performances as lounge duo Kiki and Herb, Justin Bond and Kenny Mellman retell a fictional history of their collaborations. Heavily painted with "stage-y" makeup to make clearly visible and yet obviously false age lines and crow's feet, the two are each

[244] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity; an Essay on Exteriority*, 255.

clearly both performer and character. Recounting anecdotes and showing album covers from their invented history, the two thirty-something performers produce a history that fleshes out their cabaret covers of a breadth of songs of the past half-century. Their album titles trace this fiction, from the 1957 *The Hazy Days of Kiki* through *Kiki and Herb:It's Not Unusual* and *Kiki and Herb: Whitey's on the Moon*, with implicit, and often explicit, references to (relationships with) artists ranging from Nat King Cole and Tom Jones to Gil-Scott Heron. As well, they trace the characters' personal histories, including marriages, institutionalizations, and relationships with historical figures such as Princess Grace. The recitation of these false histories is a typical trope throughout their work, and both serves to create a sense of insider knowledge among fan communities as well as framing the performance in relation to lineages of recognizable musical history.

In their presentations of a diachronous history within the synchronous frame of the theatre, the performances of Tim Miller and Kiki and Herb, along with similar work, stages an intervention in the reading of such performance as political, instead offering a move towards Lévinasian ethics. Miller's work attempts to stage an "everyman" notion of performance, producing identification in the audience through both his persona and the recounting of stories that demonstrate both a locatedness of his history and its applicability to a generation of gay men growing up and coming of age in the latter half of the twentieth century. His work positions itself against historical developments and, like much performance work, brings the diachronous and the synchronous into juxtaposition. In the recitation of the past, performers open up the notion of a future. David

Savran articulates the theatricalized relationship of past to present in relation to Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*, "in keeping the past alive [it] also announces the promise of a radically different future. As Derrida emphasises, the spectral—and utopian character of the promise 'will always keep within it . . . this absolutely undetermined messianic hope at its heart,' this hope for 'an alterity that cannot be anticipated.'"[245] It is this hoped-for development of alterity that is read as the caress, this notion of futurity that opens up the theatrical to the ethical. In tracing these histories, these queer performers produce a new historical genealogy, which redefines fecundity and productivity through this theatrical imagining. Foucault wrote of the centrality of the body to the genealogical enterprise, "the body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration. Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body."[246] That is to say, that the body itself contains and stages its own history and produces its own knowledge of generation. The theatrical bodies in this chapter appear to redefine history and therefore reopen the future.

In a discussion of John Leguizamo's work in *Performance in America*, David Román defines "queer genealogy" with reference to a staged discussion between Leguizamo and his uncle Sanny about *A Chorus Line*; it is "a genealogy

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[245] Savran, *A Queer Sort of Materialism : Recontextualizing American Theater*, 95.

[246] Michel Foucault and Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 83.

structured not by accurate historical knowledge but by an imagined lineage of homosexual heroes [Plato, Michelangelo, Disney], however unconventional or ridiculous."[247] For Román, the notion of a queer genealogy is a fecund notion, it allows for new modes of kinship structuring and produces a bi-directional sense of generational connection. While not a literal father/son relationship, the relationships created through the imagination offer a new modality of understanding (re-)generation. In *Totality and Infinity*, Lévinas writes of filiality, "The converse of paternity, filiality, the father-son relationship, designates a relation of rupture and a recourse at the same time. As rupture, repudiation of the father, commencement, filiality at each moment accomplishes and repeats the paradox of a created freedom. But in this apparent contradiction and in the form of the son being *is* infinitely and discontinuously, historical without fate."[248] A queer genealogy, as mapped through performed explorations of the historical, offers new modes of understanding filiality. Miller's storytelling both produces generation on stage and proffers this notion of "rupture and recourse" in the relationality between performer and audience. Within the conjunction of synchronous stage instant and diachronous historical narration produces a new

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[247] Román, *Performance in America : Contemporary U.S. Culture and the Performing Arts*, 122. For other related explorations and development of the notion of queer genealogies, although not always as explicitly, see Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place : Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, Sexual Cultures (New York: New York University Press, 2005), Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology : Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings : Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, Series Q (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, *Touching Feeling : Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, Series Q (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

[248] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity; an Essay on Exteriority*, 278.

model of the familial relation, not dependent upon age or actual generation, "the I thus posits itself before truth in placing its subjective morality in the infinite time of its fecundity—a situation in which the instant of eroticism and the infinity of paternity are conjoined . . ."[249]

In *1001 Beds*, Miller tells a variety of stories about his life as a performer, a story imagined through the hotel beds in which he has spent and will spend his (touring) life. As a performer, the bed has been a crucial issue to Miller throughout his work; with the focus on desire, many of the stories he has told have revolved around beds. These have ranged from the opening moment of the 1992 *My Queer Body* in which he describes his parents in bed, "Let's start at the beginning. The very beginning of my story, as far as I can tell. We're in a bed. My dad is fucking my mom . . . Where else would they be? . . . C'mon this is suburban WASPtown, USA, Whittier, California. Of course my mom and dad are in a bed this winter."[250] Through his early years in New York, he supported himself as a carpenter, originally making loft beds, a story he recounts in *Naked Breath*, "I became a builder of beds . . . I built hundreds of beds for the people of New York City . . . I'd build my loft beds anywhere. I'd build beds in hallways. In closets. A bed built out over the stove in a studio apartment's kitchen. . . . Beds for people to sleep on. Beds for people to fuck on. Beds for people to get pregnant on. Beds for people to get sexually transmitted diseases on. . . . I was a

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[249] Ibid., 306.

[250] This is the written version, from the chapter "I am Born" in Tim Miller, *Shirts & Skin*, 1st ed. (Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 1997), 1.

husband of sex! A maker of sleep!! I took Manhattan to bed!!!"[251] In basing his most recent work again on the location of the bed, Miller references a personal history, as well as his own relationship to fecundity. His performance histories begin with his own conception, a history in which as he tells it, a "queer sperm" and "dyke ovum" meet.[252] In recounting these histories, Miller offers new modes of generation, modes based on relation, desire and choice, rather than explicit filiation. The bed metonymizes the intersection of desire and generation and offers a post-Lévinasian reading of the relation in which the self is brought to subjectivity by the encounter with the Other. These performances stage an Other for the audience, producing a phenomenology of the voluptuous and simultaneously instantiating in the audience an encounter with the desire of the other as well as the production of desire—he poses the touch of the historical past and the imagined future as coincident in the appearance before an audience. The response is the metaphoric caress of the audience—an individual seeking contact within the space that knows not towards what it "reaches." One of the particular stories that he tells is a repeated story, but a different version this time. In his reimagining of an arrest after a protest at the Republican National Convention in 1992, the mattress in the jail cell this time becomes the site of a queer utopian performance, history reworked towards futurity, the idea of desire and hope blending to evoke response.

By explicitly focusing on the economy of desire, both in his own history and in the relation to the audience, Miller's performance reimagines notions of

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[251] Hughes and Román, *O Solo Homo : The New Queer Performance*, 57-58.

