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Bodies in Focus: Photography and Performativity in Post-Colonial Theatre

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Preamble: photography and imperialism

Within a few decades after 1839, the year in which the Frenchman, Daguerre, announced the mechanics of the photographic process, photography had become firmly implicated in the discursive field of imperialism. If the advent of photography (as an apparently objective science) offered unprecedented opportunities to construct and disseminate persuasively “real” representations of Otherness, it also supplied a technology of surveillance with exemplary scope. Photographic images of alterity, whether they exoticised or demonised their subjects, secured the discursive capture of non-European cultures within an epistemological paradigm that transfixed difference, rendering it inert, passive, and powerless in a pictorial form which was invested with considerable “truth value”. This difference, often enhanced by skilful framing and composition, activated Western fantasies of power while simultaneously functioning to patrol symbolic boundaries between self and Other. In the case of legislated apartheid societies such as formerly found in South Africa, photographic surveillance easily shifted from a primarily discursive practice to an actual mechanism of control with the institutionalisation of the photo-ID passbook which dictated where people categorised as “black” or “coloured” could live, work, and socialise. *Siswe Bansi is Dead* (1972),¹ devised by Athol Fugard, John Kani, and Winston Ntshona, is perhaps the best known example of an anti-apartheid text that dramatises photography’s representational power in order to protest against surveillance systems that effectively reduced human beings to their celluloid images.

The instrumentality of the photographic medium derived from both its semiotic qualities and its comfortable fit within a scopic regime that intertwined looking, seeing and knowing. Nineteenth-century positivist assumptions that the visual *was* empirical lent weight to the scientific value of photography's apparent duplication of the "seen". Models which conflated observation with knowledge, and which failed to consider the psychological, political, and cultural specificities of perception, tended to forward notions of a "transhistorical universality of visual experience" (Hutcheon 122) which still informs a number of social sciences, if not in theory, then certainly in actual practice. As Chris Jenks points out, such models ensure that "visual symbolism, the primary form of symbolism within [Western] culture, is dispossessed of its iconographic, or metaphoric, role and routinely understood as 'correspondence'" (14). It is then but a simple step to assume the innocence of "dissociative" seeing, a perspective which the camera reinforces via its physical mechanics as a tool which supposedly records (rather than constructs) the real.

Photography's claim to truthful representation rests on its combination of two semiotic codes which work in tandem to produce that sense of the photograph as a miniaturisation of the real. Rodrigue Villeneuve argues that the photographic image is firstly an indexical sign; it points to something's prior existence, implying a temporal link to that object (32). At the same time, a photograph is also an iconic sign: an "analogical materialisation of the index" (Villeneuve 33) or, put in simple terms, a visual likeness of the thing to which the index refers. This double relationship between the photographic sign and the object photographed, combined with the medium's inherently mechanical mode of image reproduction, produces what Don Slater terms "trivial realism": the "meticulous, objective and impersonal representation of the surface attributes of matter" (222). Through its trivial realism, photography creates the illusion of such exact correspondence between the signifier and the signified that it appears to be the perfect instance of Barthes's "message

without a code". The "sense of the photograph as not only representationally accurate but ontologically connected with the world allows it to be treated as a piece of the world, then as a substitute for it" (Slater 33). This process of conceptual substitution, along with the reproducibility of the photograph, gives the medium particular power as an imperialist discourse. Whether or not such power has always been used intentionally, it has had the effect of commodifying colonised peoples/cultures to an extent rarely possible in other forms of visual (or verbal) art.

Framing photographs in/through dramatic narratives

In literature and the creative arts, one response to photo-imperialism has been to document the process in ways that reveal and critique the operations of power often exercised in the "simple" act of taking a photograph. In other words, the photograph is contextualised or framed so that the interactions between the photographer and his/her subject come into focus, while the image, if it is presented at all, is revealed as the artefact of a particularised historical relationship. Two contemporary Australian plays amply illustrate this model, each in isolated but visually resonant scenes which become informing metaphors for their respective texts. Louis Nowra's *The Golden Age* (1985), about the discovery of a tribe of convict-descended forest people who return to "civilised" society only to be institutionalised because of their non-conventional behaviour, features the photographic moment as form of violation, even disembodiment. Viewed by polite society as grotesque (if exotic) misfits, the forest people are positioned as objects of an imperial gaze that seeks to reform the alter-bodies of its subjects. Photography is but one of the many forms of corporeal discipline operating in the play, but no others are staged so graphically. The imperialist camera focuses on Mac, a young tribesman whose genetic deficiencies have been partly responsible for the group's inability to reproduce. In the asylum, Mac easily refuses a manual skills exercise and other institutional procedures

