To get to the performance of Handspring Puppet Company’s production of *Ubu and the Truth Commission* in Avignon’s Théâtre Municipal, I have to cross the large square of time, nodding to the clock that marks its passing in the Place de L’Horloge. While the open space would invite forms of street theatre at any time of the year, in this festive moment groups fill each quadrant, barkers for their brief wares. Festival time exists concurrently with and yet in contrast to everyday time: attending an international festival of music or theatre or dance I abandon consideration of how many performances I can attend, of when I have seen too much to remember and reflect. Suddenly in the excitement of the abundance of potential works I might see, I begin to calculate the impossible mathematics of starting time and duration with the time it takes to get from one venue to another. Gone is the accustomed plotting of tickets within the working week, measuring how many nights one wants to be ‘out,’ instead the frenzy in the air, the bodies pressing me to see their work, suddenly makes it conceivable that I might see something at 9:00, 10:40, 14:00, 17:00, etc. For the period of the festival the only limit on the number of performances I can see
are those of conflicting hours of the shows, the distance of one venue from another and the amount of money I have left over from my festival ticket buying.

Over the years I have noticed how the advertising that begins my festival experience—the anticipation of going that marks the start of the imaginative process of spectating—the ‘release’ of the program on the internet or by mail, comes in the form of containers marked by nation. As if festivals hark back to world’s fairs, the performances seem to occur in visiting national tents or exhibits. The link between advertising and sales in the performance sphere confirms the insidious and enduring connections between nation and marketing. For many years now, the Avignon Festival has hosted a ‘special’ group of works from one nation as a subset of the festival program. I remember being annoyed and dismayed at the text on the website the year Avignon hosted works from Japan since it read like nothing so much as an ad for Air Asia. Accompanying the text was a picture of a Japanese woman, and this implication of a country full of Asian babe geishas coming toward you to serve sat oddly juxtaposed to the descriptions of the performances that clearly would not reinforce the stereotype of spectator as pampered male and the nation as a careful, elegant and feminine hostess.

Thus when a spectator arrives at the ‘portals’ of the international festival, the talk on the street continues the tag of nation by referring to the work as the German offering, or the Lithuanian or the South African. Crossing the square that day, I remember being wholly aware that I was on my way to the South African offering. Plotting a ruthless diagonal through the enticingly festive square, determined to get to the theatre on time, I encounter groups of actors in costume and speaking
assorted languages who seek to gain my attention long enough and effectively enough for me to consider adding their offering to the list of works for which I hold tickets, just one more, just one more performance. An experience not unlike being lured to the gambling table or the slot machine, I hesitate long enough to be enticed; will the work they are offering be the one I might regret missing the most? If I don’t roll the dice, will I miss my lucky chance? The mix of emotions reminds me of Tsypkin’s extraordinary novel about Doestoyevsky’s gambling, the way the author evokes the speedy movement between ruin and its despair and the inexhaustible leap of hope in the breast at the possibility of winning. In the gambler’s imagination all previous financial ruin and even the past itself dissolves in the vision of the luxury just a throw away. Such are the temptations of taking one more turn at the wheel of promise that can be performance.

If I am remembering correctly, when I reached the theatre I stepped down into the foyer of the relatively small Théâtre Municipal, its smallness perhaps a false memory taking shape in contrast to Avignon’s principal venues, huge courtyards and cloisters and the enormous outdoor space of the Palais du Papes. From my seat close to the very small proscenium stage, I noted that contrasts of size were a part of the cognitive information combining argument and story in the production itself: the two actors playing Ubu (Dawid Minnaar) and Ma Ubu (Busi Zofuka) in *Ubu and the Truth Commission* seemed huge not only by way of costume and physical size but also in comparison to the scale of the theatre. The outsizedness which would in the course of the play move to a kind of metonymic representation of the varieties of oppression also formed itself in contrast to the size of the puppets, larger than traditional marionettes, about
the dimension of a small child. For this production I could listen if I chose and ignore the surtitles: the text spoken mainly in English with a smattering of Afrikaans and the Xhosa of the spoken testimony was accompanied by surtitles with the French translation.

I remember wanting to see the piece because of the reference in the title to the famous post-apartheid hearings. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, created in the wake of the inauguration of President Nelson Mandela, marked an event commonly understood to be the most public symbol of the end of apartheid. I am mindful of how ‘common understanding’ signifies a distinction between the ‘hearsay’ of national struggles and protest that comes to the ears of those in other countries—many of us in the audience at Avignon shared this form of knowledge about South Africa—and the subtleties more apparent to an audience who experienced apartheid, who know the characters involved, and can more fully judge the evidence the theatrical production reproduces within the frame of the work.

My curiosity about the performance came as well from the reputation of those hearings as they were reported on in various media. In a time, then and now, known predominantly for the velocity of greed and the decay of social structures of care for those not on the fast train to wealth, I heard the reports and listened for what solace the performance of communal reckoning might offer against the prevailing public discourse where ‘the appearance of wrongdoing’ bears more weight than the ethical consequences of wrongdoing itself. Not surprisingly then, in South Africa the public display of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Human Rights Violation
Committee (begun in 1996) struck those present as “highly ritualized public proceedings” whose troubled theatricality I read about in articles by Shane Graham and Loren Kruger analyzing the interaction between performance and the public ritual of confessing (Graham, 12; Kruger). Thus in South Africa, even the written recorded testimony from the Commission sounded like a performance, and in Avignon direct citation of the transcripts from those hearings furnishes one part of the text for the Handspring Company’s production.

Into my seat that night, then, came a spectator already thinking through her memories, political reflections and expectations as the lights dimmed. How performances begin, I reflect, might be considered more often in thinking about the spectator/performer contract, in thinking about the practice of spectating. A friend recently said that she considers the opening of a performance a promise; in my experience even when I want to see a piece I begin in a state of wary attention, perversely testing the very thing I have sought out. Since writing about performance inevitably comes in the wake of seeing the entire piece, it is easy to forget that first watchfulness. As the lights dim or the action begins or the performer appears in the gallery, I suffer an unfamiliar and deep pessimism, my heart sinks as I think, ‘oh this might not be good.’ (A truth borne out again and again experientially; yet, it would seem I am wiling to forget the scores of bad pieces in the promise of one transforming one.) Perhaps a hold-over from my Catholic school days when I bargained with God for an A by resolutely declaring to one and all I had failed the test, the measure of my distrust is a kind of hope, a gambler’s hope no doubt, that by not feeling anticipation and excitement, I will then be brought
up from the end of the spectatorial table to sit at the right hand of God and see a miraculously good play.

Thus when I began to watch the Handspring Puppet Company that night, my spectatorial attention had to adjust itself, not only out of its state of initial worry but into an active state of awareness shifting my reception between animated objects and bodies: allegorical puppets, live actors, marionettes and a screen functioning as a “blackboard” at the back of the stage upon which are projected “crudely jointed paper cut-outs and white chalk drawings of Ubu in the style of Jarry” as the Handspring website describes it. The multiple objects and bodies inhabiting the stage disrupted the “realism” of factual reporting or the replication of testimony and evidence, not least because the gigantic appeared next to the miniature, awakening the audience to the consequences of scale in representation. Like a choric recurrence, small but recognizably individual human puppets appeared in a glass box, a box reminiscent of other famous war crimes trials, where the descriptions of torture and everyday violence juxtaposed the grotesque and sophisticated cruelty perpetrated with the unbearable memory of witnessing it or being the victim of it. This interpenetration of the human actor and the puppet speaker hinted at a permeable realm of fantasy and fact, as much about the mechanisms of the performed memory of atrocities as about a narration of what happened.

In his meditative and catholic work Memory Practices in the Sciences, Geoffrey Bowker examines mechanisms of memory and storage as a kind of teleological design we are in the midst of deciphering even as those mechanisms change under the pressures of politics and progress. According to Bowker, “past
iniquities will be forgotten by most people and institutions: when justice has been done in the present, then their memorialisation will be complete (and they can be pushed out of consciousness). Is it possible, Yosef Yerushalmi (1996) asks, referring to the trial in France of Klaus Barbie for war crimes, ‘that the antonym of ‘forgetting’ is not ‘remembering’ but justice?” (25) While [the French historian] Renan observes “that ‘forgetting, and I would even say historical error, are essential factors in the creation of a nation; in this the progress of historical studies is often a danger for nationality” (26). These observations strike an almost Jarry-like knell in their now you see it, no you didn’t logic, and returned to my mind as I thought about how the Handspring production performed an anti-sentimental work that neither trusted justice nor indulged in a forgetting that might imagine a new nation under construction after apartheid.

Had I purchased a ticket for a play called “Ubu and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission” what might I have
expected? Anyone familiar with Jarry’s work would find the two ideas—Ubu and reconciliation—difficult to credit. In the description printed on the flyer for the play, I read the list the Company gives of the qualities of Ubu “lâche, sadique, vantard, tout en prenant pitié de lui-même” (lazy, sadistic, boastful and full of self pity). The last sounds a death knell for reconciliation. Precisely because Jarry’s character exhibits the luxury of great self regarding tears following indiscriminate murder, his bulk—as in this production his size overwhelmed the stage in comparison to the miniature of the puppets—in every sense blocks the possibility of truth or the mutual recognition necessary for even a nominal acceptance of reparation. Displays of excess can have so many different effects on my reception: pleasure in the license of too much, disgust at the bullying of bulk and its thoughtless waste, sheer weariness at being constantly lorded over.