[252] Miller, *Shirts & Skin*, 2-3.

desire based on futurity, producing an ethical response from the audience. "The Ego is infinitely responsible in the face of the Other. The Other who incites this ethical movement of consciousness, who deregulates the good conscience of the coincidence of Same with self, includes a surplus that is inadequate to intentionality. This is Desire, burning with a fire that is not need extinguished by saturation, thinking beyond what one thinks. Because of this unassimilable surplus, because of this *beyond*, we call the relation that attaches the Ego to Other, the idea of Infinity."[253] Miller's work breaks the fourth wall and then offers the audience an engagement with the workings of Desire and its intersections with history. John Fletcher suggests of Miller's work that "[w]hile Miller draws from and performs to and for a particular community, the contours of that community emerging in his utopian performatives are ultimately his alone. He shares his picture with his audience, and his audience can freely identify or not with that picture. At no point, however, is it really possible for that community to contest or rethink those representations in the space of performance."[254] It is precisely that closedness and completeness that renders this not political work, but ethical. In work like this, these connections open up the audience's imagination to produce a metaphoric caress, a touch back towards the performer, the Other, that reaches towards the future, not knowing for what it strives.

Kiki and Herb's work proffers theatrically imagined history as acknowledgment of the impossibility of a political engagement with the "Other."

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[253] Emmanuel Lévinas and Nidra Poller, *Humanism of the Other* (Urbana ; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 33.

[254] John Fletcher, "Identity and Agonism: Tim Miller, Cornerstone, and the Politics of Community-Based Theatre," *Theatre Topics* 13, no. 2 (2003): 198.

By staging a false history that simultaneously attracts and distances the audience from the performance, their work furthers the work done by Miller to offer up a new understanding of genealogical productivity and transmission. By producing and staging Desire in proximity, their work models the ethical relation, through producing a "slippage (both on- and offstage) between self and Other."[255] It is this complex relation as well as the acknowledged impossibility of their "true history," as explored in both synchronous and diachronous historical modes of understanding that produces the seeds of a new reading of theatre can be found, one which sees in the reception of theatrical performance the caress as the basis of a pre-political understanding of alterity and proximity. The drag role of Kiki, a supposedly heterosexual cabaret artist somewhat in the vein of Elaine Stritch, and her accompanist Herb claim a history of successes along a seemingly endless "comeback tour" in which their performance successes are matched by personal failures and struggles. I quote at length from their "authorized biographical information" that provides the basic narrative of performance.

> Kiki and Herb met in the Eerie Childrens Institute in Western Pennsylvania in 1934. By the time they were in their late teens they were playing professionally on the Burlesque Circuit where Kiki, who had just given birth to her first child—a bastard named Bradford—was billed as "The Completely Insane Miss Kiki DuRane." In 1957 Kiki and Herb released their first LP "The Hazy Days of Kiki" to universal indifference.
>
> During the spring of 1960, Kiki married a professional boxer named

[255] Savran, *A Queer Sort of Materialism : Recontextualizing American Theater*, 68.

> Ruby Mansbach -a white man- and very shortly thereafter gave birth to her daughter Coco (1960-1967) Mansbach -may she rest in peace.
>
> During Kiki's brief and violent marriage Herb, a gay-jew-'tard, worked supporting himself as a piano player in a Jewish resort in the Catskills. In 1963 Herb met and fell in love with the love of his life, Mr. Wick, an African American bartender and jazz aficionado. Herb's connubial bliss was not to last long however for shortly thereafter Kiki was released from jail and summoned the long-suffering Herb back from the show-biz hinterlands to resume their co-dependant stab at the big-time. In the summer of 1967 Kiki and Herb made their European debut at the Grand Casino playing a Bastille Day Ball thrown by the crown princess of Monaco, Princess Grace (formerly the movie actress Grace Kelly). A few days later Kiki's daughter Coco drowned in the French Riviera prompting an emotional breakdown from which the already psychologically challenged Kiki never fully recovered. What followed were many years of obscurity with bouts of alcohol and drug induced psychosis. In the early Eighties Kiki cleaned up her "act" for a period of time long enough to give birth to her only surviving daughter Miss D. By the mid-eighties Miss D was in the hands of the department of Social Services due to Kiki's ongoing "health" issues.[256]

Although this information has become mythologized, it has been largely dependent upon improvisation and continued revision. As Shane Vogel notes in

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[256] http://www.myspace.com/kikiherb

his excellent article on a relatively early Kiki and Herb performance, "Kiki's autobiography is one of improvisatory details and unimportant inaccuracies, to which Bond adds from show to show. Her narrative endures by way of acquired knowledge sustained through the cumulative, collective activity of the audience; only by repeat attendance can you pick up all the jokes and references and still anticipate new ones."[257] In developing their own history onstage, Kiki narrates a complete world that is simultaneously the "real" world and a fictionalized version of it. This history contains album titles (and by the time they reached the Cherry Lane Theatre in 2003, the album covers as well) that explicitly reference not just particular musical eras, but particular styles and relations to history. These are all based upon a knowledge of musical history, such as the referentiality to Black Power and Gil-Scott Heron explicit in *Kiki and Herb: Whitey's on the Moon.* As the duo note about their song selection:

> [J]ust as cabaret once devoted itself to contemporary compositions, we would devote a majority of our repertoire to pop/rock songs of the last decade. . . . Some songs would be recognizable to a large part of the audience, some not as much, but hopefully a cohesion would announce itself from a multitude of modern songwriters' voices. . . . What became important to us was that each song create a universe unto itself and be a distinct version of the song, rather than merely a cover, without soul. In this way, Kiki and Herb own the material in much the same way a Mabel

[257] Shane Vogel, "Where Are We Now? Queer World-Making and Cabaret Performance," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 6, no. 1 (2000): 42.

> Mercer or Julie Wilson would own the songs that they were covering in the heyday of cabaret[258]

By framing each of their successive comebacks as based on then-current notions of popular song, Kiki and Herb effectively stage a history in the register of "as if." There is effectively "something for everyone" and part of the joy of a Kiki and Herb performance is in the recognition of the referentiality. This relation to historical reality produces their work as a continuation of the history of failure and comeback that it cites; in doing this they produce the theatrical space as the legitimate space of their success, while marking their repeated failures outside of that space. "The quintessence of Kiki and Herb manifests itself in this complicated oscillation between truth and fiction, pathos and parody. Kiki and Herb continuously compel us to re-evaluate our position as audience members, perhaps all the more so in a traditional proscenium theatre."[259] The repetition of this history offers futurity as well in the construction of historical narration. In the tragicomic moments that trace their history, the audience can always find a sense of hope, a desire for the future.

Kiki and Herb stage multiple gender roles on stage, presenting competing models of identity formation and subjectivity. Rather than relying on an identity politics driven model of association, Kiki and Herb stage their own association as one based upon situation, their childhood institutionalizations bringing them together, not a shared identity. It is in this sense of collectivity rather than

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[258] Mellman and Bond, qtd. in Ibid.: 55, note 2.

