

Playing the Role of Educators: Protagonists with Dual Purposes
in
*The Noam Chomsky Lectures, Fronteras Americanas, and The Adventures of Ali and Ali
and the Axes of Evil.*

by

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B.A., The University of Lethbridge, 2003

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL-FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

The Faculty of Graduate Studies

(Theatre)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April 2006

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a close analysis of the relationship between form and content in three contemporary Canadian plays: *The Noam Chomsky Lectures* (Brooks and Verdecchia), *Fronteras Americanas* (Verdecchia), and *The Adventures of Ali and Ali and the Axes of Evil* (Youssef, Verdecchia, Chai). I focus on particular moments within each play where protagonists communicate Chomsky-inspired media theory through Brechtian devices such as direct address to the audience, the use of slide projections, and acknowledging that they exist as characters within a play. Each chapter assesses specific techniques used within a single play and their connection to the ideological impulses driving the theatrical communication. In doing so I demonstrate how each play's particular formal features are related to specific ideological arguments.

While the body of my thesis uses this method of dramaturgical analysis for *Chomsky*, *Fronteras*, and *Ali and Ali*, I also include numerous critical voices from various Canadian print publications in order to present a broader understanding of the current methods used by many critics and academics. When comparing my discoveries to theirs, I found a divide existed between two methods of analysis and the resulting conclusions that each group had made. One group of critics upholds dramatic techniques used in naturalism and Aristotelian forms and another group shares my method of analysis, discussing the relationship between form and content. I include this range of assessments in order to acknowledge the broad spectrum of discourse surrounding such contemporary plays and present the limits that exist when merely focusing on analysis that prioritizes neo-Aristotelian ideals.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge my thesis advisor, Dr. Kirsty Johnston, who has been an incredible source of encouragement throughout my graduate years. As a result of our thesis meetings and graduate workshops, my research methods and academic writing have improved immensely. Thanks to Dr. Erin Hurley and Dr. Jerry Wasserman who began developing my quality of writing during my first year of graduate studies and to Dr. Errol Durbach for his academic advising and guidance in textual analysis.

I must also acknowledge those that left a lasting impression on me during my undergraduate years at The University of Lethbridge. Dr. Shelley Scott is the first to incite my scholarly study of theatre. As her student, I was always engaged in her lectures, appreciative of her encouragement, and encouraged by her Feminist pursuits and perspectives in Canadian Theatre. Thanks to Ron Chambers who balanced my focus on academia by strengthening my artistic skills as a director and Brian Parkinson whose advocacy of UBC served as a core reason for my application to their theatre program.

I also would not have begun training in theatre if it were not for the teacher who inspired me the most: my high school drama teacher, Mr. Bruce Macdonald. We spent just as much time talking about plays as we did producing them: memories I will always value and conversations I will never forget.

Though my instructors have guided me in my academic and artistic pursuits, others have prepared me in ways that extend beyond student-teacher dynamics. Thanks to Rachel Ditor for her valuable insights on developmental dramaturgy and literary management. My experiences with Ms. Ditor have not only equipped me to continue

work in these fields, they have provided me with a mentor who has revealed a personal investment in my development. To my friends and colleagues who worked alongside me during arduous study sessions and exam preparations. Tricia Hopton's sense of humor and was always a relief to the intensity of academic life and the perfectionist ideals I share with Melissa Poll offered a healthy dose of competition as we simultaneously challenged each other to do our best. Thanks also to Krista Charbonneau, for showing me how survive life as an academic without sacrificing your personality. U of L comrades, Andrew Best, Kelly Raymond, Christa Hercher, and Jessica Mende kept my eye on the prize (good grades and then grad school) by always providing some sort of incentive to study: strong coffee, sweet snacks, or a soundtrack to accompany the workload. You are all more than colleagues, you have been the greatest friends I could have hoped for, seeing me through some of the most challenging times in my life.

Of course, to my families and the number of ways they have shown me their support as I work through my graduate program. To my dad for his words of encouragement and his infamous "FWD" e-mails that divided long hours spent at my laptop. To my mom for her conversations over coffee and summer road-trips that keep me connected to her while I am away for my studies. To Jordan, Dallas, and Erin for letting me play "big sister" while I could and challenging me now that you each have extremely strong, individual voices. Finally, to the Patton clan for welcoming the soft-spoken "reader girl" into your family and allowing her to clog up your kitchen table with her many, many books.

For Mike

Who signed on to this gong-show before he knew what it entailed

INTRODUCTION

Brooks and Verdecchia became roommates in Toronto. On moving day, Brooks noticed that Verdecchia was hauling in a pile of books by Noam Chomsky. "It turned out that Chomsky had been seminal in both of our thinking." It also turned out that both had an interest in creating political theatre. (Sherman 19)

One of the most striking features of Guillermo Verdecchia's dramatic oeuvre is its strong connection to the work and ideas of Noam Chomsky. Verdecchia has explicitly cited Chomsky as an inspiration both in his public discourse and his drama. For example, at the *Celebrating Canadian Plays and Playwrights Conference* in 2002, Verdecchia explained how Chomsky's ideas about a writer's social responsibilities both inspired and shaped his theatrical aims:

[Chomsky] said the writer's responsibility is to tell the truth about matters of human significance to an audience that can really do something about them. I found that really interesting and really provocative, and a really good definition of how I think of what I do, and what I think many of us try to do in the theatre: try to tell the truth about matters of human significance to an audience that can do something about them. What are the truths we tell? What does it mean to tell the truth? For me, the truth is often about subverting or inverting or showing something that is hidden or buried behind an "official" story or an "official" truth or an "official" history. (Knowles 44)

Verdecchia's search for truth behind official narratives follows Chomsky's own methods.

In their 1991, co-authored play, *The Noam Chomsky Lectures*, Daniel Brooks and Guillermo Verdecchia explain that Chomsky has drawn many readers' and lecture audiences' attention to the media's misrepresentation of international socio-political injustices. As the character, Brooks, tells the theatre audience:

Chomsky catalogues a series of coups, invasions, and mass murders by countless Third World governments, all supported by the American government, and, in turn, by we Canadians through our quiet, and in a more recent case, not so quiet acquiescence. The Americans support these

violent regimes mainly because they support the business interests of companies [...]. (15)

Additionally, the character Brooks notes that “Chomsky shows how the Western Press practices self-censorship and caters to the ideological line of Big Business and government [...]” (15). Thus, Brooks’ proclamations within the theatre space point to the very source of these playwrights’ inspiration: Noam Chomsky’s research and writing in media studies.

The original production of *The Noam Chomsky Lectures* occurred in 1991, a time when Chomsky was writing and lecturing on various forms of media manipulation. In 1988, Chomsky visited Toronto to give a series of five lectures at Massey Hall, documented by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Lister Sinclair, host of the CBC program that recorded these lectures, noted that “[Chomsky] is particularly concerned with what Americans find out through their mass media” (CBC Massey Lectures Disk 1). Sinclair also locates the key question that drives Chomsky’s research: “What are the enduring institutional characteristics of our media system, the system we call “the free press,” and how do those characteristics affect what we think we know?” (ibid). This lecture would also become the impetus for Chomsky’s future media-oriented publications. For instance, in *Necessary Illusions*, the publication that stemmed from the Massey Lecture series, Chomsky states that in this publication he is “primarily concerned with one aspect: thought control, as conducted through the agency of the national media and related elements of the elite intellectual culture” (viii). *Manufacturing Consent*, a 1988 book he co-authored with Edward S. Herman, outlines a “propaganda model”, a model they describe as “an analytical framework that attempts to explain the performance of the U.S. media in terms of the basic institutional structures and relationships within

which they operate” (xi). Chomsky continued his explorations of the propaganda model in his subsequent book, *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda* (1997). In it, he cites numerous instances of and responses to “propaganda operation” in the United States (7). For example, he outlines the use of propaganda in government and the business sector, ranging from the Woodrow Wilson administration to the current public relations industry, and provides insight into the variety of ways propaganda has developed in the 20th century.

Chomsky frequently builds his large arguments by first paying close attention to particular events. As Sinclair observes: “Throughout his work, Professor Chomsky has based his conclusions on a close analysis of specific cases but his real interest is in the larger issues that the specific cases point to” (CBC Massey Lectures Disk 1).

Fundamentally, these research goals are driven by a key method associated with Cartesian philosophy: inference based on observations and rational thought. Chomsky explains the application of this philosophical practice in an interview with James Peck:

When I talk about, say, Cartesian common sense, what I mean is that it does not require very far-reaching, specialized knowledge to perceive that the United States was invading South Vietnam. And, in fact, to take apart the system of illusions and deception which functions to prevent understanding of contemporary reality, that's not a task that requires extraordinary skill or understanding. It requires the kind of normal skepticism and willingness to apply one's analytical skills that almost all people have and that they can exercise. (35)

Although his work contributes to social, political, and linguistic scholarship, with a particular focus on methods used by media, government, and big business to control the masses, he strongly encourages all citizens to apply their individual analytical skills to their readings of media, government actions, and business activities.

Chomsky's clearest call for Cartesian common sense occurs within *Necessary Illusions*. In it, he states: "My personal feeling is that citizens of democratic societies should undertake a course of intellectual self-defense to protect themselves from manipulation and control, and to lay the basis for more meaningful democracy" (vii). Chomsky not only strives for individual responsibility in the application of meaningful democracy but also for a method of enlightenment to occur through collective, educational means. Thus a medium is required, an audience is necessary, and instructors are paramount to the delivery of such material. For Verdecchia, theatre offers the means to fulfill all of these requirements.

Theatre scholars such as Joyce Nelson point to Verdecchia's use of the theatre as a means to raise collective conscience and consciousness surrounding Chomsky's research aims. In her introduction to *The Noam Chomsky Lectures*, she states:

As I recall, neither of these words, conscience or consciousness, is used in this work. *The Noam Chomsky Lectures* is more hip than that. And yet, it seems to me that this notion of "knowing together" is at the heart of the work, informing it and giving it energy. Following the impetus of Chomsky himself, Brooks and Verdecchia have recognized that mass media, mass spectacle, have trivialized and severed consciousness and conscience, separating both from a communal base. (8)

Thus, Nelson recognizes that Brooks and Verdecchia have used the theatre as an act of communal gathering in which to raise audience awareness of particular issues and topics.

Ideologically, Guillermo Verdecchia approaches the stage in the same way that Chomsky approaches the lectern. Formally, however, they differ. Where Chomsky lectures in the first person, Verdecchia's public discourse uses the medium of theatre. Although Verdecchia's solo projects and collaborations with Daniel Brooks, Marcus Youssef, and Camyar Chai dramatize a range of Chomsky's core assertions through

various theatrical forms, three plays in particular make explicit connections to Chomsky's observations regarding media manipulation and thought-control in democratic nations. *The Noam Chomsky Lectures* (Brooks and Verdecchia 1991), *Fronteras Americanas* (Verdecchia 1997), and *The Adventures of Ali and Ali and the Axes of Evil* (Verdecchia, Youssef, Chai 2005) specifically focus on the media's manipulation of social, cultural, and political material and the ensuing complacency it creates in democratic citizens. Through *Chomsky*, *Fronteras*, and *Ali and Ali*, these playwrights make it clear that the audience members are both included in that citizenry and complicit in the issues being staged.

Central to achieving this sense of complicity are the protagonists within each of these three plays. All are conscious of the audience, the performance space, their roles as performers, and the depth of the issues they will be presenting to the audience. In *Chomsky*, the characters Brooks and Verdecchia introduce themselves to the audience by their own names. They then identify propagandistic techniques used in the media and refer to Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman's *Manufacturing Consent* as the source of their material. Verdecchia takes a slightly different approach in *Fronteras* since he omits direct reference to Chomsky's work but creates a culturally conscious character, Wideload, whose monologues deconstruct media manipulation and propaganda. He also ensures that audience and actor roles are clearly delineated. As in *Chomsky*, however, a character named "Verdecchia" addresses the audience directly and identifies the theatre as a propagandistic medium. Verdecchia announces the shared experience of being in the specific theatre venue and the upcoming second character, Wideload, also introduces himself fully to the audience. In *Ali and Ali*, the two protagonists Ali Ababwa and Ali

Hakim introduce themselves as performers, welcome the audience to their show, and – when pitching a movie idea to entertainment industry people in the audience - identify a series of manipulation techniques used in the entertainment industry. Although this last case demonstrates the characters' explicit motive to sell the very movie they are deconstructing in front of the audience, they nonetheless demonstrate how Hollywood cinema is constructed to support dominant, prevailing ideologies. Thus, in each play, the playwrights use the protagonists to demonstrate and explain instances in which media have manufactured consent.

The playwrights have also noted the dramaturgical dilemma they face when trying to find an appropriate dramatic form to stage their concerns. For Verdecchia, using a naturalistic aesthetic to convey such complex material was simply out of the question, especially with regard to *The Noam Chomsky Lectures*. As he explained to theatre scholar Jennifer Harvie in her 1997 interview for *Canadian Theatre Review*:

I think there are two big reasons that we did not want to use story or character in *Chomsky*, and one is that we wanted to talk about structures and institutions as opposed to isolated events, we wanted to talk about patterns. Naturalism, I think, makes it very difficult to talk about structures and institutions. It reduces things to the singular, the unique, the exceptional, an event. It makes it very difficult to talk about structures of domination, or power, or oppression through that form. That's the reason we chose to avoid a kind of naturalistic story. (46)

Here again, Verdecchia's reasoning echoes Chomsky's commitment to an analytical framework that examines institutional structures and relationships. Verdecchia provides a further reason for avoiding naturalism, which seems to suggest that naturalism itself can be a means for hiding theatre's own complicity in the very institutional structures the playwrights hoped to critique. As Verdecchia explained to Harvie: "we wanted to implicate ourselves" (ibid). Thus, their dramaturgical aims involve seeking an effective

theatrical form for communicating their content and enabling them to implicate both actors and audience members in the issues they are dramatizing.

Verdecchia points to the same dilemma when he explains his choices in dramatizing the core issues in *Fronteras*.

The same thing applies to a certain extent in *Fronteras Americanas*, in which one of the things I wanted to do was look at the whole problem of representation of Latinos in North American popular culture. Again, it's very easy to stand up on the stage and say, "This is terrible, this is racist. Oh my god, don't you see how stupid ...?" Well, most people do see how stupid it is and how racist it is, and there's nothing really served by standing up and hectoring the audience and saying, "This is outrageous." What's more interesting and more important, I think, is to say, "This is racist, and outrageous, and wrong. And this is how I contribute to that problem. This is how I participate in it. This is how I am complicit in this." (Harvie 46-47)

The concerns of the final three sentences drive Verdecchia's formal choices. Just as Chomsky draws attention to how media interest and choices influence public understanding of events, Verdecchia is attentive to how his own choices about form in the theatrical medium can shape audiences' capacity to recognize their own complicity in the events described. He suggests that it is impossible to enter into the spirit of dramatizing a sense of complicity in current issues without implicating himself as well. As he tells Harvie: "I also think that, for example, in *Fronteras Americanas*, my – if you will "auto-critique" allowed the audience in in a way. I wasn't letting myself off the hook" (47). Verdecchia recognizes that his dramaturgical choices fundamentally shape his means of connecting with the audience. He supports this observation by stating the choice was made "So they [the audience] could perhaps enter into the spirit of self-examination and self-criticism" (47). Implicating himself in the issues not only acts as emotional connective tissue between himself and the audience, it is also a tool of

encouragement to approach *Fronteras* in an emotionally and intellectually engaged manner. Therefore, by utilizing specific techniques to communicate socio-political content, the stage serves as both a location for dramatic enactments and a site for public engagement and education. Ideologies have centre stage and the characters and audience play equal roles in contributing to the dilemma.

Brooks and Verdecchia sought new forms for political theatre in part because they felt that the Canadian political theatre of their contemporaries was unable to communicate a sense of audience complicity in the political issues presented on stage. In his article "The Daniel Brooks Lectures", Jason Sherman reveals that Brooks found this to be especially frustrating. Brooks confesses: "For years, I'd been struggling with how to do political theatre. It had no context" (19). After referring to one production in particular, Brooks tells Sherman, "It didn't take into account the fact that they were speaking to people [the audience] who are instruments of the violence the play speaks of" (19). Driven by the need to present political ideas in a manner that helped audiences to see their own complicity, Brooks and Verdecchia sought forms that would break from the patterns of their contemporaries.

Brooks also notes that the ability to communicate content through form is a priority in the creative endeavors of his theatre mentor, Ken Gass. As a fellow artist who does not prioritize traditional Aristotelian structure, Brooks recalls Gass' style as being "more intuitive, as opposed to structuring plays through character and story" (qtd. in Sherman 19). Brooks also identifies an interesting commonality between Gass and Chomsky. He tells Sherman, "There's some kind of line between him [Gass] and Chomsky in terms of how the formal devices one chooses express as much as the

material” (ibid). Since Brooks explicitly cites Gass and Chomsky as inspirational figures, his comment regarding the similarities in their work implicitly comments on Brooks’ own dramaturgical aims: locating formal features that can effectively communicate subject matter.

Brooks, Verdecchia, Youssef, and Chai are obviously not the first playwrights to connect politics and form. Many theatre and performance artists throughout the 20th century have explored such connections. For instance, their rejection of Aristotelian and naturalistic dramaturgy and pursuit of means to awaken audiences to social awareness and action has much in common with the ideas of Bertolt Brecht. Due to the widespread influence of Brecht’s theory and practice of alienation techniques in the theatre, theatre semiotician Patrice Pavis observes that the phrase “alienation effect” is often replaced by the term “Brechtian” since it is “used to describe a theatre called, variously, epic, critical, dialectical, or socialist, and an acting style that favours audience participation, mainly through the demonstrative (“showing”) nature of the acting” (39). In his *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis*, Pavis indicates:

“Brechtian” often refers to “politics of signs” - stage and text provide a space for theatre practice and signify reality through a system of signs that are at once aesthetic (rooted in stage materials or in a given stage craft) and political (criticizing reality rather than imitating it passively). (39)

He also notes that this critically engaging theatre experience is capable of “transforming the spectator’s approving attitude, based on identification, into a critical one” (19). Thus, its usage indicates a playwright’s desire to increase an audience’s critical engagement with the dramatic content through very specific theatrical signifiers and stage choices.

Pavis indicates that these theatrical signifiers include the fabula, scenery, gestures, diction, acting style, and direct addresses to the audience. Though these elements are

included in many theatrical and dramatic styles, those deemed Brechtian utilize these forms in a particular manner. Verdecchia and his collaborators use the Brechtian application of the *fabula*, gestures, acting, and direct addresses to the audience. As Pavis notes, the Brechtian use of these formal features operate as follows:

The *fabula* tells two stories: one is concrete and the other is an abstract parable of it. [...] *Gestures* provide information about the individual and his social status and relationship with the working world, his *gestus*. [...] Through his *acting* the actor shows the character he plays rather than incarnating him. *Addresses to the audience*, songs and visible scenery changes are also devices which break the illusion. (19)

Thus, these techniques aim to break theatrical illusion. They do so in order to evoke audience's critical engagement with his subject matter.

