

Transgressing Boundaries

Postmodern Performance and the Tourist Trap

Liz Tomlin

Recent research has seen a proliferation of academic interest in the role of the tourist. This work has been concerned not only with the economic and social consequences of tourism itself, but equally with the wide-ranging implications of its common currency as metaphor for postmodern cultural existence, as outlined in Heike Roms and Richard Gough's introduction to the "On Tourism" issue of *Performance Research*:

The notion of "culture as travel" has emerged alongside that of "culture as performance" to destabilize the fixed, and ethnocentric, categories of traditional theories on culture. And through the temporary and displaced, performing and travelling cultures of contemporary ethnography wanders the "tourist," playing the role of de-essentialized postmodern subjectivity, in the company of Benjamin's "flaneur," Kristeva's "stranger" and Deleuze's "nomad." (Roms and Gough 2001:vi-vii)

Yet despite the tourist metaphor being drawn on by much of postmodern performance and its subsequent analysis, there appears to have been few sustained attempts to apply the extensive debates surrounding the politics of tourism to the postmodern performance it so often infiltrates. By drawing on a particular performance structure utilized by various companies in recent years, I will address the politics of a postmodern theatre which, in seeking to both utilize and parody the tourist metaphor, is in danger of merely replicating the exploitative practices of postcolonial tourism.²

The traveling performances, framed as guided bus tours, that have constituted elements of recent theatrical events such as Forced Entertainment's *Nights in this City* (Sheffield 2000, Rotterdam 2001) and SHE SHE POP's *Schlammbeissers Reisen* (Giessen, 2001) were designed to place each spectator explicitly in the role of tourist. In each case the audience was collected by a coach framed as a scheduled tour bus, with the buses from Sheffield and Rotterdam departing from one stop only and the Giessen coach stopping on route, allowing audience members to come and go as they pleased. Although this debate



1. City Center, Sheffield was the first stop during *Forced Entertainment's* Nights in this City performance, 1995. (Photo by Robert Hardy)

focuses on the Sheffield run of *Nights in this City*, the questions raised by its particular context hold implications not only for the similarly structured events that took place in Rotterdam and Giessen, but for the wider postmodern practice that draws on the same tourist metaphor, if not the form itself.

The promotional material for *Nights in this City* described the piece as “a theatre performance with the whole city as its backdrop” and promised that it would “blur the line between the real and the theatrical.” The perceived “reality” of the streets of Sheffield, and, crucially, that of the people who populated them, was indeed to undergo significant transformation over the duration of the piece. “Seen from the windows of the bus, after all,” the promotional material continued, “everything looks like part of the action.” Indeed, both local reviews of the piece, after paying scant attention to the theatrically constructed elements of the event, concluded by praising the “un-rehearsed streets” (Sutherland 2000: 16) and the “people of Sheffield” who, for them, constituted the “stars of the show—two girls carrying an electric cooker across the Norfolk Park tram lines, a solitary drinker staring out of a pub window at his traveling audience” (Highfield 2000: 1).

In analyzing the theatrical form of such performance events I will address many of the more problematic assumptions made by the artists and audience involved. I will focus on the consequences of attempts to blur the line between the “real” and the “theatrical”; the political implications of the performative status imposed on the inhabitants of the city; and the power dynamic between watching and watched, authoring and authored. Such positions can be seen to shift over the course of such an event in relation to changes in the demographic location and the action/position of the coach in relation to the passers-by.

As the spectators were defined explicitly as tourists by the context of *Nights in this City*, the problematic question of “authenticity” was paramount to the performance event. Dean MacCannell argues that “the touristic way of getting

in with the natives is to enter into a quest for authentic experiences, perceptions and insights” (ž9ĕ :žňú) and it was the “native” Sheffield bus driver, named in the text as “Ray,” who acted as our first guide. Stopping on the brow of a hill looking down into the city center, Ray pointed out to us the place where he lived, the place where he worked, and the place where he got married žù years ago. Despite his fictional name, the driver was not, at this stage, posited within the framework of the fictional text. His evidently self-authored address to the audience appeared to constitute Forced Entertainment’s placing of the “real”: the “real” Sheffield, with “real” places, holding “real” memories of the “real” people who had lived there all their lives. The city below was posited as “Ray’s” Sheffield, defined by moments and locations special to him, an autobiographical map which we were invited to share, a Sheffield that highlighted the power of perspective and instilled in each audience member a thought of how the map might look were it drawn by them and their own memories of the city. But Ray’s map, with all its implications of history, personal and social, was to be undermined by the entrance of “Alan,” played by Richard Lowden, who arrived mysteriously over the brow of the hill and took over Ray’s microphone and narrative as the coach set off towards the city center.