[259] James Cherry, "Kiki and Herb: Coup De Theatre (Review)," *Theatre Journal* 55, no. 4 (2003): 717.

community and ethical instantiation that the characters appear. Yet, the impossibility of imagining Kiki sans Herb or vice-versa is literalized in their historical re-memberings. Vogel suggests that "Kiki offers a love that can always be depended on; a love of self-sacrifice and redemption that is not recognized by the ideologies and institutions of heteronormativity; a queer love, performed between a sixty-eight-year-old, alcoholic, "straight woman" and her gay accompanist and friend. It is a love that offers a new relationality, an ethics toward each partner."[260] In the staging of these varied modes of love, Kiki and Herb's performance opens up to all forms of desire and generation.

Indeed, although these same basic "historical" stories always form the basis for their act, they claim a connection that stretches even further and provokes even more of a sense of historical connectivity—their recent Christmas shows (*The Second Coming: A Christmas Concert*, *There's a Stranger in the Manger*, *Christmas Happens*, and *Stick a Yule Log in the Shepherd's Bush*) have explored a variety of stories relating to their presence in the manger at Jesus's birth and how the milk from the cow that ate the placenta has granted them immortality. The complex interweaving of these patently false historical stories with their repetition and citability by much of the audience offers a model of encounter with the genealogical. Their complex history extends the notion of a queer genealogy far beyond the concept of a "hit parade" of homosexual lineages, as the referenced historical figures include both real and invented characters who populate a largely imagined world.

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[260] Vogel, "Where Are We Now? Queer World-Making and Cabaret Performance," 54.

Their theatre reimagines a notion of relation and production through both charavcters. Kiki's sexual desire has led to three (impossible) children—the gay travel agent Bradford, from whom she is estranged; Miss Coco, who, aged seven, fell off of a yacht (belonging to either Aristotle Onassis or Kiki's then international spy-lover) in Monaco while Kiki was either satisfying her sexual urges or rehearsing; and Miss D, who was taken away from Kiki by Child Protective Services and for whom she always leaves an empty seat at her performances—and yet none of these children seem to offer any possibility of further procreation. Herb's one true moment of desire, with the African American bartender Mr. Wick, was destroyed by his return to show business and the non-sexual love between Herb and Kiki.[261] Their "immortality" perhaps offers a differing model of the intersections between futurity and desire, a model that simultaneously acknowledges Lee Edelman's argument for a queer rejection of the child, while offering a much more robust sense of continuation than his outright rejection of it.

Kiki and Herb imagine a desirous present that stages a repeated finality—the repeated comeback structure of their work and narrative necessitates each performance as a "farewell." In the shared space of each gig, they manifest what Judith Halberstam has called "queer time" and what I frame as the ethotopic space of the theatre. They offer up a frame of completeness, a history that appears as if it might naturally end, and yet simultaneously they open for the audience spaces of connection, spaces of desire and openness to a future. Bond has referred to

[261] http://www.myspace.com/kikiherb

Kiki as "hyper-realistic version of what the audience expects. Hopefully the audience becomes disarmed enough to take the journey with her and accept her reality as their own for the duration of the show."[262] Vogel suggests that within the cabaret space of their early work, the audience did just that and the work was productive resultantly. While the valence of this changes in the theatrically framed space—"We're here to tear the fourth wall down!"[263]—their inculcation of the audience and the development of these histories allows the same developments to take place, but moves them to the lobby space and the outside and beyond of the theatre. The caress that appears in performance then bears the potential to move beyond the space of shared time and place. "New relationships are developed, influenced, and shaped by the shared experience of Bond and Mellman's performance. Sometimes these relationships continue beyond the cabaret space, sometimes they are sexual, but in most cases they exist solely in the queer world generated by Kiki and Herb. Although (or perhaps because) they are ephemeral and specific, such relationships are undeniable and intimate."[264] These generated relations produce a notion of futurity; they are occasioned by the interaction, by the appearance of the performers and the audience returns this focus through the caress. In the work of Kiki and Herb, there is a model for the production of an ethical relation, not based on queerness or particulars of identity,

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[262] Bond and Mellman, qtd in Vogel, "Where Are We Now? Queer World-Making and Cabaret Performance," 41.

[263] *Kiki and Herb: Coup de Theatre*, qtd in Cherry, "Kiki and Herb: Coup De Theatre (Review)," 716.

[264] Vogel, "Where Are We Now? Queer World-Making and Cabaret Performance," 47.

but based on appearance and singularity, based upon the intersections of desire and futurity, based upon the creation of a space that necessitates the ethics of response.

The caress in the work of Kiki and Herb must be understood as well in relation to the aggressivity of the work. One of the most distinctive aspects of Kiki's persona and of the framing of the act itself as repeated failures is the violence with which songs are delivered. One might speak of the "Kiki snarl," a drunken sneer with which she hurls songs and stories at the audience that leaves the work hovering somewhere between cabaret performance and punk rock concert.[265] While on the surface many of the connections they make and setups for song are lyrically driven, there is a more complex negotiation than that at work. Through this aggressive delivery, a breadth of songs become pointedly, recognizably "Kiki and Herb" songs, with the vocal and aural qualities bringing a brutality to works by an incredibly diverse range of artists: Patti Smith, Eminem, My Chemical Romance, Butt Trumpet, Styx, Depeche Mode, Emmylou Harris, and the BeeGees, among them. For an audience, part of the joy no doubt rests in recognition, the development of a shared musical referentiality, these songs are used to do more that that. They produce a notion of character for Kiki, a gesture towards the audience that is nonrecuperable in its violence. Perhaps this is where the caress can be read most provocatively, not as a "softness or warmth" that seeks to comfort or to know (both cases are totalizing gestures), but as an eruption (irruption) that demands response. Kiki becomes present (infinite) within the

[265] The violence could be extended to Herb as well, although with a different inflection, in how his world-weariness produces his pained piano playing.

presentation, the body fully invested in the moment of aggressive delivery, and challenging the audience to exist, to respond. This violent punctum is a paradigmatic instance of Roland Barthes's notion of the grain of the voice, "If I perceive the 'grain' in a piece of music . . . I inevitably set up a new scheme of evaluation which will certainly be individual – I am determined to listen to my relation with the body of the man or woman singing or playing and that relation is erotic – but in no way subjective . . ."[266] The violence with which Kiki embodies the songs and the persona shatter the fourth wall, the energy leaping across the Benjaminian boundary and not merely inviting, but insisting upon response. This is, for Barthes a "voluptuousness" that produces a personal relationship "with the body of the man or woman playing."[267] This personal relationship is the caress; it is the undefinable connection that I (the audience member) reach out for with the performer. It is the acknowledgment of that Other's unicity and priority before me. The caress is, in that way an acknowledgment of the Saying, the acceptance of a "preintentional significance which is (1) prior to the sphere of signification . . . (3) irreducible to structuralist or post-structuralist *signifier*."[268] In Lévinas's thought, "[s]aying uncovers, beyond nudity, what dissimulation there may be under the exposedness of a skin laid bare. It is the very *respiration* of this skin

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[266] Roland Barthes and Stephen Heath, *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 188.

[267] Ibid.