What the gigantic also invokes is a strange lack of specificity: “[r]ather than represent any particular figure from South African history, Ubu stands for an aspect, a tendency, an excuse”. Author Jane Taylor’s list of the surrogations Ubu’s character performs here twists at the end with linguistic irony: to offer reparation is indeed to ask to be excused. But the same word contains duplicity, to make an excuse and thus an empty gesture of reparation, avoiding the ‘appearance of wrongdoing’ but not wrongdoing itself. If Ubu as a performed character has the ability to be an agent of excuse or a conduit of tendencies, then a kind of agency could be represented here. Not an individual agency but one that can be provoked by an atmosphere the theatre creates temporarily through producing associations in the spectator, a potential coordinate of endowing agency according to what the individual makes of her or his
reception. Such individual associations can contribute to an elusive and allusive cultural/national awareness circulating among members of the immediate community and beyond.

This sense of nationality, of regionality, of belonging or not as something in the air may seem too impressionistic to have everyday consequences; yet, I am reminded of a story about a Portuguese choreographer who was not chosen for a grant by the board of a funding committee dominated by Northern Europeans. According to a friend’s story, the Board’s reservations had nothing to do with the quality of her work; rather, they feared that she, being Southern, would be too Southern, i.e., too sensual, improvisational, and perhaps unmanageable for Northern audiences, or, more importantly in the case of her need for money to circulate her work, for Northern funders. How unthinking are our suppositions about national character? And to whom do they accrue? How do we assess acts of reparation? And to who are they addressed?

While the Commission’s mandate had within it the specific performance of reconciliation for the nation of South Africa, the performative shorthand in *Ubu and the Truth Commission* taken from Jarry’s surreal character—whose kingdom is and is not Poland—seeks to conjure the immaterial, intangible influence of cultural tendencies. Whether the theatre can sustain a representation of a tendency in the bodies of well-known theatrical characters, Pere and Ma Ubu, depends not just on the makers and players but upon the audience. Writing about the intent of the Company and the variety of audience responses Lorelee Kippen reports that “most audiences outside of South Africa have found the play’s burlesque performance style to be largely incomprehensible and culturally irrelevant…it did not
translate well across the various cultural, linguistic, and political borders it traverses” (4).

Kippen’s curiosity about the state of the audience’s reception of the production when far from home brought to mind the question and answer session I attended after a performance from a South African troupe in a tiny, downtown New York City theatre in the early 90s. I had seen notices posted, in the way one does passing through the subway, about a production imported from South Africa. Unlike the famous and influential production of Fugard’s *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* and many other works staged in the 70s in a climate of escalating awareness in the US about the need for a boycott of South African goods in an effort to end apartheid, the poster for the performance announced a play by and about women in South Africa, and all the actors were female. The story had been harrowing; the delivery humorous. A young American sounding woman, and I confess I identified the accent of my national language because of her earnest almost reproachful questions to the players afterwards, asked “How can you laugh about this?” One of the actors smiled graciously and the answer, not surprising to many who have had the privilege to witness true resilience in the face of daily injustice, was “what else can we do?” So Ubu’s cruel irony historically displaced from the shock event of avant-garde Paris appears apt alongside the reports from the Committee’s hearings, at least for the South African audiences according to Kippen and perhaps according to the South African actors I saw that night in a small theatre in New York.

In digressing to that little theatre in the moments of question and answer I find myself struck by the coincidence of my first forays as spectator—when the itinerant came to me
rather than my going to it—in Boston to hear and feel the heat and hold of a certain kind of drama as a physical call to action that was *Sizwe Banzi is Dead*. South African theatre moved me toward my initial peregrinations as a spectator; it seems no linguistic accident that ‘nation’ forms part of that wandering word, encountering in the drift towards somewhere else the signs of who might be at home here, of whether I might be at home here. Before I knew I would be a graduate student at Columbia University, before I knew I would be on the lawns protesting apartheid, demanding boycotts, before I knew I would wander across the academic hallway from literature to performance, I saw that piece of theatre, that vibrant and harrowing piece of theatre. Thus the historical time of seeing always shifts reception, and it need not be always be marked by a culturally significant moment. The stakes may be modest, delineating occurrences in the shifting sands of the everyday negotiation of affection and afflictions; the temporary we of the audience allows such impressions to hang in the air after the piece, to settle unsuspected in the back of the receiving mind, still shaping perhaps unconsciously the receiving body.

That summer in Avignon, time had clearly passed since the heroes of resistance in South Africa, Nelson Mandela, Stephen Biko and Winnie Mandela, played an inspirational role in the ongoing pledge to boycott and protest. This production made that clear as it deliberately associated the resoundingly unheroic Ma Ubu with Winnie Mandela, whose face appeared in the Ubu drawings on the screen. I could not help but feel the loss again of her as a model of strength and endurance; it does little good to discipline the young heart by revealing the flaws of any model or heroine. I read Winnie Mandela’s first book and found in it
many miles away in a white suburb of Boston a mode of being called up higher to look to a cause and to against all odds assume that my responsibility, even hundreds of miles away, was to stand against injustice at home and abroad. I had grown up on the tail end of the Vietnam war protests, had watched the Watergate hearings as part of my ‘Democracy in America’ class in high school, fortunate in having a smart and wise nun in my last Catholic girls’ school who gave us the critical tools to understand the distinction between the democracy preached and the sleight of hand practiced. Thus my cultural heritage includes big public acts of sacrifice, not without complications but just as surely not relentlessly undercut by an immediate nay simultaneous ironic commentary that mars without ever having to make.

In *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, by associating Winnie Mandela with Ma Ubu, the Company reiterated visually the cutting of reconciliation from the title and the execution of the performance. Handspring added “les complices d’Ubu”: a puppet dog with three heads and a suitcase for a body and Niles, a puppet formed from a crocodile handbag. In his review
of the London production of *Ubu and the Truth Commission* Ian Shuttleworth suggested the dog formed quite “literally a repressive state apparatus” while his accomplice the “crocodile handbag called Niles” “smilingly consumes the evidence” (Shuttleworth, 1999 *Financial Times*). In the action of the puppet Niles I watched a pantomime of an assault on collective memory. How could anything have happened if all traces of an incident just smilingly disappear? The compulsive nature of consuming often represented as banal in late capitalism combines with the strategic hyper-consumption of potentially harmful evidence. In a world where, supposedly, it becomes easier to guarantee everything can be and will be documented, it bears remembering how remarkably often documentation still tends to conveniently disappear, or be disappeared: months of White House emails, interrogation of illegal detainees.

Part of the magic show of power in these last years, perhaps it has always been part of the magic show of power but now the show is telecast even farther, is the ability to make the audience, citizens, think they are seeing one thing—justice—while in reality another—corruption—eventually appears. So the propaganda is that we are living in a time of a massive storage of facts, images, in digital form that in its totality will keep us safe from forgetting and identify any and all threats from the great database in the sky. But in truth according to Geoffrey Bowker often the more developed the electronics of the archive, the less we have the capacity to know how and what to save. So the sleight of hand aides the forgetting.

During *Ubu and the Truth Commission*—at base itself a work of reproducing archived memory, records of testimony, within another container of memory, the Jarry play that stands
for disruption and the avant-garde—I experienced what I can only describe as a kind of spectatorial vertigo. The players and puppeteers demanded of the spectator that we shift, we make the transition, between the ‘real’ stories of horrors narrated by the puppets only then to move into the realm of mean-spirited slapstick from the culpable Pere and Ma Ubu. Caught out by laughter I suddenly see stills of death by burning or other tortures on the screen behind the testifying figures that wrench the heart and stop the mouth. At the end of the production, I could not help but be moved by what I had been asked to be witness to; and yet, the strange almost lightheaded sense of Ubu’s historic position as king of unreal Poland and his fantasy tyrannies jarred my senses.

I wonder now as I think back if the makers of the performance did not succeed given that their purpose might have been to invoke a sense of physical and mental exhaustion from the re-enacting of repeated horrors; my state of mind and body at the end of the play was one of numbness resulting from being directed to shift affect from the historical horrific to the mock tyrannical horrific. Such a deadening of emotion might very well mimic the accretion of a kind of communal numbness as the trial of human rights crimes unfolds in time. But that same deadening risked alternative interpretations: audience members might conclude that the act of telling and listening to the suppressed narratives leaves in the end only stagnation and worn spectatorship. And yet this very conclusion was drawn by some in the wake of the hearings.

If, as in Ubu and the Truth Commission, the play offers representational commentary on a national crisis, what do playwright, actors, audience share? Was I then being invited to
re-imagine the nation, and in Avignon to make comparisons to the condition of an expanding Europe, after the revelation of truths perhaps known but now openly acknowledged, and secrets unveiled? Am I now? The violence rationalized by the South African state under apartheid to keep autocratic power disguised as orderly peace is theatrically represented as an abuse of power by a minority whose rule is injustice. How then does this work of theatre come to serve the cultural representation of reparation once white rule is overthrown? Time keeps passing, even horrors fade. Perhaps Handspring’s offering can reiterate in the repetition of telling that is theatre and expose the fractures, retell stories to plot a course towards the acceptance of not-an-ending but a “momentarily materialized” catharsis, to adapt Randy Martin’s phrase, brought on not by the humbling of the hero in the tragedy but by the humbling of us as receivers of the tale (Martin, 109).

Experiencing myself the temporariness of communal watching as Joe Kelleher might suggest, I am also aware of the durability of the theatrical task, not unlike the ongoingness of theatre that Kelleher posits as a contrast to our habitual assumption of the eternal ephemeral of performance. Rather he argues it is we who have to be reminded and to remember because it is us, those spectators, who always forget, who so easily disappear. And indeed the spectator I am at a given performances perishes as surely as any romantically imagined fragile performance; my shifting state can only be conceived of as durable because I shift, so the historical, cultural, political, affective, personal moment of seeing winks out. In its place I offer memories from how I saw what I saw when I saw it.

