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PERFORMING TRANSLOCAL MEMORY: TESTAMENT AND TESTIMONY IN CONTEMPORARY THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE

“I was walking down a slope and thinking to myself:
How do the narrators disagree over what light said about a stone?
[...] Then what? A woman soldier shouted:
Is that you again? Didn't I kill you?
I said: You killed me . . . and I forgot, like you, to die.”
-Mahmoud Darwish, “In Jerusalem”

Trauma is what defines and shapes us, both as individual survivors, as collective groups and as memorial cultures facing an unprecedented rise in violence and assaults on human dignity. The effects of the traumas of World War I and World War II, atomic mass extermination, multiple armed conflicts, genocides, terrorist attacks, numerous civil wars in the developing world pervade the modern and contemporary imaginations. The effects of trauma on the literature of the period are also profound. The challenge to capture the unspeakable component of trauma in the literary mode has become a genre in its own right. Theatre responded specifically to this challenge by asserting the impossibility of traditional dramatic forms to adequately express the perversity and violence of contemporary reality as Peter Szondi argued in his seminal work *Théorie du drame moderne* (1983). As we will discuss in what follows, in their attempt to memorialize trauma, theatre and performance disavow the forms of memory and

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representation that attempt at creating a totalizing vision. Because of a crisis of mimesis, theatre and performance are particularly susceptible to the unspeakability of suffering.

Unspeakable Trauma

In his now classic study of the rise of trauma and wound culture, Mark Seltzer (1997) defines the pathological public sphere as “the convening of the public around scenes of violence”, the public’s “fascination with torn and opened bodies and torn and opened persons, the collective gathering around shock, trauma and the wound.” (p.3). Trauma has become an overused trope that pervades all levels of interactions with the world. Parallel to this pervasiveness is the rise of corresponding trauma narratives that attempt to capture the unspeakable of wound culture in both literary and performative language. Historically, narratives about “wounded” people are a familiar part of the literary and theatrical canon. When assessing the impact of such narratives on recent theatrical and performative practices, two common challenges arise: first, the relationship of performance to language and its insufficient expression of the effect of violence on shattered people and their individual and collective experience on the stage; and second, the strenuous and complex relationship of trauma narrative to historical accuracy and theatrical truth claims. It was Shoshana Felman who first pointed out in *Testimonies: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1991) that a witness is required “when historical accuracy is in doubt and when both the truth and its supporting elements of evidence are called into question” (p.6). Felman argues that a witness is called upon wherever there is crisis of truth and evidence. Theatrical representation of witnessing and trauma are a fertile domain to question notions of truth and evidence.

Karen Malpede (1996) calls “Theatre of Witness” the performance of trauma that turns audiences into witnesses. A “memorialist turn” in theatre or a theatre of witnessing describes many contemporary plays dealing with the representations of the Middle East with its endless conflicts, revolutions, foreign interventions, and social and political unrest. This article engages with contemporary theatre’s obsession with remembrance and the way the stage dramatizes the act of “bearing

witness" in plays such as Wajdi Mouawad's *Scorched*, Judith Thompson's *Palace of the End*, and in multi-media performances such as Wafaa Bilal's *Shoot an Iraqi*, and "...and Counting". These plays and performances construct memory as a dual process of retrospective spatio-temporal narrative accounts, combined with physically re-enacted mnemonic flashbacks, alternatively memorializing the "wound" while refusing to simply reify the violence or recreate it in a sensational form.

It is now a familiar approach in trauma theory to focus on the crisis of knowledge surrounding traumatic experiences. The relationship of the literary to the traumatic is inherently linked to the crisis of modern episteme. How truth is constructed and how we view it is conditioned by the fact that we are at the same time limited historically by the empirical world, by what we purport to know of the real and by the reality of our knowledge construction based on transcendental representations. This philosophical problem goes back to Emmanuel Kant for whom the very factors that make us finite – our subjection to space, time, and causality – are also the conditions necessary for the possibility of knowledge-making. Michel Foucault echoes Kant when he referred to "the analytic of finitude" as simultaneously founded and founding of our knowledge and our conceptions of knowing (Foucault 1994). But grounding knowledge in both empirical truth and in the reality of the transcendental subject is problematic when extreme violence and trauma threaten to destroy the very possibility of existence. The unthinkable and senseless nature of trauma makes it difficult to reduce the transcendental to the empirical without dealing with the significance of knowing, thinking and constructing reality.