[268] Ewa Rychter, *(Un)Saying the Other : Allegory and Irony in Emmanuel Levinas's Ethical Language*, Literary and Cultural Theory ; (Frankfurt am Main ; New York: P. Lang, 2004), 28.

prior to any intention."[269] In the work of Kiki and Herb, the bare violence present through song expresses the essence of the Other, it is that which challenges forth the ethical response. In the performance, song has the potential to constantly unsay the Said, replacing the lyrical meaning with a caress that leaps forth from the body (within the voice). This violence negotiates between desire and identification as Kiki both repulses and invites, offering not merely a model of individual, but a model of behavior as well.

In the articulation of the caress throughout this chapter, I explore how queer performance, with its explicit staging of the encounter between desire and identification opens up to models of both historical/genealogical understanding and notions of generational futurity to produce a model of ethical subjectivity that might be productively read outside the space of the theatre. Through juxtaposing the work of Tim Miller and Kiki and Herb in relation to Lévinas's articulation of the caress, the theatre becomes an ethotopic space, in which the self is confronted with and forced to respond to the "nudity" of the Other. In further complicating that, by turning briefly to the presentation and articulation of subjectivity onstage (both through narrated histories and through aggressivity), this offers a model of the theatrical relation that recognizes and acknowledges its own limited scope and reach, countering the construction of a political subject with an ethical one, in which desire frames the ethical approach to alterity. In breaking the fourth wall within these examples, the theatre produces the caress, a touch that reaches out for the future, not knowing what it reaches for, seeing it only as Other; through that

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[269] Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being : Or, Beyond Essence*, 49.

engagement the theatre challenges the individual audience member as an ethical individual, not relying on the production of communitas or the engaged polis. In the audience member's caress, theatre bears the potential to become generative.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION: THEATRE AND A NEW HUMANISM?

Theatre is the art of appearance. In the space of the theatre, I am called into existence by the Other being that manifests in front of me. This figure appears to me, whole and unique, its subjectivity preceding my own and, in a Lévinasian move, it is that encounter that produces my own subjectivity, commanding response. In this dissertation, I have examined a variety of contemporary theatrical productions alongside Lévinasian philosophy in an attempt to reimagine the space of the theatre today. A turn to ethics offers a new imagination of human relations, a new basis for politics and justice. While the three chapters have focused on the relation of particular modes of performance—three that have historically been read and produced largely through lenses of identity politics—juxtaposed with particular ethical models from Lévinas's oeuvre, in the conclusion, I will begin to open these ideas out to look at the ways in which contemporary theatre might help to imagine a new humanism, a post-identity politics frame for understanding subjectivity. In the framing of "post-identity politics," the term post is not intended to mean beyond or after, but rather inflected by; this is an engagement with the categorization of radical alterity as the basis for a category of the universal arising from the pluralist. First exploring the question of the universal subject position, as reimagined in relationship through these Lévinasian readings of the theatre, the conclusion will then go on to briefly interrogate the idea of scale, considering questions of both the "epic" and

the "intimate" as they relate to forms of theatrical practice in the contemporary moment. Through these frames, I argue that the theatre bears the potential to provide the basis for twenty-first century readings of subjectivity; it is through the theatrical encounter that society can rethink the ethical relationship at its heart.

The shifts towards area studies and identity politics driven models of global justice(s) have problematized any notion of the universal through recourse to discourses of the particular. These models are undeniably Hegelian, grounded in a notion of recognition of the other and the same, a logic of belonging-to, as Badiou's turn to set theory further develops.[270] It is from within this re-cognition that politics is always already framed, in this epistemological/ontological basis that the ethical relationship disappears. What might it mean to reimagine a universal subject, inflected by these movements, but reinvested in the prepolitical encounter? From the Lévinasian perspective, this would be a universalism grounded in self-sacrifice. The subject for Lévinas begins from the point of substitution—"*My* substitution – it is as *my own* that substitution for the neighbor is produced. . . . It is in me – in me and not in another . . . that communication opens. No one can substitute himself for me, who substitutes myself for all. . . . it is in the course of the individuation of the ego in me that is realized the elevation in which the ego is for the neighbor, summoned to answer for him . . . . But it is I, I and no one else, who am a hostage for the others."[271] Within Lévinas's thought, one might argue that there is a privilege granted to the self, but it is based on the absence of specificity and the absence of a political framing; this privilege is

[270] See in particular Badiou, *Being and Event*.

[271] Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being : Or, Beyond Essence*, 126-7.

assumed rather only in the prostrating of the self at the foot of the Other and in the abandonment/forsaking of privilege. The direction of focus here proposes a humanism that originates not from any sense of the individual (as a fixed category), but rather from externalities, from the individual's ability/intent to be-for-another. This is a radical humanism in which being as a verb replaces the Heideggerian nominative Being. The true ethical self then is the one who stands in for any other, without consideration of whom that other "is."[272] Indeed, this notion of willingness to substitute offers what has been called a "humanism of the other." It is in my acknowledgment of the Other as other, and not in any mode of re-cognition or classification of that Other that the ethical response appears. This is an outward-focused universalism, in which within the other I find the infinite, the non-thematizable. Thus the precondition of the universal is "not me." As well, within the framing of such a humanism, it is important to note that "I" cannot assume that any other will have the same relationship to the notion of substitution; that is to say that subjectivity is not a mutual construction in which reciprocity is assumed.

While I chose all of the theatrical examples that I have discussed from within the realm of the already politically framed subject, in all three chapters, the notion of subjectivity moves from within the content to the broader structure of theatricality, an encounter with the "not-self." The function here might be then to imagine the theatre itself as a philosophical site beyond the "performance turn" of

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[272] One of the repeated comments on Lévinas's work regards the notion that any Other is an other for whom I should be willing to sacrifice myself. While Lévinas is very clear on this, particularly as a survivor of a WWII prisoner-of-war camp, many of his critics find this a difficult position to articulate.

the late nineties; the theatre is the paradigmatic site of the encounter with the other, who is first and foremost established as an other through formal relation, not through an act or a gesture of belonging. Rather than relying upon notions of communitas that have dominated political readings of the theatre since the 1960s, a turn to Lévinasian ethics invigorates the role of the individual. As I stated in beginning this dissertation by acknowledging the limited "reach" of the live theatre within America today, it is crucial to think about shifting the consideration of theatre's political efficacy away from notions dependent upon the production of a community. A focus instead on the ways in which subjectivity is developed as the basis for an ethical reading of theatre would produce it as the key form for a reinvested imagining of justice in the contemporary world, a "formal" reimagining. The sense of the dialogic imagination at work here is crucial as well, drawing from what Peter Hitchcock has described as "the importance of imagination to both the aesthetic and the economic in cultural transnationalism . . ." [273] While theatre-as-such remains the same categorically, new emphases on particular formal relationships within the theatrical space may offer potentials to focus on unpackings of pre-political relationships.