Although Ray was constantly referred to and addressed during Alan’s monologue, he never replied, and this silencing marked his transformation from a subject speaking his own text to an object of and for the Forced Entertainment text. This switch in authorial control represented clearly the move from native to tour guide, from biography to fiction, from that framed as real to that which was self-evidently theatrical. Ray’s biographical/historical account of Sheffield was thus replaced by the postmodern account that followed. Concurrently the city, seen through the windows of the coach, which Ray’s text had confirmed as Sheffield, was re-presented by Alan’s text as a virtual city that exists everywhere and nowhere. Sheffield, in fact, was to be the location, and not the subject, of the performance event. Through the text’s juxtapositioning of the geographical and historical realities of Sheffield—“It’s ž9ćú out there. It’s still the miners’ strike Ray” (Etchells ž99ú:žž)—with exotic fantasy—“At six o’clock the streets are crowded exclusively with olive-skinned men dressed in purple, filling the pavements” ()—it succeeded in appropriating the city we could clearly see from the coach windows to serve,

2. Nights in this City involved a guided bus tour through Sheffield’s city center and environs. (Photo by Robert Hardy)



through imaginative transformation, the artistic needs of the piece itself. In this way the seductive narrative delivered by Alan superimposed a stream of imagined images onto the city backdrop, ensuring that the audience's perception was held in a pleasurable ironic tension between what it understood as the "real" city and the "mix of the mundane, the absolutely fantastical, the almost fairy tale-like, the saw-it-on-television somewhere" (Etchells 299 :üē):

It's gone very quiet. If you listen you can hear the sound of the sea. This is where a motorbike got sold and this is where sheep grazed and this is where an old bloke used to take a sleep in the back of his car each afternoon. All this used to be desert and the wind blew through the desert, making patterns in the sand like the streets of a city. (Etchells 299ü:ć)

Tim Etchells's text positioned the audience as what Maxine Feifer (29ćü) calls "post-tourists": those who are aware, in John Urry's words, that there is "no authentic tourist experience, that there are merely a series of games or texts that can be played" (299ñ:žž). In this way the staged dramas that were played outside of the coach and onboard did not need to trick their audience into believing them to be "authentic happenings" lying outside of the controlled boundaries of the performance event in order to succeed in giving pleasure. Once the idea of the authentic had been superceded by the symbolic replacement of "Ray" by "Alan," the definitions of "real" and "contrived" ceased to be of issue; paid performers and unpaid (and often unaware) passers-by, could be perceived without distinction. Where Daniel Boorstin's tourist (29 ž :ēē–žžē) believed in the authenticity of the carefully constructed signifiers placed before her gaze, we, as sophisticated "post-tourists," were being asked only to delight in the blatant artifice of the seductive postmodern text, which had replaced the possibility of the authentic voice with a self-confessed irony.

Despite the inadequacy of Alan to keep the tour to its chartered route, to confirm which city we were actually traveling through, and to hide his increasingly drunken and desperate state, the fictions and contradictions of the narrative did nothing to undermine its power. In fact, the juxtaposition of humor and pathos in Alan's text, plus a musical score that carefully guided our emotive responses, combined brilliantly to lull us into the state of disbelief that his mythologizing required. For the text says more about Alan than about the city he describes, and it is precisely this subjectivity which infiltrates the objective landscape and frames its streets within Alan's darkening narrative of doubt and confusion:

Ladies and gentlemen. You could get lost here, you could lose yourself for a month if you took a wrong turn...it could be very difficult... Things could get a bit tricky.[...]