designed to reform his unruly behaviour/body, but he cannot escape Dr Simon's obsessive and voyeuristic interest in photographing his deformed genitals. Even before he castrates himself in protest, the camera's eye severs and segments his body, producing an anatomised figure whose difference is framed and contained in the snapshot image. In a short scene which pictures Mac's self-mutilated body, Dr Simon repeats this objectification quite overtly as she focuses her camera on his bloodied crotch and then rearranges the corpse with her foot until she has composed the "perfect" photo. When she is later criticised for her callous actions, her response that "photographs are a legitimate record of a patient's condition" (59) serves to highlight the ways in which the documentation of the medicalised body can function as a covert disciplinary regime. Given that the play's overall narrative metaphorically aligns the forest people with indigenous Australians, this brief photographic sequence also alludes to the enforced sterilisation of Aboriginal youths (mainly women) that had been one form of population control before full constitutional rights were extended to Aborigines in the late sixties.²

Hilary Bell's *Fortune* (1993) stages the photographic capture of another kind of "freak", the eleven year-old Chinese giant, Chang, who is paraded around the goldfields of small-town Australia in the 1850s. This play introduces the Other as an exoticised commodity in an opening scene which shows how a cruel profiteer sells the boy's appearance for souvenir snapshots. The actual mechanics of the portrait session—the photographer's incessant fussing about his subjects' appearances, the customer's reluctance to approach Chang for her portrait, and Chang's languid, mocking pose—reveal the constructedness of the photographic image [see figures 1-2]. While the imperialist habit of voyeuristic looking is here temporarily re-enacted, it is clear from Chang's bored compliance with the whole procedure that he exerts a certain recalcitrance as object of the imperial gaze; in fact, his project soon becomes to evade that gaze and assert full subjectivity within a multicultural community. The representation of colonial society in the portraiture sequence, and its

specific depiction of two adults exploiting a child, vividly illustrate Susan Sontag's point that the camera becomes a "kind of passport" which annihilates moral responsibility (41).

These brief examples demonstrate how the photographic process is contextualised by visual and/or verbal narratives designed to emphasise the limits of the camera's vision. Discursively, both plays set up their snapshot images so as to rupture the framing and focusing mechanisms which facilitate photo-imperialism, and they also present well-developed characters whose ability to draw empathy mitigates their Otherness. Such strategies, while undeniably effective, are nonetheless fairly conventional methods of "literary" historicisation, though they may be differently inflected by stage representation. What is also operative in the scenes discussed is a certain, theatre-specific—and potentially radical—*performativity* that I now want to explore at length in reference to several other plays which deploy more extensively the metaphor and/or the mode of this kind of self-critical photography.

Contact Zones:³ Photography and Performativity

In her analysis of postmodernism's impact on photography, Linda Hutcheon forwards an exciting model with which to examine the effects of combining different semiotic forms within the one artistic work. This model sees "fringe interference"—"what happens when the aesthetic equivalent of different wave forms encounter each other" (118)—as the defining feature of photo-graphy (literally *photo* plus *graphic* text), a meta-discursive form of photographic art that has emerged over the last two to three decades. Fringe interference produces tension and indeterminacy because the different conventions installed subvert and alter each other in new ways, upsetting "learned notions of the relations between text/image, non-art/art, theory/practice" (Hutcheon 19). Art characterised by fringe interference offers an ironic double vision which in turn unsettles the viewing position normally implied by either constituent form. This double vision, Hutcheon argues, also

highlights photography's "investment in looking", be it "narcissistic identification or voyeuristic surveillance" (135-36). The ideological import of fringe interference thus rests on its refusal to totalise, to inhibit disruption and contestation.