Adorno feared the repeating and reminding embedded
in the process of making and of remembering because it might deaden, and in the Handspring production that pall is determinedly cast. Yet all of life depends on sweeter forms of repetition, and actions, even temporary, against oppression can never be done once and be done. Political theater ought to make the spectator ready to regroup and try again. Any persuasive act, teaching, performing, speechifying, seeks something like a conversion. The very motion embedded in the word, that speech act conversion as Ann Pellegrini carefully complicates it in ‘Feeling Secular’: “is not a defense against vulnerability; it admits it as identity’s unstable ground.” So the need for repetition and our place in it \[Your Name Here\] depends on “the reiteration of community through the binding power of performance,” something Pellegrini acknowledges as always a possibility, never a guarantee (215).

If performance has historically sought to bind as well as support and encourage, the contemporary ‘polis’ who can be called to witness expands to include an unimaginably vast citizenry who lament and protest and affirm in an “amphitheatre” constructed through the international media, through the portals of the internet. Perhaps a form of theatrical flâneuring can exist across the thresholds of those internet portals, but idly tracing the tactile worn and treaded upon quality of a weathered threshold, I suspect not. So theatrical productions addressing the citizenry in the immediacy of place now perform before citizens whose sense of place, whose scale of place and number, whose sense of the time it takes to respond and the physical cost of being present has forever altered. Jacques Rancière warns against the presupposition that “the theatre is communitarian” in and of itself. What makes as it were for a ‘full’ amphitheatre
“in a theatre or in front of a performance just as in a museum, at a school, on the street,” is the “collective power that is common to these spectators… the power to translate in their own way what they are looking at… the power to connect it with the intellectual adventure… the power of the equality of intelligences” (278). At Avignon, in Rome, in New York, the adventure includes the sensual intelligence created by acts of non-passive spectating, and the stories that accrue.

To translate what I had been looking at and hearing I contemplated the unsatisfying in Handspring’s production: the shifting asked of me also meant accepting odd and disconcerting juxtapositions, the ‘falseness’ of the closing invitation in *Ubu and the Truth Commission* when over and over we hear as the play ends that South Africa looks “towards a bright new day.” Yet the wrong chord worked a kind of atonal magic if I did not close my ears to its reverberations in a desire for an immediately comprehensible harmonic: to accept all that had been represented was to enter back into a world acknowledging how humanly made and imperfect are all such endings. I was invited to acknowledge scale. The impossibility paradoxically opens a space where audience and actors together might acknowledge the limits of a fully satisfying conclusion, given the intricacies of eliciting conscious responsibility from a resisting party, while admitting the need to go forward even when all the wrongs of the past have not been fully excised. “We can’t go on; we must go on.” The language of reparation, words like “amends” and “forgiveness,” “bear witness” and “give testimony,” suggest that explorations of retribution and reconciliation must address an intangible quality of national relations, the very intangibility that can potentially coexist in private and public and be evoked in
theatrical production, an intangibility reproduced for spectators to remember, again. An intangibility essential to apprehending, while necessarily in motion across the transitions from act to retribution, from revelation to repair.

In responding to a question about how she came to write the text for *Ubu and the Truth Commission* Taylor lists the purposes of the process of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission: “To retrieve lost histories; to make reparation to those who have suffered; to provide amnesty for acts which were demonstrably political in purpose. One of the larger purposes of the Commission is to create a general context through which a national reconciliation can be made.” This “general context” itself must be conveyed through reports of the Commission, both heard aloud and witnessed and then published and read. The effect or experience of this context coming or not coming into being can only be manifested in the reception of the nation to acts of reconciliation. All of the hopes of those creating the Commission rest on performance but perhaps most crucially on reception, what the audience will hear, how they “translate in their own way what they are looking at” and what they are hearing.

Like the border between the story enacted and the memories of those receiving the testimony during national tribunals, a border exists in theatrical performance in the time between the moments in reception of the performance and later considerations outside the hot space of the live. This divide makes palpable the essential and ever mutable question of audience: who we are, what do we think, how does it make a difference to the performance and to later reports circulated about the performance. Experimenting, I try to imagine the
perfect audience to *Ubu and the Truth Commission* who have access to all manner of information about, for example, South Africa, the system of apartheid, the tradition of drama in South Africa, the question of true reparation in the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the code used in the production that refers to people, places and things in the cultural life of the country at any given time. Even in imagination I can see how *Ubu and the Truth Commission* would be a different play in Johannesburg than in London or Avignon at a festival of international theatre.

Perhaps the gaps then become more apparent, become more instructive for an active spectator trying to interpret the theatricalization of reparation. Loren Kruger in her analysis of *Ubu and the Truth Commission* stresses the conclusion reached by many involved in the hearings that “testimony from survivors and perpetrators was mediated representation rather than direct expression” (Kruger 556). Acknowledging Kruger’s authority about the particular conditions of South Africa and its history, I puzzle over whether direct is always better than mediated. While the Hearings depended on the anonymous perpetrators coming into focus for the victims, and vice versa, the spectator often benefits from anonymity, from the very distance Kruger decries. Rancière suggests that the emancipation of the listener/watcher rests in the “capacity of the anonymous, the capacity that makes anybody equal to everybody. This capacity works through unpredictable and irreducible distances” (279).

Wandering across thresholds, thresholds also filled with the weathered evidence of wrongdoing, is an act at a distance, an act of anonymous attention and reflection. In a very few sentences, Kruger makes it clear that the seeking of ‘truth’ and the offer
of reconciliation could be spoiled by acts of bad faith, “by the possibility of omission, if not outright lying, and by attempts to play confession as a sinister replay of torture techniques” (557). She narrates a scene between Tony Yengeni, “a black activist turned Member of Parliament,” and “ex-torturer Jeffery Benizen where the torturer ‘demonstrates’ the method only to turn to Mr. Yengeni and state that “it took only ‘thirty minutes’ of this treatment to get Yengeni to talk” (557). Kruger’s article sharpens our awareness about the “theatrical” and sometimes duplicitous nature of the hearings, but also raises the question, a question posed to me by Harry Elam in conversation, what do audiences without this intimate knowledge of South Africa, without the cues and the historical savvy to ‘hear’ the testimony in its many valences hear when we and they go to a theatre where parts of such testimony are reproduced? But then what do we want ‘them’ to hear? What desires do spectators or makers have for other spectators and makers?

As in all forms of artistic, cultural works in circulation internationally, the specific knowledge of the events in South Africa during apartheid transforms into the applicable particulars of that experience to the current crises in the festival host country and/or its need for reparation. About Ubu and the Truth Commission Jane Taylor insists, in contradiction to Kruger’s emphasis on the specific, that for the artistic creators of this work “this is not just a South African story. Ours is an era of singular attention to questions of war crimes, reparation, global peacekeeping.” We are, it seems, increasingly aware of the obligation to hear testimony, while we are yet defining ways of acting upon what we have heard.”
In South Africa, the temporal marking of the event of the hearings invited things locked away, stored away, even half forgot into the air of an open forum. In the haunted house of Europe more than one event of restitution would be necessary to organize a complete sweep of the various piles of unacknowledged wrongs heaped in corners. Instead the doors creak while from some hidden corridor ghosts continue to moan from wounds inflicted a century, a decade, a week ago. When I see theatre produced here, I sometimes have a sense of wandering past those ghosts to get to my seat; I hear them moaning in the plays that continue to be revived and circulated as part of a reworking of the texture of national pasts. Such haunting, both in the theatrical sense as Marvin Carlson evokes it and in the national sense, passes through the body of the character of the ‘actor’ in Hungarian playwright Hristo Boytchev’s Il Colonnello e Le Ali (The Colonel and the Birds). Accustomed in her acting career to taking the role of Nina in The Seagull whenever the Chekov play is revived,
the ‘actor’ begins her nightly news report in the madhouse with the words “I am a seagull.” Her translation of the nightly news, performed for us as audience as well as for her fellow inmates in a psychiatric hospital somewhere in an unidentified Balkan country, is necessary because the sound does not work on the ancient television the patients gather around in the crumbling hospital in a deep forest. So everyone relies on this character who can read lips to supply the words of the nightly report about the continued bombing and casualties in the Balkan war, the Balkan wars. But her first identifying phrase I recognize as an exchange of the impression of loss, of longing, of despair and hope furnishing the haunted house of modern European theatre: “I am a seagull.”

My above narration however is also haunted; I did not actually see or hear this take place on stage. Instead I read these lines of Boytchev’s first version of the play only after seeing a production of the second version directed by Toni Bertorelli in Rome. I puzzled over the evidence of Boytchev’s website—a site that participates in its own signs of grabbing for cultural attention by having a repeating, floating graphic that says Eastern European Wave. From the archive available on the site it seems clear that the play remained unproduced in all but a few nearby countries until the author began to circulate the second version, the one I saw, which substitutes mostly male characters for the female ones in the original.