In *Theories of Trauma*, Lyndsey Stonebridge (2009) observes that trauma is what happens when thinking fails or can no longer take place. Similarly, Cathy Caruth writes in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996), that "trauma is suffered in the psyche precisely, it would seem, because it is *not* directly available to experience." (p.61). Further, Caruth argues that the return of narrative in the second degree "constitutes trauma and points to its enigmatic core; the delay or incompleteness in knowing, or even seeing, an overwhelming occurrence that then remains, in its insistent return, absolutely true to the event" (p. 5). Moreover, Caruth argues that trauma is experienced and witnessed

through a response to an overwhelming violent event or events “that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, or other repetitive phenomena” (p. 91). The experience of violence is such that it may not be culturally grasped as it occurs, or as it destroys the fabric of language in its wake – instead it returns in stories and fictions generated by the need to remember and memorialize.

However, to “remember everything is a form of madness,” as Brian Friel (1981) wrote in his play *Translations*. It is a characteristic of memory, especially memory of traumatic events, to be linked to incompleteness and forgetting. Forgetting is not a sign of malady but of health of memory as French painter and psychologist Theodule Ribot argued in the late 19th century in his book: *Les maladies de la mémoire* (1881). Ribot was the first to speculate that memory is located in the brain after it was considered a function of the heart or other organisms. For Ribot, the recollection of the past undergoes what he called “foreshortening”, or the omission of large number of facts and details of our past.

In response to Ribot, French philosopher Henri Bergson distinguished two forms of memory in *Matière et mémoire* (1896): one based on habitude and automatism and is inscribed within the body; the other is spiritual in nature and contemplative, based on intentional remembrance which is the domain of the mind, necessary to producing knowledge. If there is to be knowledge produced by memory and remembering, the reliability of memory needs to be analyzed, since, as temporal beings, we not only perceive events in time, we also perceive their temporal relations to one another, their chronology and timeline. In the context of trauma, this temporal relation between events is eschewed and disrupted since experiencing the trauma and talking about it are always separate in time. The traumatic event itself condemns one to silence making the problem of memory intrinsic to the problem of unspeakability of violence.

Of Testament and Testimony

In giving voice to the trauma in performance, theatre engages a previously silenced witness, challenging our inability to fully digest and comprehend what

has happened, as Laub (1991) argued: “The victim's narrative – the very process of bearing witness to massive trauma – does indeed begin with someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence, in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence (p.57). In other words, the experience of trauma operates at a complex juncture between knowing and not knowing in reaction to a breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world. Kali Tal in *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literature of Trauma* (1996) maintains that iterations of trauma are “written from the need to tell and retell the story of the traumatic experience, to make it ‘real’ both to the victim and to the community” (p.21).

In general, trauma drama showcases characters' struggle to know about and make sense of unimaginable events. First, by the therapeutic *telos* of bearing witness in which the individual's goal is both to remember and to carry the truth in the fullest possible sense, and, at the same time to move past the event in the hope of healing the wound caused by it. For victims or witnesses of trauma to speak about the events is a complicated act, for it is both necessary to the healing process and painfully evocative of past suffering. A victim frequently senses a dual compulsion: one that makes speaking necessary, and another that makes it impossible and condemns one to silence. In this sense, "bearing witness" could be defined as a speech act in which one attempts to convey a true account of an event to which is attached a sense of burden or urgency. For LaCapra (2009), bearing witness is inarticulate in itself (p.61). When a witness tells of the experience, it becomes testimony: "the fallible attempt to verbalize or otherwise articulate bearing witness. Testimony is itself both threatened and somehow authenticated or validated insofar as it bears the marks of, while not being utterly consumed and distorted by, the symptomatic effects of trauma" (p. 61). And when a witness tells of an experience that has become a testimony in the act of retelling, on stage, that testimony becomes testament. Finally, the testament itself becomes a tribute to survival when it is incarnated in the body of the actor and experienced by the spectator as a live event.

Etymologically, testimony comes from the Old French “testimonie” and the Latin “testimōnium”, meaning “evidence or proof”. Testament however originated in English from the Latin “testāmentum” which is a “will” and “testis”,

a “witness” (the wish of the deceased). If a testimony is a declaration of fact or proof related to the objective nature of truth, while a testament is a statement of belief, an expression of a subjective will, then “trauma opens up and challenges us to a new kind of listening, the witnessing, precisely, of impossibility” (Caruth, 1996 p.10). Trauma drama changes the relationship between the subjective witness and the questionably objective event. A testimony is the presentation of evidence as a witnessing to the trauma; a testament on the other hand addresses the trauma of witnessing. Geoffrey Hartman (1995) proposed to consider the dialogic nature of witnessing as a story addressed to a reader who is “responsive, vulnerable, even unpredictable being” (p. 536). Further, that as readers (and by extension spectators) we are trying to find a “way of receiving the story, of listening to it, of drawing it into an interpretative conversation” (p.536).