Hutcheon's model provokes a re-examination of theatre as an art form which has always provided an arena for the potential interference between different semiotic systems, although the dominant paradigm (of conventional theatre at least) demands that such systems be coded to fit together seamlessly. The text/image "border tensions" that Hutcheon sees fundamental to the art forms she examines might, for instance, find an appropriate analogue in Brechtian theatre's interest in disjunction and contradiction. For the purposes of this discussion, however, I want to restrict my focus to interactions between photography and performance as two forms of visual spectacle with particular possibilities for fringe interference.

One of the primary distinctions between photography and performance is of course that the first presents its subject to the viewer as an inert, mechanically-reproduced image, while the second displays a live body, albeit still a coded representation of something/one else. When the same subject is simultaneously photographed *and* staged, as in the plays examined here, the performance event sets up the conditions for fringe interference, with all the potential subversiveness that Hutcheon's model claims. Because a photograph invokes the absence of the subject whereas performance tends to insist upon its presence,⁴ performativity confers a certain authority, but this is by no means unambivalent or stable. Absence "contaminates" presence and vice versa until the ontological integrity of representation itself is called into question. Other differences are also brought into play (often in both senses of the word): the photograph's fixed frame expands and ruptures as it interacts with the movable frame of the performed image, which, in turn, contracts and intensifies in response to the interference of photographic overcoding. Different kinds of focusing and image segmentation similarly complicate the visual codes of the signifying

subject, while the implied viewing position vacillates between photography's detached, voyeuristic spectatorship and the interactive *specularity* made possible when the object of the gaze can actually look back. In this respect, theatre provides an arena for extending Hutcheon's notion of visual irony to include not only a self-reflexive take on the act of representation, but also an awareness of the ways in which the performer's return look engages with, and even deflects, the scopophilia that visual art forms tend to provoke.

The kind of fringe interference outlined above is built into the performative structures of Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* (1959), though critics have generally overlooked this level of counter-discursivity to focus instead on the play's narrative treatment of photography as an instance of, and metaphor for, imperialism. Set in pre-independent Nigeria, Soyinka's text dramatises a deceptively simple tale about a village belle, Sidi, whose feature appearance in a glossy magazine precipitates changes to her community's social hierarchy and to her own sense of identity. Initially, the magazine photographs have the effect of abstracting and commodifying Sidi's beauty; they package her body as a colonisable object and present it to "a gaze originating elsewhere" (Worthen 200). At the narrative level, the play's political project turns on Sidi's recognition that photography deals in exploitable images, and on her eventual rejection of those images when she gives the magazine to Lakunle in lieu of her hand (body) in marriage. While it might come as a surprise to some viewers that Sidi decides to spurn the Westernised schoolmaster in favour of the wiry old Bale, Baroka, this is actually prefigured early in the play through an extended mime sequence which depicts the photographer's arrival in the village. The mime is initiated by Sidi as a ritualised communal dance in which Lakunle is forced to play the part of the stranger with the "one-eyed box". Punctuated by an elaborate soundscape and various ad-hoc improvisations, the mime re-enacts, at great length, the details of the photographer's visit: his arrival in a broken-down car; his futile efforts to fix it; his spectacularly clumsy fall into the river; his failure to sneak photographs of the village

women at their bath; and his premature exit from the community feast, sick from the effects of the local wine.

This extended satirical mime, a metatheatrical device featured in a number of Soyinka's later texts, works to destabilise the power of photographic representation in a number of ways. Most obviously, the parodic performance undermines the camera's agency and holds the photographer up to ridicule. The whole sequence exemplifies Homi Bhabha's notion of mimicry as "at once a mode of appropriation and resistance" that reveals the ambivalence of colonial discourse and turns the "insignia of its authority"—in this case, the camera—into "a mask, a mockery" (1985, 103). In terms of my arguments about the ideological effects of fringe interference, the mime's overt satire is actually less important than its multi-layered performativity. Like the Australian plays discussed earlier, *The Lion and the Jewel* stages the photographic moment as an instance of semiotic ambiguity, but in this case, the viewer is compelled to decode a re-enactment of a prior representation of a fictive "real". Neither the photographer nor his camera is ever staged except as re-interpreted by the villagers in their performance. As a result, the mime produces only an imaginary (performed) photograph whose image of the subject is contaminated by multiple refractions. This is neatly illustrated when Sidi (the mime artist) plays herself (the village belle) playing the model posed not only for Lakunle in his role as photographer, but also for the off-stage audience. Moreover, by staging the repeatability of the snapshot image only to code this process as a repetition with difference, the communal mime posits the possibility of changing photo-imperialism's axiomatic mode of address. Such sequences demonstrate that the subversive effects of post-colonial mimicry⁵ can be intensified by performance.