No matter how much I move itinerantly and how much the mobility of what I see marks changes in those weathered thresholds and attention to the once ignored haunting moans, some performance practices remain remarkably fixed. Wherever I roam, I read programs, I see theatre, I hear interviews in which men, overwhelmingly white men, continue to dominate the
imaginative space as protagonists, actor/makers, and directors. You might be a white man reading this, and the statement may have frozen your reception the way I find often in conversation with others that mentioning what is so patently visible, the tiny proportion of women in charge, the tiny proportion of people of color as actors, directors and writers, tends to create an uncomfortable pause unless the conversation takes place among those who find themselves under-represented. So the conversation across borders, across countries, creates a pause, a moment’s recognition quickly followed by a desire to get “back to the subject,” indeed, to get back to the subject as he has been constituted for centuries. I hear the scholar Katie Gough saying to me “visibility does not equal representation,” and my own experience tells me that is true, but I also think about, for example, a theatre filled in London for a performance of an opera at the English National Opera where in the 100 chorus members, the several principal singers, there is not a person of color among them. So visibility is not enough, but without even visibility as a start, how do we imagine ourselves as protagonists, instigators, revolutionaries?

I cannot know why Bertorelli chose the second version of the play or whether he even knew another existed. He may work with more male actors than female or this version of the play may have made sense in that unconscious or semi-conscious way these things work in a patriarchal culture. Would a female doctor in a mental hospital made up mostly of women seem odd to an Italian, or understood as a play whose main appeal would be to a “female audience?” Would it seem to ‘limit’ the potential audience who historically have been more likely to both see and expect to see men center stage? Throughout history women tend
to be cured, in those famously dubious ways like Charcot’s and Fleiss’, by male doctors and male theorists. All these possibilities occurred to me when I discovered the original text, a kind of delayed haunting of what I could not have known I was missing.

Like haunted characters themselves, two historical moments from the 20th century stubbornly recur in performance and in texts for the stage disrupting the strategically deployed notion of Europe as a global actor, albeit a reformed one, for good and for civility: the Holocaust and the Balkan wars. Although theatre makers have played their part in uncovering and representing the history of genocide in the Second World War, interventions beautifully explicated by Freddie Rokem in his consideration of the stage and the telling of histories, the Balkan wars of the 1990s remain an uncomfortably contemporary reminder of Europe’s inability to intervene. In his play Boytchev renders the specific general while keeping the characters singular by establishing a time of news reports about the Balkan wars in a setting awkwardly poised between the coming modernization of Western late capitalism and the dated paraphernalia of a country from the ‘former East.’

John Borneman in his *Settling Accounts: Violence, Justice and Accountability in Postsocialist Europe* articulates the residue in the air, the lingering doubts about reform, and not only in Eastern European countries, a sensed but invisible pollution caused by “what legal theorists call ‘moral injuries’—deeds, like attempted murder, that did not result in actual harm but were nonetheless wrong”(viii). Posthumously ‘arraigning’ such deeds through public display, representing the crime again, awakens the haunting moans and can risk the perverse danger of creating a fetish for the past evil; the resurrecting can prompt a repetition
of heinous crimes. Now as I think back perhaps *Ubu and the Truth Commission* avoided this fetishization by the clash of genres, by blocking any sentimental reception on the part of the spectator for the reports from the Hearings and for the effects on the audience of those Hearings.

In the disintering of the ghosts, modern observers, from both the generation too young to have endured the moral injuries and the generation unwilling to let them go, might be perversely drawn toward the violence and tempted to recreate it. Rather than treat the need for reparation specifically, Boytchev in *Il Colonnello e Le Ali* conjures a forgotten group of psychiatric patients into existence to show the general aftermath of disaster and neglect in the Balkans. As I think of the way the story is told, I can’t help but sense underneath the narrative the genre of fairytale—a tale from Grimm in its relentless bleakness—of the isolated hospital in the forest and the dream of intervention and succor from some supernatural power, one that will in the naïveté of the group be named Europe.

While weathered thresholds are inviting when weathered only by the largesse of time and the accumulation of riches for the explorations of the passersby, such richness contrasts with other entryways, corridors, zones on the periphery, that display only the corrosive effects of years of neglect. From my place of observing, of the ‘moral injuries’ Bourneman defines perhaps few are less addressed and more acute than the culture of neglect in the 21st century. The litany of carelessness encompasses: the continuing catastrophe in the wake of the occupation in Iraq and the war in Afghanistan, the enforced neglect engineered in the occupation of Gaza, the criminal neglect of the poor and the displaced in New Orleans after hurricane Katrina, the
ongoing dilemma in Europe of the neglect of the Rom and the refugee camps at the corners of the Union, and the untended infrastructure everywhere. To intervene in these catastrophes requires a consistent, bodily work at odds with that elusive and dangerous attention to the incorporeal realm that is the war on terror, a distraction exacting an escalating price. Thus the practice of allowing members of the community to simply fall away from any social or governmental care becomes a kind of laissez faire genocide.

As a spectator I have experienced how theatre can reveal not only the hidden from view, but the quotidian too familiar to be seen. Writing about borders of time, place and action, Joseph Roach reminds us of how Brecht “speaking of the historical specificity of the social subject as a ‘character on stage,’ suggests that ‘if we play works dealing with our own time as though they were historical, then perhaps the circumstances under which [the social subject] himself (sic) acts will strike him (sic) as equally odd; and this is where the critical attitude begins.’ Roach suggests, perhaps a bit optimistically, that “crossing the border from the habitual to the critical illuminates the historical situation of the modern subject…” (113). Becoming habituated to neglect, I notice, takes surprisingly little time, facilitated by the shift of attention toward the virtual realm on a screen or the displacement of the heart and mind to the beloved on the mobile while the body moves across a landscape at a loss to capture our attention. Tending to substantial items that wear and break requires noticing their progressive decay, acknowledging the transitions of time, and repairing requires more time and effort than the habit of the two-second select and delete, and even here I wonder about the habit of accumulation, thousands
of messages in the inbox unanswered, piling up, becoming unmanageable. To break the seal of custom and show what neglect countries tacitly (or worse) condone can be one form of intervention by drama about reparation.

Boytchev sets *Il Colonnello e le ali* ‘somewhere in the Balkans,’ a choice that underscores the vagaries of frontiers: potentially only an impression in the minds of spectators in the principal EU countries while for international spectators often a vague boundary for all things east and former Yugoslavian. Bertorelli sets his production at the *Teatro India* ambiguously: a lost hospital space in an unidentified nation, a room determinedly bare and ugly with three metal bunk beds on a plain, dark stage. To take my seat, I have walked through an outer room piled with detritus, a passage infelicitous to a spectator’s expectation of theatergoing and a reminder of the untended and the untidied, though oddly housed, and therefore inevitably a bit artistically staged, in this public and commercial foyer space. The room of the set could be in any punitive institution, a hospital, a prison, an orphanage or barracks. Various forms of neglect mark the characters, and the association of character to symptom to nation or lack thereof becomes clearer for the audience as the play sets up the opening scenes of the inmates particular species of madness. As in the first version of Boytchev’s play though now with a male protagonist, our portal for news is Hacho, the deaf character who reads lips. How long has this old television set been broken? Part of its ancientness is communicated by its size, a behemoth in the world of flat screens. Things broken and unfixed, things with which those without money must make do, continue to signal the larger neglect at work in the recent history of Europe. The news begins with the same sentence
every night: not the suggestive theatrical haunting of ‘I am a seagull,’ but a monotonous and banal sentence that deadens the real harm underneath about the continued fighting. The ‘actor’ goes on to speak of attempts by UN humanitarian workers to succeed in their mission of dropping boxes of aid, although it suggests the planes are usually thwarted. Hacho performs the same words each night; on the one hand I suspect I am not hearing the ‘truth’ from the lip reading communication, what the announcer is ‘really’ saying, on the other, the nightly report establishes quickly and theatrically the deadly and deadening sameness of news from ongoing war.

If the television stands in for something like news, the doctor stands in for something like healing. Admitting himself to be a morphine addict and not a real doctor, this figure whose presence in the community should signal aid, instead doubly enacts the lack, the lack of help and the lack of trustworthiness from one trained to serve. It hardly seems to matter, however, since there are no supplies, no medicine and no authorities to whom he himself might appeal for the missing items. This is a world lost from the attention of the media or the leaders, the characters shattered by experiences actively fighting in the Balkans war or simply caught in the vicious and swift turn from neighbor to enemy repeatedly enacted in villages across the Balkans.

Just when even I as a temporary witness have begun to weary of the torpor of madness, neglect and stasis, the announcement comes. Outside in the forest, boxes have appeared from the sky, boxes marked UN. In a sudden reversal of hopeless static sameness, the stage fills with all the characters who hunt through the cardboard boxes; each item they retrieve is displayed, first
to each other, then to us (not self consciously for the audience but rather as a byproduct of their sudden excitement). Odd how immediately recognizable to all of us are those powder blue uniforms with the symbol of the United Nations. Flags, berets, supplies, and the equipment of peacekeeping soon litters the stage. The pilot who dropped the boxes obviously lost his or her way; this official material should not be in the hands of a few forgotten psychiatric patients lost in the woods of what might be Serbia or Bosnia. Yet even those sequestered in a freezing hospital, with little food and less water endow those blue uniforms with meaning and potential.

Thinking back I wonder when I first saw such uniforms, when I myself endowed the ‘peacekeeping forces’ from my place far away from the conflicts with a hope that someone, some country could maintain peace in the broken world, war-torn in every sense. How different my response to such uniforms might be if they were being worn by a force entering my own village. A small version of the manufactured joy in the repeated ceremonies of watching the Allies land on the beach during WWII, that first surge, perhaps, of pride and here come the good guys, depends on physical distance. Such distance creates a dependence that the mucky day-to-day will be sorted out in those lands where we send peacekeepers, those ‘troubled’ regions. And in these last years the revelation about the sexual conduct of peacekeepers towards young girls and women in the places they have been deployed to protect makes the reception of those blue uniforms ever more wary. Yet, the play seems to profit from the initial momentum of a perhaps always theatrical desire for a force for good.