Both Brecht's anti-illusionist aesthetics and formal methods for intellectually engaging audiences are similar to the artistic instincts of Brooks, Verdecchia, Youssef, and Chai. Pavis gives a sense of the broad, contemporary term Brechtian but a closer look at Brecht's precise impulses and methods is also critical for understanding their relevance to the work of Brooks, Verdecchia, Youssef, and Chai. Much like Verdecchia denounces naturalism based on its incapacity for dramatizing "structures and institutions" (Harvie 46), Brecht also recognizes the relationship between form and content. As he has stated in his article "Über Stoffe und Formen", printed in the *Berliner Börsen-Courier* on March 31, 1929:

Simply to comprehend the new areas of subject-matter imposes a new dramatic and theatrical form. [...] Even to dramatize a simple newspaper report one needs something much more than the dramatic technique of a Hebbel or an Ibsen. This is no boast but a sad statement of fact. It is impossible to explain present-day character by features or present-day action by motives that would have been adequate in our fathers' time. (Brecht 30)

Brecht did not merely question the communicative ability of such past dramatic models to convey present-day topics; he actually proposed that such a pairing is completely ineffective. Here again, Verdecchia's dramaturgical motivations are connected to Brecht since Brecht specifically rejects the use of artists and works connected to the naturalistic and realistic era. Admittedly, Brecht was further arguing that the theatrical models of "our fathers' time" are incapable of dramatizing contemporary concerns while I am connecting the theatrical models of Verdecchia and his cohorts to those of Brecht: their theatrical predecessor. However, I am fundamentally concerned with Brecht's denouncement of such specific dramatic models as they relate to the naturalistic forms Verdecchia avoids.

Brecht also proposed that the relationship between form and content is also linked to ideological shifts regarding the nature and purpose of the theatre. The formal means chosen to communicate content are not only in flux with fluid societal concerns, but also operate in accordance with the artistic aims of the new era. Here is where he began to note that the new function of the theatre, or the new theatre of Brecht's generation (c. early 20th century), is rooted in educational endeavors:

Once we have begun to find our way about the subject-matter we can move on to the relationships, which at present are immensely complicated and can only be simplified by *formal* means. The form in question can however only be achieved by a complete change of the theatre's purpose. Only a new purpose can lead to a new art. The new purpose is called paedagogics. (30)

Thus, Brecht suggests that his fundamental motivation for utilizing anti-illusionist aesthetics and piquing an audience's critical engagement is to assert the use of the theatre as an educational tool.

Brooks, Verdecchia, Youssef, and Chai may be connected to Brecht's theatrical theories and practice because of their assertion of theatre's instructive purpose. Verdecchia, like Brecht, has also made explicit pronouncements in support of the pedagogical purpose of theatre. Beyond his playwriting, he has demonstrated his commitment to theatre's pedagogical ends through other aspects of his theatre practice. For example, his article "Seven Things About Cahoots Theatre Projects" in the book *How Theatre Educates* identifies some of the theatrical capacities Verdecchia has worked in that demonstrate his commitment to educating and challenging audiences. During his interim as Cahoots Theatre's artistic director, Verdecchia has been engaged in many pieces of theatre that focus on personal and theatrical border zones. Attributing this to the broader nature of the company itself, Verdecchia states, "Cahoots Theatre Projects is committed to work that examines, with precision, discrimination, and theatricality, the complexities of our individual identities and our dynamic social relationships with one another" (135). He also adamantly clarifies that in staging the accurate representation of such artistic aims, Cahoots consistently avoids expression through "mirroring" forms, implicitly reiterating his disdain for the artistic limits of realism or naturalism. He states: "It became clear then that the other central idea in our mandate – reflection – meant much more than producing likeness or mirroring nature. It meant reflecting upon, reflection as in critical engagement. It meant perspective and opinion. It meant debate and dialogue" (ibid). Thus, Verdecchia's emphasis on critical engagement contributes to larger, existing theatre communities that share similar impulses.

Verdecchia also clarifies that he does not strive to hector his audience, presuming he is the locus of knowledge and the audience will serve merely as receptors. Instead, he

wants to approach the theatre as a space of communal, critical engagement. As he explained to Jennifer Harvie:

I want to celebrate people's intelligence. I'm tired of theatre that talks down to people. I'm tired of theatre that says, "Your lives are terribly hard and just sit back and be stupid for a while"; or, "You don't want to concern yourself with that." People *do* want to concern themselves with things. People *do* want to contend with things. People *do* want to think. They want to use their critical abilities. That's one of the things I constantly try to do. (48)

Verdecchia may strive to inform audiences of particular socio-political issues but he does not do this at the expense of their intellectual capacities. Rather, the audience's critical engagement with the subject matter is both valued and encouraged.

Though Verdecchia explicitly states his desire to critically engage audiences with the subject matter in his plays, it is also implicitly suggested through his connections to both Noam Chomsky and Bertolt Brecht. In the following chapters I will focus on key moments within *Chomsky*, *Fronteras*, and *Ali and Ali* that utilize specific Brechtian devices to communicate Chomsky-inspired media theory. Specifically, the protagonists in these plays use a number of Brechtian techniques to deliver theoretical material. Key techniques include direct address to the audience, acknowledging that they exist as characters within a play, and the use of slide projections. Though these techniques are found across *Chomsky*, *Fronteras*, and *Ali and Ali*, each play favors combinations of particular techniques in ways that support the playwrights' specific educational aims. Thus, in each chapter I will identify the specific techniques used within a single play and their connection to the ideological impulses driving the theatrical communication. In doing so I hope to demonstrate how each play's particular formal features are related to specific ideological arguments.

In large part, my own impetus for writing this thesis is a reaction against a great deal of contemporary Canadian criticism that has discounted the playwrights' works by measuring them only according to Aristotelian dramaturgical standards. I would like to respond in particular to those specific critics and academics who reveal a disconcerting preference for naturalism and Aristotelian forms to dramatize contemporary subject matters. Joanne Tompkins, Colin Thomas, and Maarten van Dijk take issue with the dramatic nature of the formal features within *Chomsky*, *Fronteras*, and *Ali and Ali*, arguing that the plays are either undramatic, lacking dramatic structure, or formally confusing, basing their arguments on traditional foundations for what constitutes dramatic practice. My analysis will also engage with a second group of critics who have noted the formal impulses guiding the three plays I will examine. I hope to show how Ann Wilson, Mayte Gómez, Jerry Wasserman, Sherry Simon, Rosalind Kerr, Lisa Coulthard, and Elaine Brousseau assess the plays' relationships between form and content, each making particular claims regarding the nature of these relationships. Though not every individual in this group gives positive or supportive feedback regarding the form-content relationships within these plays, each critic does arrive at their conclusions after first assessing the relationship between these dramatic components. Thus, critics from this group, although varied in opinion, offer critical guidelines necessary to appreciate the particular blend of form-content hybrid within *Chomsky*, *Fronteras*, and *Ali and Ali*. In chapter four I will engage with these ideas and demonstrate where I think critics have accounted for the intricacies of such relationships, pointing to possible areas of contention and responding with my own analysis. This will

occur after analyzing the particular formal choices of *Chomsky*, *Fronteras*, and *Ali and Ali* in chapters one, two, and three respectively.

My primary motivation in this analysis is my appreciation for Verdecchia's continual focus on border zones and the insights and promise it affords Canadians both ideologically and artistically. Verdecchia emphasizes border zones throughout his published works, whether fiction or non-fiction, dramatic or literary. Regarding his work at Cahoots and the issues of cultural representation they engage in, Verdecchia explains his application of border zones to the company's mandate as follows:

Reflecting cultural diversity, it seemed to me, meant not thinking of cultures as isolated entities that could be 'represented' objectively or scientifically, but rather looking at the fluidity of culture, the variety of responses to the questions posed by life. We could, I thought, look at the points of intersection, of overlap, of fusion; we could, I thought, focus on the shifting border zones. (134)

In Verdecchia's approach to theatre, the border zone is where the greatest possibility lies, both ideologically and artistically. It is, therefore, the site of my investigation within this thesis.

It is precisely where points intersect that Verdecchia situates himself, theoretically and theatrically, and where he places his protagonists: on ideological border zones. I believe that Brooks, Verdecchia, Youssef, and Chai's specific formal choices also work to construct border spaces in which audiences must negotiate meaning. Specifically, *Chomsky*, *Fronteras*, and *Ali and Ali* offer protagonists who deliver theoretical material while also being implicated within and affected by those issues. Thus, Verdecchia and his co-writers engage their audiences on an entirely new level that has not been experimented by Brecht and others of the Epic theatre. Their protagonists, though using aesthetic principles and ideological motives similar to such historical antecedents, move a

step beyond pedagogical theatre and enter a realm of post-modern, post-colonial border zones actualized in dramatic practice. They engage audiences in the complex experience of cultural and artistic hybrid-possibilities that, at once, give audiences limitless opportunities for the definition of self and the definition of art while, at the same time, complicate the entire scenario by having them watch protagonists struggle with these very devices. They play with the theatre's presentational and representational modes of communication and use this communal space to challenge audiences' perceptions of the mass media, confronting them with their own complicity in the dilemmas presented. They are theatre artists and political activists who place protagonists in the forefront of audiences' consciousnesses and consciences, playing the roles of educators.

THE NOAM CHOMSKY LECTURES

Frustrated by political theatre, and shocked by the revelations of both Galleano and Chomsky, Brooks wanted to create a play that would “make you question your assumptions. [He] wanted to put self-righteousness on display”. So, one evening in the kitchen of their house, Brooks said to Verdecchia, ‘Let’s do a show called *The Noam Chomsky Lectures*’. (Sherman 19)

The Noam Chomsky Lectures is the most obvious and explicit dramatic expression of Daniel Brooks’ and Guillermo Verdecchia’s connections to the research and writings of Noam Chomsky. Beyond the title, these playwrights make this clear to their audience when the character Brooks announces early in the play: “*The Noam Chomsky Lectures* is an attempt to bring you some of the ideas present in the political writings of esteemed Professor Noam Chomsky” (14). Proclaiming the centrality of Chomsky’s thoughts and analysis to the play’s guiding impulses, Brooks and Verdecchia are particularly concerned with Chomsky’s work in media-theories. They dramatize Chomsky’s evidence of how media “cater[s] to the ideological line of Big Business and government” (15) and various Brechtian techniques communicate this theoretical material. Through an episodic narrative structure, Chomsky’s specific findings are organized and disseminated to an audience. Scenes such as “History”, “History, Part Two”, “Lecture”, “Manufacturing Consent” and “Silence and Falling” are either wholly or partially based on Chomsky’s research and writing in the area of media theory. Jason Sherman describes the playwrights’ approaches to the material as follows: “Brooks and Verdecchia apply Chomskian theory in two ways: through a lecture delivered by Verdecchia on a prevailing ‘hot-spot’ [...] and through a series of ‘theatrical demonstrations’ of how the media manipulate public opinion” (20). Since the audience experiences miniature performances that expand on the theories discussed in the example portions of the scene,

“theatrical demonstrations” are not to be confused with Brechtian demonstrations of embodying character (ibid). Rather, these moments are pieces of metatheatre. Pavis clarifies the features of the former definition of demonstration by stating:

This phenomenon does not necessarily involve an autonomous play contained within another, as in the “play within a play”. All that is required is that the represented reality appear to be one that is theatrical [...]. Metatheatre, thus defined, becomes a form of *antitheatre*, where the dividing line between play and real life is erased. (210)

By obliterating lines between fiction and reality, metatheatre operates as an expression of theatrical border-theory, where an audience’s experience with *Chomsky* borders between representation and presentation, experiencing art and experiencing the manufacturing of art.

Not only does the audience witness miniature performances within larger scenes, but they are fully aware that they are viewing a theatrical demonstration. Brooks ensures this recognition occurs with his consistent aural announcement, “Demonstration”, before each of these moments occurs. Pavis, commenting on the effects of such metatheatrical choices, states:

In this way, the staging is not confined to telling a story but reflects on theatre and puts forward its reflection on theatre by integrating it, more or less organically, into the performance. It is no longer only the actor who verbalizes his relationship with his role, as in the Brechtian alienation-effect, but the whole team is staged ‘to the second degree’. In this way theatre work becomes an active reflection and play, blithely mixing the utterance (the text to be spoken, the performance to be produced) with the enunciation (the reflection on the act of saying). (211)

Brooks’ enunciating of “Demonstration” reveals how metatheatre creates an alienation effect. It reminds the audience that they are watching a performance and effectively encourages the audience to frame their experience in a critical way.

Brooks and Verdecchia also apply Brechtian techniques in *Chomsky* to demonstrate specific instances of media-manipulation. Such formal features include slide projections of text and images, direct addresses to announce upcoming dramatic events, and acknowledgement of the theatrical event and demonstration of the characters they perform (via direct addresses to the audience). Though each technique is used to relay specific information and guide the audience's reception of that material in a particular manner, the combination of their use is dependent upon the scene in play and the subject matter being conveyed.

Beyond discussion and dramatization of media manipulation, Brooks and Verdecchia use Brechtian techniques to tackle another topic: hypocrisy, a key concern within *Chomsky*, Sherman notes that "Brooks and Verdecchia expose it every way they can. They expose hypocrisy of a government which supports the invasion of a sovereign nation, and they expose the hypocrisy of a people who through their silence support this invasion" (21). He then adds a crucial observation:

Brooks and Verdecchia go one step further, by revealing their own hypocrisies as actors willing to remain silent about the politics of a play if remaining silent will ensure their participation in it. [...] They're also a way "in" for the audience, a way for us to appreciate more fully a kind of stance Brooks and Verdecchia are taking, to question our own assumptions about our place in the world. (21)

By openly implicating themselves in such issues, Brooks and Verdecchia also gain the audience's recognition of their own individual and collective complicity in particular socio-political events. This occurs through the repetitive, direct addresses Brooks and Verdecchia make regarding shared experiences: present dramatic performance included. The result is a border-experience where the characters operate as both educators and

performers who utilize the theatre space not only as a site for reflective dramatics, but also as a location for intellectual activity.

Brooks and Verdecchia create protagonists who are aware of the constructs they are operating within, both theatrically and politically: they are aware of the roles they play in the theatre and in the very dilemmas they are presenting on stage.

They immediately establish the dualistic role they play in *Chomsky* in their introductory scenes entitled “Introductions”, “Clarifications”, and “Terms of the Show”¹. The components of the production they acknowledge include the Chomskian subject-matter, their existence within a theatrical production, and their role as protagonists.

“Introductions” clearly establishes the latter two when Brooks and Verdecchia say to the audience:

VERDECCHIA. Hello.

BROOKS. Hello.

VERDECCHIA. Good evening.

BROOKS. Hello.

VERDECCHIA. Welcome.

BROOKS. Hello.

VERDECCHIA. I’m Guillermo Verdecchia.

BROOKS. I’m Daniel Brooks.

¹ Though Brooks and Verdecchia textually title their scenes in a Brechtian manner, they do not indicate their projection on a screen, as Brecht was wont to do. Thus, refraining from projecting these titles does not qualify these announcements as wholly Brechtian and I have omitted discussion of these titles as examples of Brechtian techniques as a result. In many instances, however, they verbally announce the subject matter of a particular scene before it occurs. Therefore, the announcement of the scene’s subject matters will be more fully discussed later in this chapter through discussions of Brechtian addresses to the audience.

VERECCHIA. The pre-show music is by Trini Lopez.

BROOKS. The set design is by Dora Award-Winning designer Stephan Droege.

VERDECCHIA. I'm a Sagittarius.

BROOKS. I'm a Cancer. And these are *The Noam Chomsky Lectures*.

VERDECCHIA. Are there any questions? [*he waits for a response*] If there are no questions, we'll proceed. (11-12)

In this brief moment, Brooks and Verdecchia's presentational manners briskly acknowledge a number of elements. The salutations announce their personal connection in the delivery of the play. Stating the identities of the sound and set designers reveals their recognition of the various theatrical components present in the event and directly declaring the title of their play announces the absolute acknowledgement of the production they are presenting. Most significantly, their formal introductions and use of question-and-response establish an open-line of communication between the actors and audience. This is a critical component that affords them the opportunity to create a sense of collective complicity later in their play.

By acknowledging all of these components of theatrical practice, this moment also functions as retheatricalization. Patrice Pavis notes that "retheatricalization highlights the rules and *conventions* of the stage, presenting the performance as playful fiction only" (395). He also adds, quoting from Brecht's *Gesammelte Werke*, that Brecht is included in a group of artists who "have called for the retheatricalization of theatre as a place of play and artifice, and the 're-establishment of theatrical reality (as) a necessary condition for realistic representations of human social life'" (395). Pavis' observations

not only outline the salient features of retheatricalization, features evident in *Chomsky*, they also indicate similar use in the theory and practice of Bertolt Brecht.

Beyond the bounds of audience reception, alienation techniques can also serve the ideologies of the playwrights themselves. Due to the nature of their forms, they give their protagonists direct agency in communicating the socio-political issues in which those very characters are implicated and by which they are affected. Brooks and Verdecchia use their playwright status to give their characters, themselves, the agency to engage in such ideological subject matter on stage. In doing this, the playwrights are setting up the audience's reception of the layered realities they will experience, obscuring lines between fiction and reality. This theatrical construct is immediately established when they introduce themselves: "I'm Guillermo Verdecchia"; "I'm Daniel Brooks" (11). They solidify this distinction later, in the scene "Clarifications", when Verdecchia tells the audience, "We are the characters, this is the stage" (14). Thus, Brooks and Verdecchia begin blurring the line between creators and presenters by embodying both roles simultaneously on stage. It also gives the audience a clear sense of the characters' agency since they are not solely delivering the material, they are its point of dramatic origin: the playwrights.

"Clarifications", as its title suggests, clears up any confusion that may have arisen from the statements made within "Introductions" or any of the audience's preconceived notions about the aesthetic of the production. Verdecchia indicates that *Chomsky* "is not a satire" or "a Wooster Group Tribute"² while Brooks tells the audience that, instead:

² Brooks and Verdecchia indicate in the footnotes of *Chomsky* that their use of a desk and chairs had received questions and criticism regarding possible scenographic inspiration from The Wooster Group who characteristically used such set pieces.

The Noam Chomsky Lectures is a perpetual workshop, an unfinished play, a fourth draft, a work in progress; hence, you are a workshop audience, an unfinished audience, a fourth-draft audience, an audience in progress; hence, this is not a real play, you are not a real audience – so let's all sit back and have a whale of a good time. (12)

Though the metaphysical question of existence is presumably made in jest, the remains of the statement both announce the 'unfinished' quality of the text and satirize the act of categorizing a production before it is even underway, an area of contention Brooks and Verdecchia vocalize throughout the play.

For instance, in "Clarifications" they address many of the critical expectations forced onto playwrights by projecting the published statements of theatre critics directly on to a slide screen. Specifically, they respond to many critical constraints created by Ray "Constable" Conlogue (*The Globe and Mail*) and Alex Patterson (*Metropolis*) and present artistic tools, such as the Artstick, as a way of operating within imposed artistic boundaries (13). This dialogue begins when Brooks and Verdecchia project a statement of Patterson's, citing the publication it is printed within: "When a work resolutely refuses to view the world in anything but naïve us-versus-them terms, it is not a play but a polemic and the playwright but a pamphleteer. Alex Patterson, *Metropolis*, February 1, 1990" (13). Verdecchia responds to Patterson's objection by telling the audience the Artstick "will be used by either Daniel or myself whenever one of the performers crosses that fine line between art and demagoguery" (13). Thus, Brooks and Verdecchia project text on-screen so they may directly address the audience and tell them what aesthetic and ideological restrictions they must operate within.