If Soyinka's text shows how the photographic image lends itself to reappropriation through metatheatre, Michael Gurr's *Sex Diary of an Infidel* (1992) illustrates the ways in which internal fissures in photography's characteristic modes of representation make the

medium vulnerable to performative interference. This play's ostensible subject is the sex trade between Australia and the Philippines, but while Gurr is concerned with the specificities of this particular "exchange," he also uses it as a metaphor for the congress between Western and Third World nations. By showing how orientalist discourses facilitate an economy of desire which captures and contains difference, the play aims to deconstruct Western visions of "exotic" Asian peoples and, perhaps more crucially, the kinds of looking relations—imperial and patriarchal—that inform and enable this vision. Like Soyinka, Gurr tackles his subject through a self-conscious inquiry into representational modes and the forms of spectatorship they enhance or disrupt. His attempt to expose the scopophilic pleasures of tourism/voyeurism finds apt expression in a thematic and structural focus on photographic tropes.

While critical of a brand of commerce which exchanges money for bodies, *Sex Diary of an Infidel*'s point of attack is actually the symbolic trade in body images that is perpetuated by media genres such as photojournalism. The play's focus on a "words and pictures" documentary team in the figures of the journalist, Jean, and her photographer, Martin, is designed to show that the media's facts are no more than fictions and that the camera does indeed lie. While Jean and Martin are supposedly on a quest to expose the sex trade, it soon becomes clear that the photograph's "rendering of reality must always hide more than it discloses" (Sontag 23). Photography's pretence of disinterest masks an even more insidious kind of partiality: that which operates to preserve the status quo. As Sontag discerns, to take a picture is not passive observation but active participation which affirms "complicity with whatever makes the subject interesting, worth photographing" (12). Moreover, the photograph multiplies to potential infinity the event it captures, "mechanically repeat[ing] what could never be repeated existentially" (Barthes 1981, 4). The resultant reified vision is evident in Martin's tendency to construct people/events as re(pro)ducible images. His lack of real interest in the colonised subject's resistance to

imperialism is manifest by the fact that he is only too happy to snap dozens of shots to illustrate the sex-tour article but is paralysed to record a revolutionary protest against the continued operation of American military bases in the Philippines. Ultimately, as his portrait exhibition at the end of the play suggests, Martin's photographs function less as an *exposé*—a call for some kind of public intervention—than as an exhibit—a public display of *non-intervention*.

Gurr's thematising of what Sontag calls the "insatiability of the photographic eye" (3) depicts the voyeur's gaze as the West's characteristic look towards the Philippines and, by implication, towards other parts of Asia. On one level, the camera serves as a substitute phallus mobilised in an attempt to exercise libidinal power over the racial/sexual Other. While the play's semiotics bring the codes of photography into acute visibility so that we are always aware of how the camera positions the Other as the "purloined object of [its] look" (Freedman 71), Gurr is equally concerned to subvert that look. This is evident when Toni, the transsexual prostitute, adopts parodically languid B-grade movie poses, and, in a different way, when Martin's autoerotic self-portraiture turns the photographic/pornographic eye back on itself. The rhetoric of "the pose", as a particular form of response to photo-imperialism, is charged with theatricality.⁶ In *Sex Diary*, as in *Fortune*, the Asian Other performs for the camera, adopting the expected role/pose so as to beguile the (Western) viewer without ever becoming reduced to the stereotypical images that the snapshot peddles. Only hints of such performativity remain in these production photos [figures 2-3] of Toni and Chang posed for their respective portraits, but they illustrate (albeit as an ironic example of my paper's own levels of fringe interference) how the pose has been coded in recent performances. *Sex Diary of an Infidel* enacts a further subversion of imperial looking relations through Jean's final transformation from journalist to larger-than-life "celluloid" image: frozen in a photo pose,⁷ she is repositioned as an object of scopic desire. In terms of Gurr's overall project to dismantle the "words-

and-pictures” construction of Asia depicted through the media, Jean’s discursive⁸ capture is a decisive victory for the post-colonial subject.