However, bearing witness comes with its set of challenges for both the one retelling, the one listening, and in the case of theatre, the one re-enacting. Dori Laub (1991) observed that: “The act of telling might itself become severely traumatizing, if the price of speaking is re-living; not relief, but further retraumatization” (p. 67). As for the listener, “the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience the trauma in himself” (p. 57). This risk points to the profound impact of trauma in the process of retelling where the speaking and the listening subjects mourn a loss of not only their safety and security, but also the loss of meaning in the face of a world fragmented and disrupted by violence.

The impact of this dialogic disruption on dramatic structure is significant, as the narrative of trauma, like its corresponding memory, is fallible and fragmentary. There is no totality of narrative any more than there is a one version of the experience that can be rendered through art or literature because of our fundamental inability to synthesize our ontology. Felman (1991) noted the fragmentary and incomplete nature of testimony when she observed that testimony does not offer “a completed statement, a totalizable account of those events. In the testimony, language is in process and in trial, it does not possess itself as a conclusion, as the constation of a verdict of the self-transparency of knowledge” (p. 5). Thus, theatre functions as a “memory machine”, to borrow Marvin Carlson’s title, a space of exploration between living and telling, memory

and forgetting, "speech and survival" (p. xiii). Stonebridge (2009) suggests that while performing traumatic experiences, each writer "asks us to think about what it really means for the mind to be possessed by an experience it cannot represent to itself. Each understands what it means to be inhabited by a lost past" (p. 200).

Testimony takes the shape of a personal story recalled through the help of fragmented memory, often supplemented by the use of enacted mnemonic flashbacks. While testament deploys the figure of the ghost as witness, the voice of the voiceless dead who return from the past to remind us that we are finite and infinite beings at once; beings who inhabit time and are annihilated by it and ones who are immortal by our ability to record our history. The re-enactment of the trauma in theatrical form, metonymically reconstructs a geography of loss capturing the unexpected, overwhelming shapes of trauma in the lived world, while metaphorically referencing it as fictional palimpsest. Performative retelling transforms the individual from an object of trauma to a subject or vehicle of its expression. Thus, theatre establishes a problematic tension between the experience, the understanding, the re-enactment and the recollection. It moves the ontological status of the witness from the act of "knowing" to the act of "remembering". The trauma stage becomes then a haunted stage, a memorial site to unrecoverable loss, an abject space where one can and cannot be, where the living are silenced all the while listening to the voice of the dead.

The act of witnessing in theatre dramatizes ontology itself pointing to a dual crisis: on the one hand, the violence of the event that destroys language and our ability to speak about it, and the problem of the truth claim of historical reality. In this sense, trauma drama questions the very indexical bond between the representation and the event it represents. This questioning is due perhaps to postmodern suspicion and the indeterminacy, rupture and displacements that affect knowledge production and our relation to the real that has been transformed by mediated representations that construct it rather than render it, making it difficult to assign ethical responsibility.

Since the first Gulf War, historical evidence is revealed to be at best constructed and polemical with the use of imbedded journalism and a highly controlled media coverage. Truth is "created" within contexts that make an argument, propose a

view, and promote an ideology; in other words, the availability of information does not necessarily translate into more knowledge. In the new millennium, to make a truth claim is no more fictional than to narrate a story putting into question the evidentiary nature of testimony. The second Gulf War, like the first was another *made-for-TV* event with its own embedded journalists whose task was not to portray what they were witnessing in the most detached and objective way possible, but to promote a certain view or to package this foreign intervention for an American consumer who was asked to shell out billions of dollars to support war efforts for reasons that were then revealed to be fabricated. McChesney, Foster and Bellamy argue that this is all part of the increasingly “media savvy” governments who “have learned to make ideological warfare as important to its operations as military and economic warfare” (quoted in Scatamburlo-D’Annibale, p. 37). Through the use of embedded journalism, the media and perhaps more importantly, the military was able to attain a great amount of control over the flow of information while maintaining the illusion of transparency.

Writing about the first Gulf War, Baudrillard (1995) claimed that “everything is hidden: the planes are hidden, the tanks are buried, Israel plays dead, the images are censored and all information is blockaded in the desert: only TV functions as a medium without a message, giving at last the image of pure television” (p.63). In both Gulf Wars the media has tightly censored images of atrocities, opting to show events as firework displays of ‘shock and awe’ campaigns, rather than the actual carnage of war. In opposition to this falsely objective information circus, Colleran (2003) contends that political theatre “can honor a responsibility to the presentation of otherness, to the actual suffering behind each theatrical representation. Further, theatre can expose the constructedness of media images, and in a Brechtian fashion, lay bare the devices that underlie the illusory realism of the hyper-visible” (p. 622-623).