Additionally, Brooks and Verdecchia give the audience a theatrical demonstration of how the Artstick will be used within the production:

[BROOKS *stands*]

BROOKS. Okay, let's talk about this Gulf War. Why didn't Bush let sanctions against Iraq work? I'll tell you why. He wanted a war, he wanted to end the talk about a peace dividend, he is seeking the legitimization of war and the elevation of the United States to the status of world mercenary policeman –

VERDECCHIA. [*strikes the table with the Artstick*] The Artstick. Article 51 of *The Noam Chomsky Lectures* Charter states: "When hit with the Artstick, the speaker is effectively silenced". (ibid)

This metatheatrical moment effectively familiarizes the audience with many of the theatrical tools they will experience while indicating the nature and purpose of the tools themselves: a tool Brooks and Verdecchia must include in their play so that *Chomsky* is deemed acceptable by certain theatre critics.

While "Introductions" and "Clarifications" introduce the aesthetic and experiential components within *Chomsky*, "Terms of the Show" outlines its upcoming subject matter. Directly addressing the audience, Brooks states:

These are the terms of our show: *The Noam Chomsky Lectures* is an attempt to bring you some of the ideas present in the political writings of esteemed Professor Noam Chomsky, as well as some information you may not be familiar with. According to Noam Chomsky, you are not familiar with it because the Western Press consistently caters to the interests of Big Business, because the Western Press *is* Big Business. (14-15)

By addressing the audience, Brooks and Verdecchia implicitly point to the process of theatre making and the subject matter their play is based upon. Though Brooks' statement indicates the dramatic focus of the text, he also notes the motivation behind creating a play out of this specific material. He tells the audience:

We of *The Noam Chomsky Lectures* are concerned with the control that Big Business has on the formation and dissemination of information, we are concerned with our own collective moral hypocrisy and cowardice, and we are concerned with the movement in theatre towards a greater

and greater focus on market forces. (17)

Brooks' statement notes that while the upcoming issues are those raised by Noam Chomsky, the impetus for creating this material is their own concern for "collective moral hypocrisy and cowardice" that creates and perpetuates the dilemmas Chomsky observes (ibid). By announcing this concern, the protagonists acknowledge their own complicity in these dilemmas. This particular statement of Brooks' gives the audience an added sense of belonging to a collective, communal group who communicate through open dialogue. It also lays the foundation for future tensions that will complicate this scenario.

From these artistic and ideological foundations, Brooks and Verdecchia dive into a stream of episodic scenes that communicate Chomskian subject matter through continued application of Brechtian techniques. One of the most striking examples of this relationship occurs in the scene "Manufacturing Consent". After physically presenting Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky's book, *Manufacturing Consent*, on stage, Brooks and Verdecchia lecture and demonstrate ten examples "of how the media shapes the news and how it sets the political agenda" (34). Structuring the entire scene under units verbally titled Choice of Topic, Placement, Ideological Assumptions, Blind Stupidity, Biased Sources, Quoting out of Context, The Memory Hole, Captions and Headlines, Doublespeak, and Weight, each moment focuses on a specific instance of media manipulation that Herman and Chomsky observe in their published work.

To present this material, Brooks and Verdecchia use direct address most frequently. In doing so, the playwrights, embodying the characters by their same names, verbally transfer facts directly to the audience, as if speaking to them in a public

conversation on political matters. For example, after announcing "Choice of Topic",

Brooks gives the following information to the audience:

Manuel Noriega's lifestyle was a favourite choice of topic both during and after the American invasion of Panama. This from *The Los Angeles Times*: "Vats of blood. Animal entrails. A picture of Adolf Hitler. Spike-heeled shoes. More than 100 pounds of cocaine. All were part of the bizarre scenes encountered by American troops as they stormed the inner sanctum of deposed Panamanian strongman Manuel Noriega." Not chosen as a topic was the fact that the invasion was, according to American law, illegal, as only Congress, and not the president, can constitutionally declare war. The press has also chosen to turn a blind eye to Bush's own lifestyle. (34-35)

Brooks' speech is delivered in a presentational rather than representational manner. He obliterates the fourth wall to both announce his material directly and connect with the audience personally.

Brooks and Verdecchia also utilize direct address as a form of personal connective tissue with the audience. Immediately after the above statement, Brooks "*puts the microphone to the side and leans towards the audience*" (35) indicating Brooks' desire to make the audience feel as if they are being let in on a secret. Now that the actor-audience relationship has been made more personal, Brooks proceeds to tell them: "Rumours that the press would report on Bush's extra-marital activities during the 1988 election campaign caused a plunge in the stock market. The gossip never hit the press" (35). Brooks then increases the sense of secrecy by "*lean[ing] even farther over the table and speak[ing] in a whisper*" immediately before telling the audience "Also not a choice of topic – and I hope this goes no farther than this room – is the drinking habit of

our own prime minister”³ (35). To intensify the audience’s experience of being directly addressed, Brooks also uses this moment to remind the audience of the shared theatre space. His gesture creates a more personal connection among him, the audience, and his fellow actor. Thus, within mere minutes of sharing Herman and Chomsky’s example of manufacturing consent, Brooks uses direct address as an informative declaration and a relationship builder between character and audience.

Within “Manufacturing Consent”, each of the examples is followed by a “theatrical demonstration” of how the example operates in a new context, typically implicating Verdecchia and Brooks in the situation itself (34). A moment that theatrically hooks Verdecchia by his own ideological rod occurs in their example of Choice of Topic. After announcing the manner in which Manuel Noriega’s lifestyle has been presented in the media, the actors clearly delineate the transition into theatrical demonstration when Brooks himself announces, “Demonstration of Choice of Topic” (35). He then proceeds with an investigation into Verdecchia’s personal life and artistic choices.

[BROOKS.] Guillermo?

VERDECCHIA. Yes?

BROOKS. Do you do drugs?

VERDECCHIA. Well ... yes.

BROOKS. Did you do drugs or have a drink at any time during the creation of this show?

VERDECCHIA. I might have had an Armagnac ...

³ Based on the 1991 version of the text referring to Prime Minister Brian Mulroney’s absence from Quebec during the Oka crisis and the hearsay regarding a residence at a rehab clinic preventing him from attending.

BROOKS. How many women have you slept with in your lifetime Guillermo?

VERDECCHIA. I don't know Daniel –

BROOKS. Give us a round number.

VERDECCHIA. I don't keep track –

BROOKS. Round it off to the nearest ten.

VERDECCHIA. Daniel –

BROOKS. Guillermo, did you not tell me on August 18, 1989, and I quote, "I will never work with Crow's Theatre again." And then on January 22 of this year, did you not say, and I quote, "I got a part in Crow's new play and I'm gonna take it."

VERDECCHIA. Well, yes –

BROOKS. Yes, you did.

And on March 5, 1991, when you were asked to respond to an Ontario Arts Council survey that was asking theatre artists how the Ontario Arts Council could better serve the artist, did you not say, you who are a theatre artist ... you are a theatre artist, are you not?

VERDECCHIA. Yes, I am.

BROOKS. Yes, you are. Did you not say to me, and I quote, "I'm a very busy person, I don't consult for free."

VERDECCHIA. Daniel, that was a –

BROOKS [*screaming*] Did you or didn't you? [*pause, then calmly*] You did. And when I asked you whether or not you would be willing to do an extra, non-paying performance of *The Noam Chomsky Lectures* at DuMaurier World Stage down at Harbourfront, did you not say, and I quote, "Not for what they're paying us."

No, Mister Verdecchia, the issue here has nothing to do with your paranoid ideas about thought control in a democratic society and *everything* to do with your tendency toward alcoholism, womanizing, greed, and gross hypocrisy! [*silence*] I see that Guillermo is experiencing some of the same emotions that his character is going through at the present time. (35-36)

This moment dramatically echoes the key issue previously mentioned during the example portion of the scene: that an imposed choice of topic has the ability to manipulate an audience's reception of the individual being interviewed. Thus, it exposes Verdecchia's personal vices and artistic hypocrisy as a way of reflecting upon the subject matter of the example. Furthermore, it indicates to the audience that Verdecchia, both as an actor and as a character, is not wholly ideologically pure. As the first example and demonstration out of the series of ten, it also sets the groundwork for how the audience will frame the rest of their experiences with the entire scene.

"Manufacturing Consent" also makes use of text and images projected onto the stage screen while an actor directly addresses the audience. The demonstration of Weight makes clear use of these elements. As their example, Brooks tells the audience that stories pertaining to international atrocities and violations of human rights are given merely a fraction of the weight other stories receive in the press. To demonstrate this theatrically, Brooks silently reads to himself the article he made reference to in the example while Verdecchia presents the events of the past seven months that received much larger attention. To accentuate their example visually, "*Verdecchia stands on the desk with a stack of newspapers; Brooks sits, reading quietly*" (46). After verbally relaying some of the information found in the stack of newspapers, Verdecchia visually makes reference to some of the photographs *Life* magazine used to depict the Gulf War. Not only does he directly address the audience by reiterating what they see projected onto the stage screen, he also adds his personal commentary to each of the images.

SLIDE Photograph of soldier's face from the front cover of *Life*

[VERDECCHIA.] That's an American soldier, he's got camouflage paint on, he's got a Desert Storm helmet on, he's one cool cat.

SLIDE Photograph of Marlboro cowboy

[VERDECCHIA.] This is the back cover of *Life*, and what do you know, it's the same guy relaxing on his ranch in Montana.

SLIDE Missile launched from destroyer

[VERDECCHIA.] Very cool, very pointy destroyer firing a missile.

SLIDE Crowd of Arabs

[VERDECCHIA.] These are some helpless people that we are helping.

SLIDE Video image of POW

[VERDECCHIA.] Oh, that's the POW they beat up, very weird picture from a video, very blue, very disturbing, and very cool.

SLIDE Corpse of Kurdish woman with child

[VERDECCHIA.] This is [*sees slide*] – oh shit. (48)

By communicating what the audience is viewing, he ensures that their experience with the photographs is enunciated through him. Verdecchia uses hyperbolic yet deadpan reactions to convey a necessary sense of artificiality in order to present the nature of manufacturing emotions themselves. He is both the messenger of the news and an exemplar of how that news operates upon an individual in an emotional way. Verdecchia is skyrocketing with the wave of missiles and rocket launchers while Brooks silently keeps the quiet truth to himself. The moment operates as more than a theatrical demonstration, it is metatheatre with a political purpose. Verdecchia satirizes the entire notion of audience reception by both controlling the means by which the audience receives the material and overtly echoing the specific responses he assumes the publication desires of its audience.

Verdecchia then moves from engaging in verbal and visual dialogue with the slides to using direct address to assess the coverage *The Toronto Star* gave of the Gulf War. To punctuate the tongue-in-cheek reaction of excitement towards the war, Verdecchia notes that the press has reverted to more banal stories. He quickly relays a few of the mundane, post-Gulf War articles and then as “*he jumps off the desk and returns to his seat*”, he asks the audience, “Isn’t peace boring?” (50). Again, at the same time that Verdecchia is engaging in this material with the audience and giving his hyper-aware, sarcastic reaction to the manufacturing of emotions these photos create, Brooks has been silently reading a more subdued observation of war activities and atrocities. Thus, this piece of metatheatre uses the language of the stage to enunciate issues verbally introduced in the example.

Direct dramaturgical announcements both open the entire “Manufacturing Consent” scene and bond the various examples and demonstrations together. The protagonists directly inform the audience of the upcoming subject matter and theatrical constructs they will experience. By consistently reminding the audience of being present at a theatrical presentation that makes use of dramatic elements such as content and form, these instances serve as examples of retheatricalization.

This convention is used within the first minute of the scene when Brooks describes Herman and Chomsky’s *Manufacturing Consent* to the audience as “an in-depth analysis of how the media shapes the news and how it sets the political agenda” (34). He continues by telling them: “In the following minutes, we will give examples of how the media sets the agenda, and for each example we will give a theatrical demonstration – this is the theatre after all” (ibid). Not only does Brooks outline the

specific content of the scene, preparing the audience for the ideas they will be presented with, he indicates the aesthetic features of the staging, thereby maintaining the audience's recognition of the presentation as being theatrical. Operating as a presentational hybrid, blending realistic accounts of media manipulation with an artistic expression of these instances, it serves as a further instance of Brooks and Verdecchia's implementation of border-theory in the theatre.

Furthermore, retheatricalization – in instances such as these - also functions as an alienation effect. The audience is consistently reminded of how their theatrical experience is being created and therefore, they are continually encouraged to engage with the stage on a critical rather than emotional level. However, Brooks and Verdecchia do not further announce the deconstruction of this particular dramaturgical approach. Indeed, they establish the theatrical components of the play in introductory scenes and the dramatic parameters of their metatheatrical examples are frequently announced. However, Brooks and Verdecchia never address the *effects* these anti-illusionistic techniques have on an audience. They deconstruct the modes of operation in media and big business but do not analyze their *own* communicative techniques. For example, the presentational formal features within "Manufacturing Consent" relay its socio-political content but Brooks and Verdecchia do not further deconstruct the operation of those particular theatre techniques themselves. Lisa Coulthard recognizes this unique situation and addresses it in her article "'The Line's Getting Mighty Blurry': Politics, Polemics and Performance in *The Noam Chomsky Lectures*". As her ideas here have also challenged many of the presentational techniques used within *Chomsky*, further

engagement with her analysis will occur in chapter four where I engage in debates between form and content with other theatre critics and academics.

However problematic the situation appears, Brooks and Verdecchia ensure that it carries an artistic and ideological purpose. They cleverly acknowledge this seemingly hypocritical situation and perform their dilemma in a highly metatheatrical manner. The scene entitled "The Auction" displays this dilemma and then turns it into a moment of grand dramaturgical recognition. The manner in which Brooks and Verdecchia control the means of production is accentuated in order to echo the sense of frustration Brooks and Verdecchia (echoing Herman and Chomsky) have with the control media and big business have over the *production of thought*. "The Auction" begins by utilizing direct address and reheatrical techniques, only this time it is combined with audience participation. Verdecchia addresses the audience: "In the spirit of the free market of ideas, we will now auction off one minute of time for a statement of any kind" (51). He then asks, presumably to the lighting board operator, "May we have the house lights up, please?" (51). The auctioning of one minute of stage time then ensues with Verdecchia opening the bidding at two dollars. What follows is "BROOKS *and* VERDECCHIA monopoliz[ing] the bidding, which rapidly finishes with BROOKS winning at two or three thousand dollars" (51). Being duped by actors who disobeyed their ideological vows establishes in the audience a sense of antagonism against Brooks and Verdecchia. Brooks and Verdecchia provoke the audience by controlling the theatrical and ideological parameters of the auction itself: setting up audience expectations only to thwart them moments later. Brooks and Verdecchia, breaking the promise that the auction exists "In

the spirit of the free market of ideas”, effectively sever the connection between actors and audience (ibid).

Brooks ensures that their theatrical take-over serves a purpose. Before presenting his thoughts in his newly purchased minute of stage time, Brooks tells the audience, “I’d like to state that the freedom of the press exists for those who own one, and we own this show” (52). They may have set up a moment of antagonism between the audience and the actors but Brooks tells the audience directly that this was to set up their next argument. Thus, Brooks and Verdecchia do deconstruct their own means of production since they present the purpose behind their choice: to continue the sense of inescapable, ideological ownership existing in democratic nations and to use that dilemma as fodder for a direct audience experience with frustration of the situation. Thus, *Chomsky*’s formal features accentuate the over-arching understanding of how power relationships and thought control operate in *all* media within democratic nations; present theatrical event included.

Additionally, Brooks’ statement acknowledges the power imbalance of their actor-audience relationship but is further complicated by the fact that they are collectively experiencing the theatre event together (a fact that the audience is reminded of throughout the production). The strongest example of this personal dilemma is outlined in a scene previously discussed in this chapter: “Clarifications”. Brooks and Verdecchia utilize this relatively introductory stage time to present their artistic controls before the rest of the production demonstrates the methods by which they are being controlled. As previously discussed in this chapter, theatre critics such as Ray Conlogue, Alex Patterson, and Robert Crew manipulate Brooks and Verdecchia’s methods of artistic expression. A slide projection presents some of “Robert’s Rules”, Robert Crew’s assessment of what

constitute “the fundamentals of theatre, like communication, honest emotion, engagement, and commitment to the characters on the stage” (14). The same medium is used to present Alex Patterson’s opinion that “When a work resolutely refuses to view the world in anything but naïve us-versus-them terms, it is not a play but a polemic and the playwright but a pamphleteer” (13). Adding to the emphasis on enforcement, Verdecchia alerts the audience to the fact that Ray Conlogue is “known in some circles [as] Constable Conlogue”, a comment made in response to the slide quoting Conlogue’s belief in “the need for an Esthetic Police” (13). My initial discussions of these comments occurred in the context of Brooks and Verdecchia’s use of retheatricalization as a further instance of the formal features used to increase an audience’s critical engagement with the text. In this context, however, the particulars of this scene are important because they also address the critical context the playwrights operate within. As one of the initial scenes in the play, it gives the audience a tool for understanding the particular plights of the protagonists/playwrights and their struggle to communicate freely without the enforcement of artistic constraints.

Thus, the entire production itself is a demonstration of how artists struggle to communicate their material while being assessed by particular artistic standards and assumptions. This results in the two protagonists directly addressing their frustrations to the audience and theatrically demonstrating the continued censorship they must partake in by activating self-censoring tools such as the Artstick and the Whistle of Indignation within the play itself. They are activists who are passionate about particular ideas but, as artists, continually demonstrate the frustrations they face when forced to adhere to particular guidelines.

Though the audience is consistently briefed on upcoming subject matter and theatrical tools, the actors' responses to socio-political discoveries remains emotionally charged. In one of his most passionate speeches to the audience, evident from the amount of personal opinion presented, Verdecchia shares his artistic ideologies.

Unmediated at the moment, he tells them:

Some of you may be thinking that what we have embarked on here is not theatre. Well, that's too bad. I would like to say this: if the theatre is to survive, it must become something other than an expensive alternative to television. We are going to have to look at the world and the world of the theatre without ideological or artistic blinders. And I'm not talking about the theatre of gentle psychological manipulation, or mature content, or three-dimensional characters. I'm talking about rolling up our sleeves, diving into the muck, taking a good, hard look at who we are and what we do and goddamn the excuses. (59-60)

Unfortunately, due to the constraints they placed upon themselves early in the show (in order to adhere to critical ideologies), Brooks is forced to smash the Artstick, sending Verdecchia back to the desk.