The play’s critique of voyeurism as a mode of power/knowledge is perhaps nowhere so effective as in its form which is designed to dislodge the photographic referent from its moorings and so disrupt the gaze that has “sutured [the audience] into identification with the camera” (Freedman 67). Structurally, *Sex Diary of an Infidel* draws on the conventions of both photography and film, foregrounding the spectatorial paradigms to be disrupted as the action unfolds in a series of “snapshot” scenes—short, sharp, and imagistic—interspersed with cinematic sequences in which scene segues into scene. While the logic of the camera collocates disparate images into a dramatic album/video, its centripetal energies are balanced in a number of ways. Firstly, because photography’s processes are enacted within the viewer’s larger field of vision, s/he remains cognisant of the gap between what is being “shot” and what remains outside the frame. Secondly, Gurr’s dramaturgy resists the hermetic closure of the camera’s focus-image since all of the characters remain on stage throughout the play even though most scenes directly involve only one or two [figures 4-5]. Their insistent and extraneous presence is rarely contiguous with fictionalised space and action, hence it dissolves the photographic frame, substituting instead a metatheatrical one which focuses not merely on the framed subject but more precisely on the interplay between that subject and the acts of framing and staging it—or, in other words, on theatricality itself (see Freedman 51-52).

Following Barbara Freedman’s analysis of the crucial differences between theatre and film, the onstage audience can be seen as part of a critical metalanguage which severs perceptual alignment from the seeing eye of the camera, disperses the possibilities for identification, and splits our gaze to show it “always already in motion” (68). At the same time, the assertive visibility of the fictional audience further inhibits the voyeur’s look because it dramatises the impossibility of seeing without being seen. Extending this idea is

a third form of interaction between the performative and photographic codes, the staging of a number of snapshot images or freezes that paradoxically emphasise the embodied presence of the character, and beyond that, of the performer. Most notable is Martin's exhibition, which features live actors in photographic poses to produce somewhat unnerving "portraits" that return the observer's look. In performance terms, the exhibition goes beyond mere spectacle to stage a "fractured reciprocity" of the gaze which refuses the closure of imperial looking relations.

Of the texts chosen to illustrate my paper's discussion of fringe interference, Guillermo Verdecchia's *Fronteras Americanas* (1993) is the most direct in addressing its audience's complicity in constructing the Other as an eroticised object of the Western gaze.

Addressed primarily to a white, Anglophone audience, this Argentinian-Canadian play is partly set up as an ironic pseudo-documentary on how to "read" and critique a repertoire of media images that perpetuate notions of racial and cultural marginality, particularly in reference to "Latino" and "Hispanic" groups. A multi-media text par excellence, *Fronteras* is deliberately designed to disperse stereotypes and multiply sites of meaning. Its various sign-systems—including dialogue, projected words and images, video clips, a complex musical score, and many self-referential intertexts—constitute a particularly dense theatrical field in which the represented culture's dominant signifying codes are continually contaminated, refracted, and revised. Photography informs a number of discourses within this field and is again a key target for strategic reform. But whereas Soyinka and Gurr *re-present* the photograph as a performed image (constituted by actors through mime, movement, gesture, posture etc.), Verdecchia stages the photograph itself while insisting, through performative interventions, that it does not, and cannot, represent its subject in any natural, innocent way.

The verbal text of *Fronteras* is enacted as a "dialogic monologue"⁹ played by a single actor who presents the stories and actions of two separate characters: a self-styled macho

comic called Wideload, and a “straight guy”, Verdecchia, who is loosely based on the playwright himself. The role of commentator for the documentary sections generally falls to Wideload, creating an immediate sense of visual dissonance since he himself masquerades as a larger-than-life media icon composed of various popular culture stereotypes including Frito Bandito and Speedy Gonzales. The effect of this strategy is that the mediated image seems to comment on itself, which in turn provokes the audience to assume a critical stance even before Wideload begins his ironic contextualisations of the photographs/films shown. Wideload’s self-presentation as stereotype, which can be seen as another manifestation of the “pose”, also functions to unsettle his coded Otherness since, at the performative level, his assertive corporeality always exceeds the image he invokes. This kind of excess fits with Bhabha’s notion of the productive instability of the colonial stereotype, which anxiously repeats the dominant culture’s images of the Other precisely because they can never be proven.¹⁰