The strategic precision of the Gulf War coverage, evident in its portrayal as a ‘clean war’ or a ‘surgical war’ with its supposedly insignificant ‘collateral damage’, and the lack of visible causalities (especially on the Iraqi side) reached an epitome of fantastical construction with the infamous story of Private Jessica Lynch in 2003. In the case of Jessica Lynch, the US military attempted to follow the advice

of the great public relations pioneer, Edward Bernays who “insisted that public relations is the science of ‘creating circumstances’, mounting events that are calculated to stand out as ‘news worthy’, yet at the same time, which do not appear to be staged” (Ewen, 1996, p. 28). The media spun the story of this young woman who supposedly was ambushed when her unit took a wrong turn into enemy territory. She allegedly “fired her weapon until she ran out of ammunition” (Scatamburlo-D’Annibale, 2005, p. 41). Media reports also claimed that, while in an Iraqi hospital, she has been shot, stabbed, and even tortured. An elaborate Hollywood style rescue mission was staged and the footage was released on television less than a week after her capture. It was later revealed that this American sweetheart was well taken care of by the Iraqi hospital staff and, although she suffered broken bones from the vehicle collision, she had not been shot nor stabbed and did not even fire her weapon. In fact, she later admitted that her rifle jammed. In addition, the rescue mission was well staged and the night-vision camera shots were filmed by “a former assistant of director Ridley Scott, who had worked on the film *Black Hawk Down*” (Scatamburlo-D’Annibale, 2005, p. 41).

From Witnessing to Testimony: Palace of the End

Standing in stark contrast to the well calculated and staged American hero story, came the photos from Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad and the story of Lynndie England in 2004.¹ Deepa Kumar (2004) points out that when contrasting Lynch with England, “one’s image was constructed for public consumption, while the other’s was not” (p. 310). In Canadian playwright’s Judith Thompson’s play, *Palace of the End* (2007), the first of the three interlocking monologues, titled

¹ The Abu Ghraib prison scandal erupted in 2004 when accounts of abuse and torture of prisoners held by the US army’s 372nd Military Police Company were made public by internet posts and clandestine circulation of photographs. An investigation was ordered by the senior officer in Iraq at the time, Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, resulting in Major General Antonio Taguba’s Report asserting the abuse of prisoners, humiliation, sodomy, attack with dogs, burning with phosphoric acid, etc. The scandal soon erupted in the media when the program *60 minutes* broadcast on April 28th, 2004 interviewed high ranking officers who confirmed the abuse and blamed it on “reprehensible actions of a few soldiers.” On May 10th the magazine the *New Yorker* published a special report detailing the more systemic and pervasive practices and implicating higher ranks in the chain of command.

“My Pyramids” deals with the scandal from the perspective of the female soldier who took the fall for the entire Abu Ghraib debacle. The play premiered on the Canadian Stage in Toronto in 2007 to significant acclaim. In the first monologue delivered by the character Lynndie also referred to as “Soldier”, who laments the fact that she will never be a hero like Jessica Lynch:

SOLDIER. I mighta had a TV movie made about me, too. She is truly a hero she is, and hey, did you know she’s from West Virginia too? Yeah, she’s a country girl, like me, and us country girls kick butt! *Nobody* messes with a country girl, oh no, let go! Can you imagine how scared she felt? Everybody in her company killed except her? Prisoner of the most brutal people on earth? Yeah. I reckon Jessica Lynch is America’s sweetheart. I am America’s secret that got shouted out to the world. (p. 10)

At the very beginning of Lynndie’s monologue, a direct reference is made to the massive media scandal her actions created as she ‘googles’ herself and finds, much to her naïve joy, over 600,000 hits associated with her name. Thompson relies on the media frenzy around Lynndie England to frame her in a different light. Instead of dehumanizing her or making her into the female elemental evil, Thompson attempts to show her as a victim of a system that dehumanizes soldiers and destroys their ethical lens with constant hazing and shaming rituals. In some way, Lynndie’s vulnerability to group pressure and self-deception is not presented as repulsive rather it helps us understand the circumstances that made it possible for an immature young woman from Virginia to get caught in a violent hyper-masculine military culture. England’s pathetic susceptibility to the flattery of any kind of sexual attention from male soldiers combined with her lack of education and sophistication help us cut her some proverbial slack.