The patients begin to band together. Their various
symptoms suppressed by the sudden order and purpose provided by the goal of forming a peacekeeping unit of the United Nations. Identity bifurcates visually. We have been watching indistinct patients in drab discarded clothing who might be ethnic Serbs or Croats; now those patients place UN blue bits over the costume of the mad. As I watch the production in Rome, styles of acting complicate meaning because I am accustomed to the habit of Italian actors to portray a psychological symptom in Commedia-like exaggerations, the indications of illness a ‘bit’ performed by each member of the troupe. What comes through even the irksome exaggeration is how what we have been witnessing is in desperate need of repair: the harm done and the result of that harm marches before us in the confines of a staged hospital room.

Supplied with uniforms, the players enact the process of acquiring an identity through an ancient ritual of nation formation. The echo of Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* sounds as I watch, the enacting of national identity in the willingness to sacrifice oneself for the larger entity that is the nation. While the soldiering on stage is playacting, and the discipline a discipline in the service of peacekeeping, the ‘leader’ of this crew is a male ex-Colonnello from the army recently engaged in the conflict between ethnic members of a fractured country. I watch as the patients do the drills the Colonnello leads, and the military drill forms them into a unit. The sight is familiar to me, both because I grew up in a military family and because the lingering tradition of national unification still parades across Rome one day a year in honor of the soldiers and warriors past. Boytchev transforms the singular national into the transnational because the characters state their intention
to serve “Europe.” The recurrent echo of the question of these last years occurs; if the Balkans weren’t Europe before, are they now? To the mad the answer seems clearly no; the becoming of a force united happens because they move from a fictional space outside of geography and time into a fictional space of intervention for good.

An odd collision occurs here for me that will be echoed at the end of the play. While I see on this night in the Teatro India the theatrical nature of playing soldiers unfold before me, I have been hearing escalating rhetoric and reading about attacks on Afghanistan, a country whose borders are closer to the former east represented here than the more distant West. The stories of those killed and the stories of those serving often show young men and women doing something that still looks, and to them may well feel before combat and its consequences, a great deal like playacting. While the play we watch shows the perhaps frightening ease with which people become a proud and connected unit, my unease remains in thinking of both the global consequences of playing soldier, and the relatively local consequences. The stories from Bosnia and Servia tell tales of how seemingly easy it is for people to band together and become a proud unit with an intent to exterminate across an invented border of place and time where neighbors turn out to have actually always been enemies.

For the staged story as for the real, the solution, the reparation imagined by the characters will not come from European intervention, nor will it come from inclusion of the ‘East’ finally in the EU states, though there is no doubt the play hints at this longing to be a part of the frequently conjured mysterious, civilized, orderly, sane entity Europe. Freed from
confinement by uniforms and drill, the crew decides to go to Strasbourg, the seat of European justice, even though their initial salvation came about courtesy of that more global savior, the UN. The patients’ dialogue clearly infers that ‘sanity’, the reparation to the neglected and the mad, the injured and the wounded, will reappear under the sign of Europe, will reappear when they themselves gain shelter under the entity of Europe. I suspect Boytchev’s setting where any modern technology, TV and phone, exist in a ‘primitive’ state at least thirty years out of date deliberately provokes for the audience forceful and enduring stereotypes of the East slowly rousing itself from the condition of a communist sleeper woken up tardy into this modern capitalist world.

While the absent seagull haunts me as I write, another form of avian haunting fuels the central scene that gives the play its name. Frozen in anticipation for some otherworldly sign about when to begin their trek toward ‘Europe,’ organized now under the leadership of the Colonel whose growing sanity is in direct proportion to the purposeful cadets in semi-uniform before him, the group decides to use carrier pigeons to send messages to Strasbourg. Several borders in performance are marked out before me in the theatrical gestures used to create a late play dénouement between the sane and the insane, the rural and the city, the included and the excluded as the actors signal the flight overhead of a flock of birds, by mimicking the sway and swoop in their own bodies. In a kind of natural analog to the humanly made disciplined drill and straight lines of the battalion, the actors embody and evoke the birds convinced they have received the sign. Thus they make their way to Strasbourg, admittedly a journey only across the stage, which in the interval
is emptied of the trappings of mental hospital, in order to offer themselves—the lame and the mad—as a peacekeeping force.

Yet the dénouement does not bring a deity in machina or on foot. Like *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, Boytchev’s play unfurls in an ending uncomfortable and inconclusive. The group camps out, homeless outside the European Union Court of Justice, no longer dreaming of being a peacekeeping force as their unsuitability is clear to all but them, instead they appeal for care and asylum. I am reminded of Richard Sennett’s apt diagnosis of 20th-century society in Western Europe where the habit of revealing personal and private lives to one another blocks the public anonymity necessary for strategic public action: here I watch the helpless confusion of these characters who having no service to offer are rendered infantile, refugees needing protection rather than participants and potential citizens.

The ending suspends all sorts of conclusions, but it also literally suspends the narrative because we are all waiting outside an institution for some form of response. One of the marks of powerlessness in the 21st century I see in Europe as well as abroad is to be always waiting. The asylum seeker waits, the neglected patient waits, the paperless clandestine waits, the dark skinned suspect of terrorism waits and waits and waits. Waiting, while generally not a theatrically interesting condition for the actor or for the spectator, can demonstrate on stage an often invisible if prevalent condition of being for many who we as spectators rarely see and whose condition we as spectators free to circulate cannot share. The consequences of extended waiting can only be repaired by attentive action that brings resolution. Such resolution, Boytchev suggests in the theatrical turn he makes of
transforming patients turned peacekeepers into buskers asking for passersby in Strasbourg to contribute to the outstretched hat, continues to elude the main stage, shunting those who are waiting to a marginal existence of street entertainment, a group neglected and accumulating in numbers.

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Peter Sellars wandered into my spectating life some thirty years ago or perhaps I wandered into his itinerant life as director when he directed the Boston Shakespeare Company, a position he managed to maintain for a year before he was dismissed as too unorthodox for the Boston Shakespeare traditionalists. He would face this fate more than once in the following years even as he also became a celebrated international director of theatre and opera, though his title always seems to require the obligatory adjective “controversial” as a prefix. So when I noticed the articles that appeared several weeks before his production of Euripides’ Children of Herakles describing how Sellars had chosen immigrant children from public schools in Rome to play the part of Euripides’ stateless band of refugees, I was not surprised. A kind of anti-theatrical announcement, the opposite of the more common media fanfare given to notices which stress the inclusion of a famous actor in an upcoming production, these advertisements marked the coming night of theatre as inherently political, including as it did a cast of ‘real’ immigrants/refugees. The persuasion possible by staging the real also underscored the intent of the production; where several fine actors indicate the possibility of a bravura performance, the cast of those truly dispossessed could not help but suggest that here with real refugees the audience would witness something
closer to the true pain of dislocation, wandering, racism and poverty onstage. Whether Sellars had a hand in creating such expectations in advance of the production or whether the newspapers sought to portray the director—no stranger to Rome as his work has frequently appeared in the annual festival RomaEuropa—as primarily driven by political concerns, the scene was set for our participation in a night that would mix the pretend of theatre with the real of the daily life of exile.

Representing the tension of contemporary crises onstage always involves traversing a border Michal Kolbialka designates as existing between the real and the utterly made up. I found myself in a swirl of questions and doubts before, during and after this production. What is at stake in presenting something ‘true’ in drama, something that happened, really happened? Can a theatrical presentation of a ‘real’ incident retain the real, remand it into our custody? Since I enter the theatre/performance space from my ‘real’ life in a contemporary European world, where do I and my fellow spectators draw the boundaries crossed or kept inviolate from the ‘real’?

Of course I remember that from its inception players and writers employed the theatrical medium in the West to question the ‘real’. A modern understanding of realism as a 20th-century movement is only the end of the long history in the theatre of the search for authentic acting, pertinent to each period, each cultural moment. Yet I reflect how, at least to my ears, these last years have seen an increase of documentary theatre receiving quite a lot of media attention, more than most theatre generally receives. Guantamano, My Name is Rachel Korrie, Black Watch, Stuff Happens all take up the consequences of the US/UK coalition and the action taken to ward off perceived
terror threats as well as the war in Iraq itself. Knowing too well how no conclusion I draw can be conclusive, I cannot help but suspect that the influence of the impotence of the people to change the decisions of the politicians has fed our need to show and to hear the “truth” of “what is happening” to one another when so much of the public language of intervention obfuscates it. Here however might be a mix of the forward nature of remembering, thinking back through the first years of the war, with the moment of the performance just before the Iraq war when such collective frustrations were beginning to build.

The narrator Luca Barbareschi introduced the evening at the Teatro Valle by assuring the audience that before them stood veri (real) refugees to tell their stories. I took the handout distributed by ushers and read the explanation of the structure of the event: in the first part of the evening (40 minutes), there would be an interview and discussion about the global condition of refugees, and then in the second part (100 minutes) we would see the play. Appended to the traditional announcement signaling the beginning of a performance in Rome, signore, signori fra due minuti inizio lo spettacolo, vi preghiamo spegnere i vostri cellulari, comes the count of how long the performance will last. As few as four or five years ago, this was not part of the aural information welcoming us to the production. Now it elicits responses, not much noise for relatively short works uninterrupted by an interval, but sometimes a groan when the piece runs longer than 2 hours. I have often wondered how this announcement of time affects our reception; whether we shift our expectations according to knowing how long the production is, when it will end, whether
anyone checks their watches or phones to see if the estimate is accurate. How odd it seems to me to have the experience of the live bounded by this pre-emptive parameter offered to us all.