All the streets round here are named after pits that got closed or ships that got sunk somewhere. (Etchells 299ü:ć)

It is a fallacy that the contradictions and lack of objective signification inherent in the voice of the postmodern narrator weaken its authorial power. The world which such a voice describes may be built on shaky existential foundations but, like the mythical qualities of the fractured dream, its images—and the symbolic significance their indeterminacy allows—often exert more narrative influence and offer more coherent resonance than any documentary still. The discourse of postmodernism may have undermined the alleged objectivity of the photograph, but because postmodernism lays no claim to objective truth, its own subjective truth remains, too often, unchallenged, leaving its ironic voice accepted as the only lens through which the world can, at that

moment and from that place, be seen. Thus in *Nights in this City* the entertainment of disbelief required by the theatrical event was problematized. We were not shown the false and asked to believe it to be true, but rather distracted from any possible engagement with the actual by the more pungent mythical representations that the performance text invited. In this way both the city of Sheffield and its inhabitants were partially concealed by the Forced Entertainment text and the resulting narratives formed by its audience.

This blurring of boundaries between the real and the fictional, the authentic and the contrived, and indeed the problematics of such dichotomies, have long been recognized as defining aspects of the postmodern condition. Scott Lash and John Urry claim that postmodernism's refusal to distinguish between art and life derives from a contemporary social and cultural climate "in which the boundary between [...] the image and the real, is more than ever transgressed" (ž9ćē:řćē). They draw on Baudrillard's theories (ž9ćž, ž9ćě) of a "consumer capitalism" which insists on the consumption, no longer of products, but rather of signs:

[W]e consume the signs of advertisements, of television [...]. [O]bjects of consumption themselves have value for us as signs. It is the image, then, in contemporary capitalism, that is consumed, the image in which we have libidinal investment. (Lash and Urry ž9ćē:řćē)

In a world where all images are equal and the signified that lies behind the sign is no longer of any great significance, it is easy to see how the spectator looking through the windows of the coach can dismiss the importance of any distinction between "contrived" dramas staged by consenting performers, and the "unwitting" actions of passers-by. Yet John MacAloon (ž9ćý) defines this misapprehension as a "genre error": the error that occurs when one person's life is made another person's spectacle. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett further argues that:

[L]ive exhibits tend to make people into artifacts because the ethnographic gaze objectifies. [...] To make people going about their ordinary business objects of visual interest and available to total scrutiny is dehumanizing [...]. Semiotically, live displays make the status of the performer problematic, for people become signs of themselves. (ž99ž:ýžú)

3. *Forced Entertainment is based inside the "Workstation" in Sheffield's cultural industries quarter. (Photo by Robert Hardy)*



During the first stage of *Nights in this City* the objectification of Sheffield's inhabitants was relatively unproblematic. The coach took us through the city center, where multiple lanes and heavy traffic rendered us relatively anonymous, to be seen, if noticed at all, only as one bus among many. This left us free to "play" at tourists in our home city, participating in the text's humorous juxtaposition of the grey municipal buildings we saw outside the windows and the exotic European landmarks we were encouraged to imagine. As the people on the streets became unwitting material for the mythical representations that populated Etchell's text, they were incorporated into the action not as individuals, but as a part of the "public" city. They were anonymous due to their number and their location, passing through streets where people worked, or shopped, or visited; streets of which ownership could never be claimed; streets that, in effect, welcomed native and visitor alike, and had no reason to distinguish between them.

However, the demographic change that followed revealed the implicit politics of the games we were being encouraged to play. The coach left the city center and its immediate environs to drive up City Road past block after block of the high-rise council flats that make up Parkhill and Norfolk Park. We rode on into the Manor—one of Sheffield's most economically deprived housing estates, lying two or three miles out of the city center. It was here that the "stars of the show" were spotted, no longer anonymous elements of busy streets in the nonpartisan city center, but individuals on their home estates whose everyday actions were to be highlighted by the focus the near deserted streets gave to their presence. These were not streets that were passed through on the way to somewhere else; in that crucial aspect they were not public streets. These were streets making up a purely residential estate, which lay off the beaten track and led nowhere. In that crucial aspect it was, while not private, certainly territorial in its situation, which placed us, to all external perception, as a homogenous and unknown community intruding into an alien landscape. And it was, quite literally, an intrusive act, this coach full of staring people driving down a narrow residential road, only metres away from front-room windows, with the residents who inhabited these houses framed as if on public display—exhibits in their own homes. Perhaps it was for this reason that the coach of predominantly white spectators turned back on the outskirts of Burngreave and Pitsmoor—Sheffield districts largely populated by Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities—and chose to drive instead towards the white working-class estate of the Manor. If, in addition to the economic class divide, which the coach windows represented, there had also been a highly visible ethnic division between watching and watched, the situation may have become a little too dangerous for comfort, and the tourist analogy a little too real.