The second monologue, “Harrowdown Hill”, is based on the last few days in the life of British weapons inspector Dr. David Kelly who was found dead in 2003 two days after he appeared in front of a British inquiry where he confessed to not having seen any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. In contrast to the Lynndie England story, audience identification with this character is possible. David speaks smoothly and articulately, with a pleasing and benign, almost poetic quality. “The idea of *never ever...seeing orange juice again, or my daughter’s eyes, or wild honeysuckle*” (p. 21) in *Harrowdown Hill* is rather touching, in contrast

to the “Soldier’s” silly teenage musings in *My Pyramids*: “I get a nice French Canadian guy, a Pierre, take me in. And I could have the baby, and we could bring him up Eskimo” (p. 18). Unlike Lynndie, David sees through the constructed division between himself and a cultural *Other* by demonstrating a capacity to see Iraqis as individuals. Here he recounts his close friendship with Jamal in Baghdad (pp. 26-8). This part of David’s life could be perceived by the audience to attenuate the complicity the character could have in the type of culturally-motivated distancing that makes one unable to feel for the suffering of the perceived Other. David reminds us constantly that we are complicit in the war that our media and governments strive to distance us from. He regularly “checks in” with the spectators, asking if they agree or have shared the experience that he is relating. He even invites them explicitly into the scene to witness his death because he does not want to die alone (Thompson, 2007, p. 23). Kelly also projects the public responses to his death, explaining that the official story will announce that he committed suicide, while “almost nobody will believe it. There will be rock songs, art installations by angry Germans, television movies and the Internet will roil with talk of the murder of David Kelly by men in black, that’s how I’ll be remembered. The mousey scientist who set off a storm. Another casualty of the War in Iraq.” (p.23). If Lynndie England’s account of her time in Abu Ghraib is based on ignorance and is alienating to the audience, perhaps it is with David’s monologue that the audience begins to see a relatable and culturally open witness.

With an intensifying effect, the final and by far the most powerful monologue of the play, “Instruments of Yearning”, is delivered by the character Nehrjas Al Saffarh. Nehrjas was a member of the communist party of Iraq in the 1970s and was killed in an American bombing during the first Gulf War. The structure of the audience’s emotional progression goes from detached contempt for the Soldier, to a possible appreciation of the pressures governing the scientist’s actions, to a total identification with Nehrjas’ posthumous narrative in *Instruments of Yearning*. Everything about the Iraqi ghost of a woman appeals to the spectator’s feelings of tenderness and empathy: her physical beauty; her strength in the face of horrendous suffering; her recitation of poetry; her deep love for her dead son. Even when she addresses the audience directly trying to clarify that being an Iraqi communist under Saddam was not as the Communism

we might imagine: “Wait. I can see you are pulling away from me when I say ‘Communist.’ But this is not the Communist Party of Stalin, or Mao or Pol Pot, or post-war Europe, far from it. All the kind and thinking and peace loving people in Iraq at that time were members of the Communist Party.” (Thompson, 2007, p. 38). Nehrjas’ monologue, in contrast to the previous two, offers not a defence but a testimony made obvious by the gut wrenching death of her tortured son on the roof of the prison (p. 44) that makes the question of a North American audience’s navigation of the constructed cultural divide between “us” and “the Other” irrelevant. A mother’s grief at the death of her child is the ultimate testimony which transcends intercultural confusion. While we see Lynndie’s vibrant health and obvious pregnancy and can feel little regret for her, we experience David’s dying as sacrificial, all the while we listen to Nehrjas’ posthumous testimony as a tribute to the beautiful life she has already irrevocably lost. Each character invites a specific response from the audience. The Soldier, wants us to understand that she was not responsible for her actions; Dr. David Kelly wants us to accept his apology for his inaction and allow him, while dying, to stand as an effigy for the west’s suppression of truth; Nehrjas wants us to accept her testimony so that we better understand what happens on the other side of our war machine. This is to say that Lynndie is asking us to forgive all of the low-level soldiers because they know not what they do; David appeals in his plea to the middle-class propensity for inaction in exchange for personal security; while Nehrjas draws on our humanity and what binds us together beyond culture, race and ideology. By performing a first-person “story” in the public sphere of theatre, these three testimonies imply that it is up to the spectator to decide what constitutes a credible witness. Witnessing is no longer a healing process that “gives shape to the complex psychological, historical, and cultural processes of recovery from the collective traumas of genocide, war and oppression” as Karen Malpede contended (1996, p. 272), it becomes a process of constructing and deconstructing meaning.