However, in a version of the production that occurred shortly after the Nicaraguan elections, Brooks and Verdecchia include footnoted material that presents Verdecchia's added frustration at his own self-inflicted censorship. After assessing Henry Mietkiewics' review of a play entitled *Potestad*, Verdecchia tells the audience:

he misses the point and tells us that Argentina's Dirty War is a familiar subject and that the playwright ran the risk of turning his play into a "tedious, political rant". I would like to suggest that most of us, including Mr. Mietkiewicz, don't know *shit* about the dirty war, and I would like to know what the fuck is wrong with a political rant anyway you -. (89-90)

By rebelling against the rules he and Brooks promised to follow, as the statement enters into the realm of polemics, this brief moment affords Verdecchia the opportunity to reveal his regret for vowing adherence to certain ideological constraints. It also creates

emotional impact as the audience watches Verdecchia attempt to share his passionate beliefs only to be forced to follow the rules he promised to keep as he “*smashes the Artstick on the desk*” and effectively silences *himself* (90). It is a moment that reveals Verdecchia’s utter disgust with the system and the self-inflicted nature of the pathos he is enduring through it all.

Therefore, by oscillating between positions as actors with socio-political agency and characters who are affected by ideological infrastructures of their own, the playwrights give the audience tools for critical engagement *and* the opportunities for emotional attachment to struggling actors: a combination that becomes the fundamental experience with *Fronteras Americanas* and *Ali and Ali* as well.

The final scene of *Chomsky*, “Last Part”, also suggests the desire to maintain the tensions created by this dualistic nature. Rather than imposing a solution to the dilemma and affording the audience catharsis, Brooks and Verdecchia offer them the opportunity to consider the material and choose their own methods of resolution beyond the bounds of the theatre. Brooks takes his last moment of stage time to prepare the audience for this experience.

What we’ll do now is show you one last slide. We will turn to the slide, and the lights will go black as we exit. We ask that you consider the slide in the dark. When any one of you has had enough, you will yell, “Light!” The lights will come up, and the show will be over.... (65)

Remaining true to his word. Brooks and Verdecchia exit the stage as the lights fade and the following text is projected on the screen: “The question for Canadians is whether they feel comfortable being accomplices to mass murder. In the past the answer has been yes, they do feel comfortable. Noam Chomsky, *Language and Politics*” (ibid). In these final moments, Brooks and Verdecchia do not conclude any of the issues or insinuate that any

of their frustrations with those issues have subsided. Instead, they leave the stage on a note of piqued tension and provide the audience with the tool to release themselves, and the audience exits the theatre with those emotions intact. Much like Chomsky himself, Brooks and Verdecchia present dilemmas clearly and concisely, leaving their audience to consider what they will do to change them.

FRONTERAS AMERICANAS

"If we learn to cross borders on stage, we may learn how to do so in the world" (Gómez Peña, *La Pocha Nostra*)

Guillermo Verdecchia's solo creation, *Fronteras Americanas*, explores the notion of borders through its content and form. As a one-person show, a single performer divides stage time between the lives of two very distinct characters: Verdecchia and Facundo Morales Segundo (a.k.a. Wideload). Each delivers monologues pertaining to notions of cultural identity, borders, and belonging, with the primary actor switching character and topic between these separate units of action. Signaling Verdecchia's own conflict with cultural identity prior to *Fronteras*' production, the character Verdecchia is in search of his cultural identity, discussing his personal experiences with the audience. In contrast, Wideload explores the complex cultural landscape of North America and deconstructs the sources and methods that manufacture specific stereotypes. Thus, the character Verdecchia serves as a personal account of the effects of media manipulation and Wideload operates as means of analysis and education about such manipulation.

The audience immediately recognizes that notions of borders and belonging are focal concerns in *Fronteras* when the following statements are projected on a screen during the pre-show:

It is impossible to say which human family we belong. We are all born of one mother America, though our fathers had different origins, and we all have differently coloured skins. This dissimilarity is of the greatest significance.

- Simón Bolívar

Fronteras. Borders. Americanas. American. (Verdecchia 19)

Presented at a time when the audience assembles in their seats and the characters are yet to arrive on stage, it foregrounds the concepts of difference, division, and desire for belonging before the dramatic action begins. Much like *Chomsky*, *Fronteras* invites critical reflection about difference from the outset. However, this is suggested implicitly in *Fronteras* through the nature of the formal features rather than explicitly by the protagonists.

Topics such as borders and belonging are communicated through specific, formal components connected to the protagonists. More specifically, the protagonists use direct address and slide projections inform the audience of the particular subject matter they discuss. Additionally, they offer dramatic accounts of their relevant experiences and present personal opinions on the material. Verdecchia frequently presents his accounts of alienation to the audience through enacting and retelling personal moments, but in scenes such as "History", Verdecchia also uses direct address and slide projections to deliver "An Idiosyncratic History of America" (29). Though Wideload is the primary means for giving lecture-material, he also recalls and retells his experiences with cultural division. Therefore, the protagonists serve as both performers and instructors: acting out their dual purposes as presenters of both dramatic action and ideological material. They are characters who enact events and narrators who present topics, facts, and ideas throughout the storyline.

Specific instances of direct address also create a sense of division between actor and audience. Verdecchia and Wideload directly address the audience on a number of occasions as either "you" or "we". By re-iterating the inherent relationships created by the theatrical event, they echo *Fronteras'* contrasting ideas of community and individual

alienation. For example, Verdecchia's initial stage moment expresses the production itself as a communal act when he directly tells the audience: "Here *we* are. *All together*. At long last. [...] Here *we* are" (ibid, emphasis mine). Verdecchia even clarifies by saying, "Now because this is the theatre when I say *we* I mean all of us and when I say here I don't just mean at the Tarragon⁴, I mean America" (19-20). Verdecchia acknowledges the theatrical space to establish a sense of community; how individuals are connected through shared actions and events. Wideload, however, highlights the divisions between communities and antagonistically perpetuates the sense of tension that separates them. Besides antagonistically calling members of the audience "gringo" (22), Wideload also calls the audience "you people" (25), "you Saxons", and "you guys" (39), clearly creating lines of distinction between him and the audience as individuals and as a collective. Since these contrasting ideas of division and belonging are perpetuated by Verdecchia and Wideload through their language and the performance of their characters, duality is not only a dramatic focus of the play, but a paradoxical experience for the audience. This dramaturgical technique of Guillermo Verdecchia's not only enacts the complex nature of these concepts, it connects with the audience on an immediate and personal level. This approach is imperative to delivering the media-related observations in a very immediate and personal manner with the audience.

The connection to Chomsky's research and writings in media-theory may not be made explicitly as in *The Noam Chomsky Lectures*. However, key moments of Wideload's indicate this point of inspiration. His scenes: "El Bandito", "Introduction to Wideload", "The Smiths", "Dancing", "Latin Lover", "Of Ferrets and Avocado", "Drug

⁴ *Fronteras Americanas* was first produced at the Tarragon Theatre Extra Space in January 1993.

War Deconstruction", and "Latin Invasion" broadly examine cultural stereotypes such as the Latin bandit, Latin lover, Latin drug lord. In "Latin Lover" and "Drug War Deconstruction", specifically, Wideload analyzes the rhetoric and images used in the media to create and perpetuate these stereotypes.

When educating the audience in modes of media-manipulation, Wideload occupies theatrical border-zones. He utilizes presentational communication techniques, lecturing an audience through direct address and slide projections, and also represents a dramatic character who conveys his personal reactions to the material. In "Latin Lover", he refers to text and images often associated with the Latin Lover archetype, reiterating his evidence to the audience and delivering his own personal opinions and sarcastic quips alongside them. Though this scene is one of the first to reveal Wideload's recognition of ideological control in the media, "Drug War Deconstruction" establishes his undeniable agency when delivering a lecture to an audience. This is immediately apparent when Wideload opens the scene by telling the audience, "Hey, I want to show you a little movie" (60). Not only is the power relation between performer and audience clearly delineated, Wideload establishes that he controls the means of production that delivers information to the audience. Wideload then complicates the situation with the reminder that they are about to experience the event together. By telling them, "we are just gonna see some of de highlights" (ibid), he establishes the shared nature of a theatre event; an event that only moments ago was outlined as being framed by specific power relationships between those who deliver information and those who receive it. This echoes the more explicit comment made by Brooks in *Chomsky*, "that freedom of the press exists for those who own one, and we own this show" (Brooks and Verdecchia 52).

In *Fronteras*, however, the suggestions are made implicitly through the unspoken relationships of the theatre event itself. Not least of these is the fact that Wideload is merely a character performed by Verdecchia, the creator of the production – a fact that would be made evident through production programs given to audience members prior to the performance.

Throughout the scene, Wideload educates the audience and demonstrates his control over means of artistic production when “*An edited drug-war TV movie plays without sound*” as “WIDELoad *explains the action*” (60). By editing, directing, and commenting on a drug war film being projected on stage, he removes the film’s ability to communicate and connect with the audience as he has muted the material in favor of voicing his own observations and opinions. Even when the film delivers material in a visual manner, Wideload ensures that his voice acts as the primary transmitter of information to the audience. He starts by telling the audience, “Dis is de title: It says DE WAR ON DRUGS. In BIG BLOCK LETTERS. In English. Dis is another title: *The Cocaine Cartel*. Dey’re talking about de Medellin Cartel in Columbia” (61). Though it is not necessary for Wideload to do this, as the audience can presumably read the words for themselves, it is a way of indicating that he is the agent of delivering the film’s material; that he controls the means of information dissemination and reception. Furthermore, it serves as a characteristic instance – present in all three plays discussed within this thesis – of a protagonist acknowledging the features omitted from the material they present. Wideload clearly announces the subtext not given to the audience while implicitly addressing a much larger issue: the mass media’s control over the presence and absence of particular details.

Wideload's fundamental approach to this media-deconstruction is to relay the film's images alongside his personal opinions and analysis. Adding in his own observant, comical flare, Wideload tells the audience what is happening in the film:

Dis is de hero. He is a Drug Enforcement Agent from de U.S. who is sent to Columbia to take on de Medellin Cartel. He is smiling. He kisses his ex-wife. [*as character on-screen turns away*] Oh ... he is shy. Dis woman is a kind of judge, a Columbian judge, and she agrees to prosecute de Medellin Cartel, to build a case against de drug lords even though her life is being threatened here on de phone even as we watch. Watch. [*on-screen, the judge speaks into the phone; WIDELOAD provides the dialogue*] "But ... I didn't order any pizza". Dis guy is a journalist, an editor for a big Columbian newspaper. He is outspoken in his criticism of the drug lords. He has written editorial after editorial condemning de Cartel and calling for de arrest of de drug lords. (61)

Though the moment is clearly controlled by Wideload, as he manipulates the means of communication and the specific information that the audience receives, it also establishes that Wideload gives the audience a factual basis upon which his upcoming analysis will be based.

During this scene, Wideload also voices his views on the material's meaning and deconstructs the images the audience has been receiving. Wideload synthesizes the semiotics for the audience, telling them that the protagonist of the film "is a family man, as we can tell by his Volvo car and by de presents which he loads into de car to take to his loved ones" (61). Though Wideload could have simply stated the character's role as "a family man", the added acknowledgement reveals that he also intends to deconstruct the manner in which this icon is represented in the media.⁵

⁵ Though it may seem obvious to the reader who has noted that the title of the scene, "Drug War Deconstruction" implies the presence of this activity, Wideload has not directly revealed the title, or the upcoming activity of the scene, to the audience. Therefore, they would not know to expect such an occurrence.

Ensuring that the audience also understands how images of “bad guys” are represented, Wideload describes features of “de Medellin Cartel” (62). He tells them, “Dese are de drug lords. Dey are de bad guys. We know dey are bad because dey have manicured hands, expensive jewellery, even more expensive suits and ... dark hair” (ibid). Referring to their leader, Wideload introduces “de kingpin, Pablo Escobar, head of de Medellin Cartel, de baddest of de bad. We know he is bad because he has reptilian eyes” (62). With each use of the word “we”, Wideload begins building a sense of complicity in the reception of the ideas and ideologies presented in the film. By acknowledging that both he and the audience are viewing the material together in a shared experience, he reminds the audience of their collective status as viewers.

Wideload also uses two other methods of transmitting the film’s information to the audience: fast forwarding and pausing the tape. Controlling the speed at which the tape is played, he determines the delivery of the film’s material and what pieces of information from the film the audience will receive. Therefore, Wideload also filters material and aligns the audience with his point of view by omitting particular information. He also takes the opportunity to assess the film’s topics and issues by putting the film on pause. Doing so, he directly tells the audience:

Dis movie shows us a lot of things. It shows us dat drugs wreck families: in dis case de family of de nice white guy who is trying to stop de drug dealers – nobody in his family uses drugs – it’s just he spends so much time fighting drugs dat his family falls apart. Dis movie shows us dat de drug lords are nasty people who will not hesitate to kill anybody who gets in deir way. And you all know dat de kingpin, Pablo Escobar is now dead. But did you know dat Señor Escobar was one of the richest men in de world according to *The Economist* magazine? Now Señor Escobar was not only a giant in free-market capitalism, he was also very big in public works, especially public housing. Interesting, huh? De movie doesn’t show us dat. (62)

Again, Wideload focuses on what information is made absent and begins to tell them what the film does not reveal. Wideload asks the audience the question, "What else doesn't de movie show us?" (62). Answering his own question, Wideload tells them:

It does not show us for example dat profits from de sale of cocaine are used to fund wars like de U.S. war on Nicaragua which left some 20,000 Nicaraguans dead. Dis movie does not show us dat right-wing Miami-based terrorists, major U.S. drug traffickers, de Medellin Cartel, Syrian drug and arms dealers, de CIA, de State Department and Oliver North all worked together to wage war on Nicaragua. It does not show us that charges against major U.S. drug traffickers – does are de people who bring de drugs on to dis part of de continent – charges against dose people were dropped once they became involved in the Contra war against Nicaragua.
(63)

Not only is Wideload incredibly focused on educating an audience in how particular meanings are created and delivered in the entertainment industry, he also emphasizes that certain information ends up on the cutting room floor. By ensuring that the audience is aware of both facets of media-manipulation, he implicates them in these actions, making their silence toward the creation of these events recognizable in the current stage action. This is evident as he continues to connect with the audience on a personal level by announcing the purpose of this lesson. In one of his final statements in the scene, he directly tells the audience: "So de next time a blatant piece of propaganda like dis one comes on, I hope we will watch it sceptically" (63). By using the plural "we", Wideload reiterates the value of this shared experience of cinematic deconstruction and political education. In these moments, Wideload not only instructs an audience in methods of media manipulation, he acknowledges the present theatre relationships as a means of presenting the dilemma in an immediate and personal manner

In addition to being aware of ideological manipulation in the entertainment industry, and having a profound sense of agency when revealing this fact, Wideload also

exists as a self-reflexive character who is conscious of himself as a theatrical device (character) operating in a theatrical infrastructure (actor performing character in a production). In scenes such as “El Teatro”, Wideload acknowledges that he is present at a theatre event, performing for an audience. He announces to the audience (and, presumably, the lighting board operator) that he would like the house lights to be raised so he may see the faces of the audience, speaking to them personally about the space and the collective event of which they are a part (52-53). He then relieves them from the event by suggesting, “Let’s take a break, huh?” and telling them, “It’s intermission ladies and gentlemen. Get your hot chocolate and Wideload wine gums outside” (53). Thus, Wideload ensures that the audience recognizes his own consciousness of his theatrical function within the particular event.

What Wideload does not publicly acknowledge to the audience is how he is operating in a particular manner to deliver a specific and controlled message from Verdecchia (as playwright). It is for this reason that Lisa Coulthard’s critique of *The Noam Chomsky Lectures* also applies to *Fronteras*. She claims that “Although the *Lectures* disseminates information and delineates and depicts the utopian possibilities for revising the critical reception of entertainment, [...] it does not apply the standards for reflection and reception to its own message” (54). Though her statement refers to *Chomsky*, the basis of the accusation applies to the solo-creation as well. Therefore, Wideload’s dramaturgical function may be to give a course in deconstruction but ironically he does not deliver the added analysis of how he functions as a theatrical tool for Guillermo Verdecchia in this particular setting.

Fronteras' formal features implicitly signal Verdecchia's desire to evade possible criticisms on both dramatic and political fronts. By having Wideload present his findings as infallible and controlling the means by which the audience receives particular pieces of information, Verdecchia uses this character as a means of deconstructing media and challenging dominant ideologies in a theatrical setting. Again, this signals Verdecchia's application of border zones to his dramatic practice. *Fronteras*, *Chomsky* and – as I will further demonstrate in chapter three – *Ali and Ali* are unique in the sense that their combined use of theatrical and lecture-based forms to create a specific framework for an audience to receive the subject matter. Critics have raised concerns about this, especially within *Chomsky*, and due to the breadth of material on the subject matter discussions of this nature will be addressed in chapter four, "Critical Responses".

Admittedly, Wideload does not explicitly acknowledge all of the ideologies operating in *Fronteras*. This is because he is a dramatic character who operates as a fictional figure. What separates ideological presentations (lectures) from theatrical events is that particular concepts and ideas are brought to the viewers *solely* through a lecture's presentational format while the theatre has the added benefit of *fictionally representing* the effects of those ideologies upon dramatic characters.

Guillermo Verdecchia creates a distinct kind of tension when he gives protagonists a great deal of agency in deconstructing media and challenging dominant ideologies. These characters have a great deal of agency when delivering this type of material but they are also complicit within his acknowledged ideological and dramaturgical framework. The moment that most strongly exemplifies this tension is the scene, "Latin Lover". It begins with Wideload's announcement: "Latin Lovers"

(Verdecchia 42) and is followed by a slide projection of an Antonio Banderas photo. After introducing the photo of Antonio Banderas to the audience, Wideload discusses *Elle* magazine's published claim that "Antonio Banderas is de latest incarnation of de Latin Lover" (Verdecchia 43). Directly referencing the new image projected on to the screen, an *Elle* magazine cover, Wideload adds, "It says right here: "Antonio Banderas – A Latin Love God is Born". Wideload then reminds the audience that Banderas is not the first person to have this image projected onto him. He tells them "De Latin Lover is always being reincarnated" and demonstrates this fact by giving a historical recapitulation: announcing previous examples alongside projected images of particular individuals. Wideload engages in this dialogic element in the following:

Sometimes de Latin Lover is a woman – Carmen Miranda for example.

SLIDE photo of Carmen Miranda

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

SLIDE photo of Delores Del Rio

Dere was also Delores Del Rio.

SLIDE photo of Maria Montez

Maria Montéz, some of you may remember her as Cobra Woman,

SLIDE photo of Rita Moreno

den Rita Moreno, today we have Sonia Braga ...

SLIDE photo of Sonia Braga

SLIDE photo of Rudolph Valentino

For de men dere was Rudolph Valentino,

SLIDE photo of Fernando Lamas

Fernando Lamas,

SLIDE photo of Ricardo Montalban

Mr. Maxwell House and of course ...

SLIDE photo of Desi Arnaz

Desi Arnaz whom we all remember as Ricky Ricardo from *Ricky and Lucy* those all-time-great TV lovers. (43-44)

This historical recap of the Latin-Lover landscape creates the groundwork from which Wideload will continue to base his analytical argument. His first claim is that the media is responsible for the creation of stereotypes. Demonstrating evidence of this by referring to the language used in *Elle*, he tells the audience directly:

Let's see what *Elle* magazine has to say about Latin Lovers:
"He's short dark and handsome, with lots of black hair from head to chest. He's wildly emotional, swinging from brooding sulks to raucous laughter and singing loudly in public. He's relentlessly romantic, with a fixation on love that looks to be total: he seems to be always about to shout, 'I must have you.'"