In Lévinas's thought, justice appears in the encounter. It cannot be provided by the apparatus of the polis as the political state is always already dependent upon pre-cstablished circulations of what might be termed "interest vectors." There is no disinterested political subject, "he" is always already named and rendered recognizable. "Justice derives not from the state, which must

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[273] Peter Hitchcock, *Imaginary States : Studies in Cultural Transnationalism*, Transnational Cultural Studies (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2003), 5.

nonetheless institute and maintain justice, but from the transcendence of the other person, the 'widow, the orphan, the stranger.'"[274] In the slippage between late capitalism, neoliberalism, and democracy, the individual encounter is typically rendered little more than an exchange, dominated by disembodied corporate structure. State-led justice in this case becomes little more than the calculation of value according to "actuarial" guidelines of subjectivity. The theatre then bears the potential to reframe the role of the individual-cum-citizen in the process of encounter, the contact offering a glimmer of the possibility of enacting the ethical relation. As Lévinas himself suggests in an essay titled "Signification and Sense," museums and theatres . . . make possible communion with being."[275] If one acknowledges in this notion the distinction between fixed and processual notions of being, centering the act of live performance as a space of the Saying, in which the presence of the face erupts, cutting through the Said, in the encounter, then the act of encounter onstage moves beyond the condition of mediation. This argument shows an explicit development in Lévinas's understanding of art practices that reveals some of the ways in which his notion of an ethics might actually benefit from the theatrical framing of the encounter. The instant of the theatrical face-to-face moves beyond the always-already politically loaded moment of identity politics, the instantiated and insistent ontological readings of preexisting meaning. Theatricality bears the potential to reframe the encounter as "more" than the simple face-to-face encounter. As in the work of Alain Badiou, the theatrical encounter may be read as the paradigmatic event that demands

[274] Lévinas and Poller, *Humanism of the Other*, xxvii-xxviii.

[275] Ibid., 17.

fidelity, that "which brings to pass 'something other' than the situation, opinions, instituted knowledges . . . which vanishes as soon as it appears."[276] As he goes on to suggest, like representation, "[t]he event is both *situated* – it is the event of this or that situation – and *supplementary*, thus absolutely detached from, or unrelated to, all the rules of the situation . . . . at the heart of every situation, as the foundation of its being, there is a 'situated' void, around which is organized the plenitude (or the stable multiples) of the situation in question."[277] Thus it is not that the "event," as some readings of Badiou suggest, arises out of nowhere, but that the event demonstrates the presence of a prior absence; this is the condition of theatricality—the encounter bears the potential to be revelatory. The theatre establishes, each time, a relationship that demonstrates the need of fidelity, which establishes its own "truth conditions." This arises further out of the notion of what might be called representational supplement, the idea that the theatre always presents "more" than the conscious or intended effect.[278] As I have discussed in earlier chapters, the performer's presence approaches the Lévinasian figure of the infinite through the ways in which the Saying of presence exceeds the Said of fixed ontological character.

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[276] Badiou, *Ethics : An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, 67.

[277] Ibid., 68.

[278] There is a plethora of work that has interrogated the notion of an excess production of meaning in the theatrical moment. See for instance Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis : Essays on Feminism and Theater*, Ridout, *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems*, Joseph R. Roach, *The Player's Passion : Studies in the Science of Acting*, Theater--Theory, Text, Performance (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993). For an especially useful reading of representational supplementarity, although largely from a cinema studies perspective, see Robert B. Ray, *The Avant-Garde Finds Andy Hardy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).

The notion that theatre's liminality, its "framed off-ness," is not compromising, but in fact renders it an ethotopic space is largely dependent upon the ways in which the transmission of complete information across the (metaphorical) orchestra relies on both fixed (Said) communications and a (Saying) presence that interrupts the potential for this fixity to become a totality. In Lévinas's early critique of art, *Reality and its Shadow*, he argued that "artwork is more real than reality and attests to the dignity of the artistic imagination."[279] However, he claimed that this "higher realism" is problematic because the artwork is, of itself, total—"a work would not belong to art if it did not have this formal structure of completion . . ."[280] He went on in this work to distinguish between art and art criticism, arguing that art freezes an instant and thus can not be the basis for the ethical relation, while criticism focuses on the shadow of reality rather than (a) reality itself. His point, in part, seems to be that criticism serves as a bridge between what he wishes to establish as two separate worlds—the world of art and the world of reality. As Robert Eaglestone argues in his work on a Lévinasian criticism, "[in his early work] for Lévinas all art is essentially sculpture, because of the relationship between art and time."[281] The basic contention here is that Lévinas rules out art because it is "in the world," rather that "of the world." Because of this notion of its closedness, representation at this

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[279] Emmanuel Lévinas, "Reality and Its Shadow," in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 130.

[280] Ibid., 131.

[281] Robert Eaglestone, *Ethical Criticism : Reading after Levinas* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 107.

early point in Lévinas's oeuvre is typically not read as interruptable and thus not open to ethical encounter.

This linkage between ethics as open and aesthetics as closed is the basis for many arguments that claim that Lévinas's work cannot be applied within the aesthetic realm. While his argument frames the notion of mimesis, he does not consider it as process, relying on a pre-Barthesian notion of artistic completion or totality. (Oddly, however, throughout his work, not simply in the discussions of aesthetics, he turns to examples from the aesthetic realm, in particular dramatic examples.) It is here, however, that a turn to theatre, serves to reground his work. As I discussed above with regard to the notion of representational supplementarity, theatre's framing does set it aside in a way that might be seen as limiting to its ethical possibility, but in the encounter, it exceeds its framings. There has been excellent work done recently on the ways in which the irruption of the real within the theatre complicates standard readings of the face-to-face in the theatre.[282] In proposing contemporary theatricality as an appearance of the live that both is representational and yet exceeds representation, I contend that the theatre moves out of the historical moment of its production, revealing a void of meaning at the base. In this way, the relation produced in encounter is not subsidiary to already-acknowledged politics, but bears the potential to move beyond it. The application of Lévinas's theories then can be seen to heighten the

[282] See in particular Ridout, *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems*. In this work, he explores the notions of stage fright, corpsing, embarrassment, and the presence of animals on stage in order to examine theatre's sociopolitical meanings. Also see Alan Read, *Theatre, Intimacy & Engagement : The Last Human Venue* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

notion of theatre itself, to imagine theatre (and theatricality) as allowing for contact with the infinite, allowing for an investigation of the ultimate relation, rather than relying simply on a closed or totalized individually framed perspective. As Karen Jürs-Munby suggests in the introduction to the English translation of Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre*, "theatre has thus not given up on relating to the world but crucially no longer *represents* the world as a surveyable whole. . ."[283] The theatrical encounter, through its supplementarity (and here one might think of both onstage supplement as discussed above as well as the theatre's place supplementary to political centrality) paradoxically then can be the space for the recognition of a void in contemporary political understandings, generating through the creation of the individual ethical relationship a notion of an encounter to which one can then be faithful.