From Testimony to Testament: Scorched

If Judith Thompson’s play explores the tension between witnessing, testimony and credibility and the impossibility of reconstructing the totality of truth,

Lebanese-Canadian playwright Wajdi Mouawad's play, *Scorched*, offers a different view on how theatre relates rhetorically to the indexical nature of evidence. *Scorched* was first written and performed in French (*Incendies*) at the Montréal Théâtre de Quat'Sous in 2003. The play tells the story of twin siblings, Jannaane and Sarwane (also referred to in the play as Janine and Simon), who embark on a journey of self-discovery to find the father they thought was dead and the brother they did not know existed. This journey is commanded in the will of their mother and catalyzed by the executor, notary public Alphonse Lebel, who assists them in getting it done. The play's structure is fractured, leaping back and forward in time and space between the present of the deceased mother's testament, her past in a Middle-Eastern country torn by civil war, and the future of her children's journey to that land in search of their unknown brother. As a further narrative complication, events in one era are sometimes acted out and sometimes recounted as memory. The audience is also asked to contend with and take responsibility over the visual imagining of the play: it is common for one scene to take place in an office while the next is in a village in the Middle-East, indicating that the sets can only be evocative at best.

In Mouawad's dramatic world, the nightmarish reality of a war-torn country often lends itself to grotesque theatrical absurdity à la Alfred Jarry or Jean Genet. [*Scorched* demonstrates] the survivors' need to bear witness to the historical trauma of Lebanon and to the desire to reaffirm human needs and life. (Moss, 1996, online)

Mouawad also avoids the risk that the audience may create symbolic heroes out of his characters by endowing them with shifting transformations. It is difficult to imagine that most audience members could find a representative group with which to associate any of the characters in the play or to identify with one or the other based on their values and ethical reflection. Universally, behind the play "with its shocking violence and cruelty, lies a dramatic question as old as the *Oresteia* – How does one break out of an ongoing cycle of almost unimaginable cruelty and revenge?" (Carlson, 2002, p. 47). The specificity of character and fractured narrative takes a toll on memory and witnessing, as we are invited to go along the shifting landscape while keeping track of characters that are refracted into past present and future incarnations.

Such a theatre which focuses on effect instead of dramatic narrative has the potential to question meaning making rather than meaning construction with its distanced analysis of circumstances. When dealing with war narrative, this can be particularly effective since direct re-telling runs the risk of re-traumatizing the 'other'. "Instead of inspiring dread, fear, horror, and pity leading to catharsis, these plays re-enact violence, memorialize the victims, and perform mourning work in order to renew our shattered faith in humanity" (Moss, 1996, online).

For several years before her death, the character of Nawal also performs mourning by refusing to speak, as we are told she took a vow of silence for reasons that will be revealed later in the play. As the dramatic action progresses, the spectator learns that Nawal's self-imposed silence stems from a realization that she had during an international tribunal against perpetrators of war crimes during the Lebanese Civil War, a revelation that she kept secret until her death. As executioner of her will, Lebel provides her twins with two letters, one addressed to their father and the other to their unknown brother, both of whom the twins have never met. Jeanne and Simon are asked to travel to their mother's native Lebanon to return these letters to their father and their brother, respectively, and while both of the twins are hesitant to leave, Jeanne is the first to seek out her mother's past. Upon arriving in Lebanon, Jeanne begins to re-compose traces of Nawal's past: namely that she became pregnant with her first son, Nihad, as a teenager, and was forced by her family to abandon him, and that she later fled from her home in search of her son, only to become involved in an unidentified rebel movement during the years of the Civil War, in which she was eventually captured by opposition forces and repeatedly raped in a prison camp by the notorious Abou Tarek, who fathered the twins Jeanne and Simon. Appearing as a ghost on stage, Nawal tells her son Simon, who stayed behind when his sister left for Lebanon that she needs his hands to break the silence of her past years.

Concise in his use of flashbacks, Mouawad structured the narrative around temporal disruptions through the use of overlapping dialogues and revolving scenes. In one scene, Notary Alphonse Lebel, the executor of Nawal's will, is trying to relay information to the daughter, Janine, pertaining to how her mother met her father, after she has left his office, while the next scene which references that information being told, overlaps the current scene in cross dialogue.

ALPHONSE LEBEL. Janine!

NAWAL. (*calling*) Wahab!

ALPHONSE LEBEL. Janine! Janine!

ALPHONSE LEBEL comes back into the office, takes out his cell phone and dials a number.

NAWAL. (*calling*) Wahab!

WAHAB. (*in the distance*) Nawal!

NAWAL. (*calling*) Wahab!

WAHAB. (*in the distance*) Nawal!

ALPHONSE LEBEL. Hello, Janine? It's Notary Lebel. I just thought of something.

NAWAL. (*calling*) Wahab!

WAHAB. (*in the distance*) Nawal!

ALPHONSE LEBEL. Your mother met your father when she was very young.

NAWAL. (*calling*) Wahab!

ALPHONSE LEBEL. I just wanted to tell you, I don't know if you knew that.