SLIDE I must have you

"He is the Latin Lover, an archetype of masculinity built for pleasure." The article begins by explaining the myth of the Latin Lover and then uses the myth to explain Banderas. Banderas cannot explain himself apparently because his English is too limited. (44-45)

While Wideload's observation focuses on the rhetorical techniques used in a particular medium, his methods of communication become increasingly affected by his discoveries.

As the cover of *Mirabella* magazine replaces *Elle* on the projection screen, Wideload's opinions are increasingly evident when he discusses the manner in which the publication describes Banderas' pronunciation of the word love. He tells the audience:

He pronounces it "Looov-aaa." Ooooh isn't dat sweet and sexy and don't you just want to wrap him up in your arms and let him whisper filthy things in your ear in Spanish and broken English? Especially when, as also described in the *Mirabella* article, he wipes his mouth on the tablecloth and asks, "What can I done?" 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 statement reveals that Wideload is not only observant and capable of deconstructing the media's manufacturing of stereotypes, but that he is becoming personally affected by his own realizations.

After moving into a similar discussion of the representation of Armand Assante in *Gentleman's Quarterly*, Wideload is increasingly agitated by his discoveries. When assessing the representation of Latino people in the entertainment industry, Wideload becomes particularly upset. Roused by his realizations, Wideload retreats to demarcating lines between "us" and "them". This is evident when he announces to the audience:

It goes back to this thing of Latin Lovers being archetypes of men and women built for pleasure. Whose pleasure mang? Your movie-going pleasure? The pleasure of de Fashion-Industrial-Hollywood complex? Think about it –

In dose movies we can't solve our own problems, we can't win a revolution without help from gringos, we can't build the pyramids at Chichén Itzá without help space aliens, we don't win the Nobel Prize, no, instead we sing, dance, we fuck like a dream, we die early on, we sleep a lot, we speak funny, we cheat on each other, we get scared easy, we amuse you. (47)

However, Wideload's opportunity to continue delving into his personal assessments of the icon-creating infrastructure ceases when "*A loud buzzer goes off*" after he attempts to explain that these images do not solely exist in film ("it's not just in de movies – it's in -" [47]). Not only has Wideload been increasingly disturbed by the realization of the ideological constraints of manufactured stereotypes, his passionate outburst regarding the

public degradation of his community has been halted; controlled by the technical modes of the theatre.

Again, where Brooks and Verdecchia explicitly acknowledge the means of production they utilize (Artstick, Whistle of Indignation) in order to adhere to particular rules of dramatic practice and the desire to avoid didacticism, the suggestion is made implicit in *Fronteras*' insertion of the added component of using a buzzer to acknowledge the need for a break in dramatic action. Not only does the distraction prevent Wideload from continuing in his opinionated rant, his acknowledgement that the buzzer "indicat[es] dat some forty-five minutes of de show have elapsed and dat less dan fifteen minutes remain till intermission" highlights his previous moments of acknowledgement of the theatrical event (47). To comically cover any tracks of dramatic didacticism, Verdecchia writes the additional, comical line for Wideload. Echoing early comments of theatre as community, Wideload jokes about the discomforts of communal theatre-going:

Unofficial tests indicate dat audiences grow restless at de forty-five-minute mark so we are going to take de briefest of breaks and give you de opportunity to shift around in your seats and scratch your culo and whisper to the person next to you. (47-48)

Though the moment is not a precise example of retheatricalization since the apparatus' of the theatre are not physically revealed for the audience (buzzer excluded as it is not typically used in popular theatre practice), it serves as a reminder of the theatre's modes of operation. By directly addressing the audience and revealing how he wants to adhere to specific needs the audience may have, the performer raises the audience's consciousness of theatrical components while announcing his own recognition that he exists within particular dramatic constraints. Thus, this two-tiered theatrical recognition

becomes the primary focus of this dramatic moment rather than Wideload's previous attempt at delving into his personal opinions.

Verdecchia then uses this self-reflexive, retheatrical moment to layer the audience's experiences with cultural representations. What has been evident in *The Noam Chomsky Lectures* is also apparent here in *Fronteras*: the protagonist announces what the audience is only moments away from dramatically and theatrically experiencing. This is evident when Wideload announces to the audience, "during dis break we are gonna see some clips from a mega-musical spectacular dat will be opening here soon. It's called *Miss Tijuana*. [...] Here's de break" (48). Remaining true to his word, the audience is given "*clips of cartoons and movies featuring, among other things: Latinos, Hispanics, dopey peasants, Anthony Quinn and a certain mouse*" (ibid). The content within the break is still related to the material Wideload was referring to only moments before he was interrupted by the buzzer. In fact, it continues to serve Wideload's analysis by presenting the topically relevant material in a new light and in a new manner. Verdecchia not only uses Wideload as a tool for developing an analytical argument about cultural representation in the media, he also justifies the use of this added alienation technique *through* Wideload himself. By having Wideload directly tell the audience that they need a break, he avoids any criticisms regarding polemic activity when, in fact, the same ideological line is being followed throughout this break. Verdecchia creates a theatrical technique that allows the audience to sample the outrage a character/actor feels toward the play's subject matter before the passion becomes blatant polemics. Not only is it a creative means of delivering material, it serves as another example for Verdecchia's emphasis on borders: occupying two possibilities at the same time. It is a

dramaturgical tactic also used with Brooks in *The Noam Chomsky Lectures*, and – as I will reveal in my next chapter - is also apparent in *The Adventures of Ali* and *Ali and the Axes of Evil*.

THE ADVENTURES OF ALI AND ALI AND THE AXES OF EVIL

“We all share the desire to engage people politically in a way that allows them to hang on to their humanity, to laugh and have a good time and not be railroaded by polemics” (Youssef qtd. in Kaplan).

Protagonists who deconstruct media and government and express their personal dilemmas are also key figures in *The Adventures of Ali and Ali and the Axes of Evil*. Playwrights Guillermo Verdecchia, Marcus Youssef, and Camyar Chai present Ali Ababwa and Ali Hakim as touring performers from the fictional land of Agraba, struggling to adhere to new-found ideologies. The narrative is framed around the follies and frustrations Ali Ababwa and Ali Hakim encounter as they adapt to their new environments, both socio-politically and theatrically speaking. Ababwa and Hakim attempt to present their own production, *World Dreaming Together*, but are constantly derailed by misunderstandings and miscommunications regarding North American ideologies and expectations of theatre conventions.

Though the premise of a touring show is not present in *Chomsky* and *Fronteras*, Ababwa and Hakim embody a border position akin to those of these previous plays. They both enact dramatic material and present educational information. As with *Chomsky* and *Fronteras*, Brechtian techniques are essential elements of communicating the educational information and establishing the particular dramatic components. For instance, by directly addressing the audience, Ababwa and Hakim outline their motivations for traveling to Canada and for using the theatre space itself:

ALI HAKIM. We are come

ALI ABABWA. to explain.

ALI HAKIM. To spread peace and goodwill, win hearts and minds.

ALI ABABWA. Maybe get married. I'm single and in search of a wife.
Hello ... Hi.

ALI HAKIM. To build bridges, mend fences.

ALI ABABWA. Mow lawns?

ALI HAKIM. Rebuild trust between our peoples.

ALI ABABWA. Maybe stay a little while?

ALI HAKIM. You see, we wish nothing more than to be real like you.
Prosperous like you. Legal like you. But, as we say in Agraba, the
littlest camel does not make the biggest ... how you say ... poo?

ALI ABABWA. Or most effective refugee application.

ALI HAKIM. You can dream big but start small. And so with seed
money from the United Furniture Warehouse of Nations we are proud to
bring you

ALI ABABWA. and the people of Mogadishu, Bosnia, the Congo,
Liberia, Senegal, Gaza Strip, and South Surrey-White Rock

ALI HAKIM. our show

ALI ABABWA AND ALI HAKIM. *World Dreaming Together*. (22-23)

This moment creates character interest and also acknowledges the foreign and performative status of Ababwa and Hakim. It also informs the audience of the Alis' economical struggles. Ababwa and Hakim both directly inform the audience of these facts in a very decisive and conscious manner. This is also communicated through dramatic representation as Hakim ignorantly describes their funding agency as a hybrid of a furniture store (United Furniture Warehouse) and an international, humanitarian organization (United Nations). Thus, Ababwa and Hakim exist as 'border characters' who operate both as dramatic characters and direct presenters of information.

Though this is a common characteristic of all three plays discussed in my thesis, *Ali and Ali* differs from *Chomsky* and *Fronteras* with regard to the protagonists' diegetic worlds. In both *Chomsky* and *Fronteras*, there exist non-diegetic worlds where the protagonists, through reflexive, Brechtian techniques, take moments to comment on the diegetic world existing on stage. This element, however, does not exist in *Ali and Ali* since both characters only exist within their diegetic world: as actors who desire to perform their play *World Dreaming Together* as a means of achieving refugee status. In his book, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, theorist Keir Elam clarifies this difference:

Dramatic worlds [...] are revealed through the persons, actions and statements which make them up, and not through external commentary. This principle might be called that of the *reflexivity* of the [dramatic world], since its individuals, their properties and doings supposedly constitute their own description. The spectator infers the make-up of the world by apparently witnessing it, thus allowing the [dramatic world] to define itself rather than be set up from without by a third party. (112)

In the context of *Ali and Ali*, the dramatic world may constitute a dramatic performance, but the protagonists are only conscious of the production of *World Dreaming Together*, not *The Adventures of Ali and Ali and the Axes of Evil*, of which they also exist within.

The difference between the dramatic worlds of *Chomsky*, *Fronteras*, and *Ali and Ali*, thus, occurs on a level of character consciousness. Though Ababwa and Hakim indeed introduce themselves by their character names, as Wideload does in *Fronteras*, Wideload refers to himself by this character name because he acknowledges that he operates within the larger framework of the play, *Fronteras Americanas*. Ababwa and Hakim also introduce themselves by their names but this is because they are only aware of their existence as Ababwa and Hakim, people who are trying to perform their own

production for the audience before them. They are unaware of how they operate as Ababwa and Hakim as *characters* in *The Adventures of Ali and Ali and the Axes of Evil*. Furthermore, unlike Verdecchia and Brooks in *Chomsky*, Ababwa and Hakim address the audience by these names because they acknowledge their sole existence *as being* these particular people. They do not, for example, further acknowledge that they are Marcus Youssef and Camyar Chai *performing* Ali Ababwa and Ali Hakim. Therefore, each of these protagonists mentioned may introduce themselves directly to the audience, but their level of consciousness, regarding their state of existence, varies between plays.

This, in turn, affects the level of critical engagement the playwrights are evoking from the audience. Rather than embodying characters who are conscious of the play they have written, Verdecchia, Youssef, and Chai's protagonists acknowledge theatre constructs, but only insofar as they affect the production *World Dreaming Together*. By creating a diegetic world in which theatrical performance is a strong component, the playwrights increase the sense of representation and mimesis while still utilizing many facets of a shared theatre experience. The playwrights create characters who are capable of critically engaging an audience through Brechtian techniques (such as direct address) *as fictional characters*. Thus, Ababwa and Hakim operate as 'border characters', as they both present material and represent characters. However, since the playwrights foreground the mimetic qualities of the protagonists, dramatic interest is further increased. As I will reveal later in this chapter, this unique hybrid of theatrical techniques will layer the audience's experience with *Ali and Ali*: the media-related material Ababwa and Hakim present is not only factual evidence, it directly impacts the fictional figures themselves.

In order to achieve this outcome, Ababwa and Hakim reveal their awareness of North American ideologies. In many instances, they identify specific ideologies in place and/or attempt to utilize those practices themselves. For example, by telling the audience, “we make every effort to communicate with you in ways to which you are culturally accustomed and so provide many opportunities to purchase merchandise and commemorative memorabilia like *this* [Royal Doulton commemorative plate projected on screen]” (25), Ababwa and Hakim begin practicing capitalistic-based exchanges. Ababwa continues with his salesmanship by telling the audience: “Interested in franchise, investment, or sponsorship opportunities? Please check our website – [www dot \[ALI HAKIM ululates\] dot com](http://www.ali-hakim-ululates.com)” (25-6). Thus, they recognize the North American capitalistic system in which they must operate and strive to function successfully within those systems. Salesmanship is not only introduced here, it will become an on-going tactic used by Ababwa and Hakim as they work towards a financially secure life in Canada.

Other merchandise made readily available to the audience includes a “*Pillowcase set with a depraved-looking Leprechaun on it*” projected on the screen that commemorates an early moment in the play when Ali Hakim, now reiterated by their assistant Tim, said, “Aren’t you a little old to be believing in Leprechauns” (52). Other sales opportunities arise when Ababwa, noting that some people in the audience may be “Middle East history buffs”, takes the opportunity to commemorate a fictional, Agrabanian tale. Asking the audience, “Remember when Jafar Ali Salim led the Agrabanian General Strike of 1968?” opens up the possibility of his sale. Ababwa then tells them, “This pivotal moment in Middle East History is commemorated forever in this

bauxite miniature lovingly handcrafted by fairly-compensated wood elves from the Brown Forest” as a “*Miniature of General Strike*” is projected on the screen (53).

Ababwa also uses the sales technique of haggling when he notices that the audience is not purchasing anything. Specifically, he uses their silence as a means of commenting on the economic status of the West as a whole. He tells the audience directly:

That’s OK, we can haggle. We’re a haggling people. \$17.99. And I’ll throw in the commemorative strikebreakers. Hoo, you’re good. Drive hard bargain. No accident Western world is on top, huh? \$12.99. I pick up GST. God, you’re killing me here. (53)

The lack of sales also sparks Hakim’s anger. He “*storm[s] back on*” stage and berates the audience, asking them, “How about 5 bucks for a meatball sandwich?” (54). Ababwa then attempts to calm Hakim and remind him of the infrastructures they must now operate within. He tells Hakim, “Calm down, Ali Hakim. Is OK. Is free market” (54). However, Hakim cannot suppress his anger and he continues to shout out at the audience: “Cheap bastards. You Canadians – you can’t buy me a slice of pizza? How much did you make selling weapons to Americans, huh?” (ibid). For Hakim, acceptance of their new economy is hard to bear but for Ababwa, it is merely fact and something he is adjusting to survive under, no matter how difficult the task may be.

Their willingness to acclimatize to these ideologies is also rooted in a complete understanding of North American culture. Hakim and Ababwa reveal how they have been formally educated in the ways of North American politics and economic infrastructures. Ababwa reveals this to the audience when he says, “As graduates of the Agrabanian Institute of Niche Marketing, Cross-Polinization, and Higher Colonics, we understand how to synergize our product to extract full value in the post-deal phase” (26).

Though it is (seemingly) part truth and part fiction (since “Higher Colonics” relates to a very different field and is something Ababwa comically recognizes by using the word “extract” alongside it), it nevertheless gives the audience a sense of the protagonists’ educations from which their upcoming analysis and insights will be based. They may be stumbling to converse in proper English but when it comes to the language of capitalism, Ali and Ali are extremely fluent and ready to communicate.

As comical as these previous moments have been in outlining Ababwa and Hakim’s current state of affairs, they also create a complicated scenario for the audience. Much to Hakim’s distress, they must also suppress any personal frustration with the political and theatrical systems they are forced to operate under if they are to thrive financially. The recognition of this situation also increases Hakim’s hostile nature. The struggle with this complex scenario, however, is something that starts small and continues to build throughout the play. In one of the first moments of audience interaction (that, interestingly, occurs only moments after Ababwa and Hakim swear that they will not be involving the audience in the show), Hakim recognizes that he has become hungry over the course of these introductory moments. At first he uses direct address to make his general statement: “Whew. That sure made me hungry. *(to ALI ABABWA)* Did you speak to manager? No? I wish I had a pizza. Oh, pizza. I love pizza. *(to audience)* You like pizza? You do? Great” (27). However, after asking the audience these questions, “*He enters the audience and addresses one person in particular*” and tells him/her:

Give me twenty dollars and we get pizza. Come on. Give me twenty dollars. I thought you said you like pizza. *(he improvises depending on audience response)* How ‘bout you put it on gold card. You get points; I get pizza. What, you ate before the show? Must be nice. (27)

He then returns back to the stage and says to Ababwa, “They think nobody else needs to eat” (ibid). Loaded with hostility, ideological assumptions, and subtext, the moment speaks volumes for how the playwrights blend dramatic action, characterization, and social commentary with presentational forms. It is one of the first moments where the lines between “us” (performers) and “them” audience are clearly demarcated based on economic factors. Grouping the entire audience together under one assumption (“nobody else needs to eat” [ibid]), Hakim not only shares his frustration for his hunger – he begins to blame that hunger on the entire audience vis-à-vis the reaction of a single audience member. This is a frustration that will continue to build until, as mentioned above, Hakim finally generalizes the entire audience, calling them “Cheap bastards” because they will not buy him pizza (54).

Verdecchia, Youssef, and Chai also layer the audience’s experience with interactions such as these since they seem to be broken promises. Ali Ababwa and Ali Hakim, in their early moments on stage, vow that they will not be involving the audience in their show. However, there are numerous instances throughout *Ali and Ali* where the audience is either encouraged or forced to interact with Ababwa and Hakim. For example, they make a shared request for the audience to join them as they sing the national anthem of Agrabah, Karaoke-style (109). Ababwa also enters the audience to seek out female companionship, pleading for a single kiss from any young female unwittingly sitting in the first few rows of the theatre (102-3)⁶. With their initial promise

⁶ I am an example of one of those participants as I unwittingly sat front and centre (in a long red jacket) at their October 29, 2004 production at UBC. When you are sitting in a theatre that seats 400, with all eyes on you – including those of the character pleading

to not harass the audience or involve them in the show (26), Ababwa's and Hakim's diegetic world serves as a dramaturgical safety net since the protagonists are actually referring to *their* show, *World Dreaming Together*. Since Ababwa and Hakim only perform mere minutes of this particular production and do not include any audience members in this moment, they actually have not lied to the audience. This thwarts audience expectations as the audience may have assumed that the characters were reflecting on the use of participation in *Ali and Ali*. In this early stage moment, the audience is likely to feel alleviated of any nervousness or tension created by the impending involvement. When Ali and Ali leap into moments of direct address and audience participation, the audience becomes increasingly tense since they are completely caught off guard. Creating a sense of surprise, a common application of Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect), the playwrights apply this particular formal feature in a moment where ideological clashes are presented in an immediate and personal manner.

Hakim's resentment for the audience is spurred by his thoughts about them, thoughts that are clearly delivered to the audience in an act of ideological role-playing. The audience, and one person in particular, refuses to feed Hakim, making the audience member an active participant in his hunger. Hakim confronts both the audience and the entire apparatus of social injustice in a single action: by entering the audience. He, therefore, breaks personal boundaries and theatrical boundaries in order to directly involve the audience in a socio-economical injustice.

with you to save him from returning to a hellish land – the questions you are asked are not merely “requests” but obligations you feel pressured to fulfill.