There are three prominent instances of the documentary in Verdecchia’s play, all of them styled as lessons in media literacy. The interrogation of this form of knowledge about other cultures is particularly relevant to a post-colonial agenda because, as Marsha Bryant notes, “familiarity with the documentary often prevents us from interrogating the representational inequalities that position one class as mute and another as articulate, one class before the camera and one behind it” (78). The play’s first documentary, titled “An Idiosyncratic History of America”, consists of a commentated slide show which features, among other eclectic choices, photos of Peter Rabbit, Joan of Arc, a giant sea bass, and Samuel Beckett, all sequenced with more conventional portraits of American history in the figures of Christopher Columbus, Ernest Hemingway, and Richard Nixon. Here, photography is made to *perform* a narrative history but clearly one which represents the biases of the slide show’s curator. The power of this scene to dismantle categories of

historical privilege depends as much on the juxtapositioning of disparate images as on Wideload's wry metacommentary.

In the second staged lesson, Wideload instructs the audience in ways of "reading" the stereotype of the Latin Lover. This section begins with a projected slide of Antonio Banderas, who, Wideload reminds us, is the latest media reincarnation of a somewhat tired trope. The next slide, a photograph of *Elle* magazine, locates the Latin Lover trope in the texts of popular culture, after which the show continues with a series of magazine shots depicting other Latin sex symbols, both male and female. Wideload introduces each of the photographs, often historicising them in terms of both the subject's life and the particular signifiers embedded in his or her portrait. This verbal caption for the slide of Carmen Miranda sets the general tone:

She was Brazilian. Poor Carmen, smiling, sexy even with all those goddamned bananas on her head—do you know she ended up unemployable, blacklisted because a certain Senator named McCarthy found her obscene? (43)

Wideload's reference to the sex symbol's political fate acts as a direct intervention in the exoticising process which the photograph registers so clearly; yet, for me, the more potent point of fringe interference is embedded in the image itself in the form of the bananas which seem, on the one hand, entirely naturalised head gear within the discursive codes of the photograph, and, on the other, patently silly and downright uncomfortable, as Wideload insinuates. The potential of such detail to disturb or unsettle the viewer can be discussed in terms of Roland Barthes's idea of the *punctum*—a Latin word meaning "small puncture" or "sting", any "small point in space", and also "punctuation." The *punctum* is that element of a photograph that "pierces" or arrests the viewer because of its poignancy, its significance in place and time.¹¹ By locating the *punctum*, the reader accesses the "obtuse meaning" of the image, which, in Barthes's terms is "the epitome of counter-narrative; disseminated, reversible, trapped in its own temporality, it can establish (if followed) an altogether

different ‘script’ from the one of shots, sequences and syntagms” that conveys the obvious meaning (1986, 57).

The *punctum* is a difficult concept to theorise because it is highly subjective; but one could argue that Wideload deliberately identifies various *puncti* in an effort to help viewers develop more critical interpretive practices. In *Mirabella*’s centrefold portrait of Banderas, the *punctum* is located in the subject’s manners, as Wideload points out to the audience with an accusatory “you”: “Don’t you just want to fuck him? I do. I wonder though if it would be quite so disarming or charming if it was Fidel Castro wiping his mouth on the tablecloth?” (45) The third documentary sequence, presented as a silent video on Columbian drug cartels, operates in a similar vein, with Wideload editorialising about the significant detail that the “real” (American) commentator doesn’t see, or rather chooses to ignore.

Verdecchia’s “audition” scene also bears comment in terms of the interplay between performance and photography/film that is central to *Fronteras Americanas*’s engagement with imperialist modes of representation. For his audition, Verdecchia is required to perform to a video camera which records his efforts and simultaneously replays them to the audience on a monitor so that another instance of “double vision” is set up. Here, the performer appears both as flattened-out video image and full-bodied presence, creating the overall sense of a simulacra that endlessly refers to prior constructions of the subject. But the tension between the two modes of representation is always obvious since the video can never portray its subject exactly as the audience sees it. Moreover, Verdecchia stages regular interventions in the audition process by talking to the audience *off camera* to explain the procedures step by step. He also reveals the unwritten obligation to sell himself to the invisible casting director by professing his expertise in playing El Salvadorean refugees, Arab horse thieves, and fat Mexican hit-men. Thus the play draws our attention to the metatheatrical aspects of a discursive regime which always requires Verdecchia to