Such a colonial gaze was exposed by Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña in their presentation of themselves as previously undiscovered primitive savages, displayed in a cage and exhibited in museums around the world (see Fusco 2004: 205–21). This framing of "native" as spectacle could be seen as the exoticism of the quotidian. In "Objects of Ethnography" Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett defines this process as she describes how cultural exhibitions both feed and build on MacAloon's genre error:

Exhibitions institutionalize this error by producing the quotidian as spectacle; they do this by building the role of the observer into the structure of events that, left to their own devices, are not subject to formal viewing. [...] The task of creating fissures that offer evidence that the ordinary is really there propels the satisfaction with penetrating the life space of others, getting inside, burrowing deep into the most intimate places, whether the interiors of lives or the innermost recesses of bodies. (2004: 205–21)

She goes on to describe the West's historical preoccupation, not just with the "ethnographic other," but also with the dispossessed, and identifies the need of the privileged to "view" the lives of those who populate the margins of dominant society and to explore the forbidden territory whose "danger" is best enjoyed from a safe vantage point. This observation suggests one reason why expeditions into regions of economic deprivation were undertaken in both Sheffield and Rotterdam and, moreover, why the *Nights in this City* coach didn't stop to let its passengers out onto the streets of the Manor estate. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett observes that when the colonial gaze was turned on its own inner cities in the late 19th century, the attraction of the slums was partially due to their "intimacy at sight" (1998: 178), which afforded the visitor greater access to the private than could have been viewed in more "respectable" areas where the privileges of privacy could be paid for. Likewise Sheffield council estates in the 1990s are without the long tree-bound gardens and driveways that separate the public road from the private residence in wealthier suburbs of the city. The lack of such boundaries affords us a far more immediate penetration of—to draw on Erving Goffman (1989: 13)—the "back regions" of the residents' lives, viewed through their own front windows. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett defines this type of framing as "a living museum in situ" and the viewing of it as verging on "what might be called social pornography—the private made public" (1998: 178). She classifies this as a panoptic mode, which asserts the viewer's control over the objects of the gaze:

[T]he panoptic approach offers the chance to see without being seen, to penetrate interior recesses, to violate intimacy. In its more problematic manifestations, the panoptic mode has the quality of peep show and surveillance—the viewer is in control. (1998: 178)

4. *Forced Entertainment's* *Nights in this City* traveled through this working-class suburb of the Manor. Pictured are residents of the Manor. (Photo © iD.8 Photography, Sheffield)

In *A Decade of Forced Entertainment* the company tells us how much of their time spent in Sheffield has been as voyeurs, watching people, and picking up



notes and photographs from the streets. Notes that are often funny in their tragedy, often written from a position of deprivation, or despair, like the note found, as Tim Etchells reported, “near the high-rise flats which read, Dave, I had to get out. The gas is cut off and the TV has gone bad, back Thursday” (ž99ý:n.p.). The truth, or otherwise, of such anecdotes is never certain, and it is just that ambiguity which allows Forced Entertainment to take artistic ownership of the material in their work and use it at will. So long as the situation is not one with which the audience will identify too closely, so long as the original author—or owner—of the material remains unknown, the laughter that greets the ironic juxtaposition of tragedy and humor is relatively unproblematic. But the material used in this section of *Nights in this City* was the potential authors themselves—on the street, in pub windows, in their own front rooms. No longer were anecdotes and photographs and reproduced graffiti brought to us by Forced Entertainment, packaged, edited, sanitized, and relatively anonymous, to be revealed in the comfort of a studio theatre, geographical and cultural miles away from their origins. Here, instead, we found ourselves participating in Forced Entertainment’s creative process, changing the raw material from a working-class or underclass existence into art for a predominantly middle-class audience. Effectively, *Nights in this City* had placed its audience in the position of postmodern artists and implicated us in the very process of cultural appropriation, for it is not with the material itself that the problem lies but with the hands that shape it. As Ivan Karp argues:

The struggle is not over what is to be represented, but over who will control the means of representing. [...] What is at stake in struggles for control over objects and the modes of exhibiting them, finally, is the articulation of identity. [...] When cultural “others” are implicated, exhibitions tell us who we are and, perhaps most significant, who we are not. Exhibitions are privileged arenas for presenting images of self and “other.” (ž99ž:žü)

This transformation of a living person into a “passive” element of an artwork could be said to constitute the reduction of a “speaking” subject into a “spoken” object. When such a transition takes place without the subject’s consent, the subject is effectively colonized by the artist’s will. There were some who we passed on those streets who were able to refuse such objectification and to instead assert their right to self-representation. When the coach came to its first stop in a deserted car park at the edge of the city center, our spectatorship was intensified by the interlude in movement, the emergence of two figures in black (consenting performers) who made their way towards the coach, and the tension created by the text itself:

And there are some travelers who, in crossing a street in this quarter, have seen a host of men coming towards them, and suspecting that they were robbers, have taken flight, so, having left the beaten track and not knowing how to return to it, they have gone hopelessly astray. (Etchells ž99ü:žň)

Yet despite our intensified spectator status, there were those walking past or through the car park who looked in amusement at the coachload of people who were all looking out intently onto a near empty parking lot—tourists, in effect, with nothing to see. Their recognition of this anomaly placed our spectators’ gaze as spectacle for the very different spectatorship of the passers-by. Due to the location and immobility of the coach, attention was drawn to it as an event in itself, and we were incorporated into the performance as par-



5. The cinema in Sheffield's cultural industries quarter, located on the edge of the city center. (Photo by Robert Hardy)

ticipants. Equally, the perception, or more importantly, the acknowledgement of the coach as “spectacle” by these spectators, placed them outside of the text’s mythology, thus removing them from its narrative discourse altogether.

The reactions to the coach travelling through the narrow and near deserted streets of the Manor estate were varied. Some residents retaliated with aggressive gestures or verbal abuse; at this point, our touristic gaze was not perceived as humorously directed at “nothing” but as offensively directed at them. Once there were no more Forced Entertainment performers to provide us with an object for our gaze, it was turned on those

who had not invited it. They responded with a text of their own which was incompatible with the Forced Entertainment narrative and the ghosts it described. In this way, we were simultaneously spectacle and spectator, while those whom we would have incorporated removed themselves from the mythical narratives of the text by placing us, not themselves, as the theatrical event.

However, such self-authorship was denied to those who remained unaware of the performance event that was taking place. Yet, significantly, these were to be defined by the local press as “the stars of the show”—“two girls carrying an electric cooker across the Norfolk Park tram lines” and “a solitary drinker staring out of a pub window at his travelling audience.” Their ignorance of their own role in the narratives, which were unfolding as a result of their context, posited them as characters in a fiction who had no recourse to self-reflexivity that would disrupt the narrative process, or to assume an autonomy of behavior within it. The nature of their representations was guided by the performance text that framed them; their lack of consent or awareness strengthened their narrative impact within a text that favored ghosts and lonely travelers who had lost their way. The actual situations and often difficult social contexts of these people were used to mythologize such contexts, to deny the realities of a deprivation which might be challenged on its own terms; to enhance, instead, an impressionistic picture of a city that was not Sheffield. In this way the social context of the Manor was manipulated and re-authored for the aesthetic pleasure of its audience, encouraging a kind of decadent voyeurism whereby human beings became artistic elements to be selected and disregarded on each spectator/artist’s whim. Such fetishizing reduced the status of the so-called “performing”/subjects to representational objects who had been framed within an artist’s impression. For as the second Forced Entertainment tour guide informed us: “All the people you can see from here are ghosts. All the people walking, and all the people waiting and all the people driving. All of the people you can see tonight are ghosts” (Etchells ž99ŭ:žý). Perceived within the framework of the piece, they could indeed be said to be ghosts of themselves who had lost some vital substance to serve as reflections of the Forced Entertainment text.