WAHAB. (*in the distance*) Nawal! (p.15)

As the transitions continue throughout, they become more violent and abrasive. *Scorched's* character list includes Nawal at three distinct stages of her life: age fourteen to nineteen; age forty to forty-five; and age sixty to sixty-five. As Janine and Simon uncover the truth behind their mother's life, the revelations are enacted by ghosts on stage. Initially, these sequences are separate from scenes in the present; however at the end of the play, a confrontation of all the milestones in Nawal's life collide. This is after Nihad gives his final testimony at the his trial for crimes against humanity and Nawal realizes she has found her son who is then revealed as being her torturer and father of the twins. The stage directions read as follows:

NAWAL (15) gives birth to NIHAD.

NAWAL (45) gives birth to JANINE and SIMON.

NAWAL (60) recognises her son.

JANINE, SIMON and NIHAD are all together. (p. 78)

The analysis of the narratives, spatiality and temporality lead to the intersection of evidence and the temporal distortions of ghosting. Nawal is epitomized by her

motherhood, as from her introduction she is dedicated to her unborn child. This is supplemented by the collision of her milestones as her life is associated mainly with the birthing of her children. Janine, a mathematics professor, is forever inscribed with the rape and victimization of her mother, while Nawal learned to read and write as a way to resist the condemnation of her gender, as is evident in the words that Nazira, Nawal's grandmother, speaks on her deathbed to Nawal in one of the many flashbacks: "NAZIRA. Learn to read, learn to write, learn to count, learn to speak. Learn. It's your only hope if you don't want to turn out like us." (p. 22). The 'us' in this statement can mean her entire village, however the continuous circle of hate and despair that passes on from mother to daughter can take precedence, as in a previous scene, Nawal's mother makes her choose between her child and her family. Nawal also infers this sentiment in her final letter to the twins as she tells Janine to stop the thread of anger.

NAWAL. The women in our family are trapped in anger.

I was angry with my mother

Just as you are angry with me

And just as my mother was angry with her mother.

We have to break the thread. (p. 82)

Although there is undeniable and justifiable loathing against Nihad, the Oedipal rapist father/brother, the anger in the narrative is directed predominately toward women, alluding to the gendered nature of trauma and violence. Yet the physicality of wounds experienced by the protagonists as women represents only one portion of their trauma testimony. At the end of the play, Nihad's televised testimony where he is judged as a perpetrator of crimes against humanity stands in stark contrast to Nawal's will and testament. While Nihad does not deny that he is a monster who has raped and killed extensively, he stands in for Hannah Arendt's "banality of evil" or the fact that anyone could become the incarnation of evil given the right circumstances.

Palace of the End and *Scorched* not only try to establish what happened in the past through the testimony of the witness, but attempt to elucidate the credibility of the witness by focusing instead on containing the uncertainty of memory. But unlike Brechtian historical drama or verbatim/docudramas that evoke a presentation of facts external to the individual, witnessing is primarily a performative act shadowing the complexity of living and narrating. Karen

Malpede (1996) puts it in these words: "A theatre of witness increases the individual's and the society's capacity to bear witness. By putting the witnessing action and its crises before us, alive in time and in space, the theatre of witness provides its audience with the knowledge, the courage, the time, and the community in which to contemplate and affirm its engagement in actual, private and public acts of witness" (p. 277). This theatre operates as an ethical space that directly engages the relationship between lives lived and of storied accounts, relations that deeply bind "one" to another without collapsing the "I" or the "Other" into a totalizing "we". It reflects perfectly what Malpede (1996) claims about pre- and post-traumatic life:

In theatre of witness, a dramatic action takes form which reconnects self to deeper, previously hidden layers of self; connects self to the other; and provides a renewed connection to the social world. This happens through a series of activities that allow for hearing, remembering, memorializing, sharing, teaching, philosophizing, confronting, comforting, revealing, grieving, and feeling a continuum between one's pre- and post-traumatic life. (p. 276)

There lies the power of theatre that turns the audience from witness to the testimony, to witness to the witnessing itself, or the act of being present to one another and accountable to actions that often elide ethical responsibility. (Malpede, 1996, p. 275).

From Testament to Tribute: Shoot an Iraqi and "...and Counting"

New York based Iraqi-American performance artist Wafaa Bilal takes this accountability of the witness to the next level. While dramatic texts dealing with trauma narratives operate on the assumption that there is an epistemological tension between testament and testimony, between telling and listening, performance art on the other hand reveals the tension between telling and showing. As we relate to the played text metaphorically and metonymically, the performance pieces place us in the middle of the action, presenting not a narrative but a tribute to the body as the primary site of trauma, witnessing and retelling, pointing to an ontology instead of a semiotics of witnessing.