Hakim's continual outrage at the audience's complicity in his state of hunger soon escalates to include complicity in global events; complicity manufactured through the media/entertainment industry. Having created the sense that the audience is responsible for Hakim's hunger, due to the number of times the audience is propositioned by Hakim and the level of rage that ensues when they remain silent at his hunger pangs, Ababwa and Hakim then move on to demonstrate their deconstructive capabilities. Under the guise of a movie pitch to "all entertainment industry peoples here tonight", Ali and Ali outline the common constructs used in contemporary war-hero movies. While they do this in front of the audience in general, it is directed at one of their industry idols in particular, "Ian Handsomemanthing", who they (fictionally) indicate is seated in the audience (29). The name is soon recognized as Canadian news anchor Ian Hanomansing, when "*A snazzy promotional photo*" of Ian is immediately projected on to the screen (28). What makes this moment incredibly interesting is that they fictionalize an idol of theirs but do not present him as an embodied character. Though the image of him is projected on screen, this is merely for the sake of clarity; to ensure that Ian Handsomemanthing is understood to be the comical representation of Ian Hanomansing. Therefore, the act of seeing Ian in the audience is another instance of the playwrights controlling the means of the production. They allude to the fact that the figure is in the audience without having to give voice to the man or interact with him; he solely serves as a literal projection of their needs and desires.

From a dramaturgical standpoint, seeing Ian sparks the entire desire to sell their movie to the audience. Ali and Ali, as characters, have a financial investment in wanting to produce a movie that has even more financial potential if they can successfully

convince a Canadian icon to star in the film. Ideologically speaking, the playwrights create this scenario as fodder for a lesson in film semiotics.

The playwrights layer the protagonists' recognition of the devices needed to sell such entertaining material while delivering their account of what they argue happens in times of war, being recent war-refugees themselves. Ali and Ali immediately outline the parameters of the film by telling the audience:

ALI HAKIM. It's an action movie.

ALI ABABWA. An epic.

ALI HAKIM. A love story.

ALI ABABWA. A quiet drama of personal fortitude. (29)

Ali and Ali have identical aims: to utilize narrative structures that are emotionally charged in order to pique the audience's interest and increase the potential sale of the feature film itself.

Ali and Ali then deliver the film's core narrative components. The story involves a group of malicious individuals who enter small-town North America and wreak havoc, killing many townspeople as well as themselves. The narrative then quickly shifts as the good men and women of small-town North America then decide to liberate people of a foreign nation and end up fighting a bloody, overseas war. With focus on one good soldier specifically, the armed force soon realizes that there is something very special about this war in particular (though they do not identify what). The soldiers, and the protagonist in particular, befriend a soccer-loving boy named Ali. Unfortunately, Ali has lost his limbs due to a landmine explosion and as the soldiers visit Ali in the hospital, they become increasingly angered by the war and the destruction it is causing. The

soldiers, leaving the hospital to continue with their fighting, meet British soldiers who, being told of young Ali's love of "David Bendham", give the soldiers the famous soccer player's jersey (which they happen to have in their possession). Immediately thereafter, enemies attack the soldiers and the soccer shirt is left behind in their recently retreated, flaming jeep. The soldiers appear to be defeated but they continue to fight. The protagonist is able to retrieve "Bendham's" shirt but not before being shot by enemy gunfire. The other soldiers refuse to leave the protagonist behind and save him as well as the soccer shirt promised for Ali. Together, they fight back against the ensuing enemies and make it back to the city. By the time of their arrival, sadly, Ali is already dead. Though the war has been won and celebration ensues, the soldiers, especially the protagonist, will never forget Ali and the war they fought (29-49).

Though the through-line of the narrative is essential to the story, it is the additional touches Ababwa and Hakim make, via recognition of manufactured icons, that makes the entire story a masterful piece of semiotic deconstruction delivered under the guise of an artistic endeavor. Ali and Ali simultaneously construct a narrative for emotional effect, deconstruct its sign systems, and demonstrate their complicity with the manufacturing of these images for their own financial benefit. They are able to both deliver their tale while using it as a lesson plan about the entertainment industry's manipulation and perpetuation of stereotypes. One of the first moments to suggest this occurs when Ali and Ali introduce the 'enemies' that enter small-town-North-America early in their film. Together, Ababwa and Hakim teach the audience how sign-systems operate in film: by outlining the sign and then deconstructing how the signifier is operating. This is evident when they tell the audience:

ALI ABABWA. Some bad motherfuckers come to town, yes?

ALI HAKIM. Some of the worst motherfuckers.

ALI ABABWA. They're dirty.

ALI HAKIM. They have greasy hair.

ALI ABABWA. Ugly clothes from Wal-Mart.

ALI HAKIM. They're dark.

ALI ABABWA. With a dark purpose. [...] For what purpose we do not yet know.

ALI HAKIM. We know only they are fanatics.

ALI ABABWA. Because they are always praying and muttering and looking sideways out of their squinty suspicious eyes with jealousy and envy at the material wealth and FREEDOM the people of Hometown enjoy [...]. (29-31)

Here, the images of "praying and muttering and looking sideways out of their squinty suspicious eyes" operate as the signifiers of the sign, "fanatics" (31). They also show how dark strangers are coded as having a dark purpose. Thus, Ali and Ali recognize and deconstruct the way that these particular individuals are represented in film. Though they understand that creating dramatic tension such as this is necessary to create and sell a film, they also take the time to deconstruct the very tools they would be using in order to make their film a financial success.

Ali and Ali also present the grueling reality of specific situations often used in stories such as these. Like much of the 2003 news coverage on "The Occupation of Iraq"⁷ centered on a young boy named Ali, a dismembered casualty of war, Ababwa and

⁷ Though this is the phrase used in much of the North American media, echoing its use by the Bush administration, I have also witnessed certain interviewees of news-programs using the term "The Invasion of Iraq".

Hakim attempt to capitalize on their audience's response to a similarly sketched protagonist in the film they are pitching. A poignant example of this occurs when Ababwa sells the moment of the soldier's attending to the hospital-stricken, recently dismembered Ali. He tells the audience of the fictional Ali's hospitalized state-of-mind: "he [Ali] has seen how your boys have already transformed his country; how his friends, the urchins of the streets, are happier, even though their schools are destroyed and they have no running water and their parents are being sexually tortured in the prisons of the former dictator" (38). Using his comic flair, Ababwa capitalizes on the pathos of the situation while ensuring the audience recognizes how constructed, incomplete, and misleading the familiar story is.

Moments such as these impact the audience on three levels. First, they are encouraged to laugh at Ali and Ali's awkward attempts at adhering to Western, capitalist ideologies. Second, they learn the factual material Ali and Ali present and understand how the entertainment industry creates and perpetuates the very information they are absorbing and have been absorbing for years. Finally, all of this occurs through Ali and Ali's use of direct address to deconstruct the iconography and stereotypical scenarios manufactured by the film industry. They may refer to their narrative as a "movie pitch", reminding the audience of Ababwa and Hakim's recent adoption of capitalistic drives, but its three layers serve as lessons in deconstructing the entertainment industry's rampant, racial misrepresentations or sometimes even more sinister factual omissions.

After the audience is exposed to further accounts such as these, Ababwa and Hakim deliver their most haunting realizations yet: that the story they have just manufactured is exactly the kind of material that would win them accolades from the

entertainment industry itself. This occurs when Ababwa, through his typical candor, relishes: "I think I smell an Oscar" and Hakim, taking the opportunity to draw the audience into the gravity of this realization, asks them: "Do you?" (47). Thus, Ababwa and Hakim recognize that they have created a work of art that ideologically operates according to particular standards in the film industry. Additionally, the final note they strike with the audience is that they have been given the information in order to make their own decisions. The protagonists may act as agents of information dissemination and semiotic deconstruction but only insofar as it educates and equips the audience to become agents themselves; agents who must make their own decisions regarding the material they have just been given.

While this presentational mode creates a strong sense of ideological dissemination, the dramatic elements of representation follow hot on the tails of this scene. The audience is soon reminded that Ali and Ali exist under the constraints and contracts of the Theatre Manager as he arrives to halt their lecture. As hard as Ali and Ali try to disseminate their findings, they are continually met with the discouragement of the Theatre Manager who is quick to destroy their ideologically-demonstrative and deconstructive ways and insists on dramatizations that fit his theatre company's artistic mandate. The Theatre Manager (Duncan) enters the stage, seeking technical requests from the stage manager and speaking directly to the audience: "Excuse me. Can I have some light here? (*he addresses the audience*) I apologize for the interruption, ladies and gentlemen" (47). Like Ababwa and Hakim, and many other characters in the playwrights' repertoires, Duncan fully introduces himself and describes his artistic intentions to the audience. He tells them:

My name is Duncan McVingoe and I'm the Artistic and Managing Producer here at the Vancouver East Cultural Centre. And first, I'd like to thank everyone for coming. Thank you. It's an honour to have you. Welcome. I'd also like to make it clear that our mandate to represent, accommodate, dignify, and empower cultural communities through theatrical productions of high artistic quality doesn't mean that – well (47)

His words drift off as Hakim and Ababwa attempt to interrupt his speech to make requests of their own. Refocusing, Duncan continues to tell them, "Well, it means we have a responsibility to you, our audience, a responsibility we tek seriously" before excusing himself so he can handle the persistent interruptions from Ali and Ali (48). The audience becomes aware of the force Duncan, driven by his own desire to fulfill a particular artistic mandate, has over the performers. This is clear from the following stage moment where Duncan, returning from his dispute with Ababwa and Hakim, tells the audience:

Ladies and gentlemen, again I apologize for the unorthodox interruption. However, as part of our pro-active education and outreach mandate, I feel it is necessary to facilitate ongoing dialogue for personal and intercultural exploration.

ALI & ALI nod vigorously and give thumbs-up.

Ye see, we had agreed that they would present a new ethnic family drama. Hadn't we?

More vigorous agreement from ALI & ALI.

After all, that's what ye came to see – an ethnic family drama that offers you a window onto our nation's cultural diversity yet resonates with universal themes. So tha's what they're goin' to be doin' now ... (*with a significant glance at ALI & ALI*) Right? (48-49).

Not only does it serve to reveal the artistic constraints under which Duncan, as a Theatre Manager, feels he must operate, it gives the audience a sense of the artistic requirements Ali and Ali must fulfill in order to ensure their own financial stability. Thus, it gives the

audience an understanding of these characters' motivations. As much as they try to use the theatre space for their own purposes, Duncan forces Ali and Ali to perform specific scenarios. Their agency as artists is demonstrated as constrained by the power structures informing the Canadian theatre in which they are performing. Not only does Duncan's rich Scottish accent suggest a connection to a white, Anglo-Saxon-Protestant community, his full name further highlights this as it appears to be the amalgamation of two very well-known Canadian theatre artists: Duncan McIntosh and Mary Vingoe.

The playwrights create tension by pitting each of these characters' theatrical and ideological stakes against each other. However, critical engagement with their conflict is also blended into a scenario in which Ababwa attempts to subdue Hakim's anger toward the entire situation. Hakim becomes increasingly cognizant of the suppression and suffering he (and others) must endure. This sparks emotional outbursts from Hakim and jeopardizes both the Alis' chances at continued theatrical success (vis-à-vis the audience's approval). This, in turn, puts them both at financial risk and is something of which he and Ababwa are aware. Hakim, therefore, is both angered by the particular system and is forced to adhere to it in order to survive financially in Canada. Though Ababwa has many conversations with Hakim in the presence of the audience that are intended to soothe Hakim's anger, the strongest example of Ababwa's desire to contain Hakim's rage is when Tim (their stage assistant) is summoned to tranquilize Hakim. After calling the audience "Cheap bastards" (54) when they will not give him money for a slice of pizza or a meatball sandwich, Hakim's rage grows with the added fury only ideological awareness brings. He shouts at the audience: "Fuck all you in your peaceful West. Oh sure, you think I am violent and disrespectful, huh? Why don't I embrace your

fucking democracy? I wonder?! 100 years ago you called it civilization and you're still shoving it down our throats!" (55). Having been summoned only moments prior to Hakim's final rebel yell, Tim quickly enters and tranquilizes Hakim with a needle in the neck. Heavily sedated and ideologically subdued, Hakim is dragged offstage for Tim to revive and bring back to a more peaceful state of mind. Like similar techniques found in *Chomsky* and *Fronteras*, such as the Artstick and the intermission buzzer respectively, this serves to subdue the protagonist's opinions before they become blatant polemics.

Though Ababwa feels the submission of Hakim was momentarily necessary, he appeals to the audience to understand Hakim's plight. Still struggling with his English, Ababwa pleads with them: "My friends, please. Ali Hakim is very – aroused? He has much on his serving dish, many worries, responsibilities" (56). Not only did Ababwa have to subdue Hakim due to his recognition of the financial risk he was putting them in; Ababwa refers to Hakim's enemies as friends and capitalizes on this moment by using this solitary stage time as a lucrative sales approach. Reminding the audience of all the memorabilia he and Hakim are willing to sell, he then exploits the very ideological elements that had just enraged Hakim. Ababwa does this by telling the audience, "We are – due to circumstances beyond our control – practicing neo-liberals, and will sell pretty much anything for a price" (56). Importantly and thankfully, Hakim was not on stage to overhear his close friend and traveling partner sell his soul. The decision to adhere to North American ideologies serves as another dividing line existing in *Ali and Ali*. This time, however, the border is between characters as it separates the belief systems of two close friends: Ali Ababwa and Ali Hakim.

Ababwa and Hakim may have differences in opinion with regard to specific North American practices but they are united through their shared experiences as struggling refugees. This sentiment is what closes *Ali and Ali* as Ababwa and Hakim share in smoking a hookah after a long day of performing and attending to their concerns back in Agraba. Noting the closure of their time on stage, Ababwa, much like Brooks and Verdecchia in *Chomsky*, informs the audience that they are free to exit at their own will. Sitting on stage, Ababwa tells the audience, "When you decide to go, please leave quietly as Ali Hakim is sleeping. Good night" (123). All theatrical signs indicate that it is the end of the play as their stage light dims and music starts (ibid). However, audience expectations are, again, thwarted as the two characters wake from a brief, shared dream of a peaceful, utopian Agraba. Evoking a convention used in theatre and Hollywood film, Hakim shares the details of his dream with the audience. He then makes a final suggestion to the audience, that it was not merely a dream, but "perhaps it was the future" (126). As the final stage moment, it signals an important suggestion for the audience to consider, that the blissful Agraba is a possibility. Furthermore, Hakim, the most personally distraught and ideologically angered of the two characters, is the one who envisioned this possibility. Thus, the act of Hakim's hopefulness serves to layer the audience's experience with the entire contents of *Ali and Ali*. They have been critically engaged in ideological subject matter, personally involved with the lives of dramatic characters, and – in this brief, final moment – are given the suggestion that a future possibility exists.

CRITICAL RESPONSES

For Canadian high school and university students who became the playwrights, directors, critics, and audiences of the 1970s and beyond, the requisite linkage of action with motivation, the neo-Aristotelian concepts of unity of action and characterization, and the deployment of reversal and recognition as universal dramaturgical techniques [...] became virtually second nature after four or five years of drilling in classrooms in which the study of Shakespeare's tragedies was obligatory. We became experts [...] at demonstrating that all of these characteristics were somewhere "in" the plays we studied, since those characteristics were definitive of dramatic "greatness" and the plays that we studied were by definition "great" (or why else would we be studying them?). That students are to this day taught in textbooks how to find rising actions, climaxes, turning points, and denouements "in" any play that they take is in indication of how pervasive, and how pernicious, such concepts have been. (Knowles 26-27)

Much of the critical discourse surrounding *Chomsky*, *Fronteras*, and *Ali and Ali* engages in a type of dramaturgical analysis that academics such as Ric Knowles have noted as being problematic. His observation, that many Canadian theatre artists since the 1970s consider neo-Aristotelian concepts to be the definition of dramatic greatness, is certainly evident in the contemporary criticism of these particular plays. Joanne Tompkins, Jerry Wasserman, Sherry Simon, Ann Wilson, Mayte Gómez, Anne Nothof, Maarten van Dijk, Colin Thomas, Rosalind Kerr, Lisa Coulthard, and Elaine Brousseau all discuss dramatic components like plot, character, and style of production. However, these critics fall into two categories based on the manner in which they engage in dramaturgical analysis. Joanne Tompkins, Colin Thomas, and Maarten van Dijk prioritize the use of neo-Aristotelian techniques, discussing whether or not such components are "in" these plays, while the remaining critics acknowledge the relationship between form and content, assessing the formal features based on the manner in which they communicate the material within the text.

While their observations may be divided based on their methods of analysis, their impressions of the content itself are unanimous: they find the material within each play powerful and relevant for many contemporary social, political, and cultural contexts. In her book review, "Absence of Drama", Joanne Tompkins reveals that she "found *The Noam Chomsky Lectures* informative and certainly discomforting" and also notes that the play "ensures that its audience will feel uncomfortable for at least two hours" due to the intellectual, emotional, and moral challenges that are set before them (166). She also identifies the antagonistic focus of the content: "the primary target is media manipulation, which includes omission: Brooks and Verdecchia expose Canadians to the atrocities that we like to think do not touch us" (166). Jerry Wasserman's synchronic assessment of the 1991 Canadian canon references *Chomsky* as "the year's most extraordinary play". Citing *Chomsky*'s powerful political content as the basis of his claim, Wasserman further explains:

Besides indicting the media, Brooks and Verdecchia make two other very blunt points. The first is that 'we' are not just innocent bystanders in the cover-up of American crimes [...]. The second, related point is that everyone involved in Canadian theatre itself, on both sides of the stage, is complicit in 'our own collective moral hypocrisy and cowardice'. (79)

Both academics consider *Chomsky*'s content to be engaging and involving the audience in contemporary issues that affect Canadians.

Fronteras Americanas has also garnered critical praise for its socio-cultural content. Specifically, Mayte Gómez, Sherry Simon, Anne Nothof, and Jerry Wasserman all discuss *Fronteras* in light of its dramatization of border zones with the latter three also connecting the play to bodies of work of that similarly challenge such concepts. In her article, "Healing the Border Wound: *Fronteras Americanas* and the Future of Canadian

Multiculturalism”, Mayte Gómez identifies two types of borders that are present in *Fronteras* and then proceeds to discuss how each is dramatized in the play. Specifically, she makes the distinction between what she calls the “individual border”, the division of self, and the “continental border”, a border that “divides the Americas into North and South and is grounded in colonial relations which translate into stereotyped representations of the “other”” (29). Sherry Simon claims that *Fronteras* contributes to a body of work that she calls, “Border Writing” based on its dramatizations of borders that Gómez similarly identifies. She notes that Verdecchia offers insight into the individual struggling with this dilemma, adding that he “uses the theme of displacement to mobilize themes of self-identity and self-betrayal” (214). Like Simon, Anne Nothof identifies the characteristics it shares with other plays that dramatize such dilemmas. Her article, “Canadian Ethnic Theatre: Fracturing the Mosaic”, builds on Enoch Padolsky’s observations about Canadian minority writing. Quoting him, Nothof notes that the form used in much Canadian minority writing “constitutes ‘a primary cultural site for the discussion of plural, cross-boundary, and intersecting concerns” (194). Nothof further identifies *Fronteras*’ contribution to this canon, stating that it is “a performance of self in terms of heritage and future possibilities for a composite identity – an attempt to inhabit the border zones” (194). Wasserman’s article, “Where is Here Now? Living the Border in the New Canadian Drama”, is also connected to work such as Simon and Nothof’s since he identifies both *Fronteras*’ emphasis on border spaces and connection to a larger body of Canadian literature. Referencing Homi Bhabha’s discussion of borders in *The Location of Culture*, he notes that the play explores the experience of living “‘border lives’, occupying the ‘in between’ spaces’ where categories overlap and ‘provide terrain

for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration” (166). Wasserman then points to other Canadian plays that also dramatize issues surrounding this concept and suggests that collectively they offer “some of the most exciting work in the Canadian theatre” as each is “redefining and reconstructing the Canadian imaginary” (164). Therefore, Gómez; Simon, Nothof, and Wasserman each recognize how *Fronteras* challenges the definition of borders while Simon, Nothof, and Wasserman discuss its contribution to bodies of works that collectively challenge current strains of thought in Canada.