The ethical status of such appropriation has many respected defendants. On the question of intercultural appropriation Richard Schechner states that:

[I]ndividual artists, on all sides of this question, steal. [...] On the individual level, it’s hard for an artist not to steal, if it’s useful for their repertory of skills or if it suits. That is what artists do. Fundamentally, they are *bricoleurs*. (In Pavis ž99 :žŭ)

However, Schechner does acknowledge the fundamental inequality of the world playing field on which such “mutual” thefts may take place:

One wonders how well-received in New York, Paris, or even Holstebro a Yanomami shaman in search of Odin-style barter would be. That is, if the shaman arrived paying his own way, setting his own agenda and calendar. The whole system of intercultural exchange cannot escape history: it occurs in the aftermath of colonialism. (1988:135–36)

The inequalities of such so-called intercultural exchange could be clearly identified in the economic divide between those onboard the Forced Entertainment bus and those who were to be aestheticized for their audience's pleasure. The cultural industries quarter, where Forced Entertainment is based, is one of Sheffield's most high-profile successes and there is no doubt that the image it has generated has greatly benefited the city's cultural standing, its development and expansion bringing both money and employment into the city. Its cultural projects, however, have benefited only a small arts/media-based community—often transient—with money invested in cultural festivals predominantly situated in the cultural industries quarter itself. This lies on the edge of the city center, populated mainly by those who work in its buildings. Much, although not all, of Forced Entertainment's audience derives from this community and its student offshoots, creating a cultural divide between those on the coach and those on the streets we passed through in the Manor. This turned what had been intended as a pastiche of a guided tour into something nearer the real thing with the Manor and its residents framed as “urban decay” for our narrative pleasure. Our fictional context had uncomfortably merged with the actuality of the experience. Our appropriation of their context was not a legitimate artistic exercise. Rustom Bharucha explains:

Colonialism, one might say, does not operate through principles of “exchange.” Rather, it appropriates, decontextualizes, and represents the “other” culture. [...] It legitimates its authority only by asserting its cultural superiority. (ž99č :ž–ř)

Like tourists who take coach trips “off the beaten track,” those of us on the trip through the Manor enriched our own project at the expense of those who would never have the resources or even gain passage through the gleaming security-conscious foyers of the cultural industries quarter to claim cultural or economic payment for their participation. The “use” made of the people of Sheffield is analogous to Davydd J. Greenwood's identification of the tourist market's exploitation of “local color” as a selling point whereby “activities of the host culture are treated as part of the ‘come-on’ without their consent and are invaded by tourists who do not reimburse them for their ‘service’” (ž9č9 :žčč). Although the factor of economic and cultural inequality is ever present in constructed tourist villages, the fact remains that the participants consent to being exhibited, possibly, as Urry suggests, “both to protect themselves from intrusions into their lives backstage and to take advantage of the opportunities it presents for profitable investment” (ž99ň :9). In the performance events under discussion no such opportunities were offered, and no consent was given. Like the old Chinese settlers in Locke, the California town sold in ž9čč to Asian City Development, Inc. to undergo development into an “authentic Chinese tourist attraction” (see MacCannell ž99ř :žčř –č9), the inhabitants of the “living museums in situ” generated by performance events such as *Nights in this City* are exploited by the expropriation of “the details of



6. The “National Centre for Popular Music” (due to open summer 1999) faces the “Workstation,” home to Forced Entertainment, in the cultural industries quarter of Sheffield, UK. (Photo by Robert Hardy)

their everyday lives, just the look of them as they shuffle down the street, marketed as an ‘experience’ for tourists” (MacCannell ž99ř :žčú)—or, in this case, theatre audiences.