One of the strangest features in that evening designed for us by Sellars and Euripides—reminiscent of the unsettling mix in *Ubu and the Truth Commission* of jarring Jarry figures and earnest puppet representations of true victims—was our greeter cum narrator. Marked by his large gestures and hyper-theatrical manner as a ‘real’ Italian actor for any of the audience accustomed to bourgeois Italian theatre, Barbareschi moved up and down the aisle smirking and suggesting we were certainly not accustomed to *this* kind of theatre. In doing so, of course, he made division in the audience between those who are indeed accustomed to a certain kind of political didacticism in live performance and those who choose the theatre they see according to established theatrical canons as well as whether they have a subscription to a particular establishment. Either audience can find the didacticism a strain or the traditional theatrical bigness a delight depending on mood and generosity, but his insistence reminded me how the choices we make in buying theatre tickets does indeed form a basis from which we see and receive.

Like the MC he imitated, Barbareschi handed the first part of the evening over to Paula Boncompagni whose book *Rifugiati* recounts the testimonies of refugees in Europe. She spoke of appalling conditions, gave examples, and as she did the audience grew more and more restless. I wondered, unable to ignore the growing distraction in the theatre, whether a method exists for disseminating information about numbers and injustices done that does not at some point create a inevitable distance between the horrors narrated and the audience’s sympathetic
understanding or even active interest.

The narrator, no doubt responding to the impatience in the air, intervened as he might not have had the writer been a man. Many, many Italian men famously cede the stage to no one and as famously ignore any suggestion that they might have been going on too long. Yet Barbareschi stopped Boncompagni mid-sentence to suggest she let the refugees themselves talk. “Give us the real refugees, speaking out of genuine experience.” Two women walked to the front of the stage, on the same level as my seat in the platea rather than higher up on the stage itself: this young Iranian woman and older Columbian mother, according to our handout, had both fled their countries because of their political beliefs and were now residing in Italy. Throughout the discussion with the women, one could hear comments, some audible, some less, while the theatre continued to fill with the air of impatience and a bewildered weariness. As with the Avignon production of *Ubu*, one sensed the uneasy shift between borders of reportage and theatrical performance, and the audience reception, dependent in general on the clues we are given, met the uneasy combination with its own confusion and frustration at not playing the accustomed role of spectator to performance.

During the break between discussion and production, young people came around with hot, sweet tea. Most of us stayed in our seats, unusual for an Italian theatre audience, as if we were acknowledging our confusion about when the show began, what part of the evening was intermission and what part, a continuation of the unusual mix of information as the instructions on our handout describe the first part as “an important moment for listening” and thus the spectacle
by perverse implication as not an “important moment for listening.” Finally the audience sighed with audible relief as the universal sign of all indoor theatre since the early 19th century signaled the beginning of a play: the lights went down, the audience fell into its habitual mode of silence in a darkening theatre.

I remember as I think about the opening of Children of Herakles how in the aftermath of 11 September and the subsequent bombing in Afghanistan many festival organizers and theatre directors began to import and display traditional music and art from those nations under siege and suspicion, seeking, I assume, to undermine the cardboard cutout versions circulating of ‘Muslim’ and/or ‘terrorist.’ It speaks of an incredible hubris that so much effort seems necessary to re-establish to the forgetful Judeo-Christian mind the cultural offerings in the Arab world and makes me think of Patti Smith’s furious lyrics for her furious song about this very blindness: “We invented the zero/but we mean nothing to you” (“Radio Baghdad”). Suddenly many festivals began offering evenings of ‘ethnic’ music from traditionally Muslim countries. I find myself inevitably recalling Edward Said’s complex consideration of the exotic pleasures created from the ‘idea’ of the orient. How pointedly then did this importation of familiar folk music from Afghanistan to the stage in the RomaEuropa 2002 festival in a time of war and crisis conjure the schismatic, colonized world. Yet the circulation of music has changed even since Said’s Orientalism, is still changing by means of the internet, itinerant samples available from countries once aurally bounded by the recordings that never traveled.

Sellars complicated such importation often moving under
the category ‘world music’ by having a true rarity for Western theatrical presentation, at least a rarity in terms of my experience in theatres, a female bard (jyrau) sitting in the middle of the stage on what looked like an improvised altar. Costume enhanced the foreignness of her difference since she wore an astonishing hat—astonishing of course perhaps only to me since I am not accustomed to the dress of Kazakhstan—a turban topped by braided extensions forming two horns adorned at their peak by puffs of fur. Ulzahn Baibussynova began to play what I assumed was Kazakhstani music while before her sat boys of different hues collected inside the boundary of florescent light set out on the stage floor around the altar. While the choice of a woman bard might mark one deliberate gesture towards the contemporary moment, I remember thinking how this introductory song could just as well constitute a recuperation of Greek tragedy in its original performance ritual.

In retrospect I recall the many interruptions Sellars, perhaps deliberately employing a Brechtian mode of undoing audience habit, made throughout this night of theatre. Open the theatrical event with a discussion of refugees by experts and refugees themselves, reinterpret the choreography of Greek tragedy with the addition of a bard from Kazakhstan and then dramatically offer a less absolute, more floating border between young (and amateur and refugee) and old (and actors and experienced). Onto the stage where the children sat in an enclosed cell of light listening to the music, the drama itself began as an old man appeared in a wheelchair, Iolaus, played by Czech actor Jan Triska who I have seen in other works directed by Sellars. Wheeled in by an African-American soldier (Albert S.) with a gun slung over his arm, dressed in camouflage, Triska
begins to speak and for the first time in the evening surtitles appear since the actor speaks in English. While displaced and in exile, the two women from Columbia and Iran spoke Italian, narrated their out of placeness in the language of their host country. So I am startled to remember that Euripides will come in English tonight, that the production itself while negotiated by groups of refugee children in Rome will make its political topography the United States and the US’s effect on Europe and beyond.

Iolaus speaks in a voice full of resentment, rhetorically exaggerated, a deliberately antique style. His sense of the injustice paid to his old friend Heracles’ children comes in part from his warrior’s sensibility; the children deserve protection under the accords of war. I have a particular relation to this rhetoric as my father employed it in the home and in active duty. While we fought constant battles at the table initiated out of his past hurt and disgust at the Vietnam protests and my serenely righteous adolescent position as standing for peace, justice and rock and roll, the one aspect of the military I did come to respect through him was that of service and actions one might endeavor to perform regardless of personal feelings or sacrifice. That in 2002, the military and my usually loyal Republican father had quite clearly advised against war and would do so up until the invasion of Iraq had much to do with my reception of Iolaus’ anger and therefore with the ‘relevance’ of the little known Euripides’ text to my spectating in this moment, local and international.

In a time of the willful breaking of all the codes and conventions of warriors and captives by the US and its allies, a breach that would become worse and worse with revelations of
rendition and torture, this old man’s words echoed in the then and now. His vulnerability stressed by the chair, he nonetheless makes a forceful oration on behalf of his charges. While *Ubu* took up reparation, successful or not, as a forthright subject, and *Il Colonnello e le ali* demonstrated the effect of neglect and ostracization from European protection as a condition in need of reparation, Sellars staging of *The Children of Herakles* reaches back to the territory of the past for theatrical invocations of the polis, occupiers and occupied, in order to warn of actions that will in the not very distant future call for substantial reparation. As I write the damage continues, the need for reparation escalates. Few countries in Europe in the 20th century avoided being occupied or occupier, and while studies show how much the youngest generation of ‘new Europeans’ have lost the knowledge of this history, the reawakening of the bordered world of war and its aftermath came through very strongly in Sellars’ production. Unusually this particular play focuses on the unmoored human lives left homeless by the battles between nations, echoing Boytchev. Sellars stressed allusions to the immediate moment and the heated debate between the US and its former allies about the bombing in Afghanistan, and the rattling of trumped-up inspectors’ reports that signaled what we now know in retrospect to be the already decided plan of attack on Iraq.

Any deliberate political staging of a Greek tragedy seeks to create for the time of the performance an atmosphere of immediacy: I am a citizen being appealed to by my leaders. I must listen and theatrically I am charged with the responsibility of advising on action. Surely there were those members of the audience who were bored and those who refused the invitation
to inhabit the space of citizen/witness. But Sellars through his performative interventions challenged us as spectators to see in the re-enacting how countries make decisions, how false the narrative drive of history—our country has always cared for the oppressed, protected the weak, [fill in the blank]. We witnessed again before us the current and ancient nature of the trap of knowing no way out but violence and the breathtakingly cruel strike of power that rejoices in an act of violent attack as a show of might.

An idea of myself as a member of a polis made me think of the onstage version of my participation, the Chorus, which in turn brought to mind Erica Fischer-Lichte’s articulation of the late 20th-century phenomenon of “that rebirth of tragedy out of the chorus.” Sellars in an interview in La Repubblica suggests that the public will participate in the play as the ‘chorus.’ Whether what was offered was accepted, i.e., that we would agree to the audience contract and take the part of a chorus, the modern “permanent tension” Fischer-Lichte designates “between the individual members and the community they formed,” became part of the bordered space in the Teatro della Valle (245). In one way clearly Sellars’ intent was to create a chorus like that Fischer-Lichte describes as a “searing critique of the late capitalist, post-industrial societies” (243). And yet Sellars also articulated his sense that the play itself needed no translation to contemporary Europe in 2001: “Euripides has written a tragedy [2400 years ago]… that could have been written this morning.”