masquerade as a stereotype. In this instance, his audition for the part of Sharko has the added structural effect of suggesting a transition into the Wideload persona. Overall, such demonstrations of performative subjectivity ensure that neither Wideload nor Verdecchia can be ascribed an essentialised identity; instead, their role-playing and role-switching constructs subjects able to elude the imperial gaze and simultaneously expose the constructedness of the culturally marked Other.

My discussion of Hutcheon's model of fringe interference has attempted to locate this form of signification as a conscious, strategic, and highly effective intervention in the discursive field of imperialist representation. To the extent that to represent also implies to speak on behalf of some person or group (Bryant 78), the various plays' *interferences* in photographic modes of representation open up spaces from which colonised subjects might themselves speak. The performativity embedded in this recuperative project is potentially more complex than that which informs recent postmodern photography as a specific art form that cannot, by definition, present the photographed subject in the flesh. For critics accustomed to dealing with postmodern performance, performance art, and other media that inhabit the borders between embodied performance and (disembodied) photography, my arguments will not be new. However, in applying performance-based critical methodologies to plays more often read (and taught) in terms of their thematics, I hope to extend the available tools for post-colonial theatre analysis and, at the same time, to reappropriate the extraordinary power of photography for a deeply political—and fundamentally theatrical—project. If, as Hutcheon maintains, the camera seems to “reproduce so easily those grand narratives of [Western] culture” (123), I maintain that this is partly because photography has lost the ludic impulse that Daguerre, as a master of theatrical spectacle,¹² surely envisaged for his invention. To insist on the performativity of the photograph by putting it into contact with live performance itself is to imagine a space in which art might bring the

colonised body into focus as a defence against cultural imperialism rather than an instance of its practice.

¹Dates given after plays refer to the premiere performance. All page references are, however, to the published texts.

²I am referring here to the systematic sterilisation (usually by chemical injection and without consent) of Aboriginal girls/women in various communities in the 1950s and 1960s. There is evidence to suggest that settlers occasionally castrated Aboriginal men throughout the colonial period but such practice was not part of an official (if unwritten) policy.

³Marsha Bryant has adapted the term “contact zones” (from Mary Louise Pratt’s work) to describe the interactive space between photography and writing, a space in which “neither representational code effaces the other” (77).

⁴I don’t wish to suggest that performance is driven by a metaphysics of pure “presence”; rather, I would argue that it is the sense of “presence” that gives the medium its claim to one important level of reality—not the representational real (since the performer generally plays a role) but the phenomenological real of an event (the performance) which actually happens in real time and space.

⁵See Bhabha (1984, 126-27) for a detailed explanation of the ways in which mimicry enacts difference and disavowel.

⁶See Sayre (Chapter 1) for a general examination of the photographic “pose” as a form of rhetorical language.

⁷The published text suggests that an oversize photo of Jean is used, but all professional performances (Melbourne: Playbox, 1992; Playbox 1993 touring production; Brisbane: La Boite, 1995) have simulated this effect with the live actor in a freeze.

⁸I use the word “discursive” here in the sense of discourse as visual *and* verbal: Jean is captured visually in the photograph and turned into a kind of souvenir and she is also silenced in the process.

⁹See Harvey and Knowles’s discussion of the monodrama’s specific possibilities for dialogic (or multi-vocal) expression. Such dialogism could, of course, be read as another form of fringe interference.

¹⁰See Bhabha 1983, and also Ann Wilson (9-13) whose article on *Fronteras Americanas* makes extensive use of Bhabha’s theories.

¹¹See Barthes (1981, 26-27; 43-5). Bergan (523) seeks to extend Barthes’s ideas about the *punctum* for use in specifically theatrical contexts.

¹²A gifted draughtsman, Daguerre designed for the Paris Opera in the early 1800s, creating panoramas from which he eventually developed the diorama, a creation whose immense popularity turned on the fact that it stages the impossible: a scene which the viewer knows to be an illusion but which seems absolutely real.

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