While one might argue that all theatre then stages the ethical relationship (a contention with which I fully agree), within the scope of this dissertation, I set out to address the ways in which contemporary theatre revealed a void at the heart of the post-colonial/post-cold war/imperial moment and bears the potential to generate a new ethics at its base. To begin to examine where these potentials might open up, it is necessary to return to some of the conditions set out in the introduction and to look at the way in which the contemporary moment has sought to frame subjectivity, particularly from within the notion of American/first-world capitalism. As I discussed in looking at the work of Tony

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[283] Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre* (Abingdon, [England] ; New York: Routledge, 2006), 12. See also Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait, *Theatricality*, Theatre and Performance Theory (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Kushner, sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein, in his articulation of World Systems Theory, argues that 1989 was the end of a systemic cycle that had been in process for two hundred years (the beginning is tied to the French Revolution and the Enlightenment). While Wallerstein has long argued for the importance of the "World Revolution" of 1968, in his more recent work, he points to the twenty years following that as the final unraveling of the liberal political system. "The true meaning of the collapse of the Communisms is the final collapse of liberalism as a hegemonic ideology. Without some belief in its promise, there can be no durable legitimacy to the capitalist world-system. The last serious believers in the promise of liberalism were the old-style Communist parties on the former Communist bloc. Without them to continue to argue this promise, the world's dominant strata have lost any possibility of controlling the world's working classes other than by force. Consent is gone, and consent is gone because bribery had gone. But force alone, we have known since at least Machiavelli, cannot permit political structures to survive very long."[284] From his post-Marxist viewpoint, Wallerstein claims that the next fifty years will be filled with uncertainty and unrest as the world seeks out a new equilibrium; whether one accepts his conjectures that this will replace capitalism or not, the framing of a new world system unquestionably requires new models of subjectivity. One might begin to examine in the contemporary what has been termed a "clash of fundamentalisms" as well as a plethora of refugee crises as revealing these cracks in notions of belonging. Within the liberal world model, the subject was initially

[284] Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, *After Liberalism* (New York: New Press : Distributed by W.W. Norton, 1995), 242.

conceived as a Hobbesian individual who framed "his" own accession to the social contract; however, much recent work on the production of the subject reframes the notion of subjectivity's directionality, relying largely on an Althusserian notion of state-driven interpellation, where the subject is formed in response to the call of "the law."[285] The particular question with regard to individual subjectivity within a liberal worldview is one then of political citizenship, largely based on a discourse of the rights of the individual, framed as an economic agent: "citizenship is linked to work—as it is in Judith Shklar's understanding of citizenship as the 'right to earn,' T. H. Marshall's understanding of social citizenship as the right to basic material well-being, and Alice Kessler-Harris's understanding of economic citizenship."[286] In attempting to distinguish between the notion of nationality and that of citizenship, Saskia Sassen suggests that there is a great deal of slippage between the two, "Both identify the legal status of an individual in terms of state membership. But citizenship is largely confined to the national dimension, while nationality refers to the international legal dimension in the context of an interstate system. The legal status entails the specifics of whom the state recognizes as a citizen, and the formal basis for the rights and responsibilities of the individual in relation to the state."[287] In the contemporary moment, subjectivity is still largely imagined along national lines,

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[285] Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays* (New York,: Monthly Review Press, 1972).

[286] Linda K. Kerber, "Toward a History of Statelessness in America," *American Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (September 2005): 744.

[287] Saskia Sassen, "The Repositioning of Citizenship: Emerging Subjects and Spaces for Politics," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 44.

which crucially maintains the ability to frame some subjects as outside the law. Indeed, this more complex relationship between multiple discursive systems relies somewhat as well on a Foucauldian understanding of subject construction through a matrixial relationship with social practices.

In contrast to the sociological view of Wallerstein and the world systems theorists, the postcolonial and identity politics-driven notions of subjectivity have been historically largely defined through a return to psychoanalysis. Such work usually reads the development of the individual as a subconscious course of bracketing off identifications, through a series of developmental processes.[288] According to such a belief, the subject makes associations and rules out other associations, internalizing these processes and resulting in attachments being formed through melancholic foreclosures and desires.

Most contemporary understandings of subjectivity tend to derive from one of these two worldviews. The most succinct articulation of the meeting points between the two is in Judith Butler's *The Psychic Life of Power*, in which she argues that "[r]egulatory power becomes 'internal' only through the melancholic production of the figure of internal space, one that follows from the withdrawing of resources – a withdrawal and turning of language as well. . . . the subject is produced, paradoxically, through the withdrawal of power, its dissimulation and

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[288] See for instance: Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (New York: Norton, 1975), Freud and Strachey, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Sigmund Freud and James Strachey, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (New York: Liveright Pub. Corp., 1977), Jacques Lacan and Bruce Fink, *Écrits : A Selection* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), Jacques Lacan, Juliet Mitchell, and Jacqueline Rose, *Feminine Sexuality : Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne* (New York: W.W. Norton : Pantheon Books, 1982), Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 1st Evergreen ed. (New York: Grove Press, 1982).

fabulation of the psyche as speaking topos."[289] While the liberal subject is thus always a subject produced "in relation," the development of subjectivity has been understood to be about the production of internalization. Postmodern views of the decentered and fragmented subject largely tend to maintain a sense of subjectivity as the framing of an internal conception of the self. As well, most conceptions of the subject produce a sense of the self as discrete, resulting in an identity that is concretely "owned" or "ownable" by the individual.[290] This is particularly true with regard to explorations of the relation of subjectivity to citizenship, as briefly discussed earlier. The contemporary moment seeks to reengage with the idea of the nation-state in a period when, for many cultural critics, the world seems to have the need to move on, but it has not as yet determined a new political framework to successfully replace the nation-state.

To offer one possibility of the way in which viewing theatre through the Lévinasian perspective might begin to open up to develop new notions of politics, I turn to a recent work by Peter Sellars, his 2003 production of Euripides's *The Children of Herakles* and its interrogation of the condition of refugeeism. The performance that I will discuss took place at the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts, but this production was also staged at the Festival d'automne in Paris and the Ruhr-Trienniale in Germany. Sellars chose to use this production to examine the status of refugeeism in the world today. It is useful to

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[289] Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power : Theories in Subjection*, 197-8.

[290] The notion of postmodern subjectivity has been very widely explored and articulated in a wide variety of frames. While conceptions vary greatly, most tend to remain indebted to an enlightenment-driven sense of self. It is important to acknowledge, however, that much has certainly been written about the idea of a subject-in-process or a "becoming subject."

consider briefly the figure of the nomad alongside the term refugee, as they are similar words and often used interchangeably within political contexts. However, in examining them more closely, some crucial differences appear; the primary one is a distinction between being and becoming. One is only a refugee in process—between a there fled from and a here sought for safe haven. The nomad, on the other hand, may be read as a possessor of a form of consciousness, one which is always already outside of the political order.[291] I raise it as a figure that offers a potential power to the refugee. Nomad and nomadism, within a Western post-Enlightenment tradition, has often implied a romantic or wistful longing, yet as well, the figure of the nomad has been simultaneously othered and criminalised, this has been largely a distinct process and one which has always been maintained by a certain perceived legal necessity, based on the alignment of property and the stable enlightenment self. Contemporary politics relies on the construction of refugee subjects, of those on the outside looking in, in order to maintain its fictions of power. The refugee points to the stability of government(s), to the maintenance of order, as s/he can be read as between states of legal authority, while the nomadic construction then reveals the aporetic constructions of power, the holes at the center of contemporary democracy. In *A Thousand Plateaus,* Deleuze and Guattari frame the nomad as the architect of the war machine, arguing for Nietzsche as the founder of a nomad philosophy and exploring what they classify as nomad art—art concerned with smooth rather than striated space,

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[291] There has been a great deal of work done in cultural studies as well as legal examinations of the relative positions of various nomadic cultures, including the Roma, Spanish Quinqui, and Irish and Scottish Traveller communities.

with material instead of matter and forces instead of form, art with a focus on the haptic rather than the optic view.[292] The refugee in contemporary politics is an actor in striated space, still articulating and illuminating the boundary cultures. Indeed a refugee is, by necessity, a boundary actor, no longer "there" but not yet "here."