In keeping with the bordered tensions of today and yesterday, of occupiers and occupied, Sellars sought a relation with the audience through the production in which they were not invited to participate in order to make a work of the
imagination, but to taste and see directly the work presented.
[“I hate the imagination: I prefer to have things represented
directly, to be tasted and seen”] I could only surmise that in
an effort to achieve such directness, Sellars staged a very static
production, intentionally blocking the motion of fictive action,
by placing microphone stands towards the front of the stage
where the actors stand to deliver. Do I ever see a microphone
the size used by a reporter or in a press conference without
shifting to a mode of reception created out of the saturated now
of 24-hour media? By the deliberate staging of this contest of
wills among members of the governing class speaking their
piece into the microphone, Sellars conjured the constraints, the
bordered constraints of something at once live and mediated.
Even when the actors took the microphones in their hands,
the staging remained deliberately static. As the polis we were
addressed in a contemporary fashion from the odd conjunction
of the far away, that is, someone anywhere in the world speaking
to a microphone, and the near, that is, the scale and distance
of our screens. The evocation of a community gathered in one
place at this one time came only when the actors used the main
aisle, the spatial conduit for news, entrances and exits, just as the
two sides of the Greek amphitheatre represented port and city,
the ancient fonts of all news.

Elaine Tse played Copreus, the envoy of Eurystheus, he (in
Sellars’ version she) who has been chasing the children from
town to town, keeping them on the run, a journey where every
border they tried to cross before arriving at Athens has been
closed to them. Only writing now, remembering the production
does it occur to me how much this Asian actor resembled
Condileeza Rice, the same manicured and coiffed poise that
makes her look like corporate everywoman and renders any ethnicity almost invisible, certainly visually tame. Sellars cast Brenda Wehle as the president of Athens, her hair in a contained bun, Madeleine Albright-like, she is older than Copreus, a matriarch with furrowed brow, the daughter of Theseus (which would be enough to worry anybody). Iolaus turns to these women of state to remind them of the reputation of Athens as a ‘free’ country with a ‘free’ people; the echoes of the current rhetoric in America could not be clearer.

The story takes place ‘in media reparation’; the post-war world a world where damage has been done, and damage must be repaired. Playing out this earlier episode from another country’s history in the crux of crisis offered, to those of us interested in contemplating the parallels, a way of seeing the unfolding of a crisis and its resolution (or lack thereof). “By performing history, theatre,” writes Freddie Rokem, “at times even more forcefully than other discourses about the past like historiographic writing or novels about historical events, engages in…ideological debates, frequently intervening in them directly” (Rokem 3). In *Children of Herakles* the leaders appear bewildered as well as bullying. Euripides presents them in the midst of the dilemma of choice about acting and consequences. While I experience the staging as static in the manner of ‘talking heads’ television news, the Italian critic Maria Bonano suggests Sellars intends the performance to work as a thawing of the “glaciale” and removed medium of TV where the spectators become anesthetized from the pain paraded before them. Strangely, this desire seemed to me to have only reinforced the glaciale response in the audience as it listened to the refugees’ stories before the play began, and the coolness of reception
carried through the playing of Euripides.

One of the most delicate negotiations a director/performer makes comes from the paradox of intent and representation; often the mechanics employed to display or affect the audience in a certain way will create the reverse. I remember a moment in a class when a group who, taking on the mantel of avant-garde artists at the turn of the twentieth century, were to imagine a performance in a space in order to give life to a tenet of a particular group, Futurists or Dadaists. They proposed a work where everyone could choose to participate as he or she wanted, where there was absolutely no pressure on the makers or the receivers to care about what was happening, and they set it in a new gigantic commercial mall in London. Quite instructively for me, this was the most animated discussion in the class where their fellows became frustrated, critical, and rebellious in response to something that so deliberately purported to be without intent or direction. The piece that broke the students’ passivity was the piece that offered them a passive paradise.

In Euripides’ tale, Demophon, president of Athens, does presumably the right thing as he takes action to grant asylum to the children. In relief at this invitation to finally take shelter, the refugee boys from Rome chosen by Sellars to represent the children of Heracles break the container of the proscenium stage to come down into the audience and shake spectators’ hands, to thank us, the ‘Athenians,’ for our largesse. In this moment depending on where you are sitting the audience is made chorus—for those not on the aisles or available to the children’s reach, we still watch theatre being made albeit now closer to us and unmediated by microphones—encouraged to be the welcoming democracy loving Athenians in contrast to the
countries who have expelled the boys from their lands. Iolaus calls out to Heracles’ mother Alcamene who has been protecting the refugee girls in the temple, and the space of the city widens out further into the space of the spectators. Remembering hearing a voice, not sure who spoke or from where, I looked in the direction of the sound of a second-floor box on the right of the stage. Slowly as the lights went up a woman who also appears to be Asian, Julyana Soelistyo, appeared surrounded by eight refugee girls, some African, some Slavic, some Columbian (ethnicities I discovered when I read the descriptions of the children provided in the program).

Alcamene covered from head to foot in the costume of a burka with only her face showing moved to the front of the box. This costume doubled, at once theatrical and a current visual trope, accurate or not, of the oppression of women by the Taliban through the prescriptions of fundamental Islam and by extension a reason for the ‘West’ going to war. Nothing comes without cost in the world Euripides designs, an antique reminder of immediate consequences in this age given to wars at a distance from the countries waging them and those of us remaining supposedly unscathed. Having given asylum, taken an action to cure the dispossessed condition of the children, Demophon admits to Iolaus that she has consulted the Oracles who all suggest victory will not come unless a virgin is sacrificed. I cannot help but sigh inwardly, Muslim or Christian, Greek or Roman, sooner or later it seems every story will include some god or another who wants an ‘unspoiled girl’ for himself, in this world or the next. While Demophon can give shelter, she cannot implicate her own people so intimately as to ask one of them to make this sacrifice. A strong young voice startles the
audience from the aisle: Julyana Soelistyo, tiny now that we can see her out of the box and on the aisle of the platea, doubles as Macaria, daughter of Heracles. She offers herself as sacrifice, in a widening arc of community, her first concern her family, her brothers and her sisters, and then she offers her death as an act to save the city that has sheltered them. Her one request is that she be surrounded by women when the deed is done.

I am mindful here of how sacrifice as an act of soldiering has historically been bolstered by the rhetoric of patriotism; depending on the country they serve, soldiers also sign up for the job. The act of sacrifice is complicated by the strained bond of a latter day mercenary remunerated for the service and yet still acquiescing to a system in which she or he pledges an allegiance to protect the nation. I could feel that night how watching this bloodletting changed for a moment the detached quality of reception in the Teatro Valle in contrast to the mood in the theatre when we were presented with numbers and the casualty figures of war’s aftermath in the count of the homeless and exiled. Here the numbers overwhelming and insubstantial made sudden sense in this scene of one woman’s sacrifice whose passage from proud youth and sentience to corpse we witnessed before us.

All that remains on stage after the sacrifice done by women and in a protective circle of women is a plastic sheet. Two soldiers assist, the African-American soldier in charge of Iolaus’ chair and a blonde woman whose physical contrasts—feminine but also bulky, awkward and suddenly tender—reminds the spectator of pictures of the relatively new phenomenon in the US of women serving in combat. They perform the ritual of the necessary showing of the death and its aftermath. A collision
and collusion of memory occurs, and I deliberately shift it to the side as I re-remember and replace the past previous to the past nearer to mind; the near-iconic status of the first pictures from Abu Graib and the standing body of the woman soldier taunting. On this stage the soldiers accept Macaria’s blood poured down in libation as it spreads onto their bodies. Afterward the women take the body tenderly, and the sacrifice is complete.

Like Antigone, Macaria chooses death and that choice has consequences for the community. By its enactment Macaria’s sacrifice will protect a city, enact a reparation, and yet, inevitably it will call for another as the cycle of sacrifice and appeasement continues. Sellars’ staging of this very simple story, the strange and awkward juxtaposition of the everyday condition of refugee, of exile from home to the characters in the story meant that at times in the story the children came into focus in their singularity, not cast because of how they looked, how they acted but chosen for who they were or more precisely the condition they inhabited. Their insertion into the staged story in an odd way reminded me of Zola and Company in their zeal to enact a realism using recognizably authentic everyday objects on stage.

With the scene of Macaria’s death, however, the energy on the stage intensified and the craft of acting reclaimed the space as she and the soldiers enact the ritual before us. What kinds of turns did my spectating take that night? Why did the scene with Macaria change my way of watching so markedly? Was it witnessing the one to one relationship of suffering to body, of loss to witness—even as I turn my head so as not to see the cut of the knife—as it causes an empathy nearly impossible in the repetitive sight of a panning shot of many bodies left in a
market square after a car bomb, in a roadway after a firefight?