While he does not specifically discuss *Fronteras*’ dramatization of borders, Maarten van Dijk applauds Verdecchia for staging post-emigration issues. Reviewing *Fronteras*, van Dijk reminds his readers of Salman Rushdie’s comment on emigration being “the central experience of our time” and, if that statement is true, “then remarkably few works deal with it in depth, especially in the theatre” (158). He then claims, “Guillermo Verdecchia’s brilliant theatre piece, *Fronteras Americanas* (*American Borders*), is important first of all because it gives full voice to this experience” (158). Thus, van Dijk observes of *Fronteras* what others have of *Chomsky* and *Ali and Ali*, that the play dramatizes many contemporary social, cultural, and political issues in a thorough and insightful manner.

Fronteras has also been critically noted for being an expression of our current socio-economic infrastructure. In her article, “Border crossing: the technologies of identity in *Fronteras Americanas*”, Ann Wilson states that the character Verdecchia is “an effect of the complex weave of the social technologies of late capital that refuse individuals the luxury of a stable, secure sense of identity” (7), adding that *Fronteras*

“views the individual as a social being and so emphasizes individual identity as produced within the context of ideologies” (8). Wilson emphasizes that *Fronteras* not only presents contemporary socio-economic dilemmas, it also represents the ways in which these broader problems affect individuals on a personal level.

The Adventures of Ali and Ali and the Axes of Evil has also been lauded for its ability to respond to recent global issues. Colin Thomas, theatre critic for Vancouver’s entertainment publication *The Georgia Straight*, gives his insights on the February 10 – 14th 2004 production at the Vancouver East Cultural centre. In his theatre preview, he notes: “The script’s humour contains provocative analysis of capitalist American arrogance, of mind and media control”. His review also states that the play “contains refreshingly original passages” and that “the two clowns [Ali and Ali] parody post-9/11 cultural representations and misinformation”. Thomas’ review also claims: “Because writers Marcus Youssef, Guillermo Verdecchia, and Camyar Chai are really, really, smart, they go much further than simply sending up Arab-bashing. They also ridicule liberalism” (ibid). In both of these publications, Thomas identifies the content’s relationship to contemporary socio-political issues and champions the playwrights’ abilities to satirize a range of political platforms. In his *Vancouver Plays* review, Jerry Wasserman’s response to the production at the East Cultural Centre is similar to that of Thomas since he identifies the socio-political relevancy of the material and the candid yet intellectual manner in which the details are dramatized. Specifically, he states:

Political satire rarely appears on Canadian stages these days and this [*Ali and Ali*] is a model for how sharp, controversial, and even “politically incorrect” political comment can be handled. Our relationship as Canadians to the foreign policy of the New American Empire and to the Iraqi/Palestinian side of the Middle East story is of great importance to all

of us. This show, kind of a Canadian theatrical Al Jazeera, intelligently handles such material [...].

Rosalind Kerr also observes that *Ali and Ali* “is relentless in exposing the western hypocrisy that conceals our complicity in projecting “the axes of evil” into Iran and Iraq” in her *Canadian Theatre Review* article, “Theatre as a Weapon against Mass Delusion”, (91). Her observation, that *Ali and Ali* satirizes North America’s projections of a monstrous “Other” onto Middle Eastern nations and those of Middle Eastern descent (ibid), additionally locates specific political commentaries being made by the playwrights.

Many critics who have analyzed *Chomsky*, *Fronteras*, and *Ali and Ali* celebrate the issues within the texts and their relevance for contemporary social, cultural, and political dilemmas. Strikingly, however, although they are unanimous in their positive comments regarding the content within these plays, their assessments of the dramatic forms used to communicate the material are divided. More specifically, they fall into two distinct, critical categories: those who assess the plays’ dramatic potential based on neo-Aristotelian ideals and those who assess the relationships between their formal features and socio-political content.

Tompkins, Thomas, and van Dijk belong to the former critical group, respectively arguing that the plays are either undramatic, lacking dramatic structure, or difficult to distinguish in regard to which form of drama they can be identified. Tompkins begins her review of *Chomsky*, “Absence of Drama”, by acknowledging the unique narrative format and characteristic communication tools that operate within the play. She suggests that these elements are immediately revealed to the audience since *Chomsky* “begins in lecture format, complete with slides” (166). Tompkins then states that the first quotation

on the slide, a statement of Noam Chomsky's that encourages individuals of democratic nations to engage in "intellectual self-defense" (Brooks and Verdecchia 11), "opens the process by which the play's authors and performers, Daniel Brooks and Guillermo Verdecchia, reveal the ways in which the audience needs this unorthodox defense program" (Tompkins 166). She then gives her own critical feedback on this dramaturgical approach. In response to her earlier comment that Brooks and Verdecchia "take to task theatre reviewers who [...] never seem to understand this (or any) play", she responds by stating:

At the risk of being the next reviewer to be pilloried at their stake, I found *The Noam Chomsky Lectures* informative and certainly discomfiting, but not dramatic. The play is tied too closely to its lecture metaphor and to the slides and overheads [...] to sustain drama. (166)

She also notes that while "There are brief moments when the two performers re-enact the visit by two American senators to Saddam Hussein" and that "they also hold an auction [...] these moments are not sufficient to give dramatic weight to the piece" (166). With these statements, it is clear that in Tompkins' view, "dramatic weight" involves the thorough involvement of traditional, Aristotelian dramatics: dramatics based on the prioritized use of mimesis and audience immersion in characters.

Though Brooks and Verdecchia also recognize that this seeming lack of narrative is what they will be critiqued for, and state this directly in the text itself, they have only done so due to the fact that traditional, Aristotelian, climactic narratives are what they argue many people assume constitutes a dramatic structure. They refer to the lack of climactic narratives not only to reveal the continual, presumed usage necessary in the theatre, but also to challenge the basis of that necessity in the first place. Much like their content challenges grand narratives in a political context, their narrative structure

challenges the grand assumption that all drama should use one single structure in order to effectively convey all ideas in art.

Tompkins also identifies how Brooks and Verdecchia share these particular opinions in *Chomsky*. She states that they are “Ever the ones to predict responses” (166) since they directly tell the audience:

Some of you may be thinking that what we have embarked on here is not theatre. Well, that’s too bad [...] if the theatre is going to survive, it must become something other than an expensive alternative to television. We are going to have to look at the world and the world of the theatre without ideological or artistic blinders. (Brooks and Verdecchia 59)

Tompkins responds to this event by stating, “While the authors acknowledge that the play lacks a narrative (and assume that such an acknowledgement is enough to counterbalance criticism), it is the lack of dramatic structure that mars the play most” (Tompkins 166).

Tompkins’ primary concern is that *Chomsky*’s style itself is not dramatic, stating: “this “play”⁸ too closely resembles a lecture: it has stretched the bounds of drama so far that it has eliminated the dramatic element” (167). While Tompkins makes clear observations of the texts’ socio-political material, and even applauds its use, her critiques strive to measure *Chomsky* against dramatic standards that Brooks and Verdecchia do not desire to reach, as she herself even notes they state within their own text. In the case of *Chomsky*, Brooks and Verdecchia are not only trying to bring new ideas and ways of thinking to the stage, they are also challenging the very basis of dramatic communication and the tools utilized in these methods of expression. This is a point that Tompkins does not discuss and, instead, opts to assess its value in the theatre based on conventional modes of

⁸ Her use of quotation marks rhetorically downplaying *Chomsky*’s dramatic elements.

dramatic communication; modes Brooks and Verdecchia are attempting to challenge in the first place.

While I address Tompkins' emphasis on neo-Aristotelian ideals in her analysis of *Chomsky*, I acknowledge that this approach is a departure from her more characteristic focus on the relationship between form and content. Tompkins' writing on Canadian, Australian, and post-colonial literature often addresses the manner in which key themes and ideas are communicated through dramatic form. Some of her pieces even discuss the specific use of metatheatre in particular plays or address how binary modes of communication are conveyed in a theatrical context (see "Re-Orienting Australasian Drama: Staging Theatrical Irony", "'Spectacular Resistance': Metatheatre in Post-Colonial Drama", and "'The Story of Rehearsal Never Ends.'"). Thus, her article "Absence of Drama" may be an anomaly within the body of her work but since it prioritizes neo-Aristotelian ideals, I find it necessary to assess her critique of *Chomsky* in the manner I have.

Verdecchia's recent collaboration with Marcus Youssef and Camyar Chai, *The Adventures of Ali and Ali and the Axes of Evil*, has resulted in another round of criticism focused on analyzing the play for its chosen modes of dramatic communication. While Colin Thomas has a personal affinity for its content, as he considers the play's passages to be "refreshingly original" and applauds the writers for attacking political action and events on all fronts, he takes issue with the dramatic premise and tensions within the text – or the seeming lack thereof⁹. In response to the portion of the title that alludes to the

⁹ Based on my weekly readings of his *Georgia Straight* reviews between September 2003 and April 2006, I have observed that there are common structural characteristics within his work. Although he generally opens by identifying a play's overall story and the

play's emphasis on "adventures", Thomas states, "Ali and Ali don't actually have any adventures, which is a bit of a problem". He then goes on to claim, "its central premise has nothing to do with the plot and that plot is so weak that it's almost indiscernible".

After telling his readers what the "indiscernible" plot and premise of the play are,

Thomas outlines the key problems he has with *Ali and Ali*:

So what's not to like? Well, *Ali and Ali* runs an hour and 40 minutes without a break, and because most of its concepts are poorly theatricalized it gets boring. The premise that the Alis aren't honouring their contract has very little to do with the ultra-light story, in which they search for "axes of evil". Because that search barely registers, there's insufficient narrative to pull us through the evening. The authors offer a freely associative structure as an alternative, but that form can only work if every passage creates its own intense interest – which doesn't happen.

Although he praises the play's political deconstruction, here he is lamenting the lack of dramatic conflict and climactic narrative in the play's form. He does not consider how such a form itself is a medium like the others which Brooks, Verdecchia, Youssef, and Chai encourage all to analyze critically. While Thomas does not directly discuss the merits of *Ali and Ali* as a play or piece of drama, as Tompkins does with *Chomsky* and van Dijk, as I will soon reveal, does with *Fronteras*, the emphasis of his discussion remains similar to critiques such as theirs: a focus on the lack of traditional narrative. Admittedly, Thomas' acknowledgement that "The authors offer a freely associative structure" (ibid) reveals that he *is* critiquing the formal features for their ability to operate in accordance with their own, unique dramatic abilities. Their formal resistance to traditions of Aristotelian dramaturgy and plot driven adventure narratives continues the media deconstruction work advocated in the play's explicit content. However, while

themes and ideas being dramatized, he frequently focuses on the nature of the plays' structures and offers his personal responses to the use (or misuse) of particular dramaturgical components.

Thomas is able to identify the form these playwrights utilize, and critique it based on the merits of an episodic structure, his overall assessment of the production becomes ironic for a few reasons. First, he states: "there's insufficient narrative to pull us through the evening", presumably emphasizing the need for climactic structure since Thomas does not explicitly outline what he means by "sufficient narrative". Immediately thereafter, he states that this "lack" is filled with an episodic ("freely associative") structure (ibid). My concern here is not that Thomas has recognized the use of episodic structure in *Ali and Ali* or that his critique is based on the merits of this particular structure being used. Rather, I am concerned with the fact that his initial reaction emphasizes that the play lacks a traditional narrative. If Thomas knows that this traditional narrative is not being used because the playwrights desire to create an episodic structure, he need not bother asserting the lack before revealing the inclusion. It is still a rhetorical method of emphasizing what Verdecchia, Youssef, and Chai have *not* done instead of directly referring to the style, genre, and structure they *have* chosen.

While this first group of critics claim that the plays themselves are undramatic or unstructured, another critic raises questions of categorizing the production's formal features. Specifically, Maarten van Dijk notes the difficulty in categorizing *Fronteras* into one distinct dramatic genre. Referencing *Fronteras* as "play", van Dijk hints that his dramatic concerns are similar to Tompkins'. In van Dijk's case, however, he expands on his use of these quotation marks by saying, "the quotation marks flag the problems of a straightforward identification" (159). Thus, instead of stating that *Fronteras* does not meet the qualifications of "play" or "drama" due to its chosen format not conforming to classic dramatic models, van Dijk acknowledges the difficulty of categorizing the unique

nature of the piece itself. However, while he notes the difficulty of assigning the play a “straightforward identification”, he believes that it deservedly won the Governor General’s Award for Drama in 1993. Thus, van Dijk may not be able to assign a direct word to the dramatic style or form utilized in *Fronteras* but he also finds no need to use one. Instead, he opts to assert its impact by supporting the very accolade given for dramatic distinction.

Maarten van Dijk also belongs to a second category of critics that includes Ann Wilson, Mayte Gómez, Jerry Wasserman, Sherry Simon, Rosalind Kerr, Lisa Coulthard, and Elaine Brousseau. These individuals assess the plays’ relationships between form and content, though each makes particular claims regarding the nature of these relationships. Although van Dijk notes the difficulty of a “straightforward identification” of *Fronteras*’ form, he also observes the connection between the play’s form and content.

As a nation of immigrants, we are probably familiar with the struggle to overcome the voicelessness of linguistic displacement and psychological and physical alienation and deracination. This familiarity also forms the considerably inventive structure of the work. Verdecchia’s struggle contains its own reward because it leads to the healing of the central character, and the symbolic forging of communal bonds between alienated performer and his displaced audience. (158)

Here, van Dijk observes that issues such as displacement, alienation, and deracination shape the structure of the play itself. Thus, form is a direct derivative and expression of the content.

Like Tompkins, van Dijk notes that Verdecchia “attempts to forestall possible criticism through a self-referential irony” in *Fronteras* (159). Speaking directly to the audience, Wideload talks about theatre expectations:

I mean I doan know about you but I hate it when I go to el teatro to de theatre and I am espectin’ to see a play and instead I just get some guy

up dere talking about himself deir life story – who cares? Por favor ...
And whatever happened to plays anyway – anybody remember plays?
Like wif a plot and central character? Gone de way of modernism I
Guess [...]. (Verdecchia 33-34)

van Dijk considers Wideload's statement to be "more than fashionable self-reference, however, because it arises urgently out of the predicament of "Verdecchia", who can only reflect his own fragmented displacement as a result of getting lost "while crossing the border" (159). Thus, he notes Verdecchia's use of self-reference to anticipate and identify possible critiques but, unlike Tompkins, he argues that such self-reference serves an important function in the play's particular dramatic constructs.

Ann Wilson and Mayte Gómez highlight a key formal feature used to theatrically represent this border-dilemma on stage: Verdecchia playing two characters in this one-person show. Ann Wilson argues that Verdecchia "stages this division in performance by playing two characters" (7), a direct result of the socio-cultural dilemmas with which Verdecchia, as playwright and character, struggles. Gómez also identifies the dramatization of these concepts with her observation that "Verdecchia discusses well-known stereotypes [...] and performs some others" (29-30). She believes *Fronteras* "acknowledges the presence of two cultures alive within an individual, as he struggles to find his 'identity', his 'Home'" (30). While like the first set of critics, Wilson and Gómez's articles are highly engaged in the social, cultural, political, and economic factors imbedded in *Fronteras*, they are also attentive to Verdecchia's means for mobilizing those themes through dramatic forms.

Sherry Simon has a similar approach to assessing the dramaturgical techniques used by Verdecchia in *Fronteras*. In "Border Writing", she notes that *Fronteras* "consciously straddle[s] the frontiers of language and use[s] the grossest stereotypes of

national identity [...] along with innovative narrative techniques to disorganize and provoke naïve perceptions of identity” (213). Though her focus lies in the narrative form *Fronteras* takes, her analytical approach to *Fronteras* is similar to Wilson’s and Gomez’s. She locates the particular dramatic elements that Verdecchia uses in order to explain the complexities of the content and explore them further. She also makes note of another particular characteristic that makes Verdecchia unique: though he explores the complexities of socio-political dilemmas, he also foregrounds the struggle of a protagonist within that infrastructure. Comparing his work to other border writing, Simon suggests:

Verdecchia’s approach is lighter – he concentrates on the individual rather than attempting to construct a complex social fresco – but just as penetrating in its analysis of the conflictual demands of border experiences. (214)

She then notes that Verdecchia “uses the theme of displacement to mobilize themes of self-identity and self-betrayal”, adding that he also “explores themes of divided and mixed identity” (214). Overall, Simon places *Fronteras* in the framework of “border writing” and analyzes it for what it has to offer this unique genre by looking at both its themes and narrative style. The methods of Simon’s analysis, thus, reveal her focus on assessing *Fronteras*’ formal features on their own terms: as a piece of “border writing” and a piece of theatre.

With regard to critical assessments of *Chomsky*, Jerry Wasserman opens his article “Drama”, an overview of the Canadian body of dramatic texts produced in 1991, with a question pertaining to the key dramatic forms utilized that year. He asks his readers:

Is it just a coincidence that in this time of constitutional crisis-driven national soul searching, in which the political process itself is revealed as theatre, the longest running show in town, Canadian playwrights appear to be (re)turning to history – and herstory – for their material, and to metatheatrics for their form and style? (78)

He then notes that in 1991, “postmodern self-consciousness and its accompanying stylistic eclecticism constructed a variety of historical reclamation projects, some personal and immediate, and a lot of them very good” (78). Wasserman outlines the major ideas Brooks and Verdechia bring to the stage, “that ‘we’ are not just innocent bystanders in the cover-up of American crimes” and “that everyone involved in Canadian theatre itself [...] is complicit in ‘our own collective moral hypocrisy and cowardice’” and that “Their prescription is to have us all ‘look at the world and the world of the theatre without ideological or artistic blinkers’ (sic)” (79). Connecting form with content, he then asserts: “From this derives the play’s radically Brechtian presentational technique and broad humour” (79). He then adds that this humour is not only seen in the creation of “earnest political science lessons from the theatre of the world” and “hilarious illustrations from the world of theatre”, but also “In a brilliant self-referential vaudeville” that “deconstruct[s] ideology and art – including their own – as two sides of the same theatrical coin” (79). Since Wasserman’s critical observations are directly linked to his discussion of *Chomsky*’s primary themes and ideas, he emphasizes the link between the plays’ contents and their forms.

Wasserman also assesses the result of the forms utilized. Referring to the use of vaudeville throughout, Wasserman observes, “Slapstick has rarely been so chilling” (ibid). He also took interest in the scene “Silence and Falling” where Brooks’ physical falls represent the number of civilians, multiplied by 100, that were killed by government

forces in El Salvador a year prior to *Chomsky's* published production. Noting the relationships of form and content, ideology and art, Wasserman states that the semiotic system being used on stage operates as "the pratfall as dying fall; performance art as political wake-up call" (79). He not only identifies this relationship but the emotional and intellectual impact Brooks and Verdecchia's "theatrical coin" can have on an audience.