The production of *The Children of Herakles* was an attempt by Sellars to "refind the Greek origins of democracy"—his trilogy of plays each evening began with a panel discussion on contemporary issues of refugeeism and testimony from a local refugee. After a brief coffee break, this was followed by the performance, a clean and simple staging of this rarely-performed piece with simple touches of glass screens, microphones and the now ubiquitous orange jumpsuits of Guantanamo. Notable in the performance was a silent chorus, Herakles's children; nearly thirty Boston area refugee and immigrant youth, who sat for most of the performance, still center-stage, staring out at the audience. These are not actors; they are clearly framed as being there for their embodied realness, refugees whose presence on stage exceeds the frame and implicates the comfortable audience themselves as guilty within the system of contemporary politics. In their presence throughout, they reveal the void at the center of the current political situation. Already "here" within the heart of Empire, their re-performance as refugees allows them to maintain a connection to what might be

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[292] While it is important to acknowledge, the focus of their work is outside the scope of this dissertation. In particular, Deleuze and Guattari's claims with regards to capital—their alignment of global and local with smooth and striated seem highly questionable today, as well as not necessarily productive within an exploration of the modalities of the contemporary political field.

read as nomadic subjectivity; they have already been granted asylum, are no longer refugees, and yet continue to perform this "outside-ness." The play addresses the children's seeking refuge in Athens and the resultant conflict with Argos. It is the simplicity though of this embodied waiting, this moment of pause elongated for the nearly two hours that makes the play a "success." In their presence, they trouble the collision between synchronous and diachronous time, between a refugee presence that relies on the notion of a telos and a nomadic notion of continuity; this connects back as well to the notion of presentist time within the theatre, which I explored in the first chapter. The construction of the theatrical moment generates a space rife with ethical potential, not indeed a location that imagines a future community or utopia, but a fully instantiated locus of ethical relation. This is indeed the space of ethotopos, a temporally instantiated space in which the ethical relation must be played out. In the moment that Demophon (the president/ voice of the people) grants the children refuge, they break the fourth wall, coming out to greet the audience, to thank them, inculcating the audience as "citizens" of Athens, the inside and outside once again combined and inverted. This breaking of the fourth wall produces a truly Lévinasian encounter; these are not simply actors, but individuals whose own presence clearly exceeds that of a theatrical "character." Each shakes hands with several audience members; from my seat in the orchestra, two different children greeted me, thanking me in halting English mixed with Croat. In this moment, the notions of language, of the face-to-face, and of human touch all appear. While distinct from the ways in which these appear in the examples that I explored

throughout the previous three chapters, what erupts here is the truly interpersonal face-to-face encounter and with it, all of the possibilities of the ethical relation.

It is this one moment of commonality, of shared language, from characters who otherwise remain silent that most explicitly bears the potential to offer a new personal responsibility from within the contemporary moment and global consciousness. The second interval is time for a shared dinner, from a local restaurant that serves the food of a particular large local refugee culture. The final act is a film, the night I was there the David Riker film *La Ciudad* (about Latin American immigrant communities in New York). The evening seeks to address the issues of refugeeism in contemporary culture, where it is most particularly effective is in both the moment when the fourth wall is broken and in the polyglossic impact of the evening, in the individuality of each story that fleetingly appears and in the ways in which it evokes relationships prior to politics and ownership.

As I suggested in the introduction, performance in the current moment may be read as the equivalent of the epic. The scope of Sellars's work here clearly points towards a consideration of scale; it is not "merely" theatrical performance, although the audience is certainly free to be present for only the theatrical portion of the evening. This notion of scale, however, is not simply equivalent to the frame of the evening, but to the intensity with which it invigorates the contemporary moment. In discussing the modernist period, Georg Lukács argues that "epic writing gives form to the extensive totality of life, drama to the intensive totality of essence . . . drama can nevertheless, in its formal *a*

priori nature, find a world that is perhaps problematic but which still is all-embracing and closed within itself."[293] When he discusses the notion of totality with regard to these two, I would contend that what he defines as the totality of essence is equivalent to Lévinas's critique of a "totalizing world view" whereas the totality of life is the Lévinasian approach to the infinite. In setting out the distinction within the Greek world, Lukács defines the character of the epic as the "empirical I" in contrast to drama's "intelligible I"[294]; in other words he ignores the category of performance, the notion of encounter present in live theatre. He reads the novel as "the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life is no longer given, yet which still thinks in terms of totality."[295] When he imagines the novel as the new "epic" form then, it is clear that the notion of completeness and the sense of character with which he endows it is connected to the height of liberal humanism; clearly modernism continued to "think in terms of totality," while recognizing the subject as being produced in relation. As discussed earlier, both from a Lévinasian perspective and from the contemporary moment, this sense of totality is a limiting frame. For Lukács, the value of the epic is as the form of artistic production that both represents and produces a particular political moment. He establishes it as the epic by looking at ancient Greece as its birthplace, stating that afterwards, "[a]rtistic genres now cut across one another . .

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[293] Lukacs, *The Theory of the Novel; a Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, 46.

[294] Ibid., 47-8.

[295] Ibid., 56.

. and become traces of authentic or false searching for an aim that is no longer clearly and unequivocally given. . . . where the historico-philosophical meaning of periodicity is never again concentrated in the forms themselves."[296] While Lukács's valorization of ancient Greece is troubling—he claims that all art forms in Greece appeared "only when the sundial of the mind showed that its hour had come"[297]—his argument about the centrality of the epic in terms of a Greek understanding of self being replaced by the novel in terms of an understanding of the liberal humanist subject is provocatively useful. In contemporary performance, we can find the particular intersection of the universal and the particular that defines the current moment. Although the subject has been permanently fractured, the current moment seeks to redefine a notion of the individual; a return to a universal subject, but one who is defined relationally. While for Lukács, the classical period integrated interiority and exteriority, represented in the epic, and the novel represented an age of interiority vis-à-vis the state, in the contemporary, I contend that the focus is on the individual encounter, the event of both the ethical relation and the theatre, in which interiority arises from exteriority. The theatre becomes then the "epic" site of the contemporary moment, the encounter between self and other reframing the individual and resultantly producing the ethotopic space. In the example of *The Children of Herakles*, the encounter challenges each individual, producing subjectivity in the meeting. There is no direct political engagement and no sense

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[296] Ibid., 41.