In an interview in *Freedom Machine*, Tim Etchells confesses his reservations about how *Nights in this City* would be received and asks “how long do you have to have lived somewhere before you’re allowed to *lie* about it?” (ž99 :üě-üŷ). The ethics of such an enterprise, however, are not problematized by the question of legitimate authorship per se, but rather are concerned with the consequences of an authorship which *by its very cultural superiority* has the power to negate the authorship of others, if no real engagement with the narratives of those “others” is undertaken. To return once more to Bharucha, the artists of Forced Entertainment were “more concerned with strengthening their own visions rather than representing other cultures in their own contexts” (Bharucha ž99ň:ü). The ethical dilemma raised by the fictions “imposed” on the Manor and its residents lies in the very real social inequalities which would ensure that the residents of the Manor would never have the resources to impose equally powerful fictions onto the cultural industries quarter or its inhabitants. Neither, more significantly, would they be empowered to represent themselves and their own culture to the Forced Entertainment audience in any way they might choose. As Edward Said asserts: “The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them” (in Hays ž99ü: ü).

The significance of leveling such a charge at a theatre company that has focused much of its efforts on retaining infinite narrative possibility is critical to the political implications of aspects of this work and much of the work it has engendered. The postmodern impulse to explode traditional narrative blocks formerly imposed on audiences doesn’t always ensure narrative freedom for all.

7. As the people on the streets became unwitting material for the mythical representations that populated Etchell’s text, they were incorporated into the action, not as individuals, but as a part of the “public” city. (Photo by Robert Hardy)



The privileged and pleasurable readings the Forced Entertainment audiences were enabled to create were dependent, in part, on the repression of the narratives of the Manor residents. For although the possible narratives inspired by the aesthetic framing of the Manor residents were innumerable, their own self-authored narratives—whether actual or fictional—were of no interest; we imposed our narratives on them to suit our own needs, guided by the Forced Entertainment performance text. As Diana Taylor observes in her critical overview of Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Coco Fusco's "Couple in the Cage," "native bodies can only be seen or heard from the perspective of the 'discoverer.' The colonialist discourse that produces the native as negativity or lack itself silences the very voice it purports to make speak" (299c:ž ř).

In *A Decade of Forced Entertainment* the company talks about their obsession with maps: maps that are false, but somehow accurate; subjective postmodern maps that use and misrepresent fragments of the "real" to create a more "accurate" impressionistic account of the world they are describing. The danger with such subjectivism is that it hides its own ideology behind the confession that it has lied. Objective facts can be challenged, objective "realities" can be fought for, but in a postmodern discourse, where no one ownership of representation has any greater moral or existential right to exist than any other, the representation owned by the dominant voice or culture will always subsume other representations due to its greater resources of communication. Like the silencing of Ray's voice by the postmodern text that replaced it, *Nights in this City* silenced any potential voices from the Manor by speaking in their place.

And it is this authorial voice that distinguishes these performative experiments from events or "Happenings" which utilize their environmental surroundings without framing them and without isolating the watched from the watching, the "objectified" natives from the "subject" tourist. Seminal work in the ž9 ņs and 'ěns, such as *City Scale* created by Ken Dewey, Anthony Martin, and Ramon Sender, or Allan Kaprow's *Calling* and *Self-Service* (see Sandford ž99ŭ) all utilized the cityscape in which they took place. However, the lines between witting and unwitting participants were either drawn along conventional rules of performance—that is, the watched were the consenting performers, the watching the consenting viewers—or the participants' actions were so imperceptible as performance as to make the distinction between witting and unwitting participant impossible for either to discern, thus invalidating the potential power relationship between them.

Nights in this City, on the contrary, used its narrative power to experiment throughout the piece with altering the perspective and performative status of those on board the coach and those seen from its windows. I was situated, over the course and through changing landscapes of the performance, as active spectator, spectacle, tourist, post-tourist, colonialist, and voyeur. This predominantly touristic perspective is discernible in much emerging performance work and, as such, is becoming a legitimate postmodern position. Yet we should heed Bharucha's timely warning that, "the notion that we are 'all always already tourists' [...] still contradicts the reality of millions of people" (in Roms and Gough ž99ě:vii). Otherwise the narrative freedom offered by certain postmodern discourses may, through its seductive and self-denying authority, become the colonizer's tongue, whose subjective versions represent, by default, the new "grand," or dominant, narrative, due to the millions of voices left without the resources, or the cultural credibility, to answer back.

Note

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Liz Tomlin is currently Research Fellow in Performing Arts at the Manchester Metropolitan University. She is also codirector of Point Blank (formerly reflex theatre) at the Open Performance Centre Ltd.