Rosalind Kerr also discusses the relationship between form and content in *Ali and Ali*. In her *Canadian Theatre Review* article, "Theatre as a Weapon against Mass Delusion", she analyzes both the structure and techniques used in *Ali and Ali* and how they dramatize the play's subject matter. Kerr reveals this analytical process in her statement: "Intended to serve as a carnivalesque corrective to the stereotyping of "brown people", the show is relentless in exposing the western hypocrisy that conceals our complicity in projecting the "axes of evil" into Iran and Iraq (91). She also notes that one of the play's premises, the possible risk of a terrorist attack, is established early in the text. She states that this moment occurs via video projection when Mohandes warns Ali and Ali, and the audience:

You and all your loved ones are going to fucking die. ANY FUCKING MOMENT! My extensive research proves that people who are bored are far more likely to commit terrorist atrocities. This, of course, is why so many terrorist attacks occur in the theatre. But mine is not the realm of politics (or aesthetics) my friend. I am here to provide security, not evaluate the righteousness of a cause. (18)

Though she identifies the characters' recognition of the audience and their use of direct address, she also argues that in moments where such formal features are used, the audience becomes connected to the future ideas and dilemmas presented. This is evident when she states: "From this point on, the challenge is out to "the good people of Real

Life Canada” in the audience to examine their own position vis-à-vis terrorism (92). Kerr continues to address Ali and Ali’s abilities to utilize the theatre space as a means of exploring audience complicity. For instance, she argues: “By the final third of the show, after Mohandes uses his dying breath to report that he has located the “axes of evil” in the audience, the lines of demarcation between us and them have come increasingly blurred” (92). She notes that moments such as the invasion of the Alis into the audience, wearing their cardboard jeeps as they “search for WMD [Weapons of Mass Destruction], only to arrive at the conclusion that the WMD are not the axes of evil but evil axes (or any other sharp implement)” are ones in which this sense is created (ibid). Thus, Kerr’s observations are imperative to the broader discourse engaged in *Ali and Ali*. She identifies specific moments where the Alis break physical boundaries and makes strong arguments surrounding the manner in which such actions map out new intellectual and emotional boundaries from within the audience members.

In her analysis of *The Noam Chomsky Lectures*, Lisa Coulthard investigates the play’s formal structures and shows how they are connected to the ideologies expressed within the content. She then assesses *Chomsky* on these specific, formal grounds. Her critiques do not ask if the play is dramatic nor does she simply identify the particular forms utilized in order to communicate content. Coulthard identifies that formal analysis is paramount to discussing *Chomsky* by stating: “In order to discuss the politics and the political import of *The Noam Chomsky Lectures* it is necessary to consider the form of the play” (46). Coulthard then focuses on form’s ability to conform ideologically to what the content itself instructs (46). She initiates her analysis by outlining *Chomsky*’s key formal features:

In terms of performance, the *Lectures* is anti-illusionistic, meta-theatrical and self-reflexive; it is aware of itself as a play, lecture and performance and deals very centrally with many aspects of drama, theatre and acting; the authors/actors/characters refer to the venue in which the play is performed; the conditions of the creation and reception of the theatre and performance are explicitly discussed; the title of the published version reads *The Noam Chomsky Lectures: A Play*. (48-49)

Her primary concern with these instruments of communication is that they play a key role in “the division between audience and performer”, noting what Kerr has also observed, that the lines “are at once blurred and enforced” (49). Her argument then builds to the discussion of the line between theatre operating as a play and drama acting as politics, stating:

Theatre, like politics, is influenced and determined by certain ideological factors and assumptions, and it is important, in fact necessary, to be aware of those factors and assumptions; the play argues that it is important to understand the “manufacture of consent” and thought control which can be a part of its critical reception. (51-2)

Thus, Coulthard addresses the value of the formal features as they relay *Chomsky’s* specific socio-political content.

Coulthard then assesses how the formal features operate under the ideologies within *Chomsky*. She claims, “the semiological guerrilla warfare of *The Noam Chomsky Lectures* is selectively aimed indeed, and I think we have to ask if another ‘medium’ is needed to teach people how to read *The Noam Chomsky Lectures* in a critical fashion” (52). Her fundamental reason for this is that “The *Lectures* asks the audience to question theatrical and political assumptions, but does not in fact ask them to question the status of the *Lectures* and its information and truth value” (53). She then notes that *Chomsky’s* approach to political activism in the theatre, or “any discussion of self-defense in decoding mediated discourse” such as this, “implies that unmediated discourse is a

possibility, ideology is easily deciphered and sifted out from a message and further, such a discussion of mediated discourse is an unmediated discourse” (ibid). Interrogating the Cartesian common-sense rooted in both Noam Chomsky’s works and Brooks and Verdecchia’s play, Coulthard states that “Chomsky, Brooks and Verdecchia all suggest that ‘elementary truths’ exist and are easily discovered with a little common-sense and cynicism”, adding that “Brooks and Verdecchia’s ‘lecture’ can be taken to task for its attempt to expose ‘elementary truths’ about politics, theatre and thought control in democratic societies, without questioning those truths or their presentation of them” (ibid).

Coulthard does not discuss, however, the numerous instances where, in *Chomsky*, Brooks and Verdecchia are also forced to operate in accordance with specific critical constraints due to an imbalance in power in their own collective group: the theatre community. The audience is made aware that the actors also manipulate their own art in order to adhere to particular constraints set out by theatre critics such as Ray Conlogue, Alex Patterson, Robert Crew, and Geoff Chapman.

This is precisely the point that Elaine Brousseau makes as she responds to Coulthard’s comments in her article, “Personalizing the Political in *The Noam Chomsky Lectures*”. Re-quoting Coulthard, she states, “It is difficult [...] to see how Lisa Coulthard, in her recent essay about the play, can maintain that Brooks and Verdecchia do not apply ‘their own standards of critical reading and viewing to the reading and viewing of their own texts’” (260). Brousseau asserts, “Brooks and Verdecchia do precisely this – both theatrically, by undercutting themselves as deliverers of information, and directly through language [...]” (ibid). Though she references scenes such as

“Response to Critics” as moments when Verdecchia addresses the audience directly to inform them of the critiques they are up against, these moments, nevertheless, share similar techniques and tactics with those I have noted in chapter two.

Though Brousseau disagrees with Coulthard on this particular point, she, like Coulthard, discusses the strong relationship between *Chomsky*’s form and content. As other critics have noted, Brousseau states that *Chomsky* “is not narratively structured; rather the action consists of an onslaught of information about versions of history intended to get the audience to question its assumptions about the media, government, policies, and the general goodwill of democratic states” (249). However, Brousseau identifies a core characteristic of this structure: it “theatricaliz[es] Chomsky’s rhetorical method” (250). She outlines the basis for this claim as follows:

Using their own words, Brooks and Verdecchia manage to convey the logic and rigor of Chomsky’s positions on these issues, and to incorporate his distinctive rhetorical style: statement, followed by example after example, followed by overwhelming evidence, which often takes the form of copious footnotes. (ibid)

Not only does Brousseau describe Chomsky’s rhetorical formula, she also notes that Brooks and Verdecchia echo this style in the structure of their play. Brousseau also counter-argues charges regarding the theatrical and dramatic nature of *Chomsky*. Though she does not explicitly refute Thomas or Tompkins, Brousseau states, “*The Noam Chomsky Lectures* is a play and not a lecture [...]” (253) since “Clearly, politics is theatricalized in these demonstrations of how the media sets the limits of permitted discourse” (252). Thus, by arguing that Brooks and Verdecchia use demonstrations to communicate their core political observations, Brousseau supports similar evidence I

have noted in chapter two regarding the theatrical nature of these demonstrative moments.

Brousseau also supports one of my primary arguments about these plays, that Verdecchia and his co-writers, in these particular plays, occupy theatrical and political border zones. She states: "*The Noam Chomsky Lectures* is not only theatrical, but also highly conscious of itself as a theater piece. Playing with the definition of theater, it lurks along the boundaries – and challenges the very existence of those boundaries – between “art” and “propaganda”” (ibid). Regarding the role of the protagonists themselves, and the fact that each playwright plays a character named after himself, Brousseau observes that “the line between actor and role is so fine as to blur the normal distinction between actor and character” (ibid). Thus, Brousseau makes similar discoveries as I have made in chapter two regarding the operation of personal and political border zones in *The Noam Chomsky Lectures*.

As I also argued in my introduction, Brousseau makes the connection between these playwrights and Brecht. More specifically, she emphasizes a core argument I have made, that these playwrights all seem to involve audiences in a manner that encourages social change. Additionally, Brousseau claims:

It could in fact be said that Brooks and Verdecchia have put together a dramatic work that creates a kind of audience that Brecht imagined, an audience able to separate emotion from reason and to look critically at a play, not identifying with characters but seeing them as part of social and political situations that were capable of being changed. (ibid)

However, I would remind Brousseau that while Brecht called for increase in audience consciousness in much of his theoretical writings, he also claims: “At the same time it would be quite wrong to try and deny emotions to this kind of theatre” (23). More

specifically, he identifies that the use of intellect is not at the expense of emotions but, rather, the former is to be encouraged more than the latter. As Brecht explains, "The essential point of the epic theatre is perhaps that it appeals less to the feelings than to the spectator's reason. Instead of sharing an experience the spectator must come to grips with things" (ibid). According to Brecht, emotions should not be evoked from an audience in order to share an experience with the characters but, instead, emphasis should be placed on the audience's connection with concepts and ideas. I would further argue that encouraging spectators to "come to grips with things", to engage in viewpoints on life, is motivated by a playwright's sense that something in society needs to be changed. Effecting change is, I would also argue, driven by the emotions of passion and desire since change itself cannot be initiated without some form of internal impetus.

Though Brousseau claims that Verdecchia and his co-writers are connected to Brecht since they encourage critical thought and social change, she also argues that Verdecchia and his cohorts do not dismiss an audience's emotional involvement entirely. The protagonists connect with an audience by sharing personal details and, as I have argued throughout this thesis, discuss their individual experiences suffering under the very ideologies they each lecture about. Thus, they seek to both incite critical thinking and encourage emotional connections with issues affecting the protagonists: placing their protagonists on intellectual and emotional border-zones. Verdecchia and Brooks and, as I have previously argued in chapter three, Youssef, and Chai, personalize the political by occupying dualistic spaces within audiences themselves: their hearts and minds.

CONCLUSION

Daniel Brooks, Guillermo Verdecchia, Marcus Youssef, and Camyar Chai all engage audiences in border experiences in their plays: *The Noam Chomsky Lectures*, *Fronteras Americanas*, and *The Adventures of Ali and Ali and the Axes of Evil*.

Specifically, they blur distinctions between characters and educators, performance space and audience space in order to both dramatize socio-political material to an audience and deliver it to them in a resounding, informative manner. As a result, the protagonists are cognizant of the dual roles they play in the theatre as actors and instructors. They also recognize that they play a role in a variety of socio-political issues, issues they decide to deconstruct in front of their audience. As a result of the blurring of these lines and the consistent reminders of being part of a community-based event, the audience also shares in this collective awareness of theatricality and socio-political responsibility. Their collective consciences and consciousnesses are blended with use of emotional responses: both from the protagonists as they relate to the subject matter and from the audience as they witness the protagonists. The result is a complex hybrid of audience reception that activates both rational thought and emotional response.

I began this research interested in these particular plays due to their distinct formal choices and the conflicting critical responses they inspired. Specifically, they use direct address for dual purposes. They share global facts and personal anecdotes. They expose mechanisms used in the media to enforce thought control and then expose, in outrage, the very mechanisms they are forced to operate under as artists, cultural stereotypes, and refugees. Additionally, they use slide projections to deconstruct

infrastructures while attempting to subdue their personal responses, effectively silenced by the aforementioned imposed mechanisms placed directly on the protagonists.

My thesis was predominantly guided by the following questions: what is the relationship between the form and content in these plays as each informs and responds to the other? What are the specific characteristics of those moments when Brechtian techniques are used for dual purposes? What are the politics and ideologies driving those moments and what formal choices represent those aspects in action? My studies began by suggesting that *Chomsky*, *Fronteras*, and *Ali and Ali* present protagonists who both mimetically embody fictional characters and present audiences with non-fictional material. Though they share this broad characteristic, the features of each play are unique in the way they reveal specific socio-political ideas. In chapters one through three, I assessed particular moments that used Brechtian techniques for dual purposes: to both instruct and emotionally engage an audience. As a result, I discovered unique distinctions between these plays. In chapter one, I analyzed *The Noam Chomsky Lectures* on these foundations and discovered that the playwrights used their namesakes for dual purposes. The revelation of their writer/actor/character status complicated scenarios in which Brooks and Verdecchia revealed both personal details about their lives and the artistic ideologies to which they are forced to adhere. The former revelation of personal details implicates the actors in situations discussed mere moments earlier. Through the use of demonstrative metatheatre, the characters reveal how the actors and playwrights are not ideologically pure but, rather, are also complicit in moral hypocrisy. Exposing artistic ideologies in which they are forced to adhere reveals to an audience that the

actor/characters struggle under the constraints of particular ideologies by portraying those emotions for an audience, only to be silenced by mechanisms mere moments later.

I approached *Fronteras Americanas* in a similar vein and discovered that Verdecchia's decision to represent the division of self also allows him to represent a core issue of the play. Guillermo Verdecchia portrays two characters, Verdecchia and Wideload, who are both guided by the desire to inform an audience of particular cultural dilemmas. Each is also directly affected by those cultural dilemmas and expresses those struggles directly on stage. Interestingly, while Verdecchia and Wideload each acknowledge the use of the theatre space, they do not exist as performers in the same way as Brooks and Verdecchia. While Brooks and Verdecchia struggle with artistic ideologies, Verdecchia and Wideload grapple with cultural ideologies and the ensuing sense of a divided self. Thus, Verdecchia, as writer, begins shedding the use of character/actor status in order to dramatize larger socio-cultural issues on a personal level.

Interestingly, he returns to character/actor divides in *Ali and Ali*. In this play, however, Verdecchia – perhaps informed by past discoveries – removes the protagonists' cognizance of the larger dramatic landscape they exist within. They exist as performers named Ali Ababwa and Ali Hakim but they do not directly tell the audience (as Brooks and Verdecchia do in *Chomsky*) that they are Marcus Youssef and Camyar Chai playing Ababwa and Hakim, respectively. The audience absorbs the factual material Ababwa and Hakim deliver while simultaneously remaining in the diegetic world of these performers. Thus, Verdecchia, Youssef, and Chai consistently encourage emotional engagement while also delivering informative material. It is the most mimetic Verdecchia has been in

these three plays. However, Verdecchia retains the use of Brechtian techniques necessary for effective delivery of information by creating characters who are performers rather than creating characters who acknowledge they are actors in real life.

Due to the complexity of these plays' formal features, it is easy to see how Maarten van Dijk finds genre identification a difficult task. The decision not to evoke climactic structures or mimetic characters could, justifiably, also incite dramaturgical debate. Additionally, the fact that these plays deconstruct grand narratives but do not wholly apply the same tactics to their own storylines would make some people question their ideological purity. These dilemmas, as illuminated by numerous critics cited in chapter four, are merely a product of the unique nature of the plays themselves. The divided critical responses are a result of the application of border-theory in these particular plays and the dualistic use of Brechtian techniques.

Though the plays offer evidence of influence from theatre predecessors such as Brecht, this is not to say that Verdecchia and his co-writers have applied Brechtian techniques wholly or in exactly the same manner. Their texts' immediate response to current socio-political activities deviates from Brechtian strategies for historicization. Furthermore, the playwrights use slide projections but not in the same manner that Brecht used placards to announce upcoming dramatic action. Where Brecht aimed to encourage an audience's emotional detachment from the story's plot, the slides of these plays often aim to incite emotional responses such as anger, outrage, or frustration toward particular statements and actions captured in the media. Thus, Brechtian techniques are used within these plays but these plays do not use all of Brecht's techniques. Furthermore, there are

many aesthetic similarities, such as the slide projections, but not all of these features are used in the exact manner attributed to Brecht.

What I have discovered is that while Brooks, Verdecchia, Youssef, and Chai have incorporated Brechtian techniques into their plays, one of the core critical debates is that their aesthetics and their politics do not fit neatly into a single category. The level of critical debate surrounding the issue of dramatic description certainly suggests this is the case. Verdecchia has also made it abundantly clear that he is not driven to dramatize singular moments or events, neither in his plays or the plays he has produced as an artistic director. Thus, I have been able to understand what Verdecchia and his co-writers are working to achieve in the theatre: giving audiences direct experience with borders and illustrating problems and possibilities. However, what I now question is when academics and critics will thoroughly acknowledge the transitions themselves, charting them for what they are rather than what they are *not*, thereby documenting shifts in theatre practice.

What began as an investigation into the practice of these specific Canadian playwrights and the conflicting critical responses to their work leads me to questions about critical practice in Canada. Specifically, the focus of my own research and writing is similar to that of Ric Knowles' book *The Theatre of Form and the Production of Meaning*: "to examine the role of dramatic form, and of play structures, as material agents in shaping (rather than simply reflecting) both consciousness and social formations" (17). I, too, am haunted by Knowles' question: "Why bother to undertake a politicized reading of dramatic form? Do I really believe in the power of contemporary theatre in Canada to produce dissent or effect change?" but am ultimately encouraged by

his response: "Well, yes, if anything can (though perhaps not on its own)" (18). Though Knowles acknowledges that the theatre's power "to produce dissent or effect change" may not occur "on its own", I would further argue that this cannot occur without the support of theatre critics who recognize these efforts and achievements in the first place. Knowles identifies that use of neo-Aristotelian ideals was prevalent in theatre training since the 1970s and this may indeed offer the reason for the current state of theatre criticism. However, the critical characteristics Knowles identifies are not fruitful methods for future analyses since they will overlook many of the insights made by playwrights who avoid naturalism and neo-Aristotelian techniques. This is certainly what I have discovered in the critical responses to *Chomsky*, *Fronteras*, and *Ali and Ali*.

The core concerns of this thesis have also led me to question my own complicity within the choices made in theatre, publishing, and education. Much like Brooks and Verdecchia acknowledge that they are also complicit in many appalling decisions, I must also confess my own prioritization of neo-Aristotelian ideals when discussing dramatic texts within classroom settings or much of my own writing. My acknowledged complicity in such a dilemma is certainly an understandable outcome of studying *Chomsky*, *Fronteras*, and *Ali and Ali* since they encourage audiences to recognize their own complicity in a variety of communal activities. However, rather than focusing on the errors of our ways, Brooks, Verdecchia, Youssef, and Chai incite action and stir us to change. *Chomsky*, *Fronteras*, and *Ali and Ali* all conclude on a note of consideration, a moment where the audience is to pause and reflect on their individual capacities to change. Taking cue from such suggestions, I too would encourage individuals within the theatre and academic communities to acknowledge their complicity in prioritizing neo-

Classical ideals. Once we have achieved this, we may then recognize and act upon our individual responsibilities within these communities rather than feeling overwhelmed by the actions made by the larger communities in which we belong.

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