Later thinking again about the creakiness of the evening, the strange scaffold of the beginning, the odd shift of static ‘this is important now’ delivery and the sudden moments of grief and power, I recognized how Sellars’ production invited me to inhabit the position of emancipated spectator Rancière advocates for since I came away thinking the work had demonstrated not only that sacrifice and reparation often co-exist, but that neither is necessarily graceful in act or transition. The move toward repair and truth telling usually means someone must step away from the position of power that is the protected space of not admitting or actively hiding wrongdoing. Obviously the notion of ‘willing’ in the sacrifice sits uneasily with the lives taken, the families, the loved ones sacrificed in war, in violent clashes between those in power and those not. But Erika Fischer-Lichte’s writing about how the theatricalization of ritual and sacrifice has a particular resonance for us in contemporary audiences joined up the odd hot and cold of this performance. When I went back to look again at the passage with the description Fischer-Lichte gives of Eysoldt, a German actor, who played Sophocles’ Electra at the beginning of the 20th century, I could not help but think of Macaria’s staged death:

Her “phenomenal body did not disappear behind her semiotic body”. Rather it “came to the fore” as a “vital, organic, energetic body whose sensuousness works directly on the phenomenal body of the spectators…the events stormed past… like a dream fantasy… [Eysoldt] transgressed yet another boundary—that which separated theatre from ritual. Not only was a ritual of sacrifice represented on stage but, moreover, a ritual was actually
performed. The performance was realized as a kind of ritual—the ritual of the [actor’s] self-sacrifice which created a temporary community of actors and spectators.” (5, 9-10)

Sellars’ use of the refugee children in the play seemed to me as a spectator to suggest his desire to return to ritual in a time of global and local distraction. Yet the mix in his production of agitprop and civic sacrifice made aesthetic brings to mind what ritual, at least as it has been theorized by anthropologists studying communities, takes for granted: that the participants in the ritual are either known personally to us or we know them to be members of our own wider community. In the Teatro Valle, I only have the word of director and of theatre management that the children I see before me are really refugees. This is theatre after all and the contract is one of pretend, so why should a spectator assume a body on the stage plays a condition rather than a role? Oddly as the play unfolds, I forget which parts I am to receive as a doubled performance of the theatrical narrative infused with the power of the actual condition of the children in their every day life as wanderers and exiles.

The parts the various children play are largely made of gesture and they do not speak, so what might prove a jarring sense of their amateur skills as against the seasoned actors who play their elders never occurs. For that matter who knows what condition the professional actors inhabit in their daily life? Could they not be voluntary exiles, ones not suffering the dire straits of most refugees, as I am? While not at all at risk in my position of being far from home, I did receive the work from the doubled state of having been raised in the US and having
lived in Europe for many years. What catharsis or more aptly
Martin’s “momentary materialization” of catharsis might be
instigated at this remove from the recognition of members of a
shared, intimate community?

In retrospect, in the collecting of the tiles tossed to the
side of the doorway of the mind, I remembered particulary
the suitableness of the ending of Euripides’ play for Sellars’
purpose of showing how then tells about now. The victims of
the aftermath of the ancient war set the stage for the modern-
day dénouement of a cycle beginning again. The narration of
the story shifts to the almost entirely silent Albert S. On that
night I understood the shift to facilitate an aural reception of the
rhetoric of war told in a rhetoric recognizably African-American
marin speak. Even now I wonder what it would sound like
to hear the cadence of this speech without understanding
the words. Would the rhythm have an affect on those in the
audience who might have seen the numerous films from the
US with harsh sergeants verbally roughing up the recruits for,
it is always implied, their own good? This rhetoric with as many
rules as any political or sophistical one comes to Albert S.’s aid
as he plays the ancient Greek part of reporter, the theatrical part
that requires the speaker to offer ‘images’ by sound and analogy,
to make us the audience ‘see’ the battle, ‘witness’ the triumph. A
narrative partly of heroism, Albert S. tells how Iolaus, insisting
upon getting out of the wheelchair, became young for a day, a
fighting god, and how the group triumphed.

Alcamene, however, listening carefully for the political
meaning within the soldier’s description of the dramatics of
war, is distressed to learn that Eurytheus was not killed but
taken prisoner. She insists the Athenians put him to death, but
Demophon assures her this is not possible. The same principles that require the Athenians to protect the boys require them to imprison rather than kill Eurytheus. Brought before Demophon, and thus before the whole audience, Cornel Gabara’s Eurytheus enters dressed in the outfit that visually marks him as a part of our war news, the outfit those prisoners alleged to be members of Al Qaeda in Guantanamo Bay were required to wear then in their eternal encampment: jumpsuit, handcuffs, darkened goggles. I pause and remember the explosion of commentary such a move made that night: I think it was the first time I had seen the ‘costume’ of imprisoned ‘Islamic terrorist’ imported onto stage. I pause as well because the ongoing imprisonment set to be dismantled at the very instant of Obama’s tenure as President still exists in a limbo—closing, closing, closed?

As a spectator I am charged with past and present and future in the words of Demophon who tells Alcamene that even if she kills Eurytheus, it is written that the children of these children of Heracles will wage war on Athens and on him. The violence will continue. She chooses to kill him and let the violence come. The resonances are many. The Athenians/children of Heracles are saved by a recognizably American soldier, who will it seems easily turn from savior to oppressor. The bitter feuds continue generation to generation, each violent act calls forth another; the threats from those made to wait in prison have apocalyptic certainty, the sacrifice of one victim for another will in the future take its vengeful toll.

However disjointed and disorientating I might have found the mix of realpolitik and fiction that evening, I think now about Sellars’ intent to dissolve the very solid walls of the traditional theatre so that what was playing on stage partook directly of
what was ‘playing’ on the street. We, the audience for *Children of Heracles*, witnessed daily news of the international protests against and diplomatic struggle about the war in Iraq; in Europe I had spoken again and again with friends and acquaintances who felt unjustly and inevitably subject to the will of the US president they did not elect. Writing now from a distance of a decade on, it is strange to recognize how the body politic appeared in the aftermath of the beginning of the war to be wasting away on intravenous feeds, barely able to lift its head. The success of the right in Europe, the anxiety of climate change met with the ineffectual sense that we are already too late, the witnessing of remarkable wrongs perpetrated with brazen confidence because though there will be an outcry, there will be no one ultimately to answer to. Though decisions made across the Channel and across the Atlantic and Pacific have always effected Europeans, the now well-documented growth of terrorist plots aimed at the vague border of the West from the equally stereotypical and shifting border of Islam means that Europeans have a sense of heightened danger while being without the choric power of speaking to the community making choices about how best to protect them. While the internal workings of the Bush administration remained somewhat obscure before the war, figures like Colin Powell, Donald Rumsfeld and Condileeza Rice became as recognizable in Europe as Merkel, Berlusconi or Sadam Hussein. Sellars’ staging mimics the sight of leaders and their seconds in command endlessly before the microphones, endlessly reiterating arguments for why the ‘war on terror’ is now a global phenomenon in need of a united strike.

However static in the main then, I experienced the movement in the play between the all too human scale of
personal sacrifice and the decisions made by leaders who have systematically hedged their bets as an invitation to consider the strange form of participation and passivity of being a citizen in a time of a supposed global, supposed community (though neither can Greek drama be said to be naïve about the complications of being a citizen in Oracle- swayed Athens). Perhaps I experience that movement as meaningful more fully in the remembering and the recounting than in the watching; the itinerant nature of spectating includes a wandering away from the experience, the wandering thoughts that occur in the wake, the way bits of the piece wander back into mind when recounting in order to show, to tell, to listen again.

Yet that present and palpable sense of unease and confusion in the audience for The Children of Herakles cannot be attributed to only the most obvious and large cause of war and impending war. The chorus we were could only respond to what we saw, what fate was implied for the characters, what implications for the wider community are created in the story and its non-resolution. But Sellars decision to disorient the spectator by the mix of ‘real’ and tragic narrative enacted in a Brechtian key produced a discombobulated and disturbed spectator. As Freddie Rokem suggests, in Brecht’s description of the “V-effekt,” the spectator in a theatre resembles the witness to a “traffic accident” who watches “an actor, a demonstrator, act the behavior of the driver or victim or both in such a way that the bystanders are able to form an opinion about the accident” (8). Rokem’s apt substitution of “historical event” for “traffic accident, because—and this is not an irony—they have many characteristics in common” could not be a more perfect formulation for what Sellars presented to me and to my fellow
travelers. And we were left with the impression that night in 2002 that the reparation, the clean up in the wake of the 100 car pileup currently in process in Afghanistan and about to be underway in Iraq would be incalculable.

Leaving the Valle that night, leaving the Teatro India after *Il Colonnello e le ali*, leaving the Theatre Municipal in Avignon after *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, I came away in a strange spectatorial condition. Each production had taught me new ways to receive a mix of genres, of the factual and the fiction it relies on, of the metaphorical and the damaged real. Yet, none of the performances ‘worked,’ the disjointedness made it impossible to depart with a sense of having seen something extraordinary, a work of art moving artfully and engagingly between references to the moment and a world created out of its own imaginative power. Still my dissatisfaction in the immediate aftermath of seeing the work did not, obviously from what you have been reading, keep the plays from haunting my memory: the juxtaposition of puppets, marionettes and truth, the sad little army of would-be peacekeepers, the cluster of children left waiting and the violent assertion of violence to come at the end of a revival of a Greek play. So I wonder, might there be a category for plays that do something other than ‘work’ in the moment of their presentation. I remember thinking, trying to account for what seemed like a change in perception, that perhaps the dissatisfaction about the work as a coherent and well rendered performance echoes what I considered when I thought about *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, how beginnings and endings can be rendered in such a way that they release what they appear to contain.

Reparations like performance itself are iterative—they
are periodic, necessary reminders for organisms, human and communal, prone to forgetting. The grammatical seduction of a specific, singular pronoun—”the”—attached to a process less reified and more sporadic than the single will bear—”nation/audience/West”—can make me as a writer and you as my reader susceptible to the “one and only-ness” of those things dependent on taking shape and changing shape very much more as a practice than an outcome. If we are to make alliances in an imperfect world, then we must make sense of imperfect alliances. There are, I muse, direct and indirect theatre pieces about reparation not unlike the one in which I learn again with Gogo and Didi that the political world requires waiting, that the incremental is often, against all odds, worthy of celebration or at least appreciation, that while waiting, in waiting, I can pay attention, attention an expenditure that performance requires and repays, if not always at the moment of the offering.