Bilal's performance piece, *Shoot an Iraqi* (2007), tells the story in a different context than the strictly linguistic or theatrical. As an original experiment of its kind, the piece was based on the artist's living for one month in a Chicago gallery with a paintball gun aimed at him at all time that allows people the world over to shoot at him with an internet controlled gun and a webcam. The performance had a sub-title: "Domestic Tension"; subsequently a book was published under the title "Shoot an Iraqi" (City Lights, 2008) that documented the gallery living experiment. The idea originated in an article Bilal read in the newspaper about a young soldier who goes to work every day in Colorado and whose job is to control missiles and drones that remotely shoot at Iraqis. It is reported that after twelve days in the gallery, Bilal was shot at over 40,000 times. By the end of the experiment, over 60,000 people from over 130 countries had fired their internet gun at him, while some even hacked the paintball gun to fire automatically.

A similar and related project by Bilal entitled "*...and Counting*" was a live tattooing session set up at the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts Gallery (NY 2010). Bilal had 105,000 dots tattooed on his back representing 100,000 Iraqi deaths according to the official death toll, and 5000 American deaths. The green dots representing the Iraqi death toll were only visible under ultraviolet light while the Americans deaths were represented by red ink dots. During the performance different people from all walks of life read the names of the dead. These experiments point to the tensions representing violence which cannot be defined through the external experience of vision, but through an understanding of the instability of the relationship between internal and external forces, history and memory, trauma and survival. This "instability" which is at the heart of performance art asserts the variability of meaning, foregrounds performance as processual, collapsing the boundary between oral and visual, seeing and listening, suffering and witnessing. *Shoot an Iraqi* tells us that history is more than text (written or photographic), more than words (spoken or heard), it is embodied and corporeal, and it is only through an exploration of the gap between the body and the text, writing and affect, pain and healing, that we can tell the story of survival.

The question then arises: does trauma have to be provable in the realm of the real, or inscribed in the body for it to be representable? It is important here to point

out that what is real, what is plausible, what is provable, and what is reproducible, is not necessarily representable. Truth is not inherent to the representation, but the object representing makes a claim that it is true. When photo-journalism publishes a picture of a kidnapped American soldier in Iraq, we have to suspend our disbelief in the face of the possible tragedy and consent that that picture is true, authentic and real (even though some may seek to debunk the “truth claims” of the event that the picture claims to be an evidence of). When we are asked to witness the painful tattooing of the artist in order to make a statement on the embodied nature of suffering, we assume that there is a general cultural context in which this shared knowledge is recognizable.

However, the truths claims of trauma representations not only operate in a different semantic and symbolic fashion, but also inhabit and engage a different sense of temporality. Bilal’s “... And Counting” points to the fact that trauma is ongoing and that as witnesses all we can do is pay tribute to the fallen, in order to memorialize their absence in our physical presence which aims to disrupt official narratives of heroism. Jay Winter in *Remembering War* (2006) suggests that the “traumatic memory” of individuals who experience war and trauma creates a disruption of the heroic narrative structures of war. For Winter (2006), these memories challenge conventional interpretations of meaning where “traumatic time,” which is created by engaging in the experience and effects of war trauma, is circular or fixed rather than linear (p. 75). Therefore, the plays and performances analyzed in the light of this article create a drama situated between the past and the future, between what was and what could’ve been. Whitehead (2004) in turn calls this an implicit repositioning of “the relation between language and the world, so that the text shifts from a reflective mode – based on a position of self-awareness and self-understanding – to a performative act, in which the text becomes imbricated in our attempts to receive and understand the world around us” (p. 13).

In this paper we have argued that the “memorialist turn” in theatre is a process of double disavowal that problematizes the witnessing of trauma and the trauma of witnessing, focusing on how the individual tries to remember or reconstruct what happened in the realm of the “real”, while escaping into the fantastical when the demands of bearing witness become severe. Thus, each of these plays and

performances engages in a different way with trauma while respecting its unspeakability and the component of silence that overshadows language. By approaching the unspeakable performatively, theatre and performance afford us a space where the voice of the witness and the survivor can be heard and can articulate meaning. Addressing the modalities of perception of the audience bearing witness to witnessing, this article looked at theatre and performance, not as sites of construction of trauma that an audience can consume, but as a space of estrangement where the witnessing to witnessing becomes an ethical responsibility. Revealing an exchange that is both realist and anti-realist, artistic representation and reproduction of actuality, spectacle and mimesis, this paper argued in favour of apprehending performance as the fundamental relationship between the translocal forms of memory and the conditions of possibility of an aesthetic openness toward otherness.

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