[297] http://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/theory-novel/ch02.htm, accessed 12 August 2008

of a utopian longing, but a real instantiated moment of contact, in which the individual acknowledges her/his ultimate responsibility before another individual. While *The Children of Herakles*, with its structure and framing, is a fairly unique production, other large-scale works are attempting to explicitly focus on actor-audience relations in a variety of similar ways, which offer a model for a large scale interrogation of ethical response. In addition to Sellars, director/composer Mikel Rouse's trio of new operas all examine this relationship in provocative, yet different ways. The most recent, *The End of Cinematics* intercuts live performance and cinema in ways that challenged most reviewers; the 1995 *Dennis Cleveland*, shattered the fourth wall, staging a television talk show in which performers mixed freely with the audience, which although a standard trope in much contemporary theatre is much rarer in opera; its use here serves to produce truly challenging encounters between a largely upper middle class audience and the performers in what appears to be a Jerry Springer style chat show. The first in the trilogy*, Failing Kansas*, takes as its inspiration Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* and the various sources that Capote used as well. Despite its entire nine-song score being sung solely by Rouse, the opera layers sounds and voices, creating a mixed and multilayered narrative in which the audience cannot necessarily follow a clear path through the story. In many ways, this production might be seen at one level to instantiate a space similar to those that Josh Kun has elsewhere termed audiotopias, "sonic spaces of effective utopian longings where several sites normally deemed incompatible are brought together . . . identificatory 'contact zones,' in that they are both sonic and social spaces where

disparate identity-formations, cultures, *and* geographies historically kept and mapped separately are allowed to interact with each other as well as enter into relationships whose consequences for cultural identification are never predetermined."[298] The exploration of aural spaces and encounters in Rouse's work (along with that of other contemporary theatrical composers) might model as well the ethical relation in this blending of music(s). While Kun's brilliant analysis focuses on the ways that such spaces have historically served to construct narratives of race and ethnicity in the United States, I would contend that such spaces, as in Rouse's work, may also serve to produce instantiated present ethotopic spaces where the aural provides the space of encounter between individuals, not necessarily physical contact, but the presence of the body within the voice offering another possibility for the generation of the ethical encounter.

The final example that I'd like to briefly touch on takes the scope of the epic and inverts it; within recent theatrical work, there has been an increased focus on what might be imagined as intimate contact; the one-to-one performance. I have written about this elsewhere, in discussing the work of German choreographer Felix Ruckert, whose piece *Hautnah* reframes the notion of a private dancer, in secluded one-to-one dances that then return to a public space, where dances are (generally) re-narrated by the spectators. Within the discussion, I frame the self as the audience member, the Other as the dancer, and the rest of the audience as the Lévinasian figure of the third party. Explaining his conception of the Other and the need for a third party, Lévinas wrote "If the same

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[298] Josh Kun, *Audiotopia : Music, Race, and America*, American Crossroads (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 23.

were to establish its identity by simple opposition to the Other, it would already be part of a totality encompassing the same and the Other."[299] Lévinas contrasts the self to the Other, arguing that to truly do so is impossible, because in order to do so, one must subsume the Other into the self, defining the Other *only* through its relation to the self as a condition of self-knowledge. Thus, in the case of *Hautnah* and similar individual performances, the individual encounter is crucially framed by the presence of others and the need to "tell the story."[300] While the intimate, personal relationship is at the heart of the ethical encounter, for Lévinas, it is crucial that this relationship is ultimately grounded in sociality. "The third party is other than the neighbor, but also another neighbor, and also a neighbor of the other, and not simply his fellow. . . . The third party introduces a contradiction in the saying whose signification before the other until then went in one direction . . . The one for the other of proximity is not a deforming abstraction. In it, justice is shown from the first, it is thus born from the signifyingness of signification, the-one-for-the-other, . . . Justice is impossible without the one that renders it finding himself in proximity."[301] While the focus of these performances themselves is not on justice, the formal construction necessitates an engagement with its processes and practices. By bringing the emphasis of the performance to the personal encounter (and in the case of these

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[299] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity; an Essay on Exteriority*, 38.

[300] The individual performance has proven a very popular form in recent years, with works by performers many performers, including Kira O'Reilly, Adrian Howells, Curious, Heather Woodbury, and Sarah Michelson, as well as a recent adaptation of Michel Houllebecq's novel *Platform*.

[301] Emmanuel Lévinas, *Otherwise Than Being, or, Beyond Essence* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 157-59.

individual performances), its reintegration into the realm of the social, such theatre models the ethical relation.

Recent performance forms appear to focus not solely on the political content of the performance, but to place an emphasis on the face-to-face relation. By examining these interactions alongside the theories of Emmanuel Lévinas, I have argued that the theatre is the primal space of the ethical relation, what I have termed ethotopos. Not limited by the instantiated categories of performer and spectator, the encounter across the (figurative) orchestra pit performatively enacts a social contract, setting into motion a relationship in which the self is defined through the temporally framed unconditional obligation to the Other. Such an engagement with theatre might offer a counternarrative to what Jacques Rancière has called the "paradox of the spectator":

> The numerous debates and polemics that have called the theater into question throughout our history can be traced back to a very simple contradiction. Let us call it the paradox of the spectator, a paradox that may prove more crucial than the well-known paradox of the actor and which can be summed up in the simplest terms. There is no theater without spectators (be it only a single and hidden one, as in Diderot's fictional representation of *Le Fils naturel*). But spectatorship is a bad thing. Being a spectator means looking at a spectacle. And looking is a bad thing, for two reasons. First, looking is deemed the opposite of knowing. It means standing before an appearance without knowing the conditions which produced that appearance or the reality that lies behind

> it. Second, looking is deemed the opposite of acting. He who looks at the spectacle remains motionless in his seat, lacking any power of intervention. Being a spectator means being passive. The spectator is separated from the capacity of knowing just as he is separated from the possibility of acting.[302]

In turning instead to examine the theatre through the lens of ethical philosophy, we may see how it bears the potential to become a central figure in the reimagination of human relations in the twenty-first century. The gap between spectator and actor is changed into the space of the ethical relation and the terms themselves redefined; the spectator is activated as a subject, not merely grounded as "looking." Theatre itself may then serve to allow society to imagine a new ethical basis and ultimately new modes of justice and personal relations. In this dissertation, through beginning with politically framed performance and moving to a consideration of theatre's formal structuring, I have demonstrated how theatre produces and maps the ethical relation, offering a glimpse towards a new imagining of universal subjectivity. I began with two epigraphs, the first from Herbert Blau proposing that theatre is in fact the encounter with someone's death and the second from Lévinas articulating that the encounter with another's death, and my willingness to substitute myself is the beginning of ethics. In juxtaposing these, we may begin to read theatre as the primal scene of the ethical relation. Within the theatre, however, time moves differently than outside, as it is framed off from daily practices. Rather than a utopia-yet-to-come, the theatre forces us to

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[302] Jacques Rancière, "The Emancipated Spectator," *Art Forum*, no. March 2007 (2007): 271-72.

confront this encounter with death and substitution in what might be thought of as messianic time, the non-discrete instantiated present of the ethotopic space across the orchestra pit. Time is compressed as the theatre produces an ethics of response, inculcating its participants in a moment that flashes upon them imagining new concepts of justice and relation for the twenty-first century.

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