

**University of Alberta**

**Representing the Unrepresentable:  
A Critical Analysis of Staging Genocide**

by

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores the theatrical staging of genocide using Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection to highlight the impossibility of understanding and fully comprehending genocide. Traditional staging methods typically use a cohesive narrative structure which limits and edits the event to provide a stable conclusion. The debate of representing genocide does not centre solely on why one tries to stage these events but has shifted to emphasize how and if these events can be represented. Many theatre groups recognize the benefits of non-traditional staging methods. Groupov's *Rwanda 94* (2000) highlights the inability of the abject to be performed and the impossibility of containing genocide by the length of the production as well as the integration of several art forms. In the exploration of visuality in Hotel Modern's *Kamp* (2005) the challenges of representing pain and violence are foregrounded. The ability to view the Holocaust is impacted by the intersection between film and the use of small puppets.

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## **Introduction**

The act of telling a story is inherent in human nature from the time a small child tries to communicate what he or she wants. A child mimics those in close contact, points, yells, and reproduces sounds until he or she is finally understood. But what happens when the original source is too complex to mimic? When words cannot describe an idea or an event? The act of planning genocide is often well thought out and highly formulaic. However, the repercussions of these events are unfathomable and the ability to understand and contain mass violence is extremely challenging if not impossible. Utilizing the theatrical stage to portray stories and events from the past is highly problematic because the stage naturally compresses events into a quantifiable and structurally commensurable narrative. This thesis will discuss the complexities of representing genocide and will analyze and critique two productions which have staged genocide.

The first chapter explores the questions surrounding the representation of genocide as inherently an abject event as defined by Julia Kristeva. Abjection is a disregard for borders and viewed as a threat to society. Genocide seeks to extinguish the abject by showing what is abject in society and removing it but in doing so, genocide becomes an abject event. The portrayal of genocide on the theatrical stage is problematic because of its abject nature as an event and through language. The liveness of the stage is inherently problematic when representing genocide because genocide, by definition is about mass killing. Death on stage is impossible to recreate and the representation of death clearly falls short of the actual event. I will also explore the idea of representing genocide without

silencing survivors. In Susan Sontag's book on photography and regarding the pain of others she says, "All memory is individual, unreproducible – it dies with each person. What is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulation: that *this* is important, and this is the story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds" (86). I will explore the tension between personal memory and collective memories and address how the act of witnessing can effect memory. Professor and psychiatrist Dori Laub suggests:

The listener, therefore, has to be at the same time a witness to the trauma witness and a witness to himself. It is only in this way, through his simultaneous awareness of the continuous flow of those inner hazards both in the trauma witness and in himself, that he can become the enabler of the testimony – the one who triggers its initiation, as well as the guardian of its process and of its momentum. (58)

Artists are witnesses to both the trauma of the person, in this case of the Holocaust and Rwanda genocide survivors, and witnesses to themselves as they attempt at representing the event. In the theatre, the live audience also becomes witnesses to the trauma through the representation and telling of the event.

Chapter two will focus on the idea of narrative and use of multi-medial strategies in theatre company Groupov's depiction of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, *Rwanda 94* (2000). By looking at Kristeva's theory of abjection, it is shown the language used in describing genocide tries to contain language in order to allow societies to be "free" from events that are deemed abject. Kristeva describes the affect abjection has on narrative:

For, when narrated identity is unbearable, when the boundary between subject and object is shaken, and when even the limit between inside and outside becomes uncertain, the narrative is what is challenged first... In other words, the theme of suffering-horror is the ultimate evidence of such states of abjection within narrative representation. If one wished to proceed farther still along the approaches to abjection, one would find neither narrative nor theme but a recasting of syntax and vocabulary – the violence of poetry, and silence. (141)

Genocide, as an abject event, breaks down language structure. Groupov, compiled of actors from Belgium and Rwanda, approaches the topic of genocide in a multi-faceted strategy, using verbatim text from witnesses and survivors as well as adding dance, video footage, and fictional text to enhance the dramatic narrative. The play even encapsulates a long academic lecture on the events of 1994. Utilizing an official recording of the performance as well as a collection of reviews and the script, I explore how representation and genocide as abject correlate. I foreground the limitations of language in *Rwanda 94* as well as explore the complexities of trying to portray and contain a massive event in one production.

The final chapter moves away from the details of abjection in order to discuss the complex visuality of genocide on the theatrical stage by analyzing Hotel Modern's *Kamp* (2005). *Kamp* depicts a day in the life at Auschwitz and gives an overview of what happened in the camps. A performance was recorded for documentary purposes and a complete copy posted on youtube.com, which

served as my primary source of investigation along with reviews and critical articles. Josette Feral and Leslie Wickes discuss the aesthetic of shock and suggest, “placing theatricality at the center of a particularly violent event is somewhat problematic, because it makes the death of another into a quasi-insignificant consideration by reducing it to an element of the spectacle. It diminishes the other to the role of an object, a mere pawn in service of the aesthetic work” (56). Utilizing a tragic event in which survivors are countless, can be problematic as the artist focuses on aesthetics and finding a conclusive or theatrical way to explore the subject. I critique Hotel Modern’s aesthetics of violence by analyzing the use of intermediality and puppetry in *Kamp*. Hotel Modern’s piece stages the Holocaust using puppets eight centimetres in height and follows the action using a small camera to project a live feed. One of the most striking contrasts in their approach is the diminutive affect of these puppets, versus the enormity of what the Holocaust has become in our cultural memory. The use of puppets and film creates multiple ways of seeing and understanding this unrepresentable event and thereby expands the aesthetic instead of limiting the interpretation.

Analyzing *Kamp* and *Rwanda 94*, two vastly different productions, allows for a better understanding of the complexities of staging genocide. Although “accurate representation of trauma can never be achieved without recreating the event, since, by its very definition, trauma lies beyond the bounds of ‘normal’ conception” (Dauge-Roth quoting Kali Tal *Writing and Filming* 44) non-traditional staging methods give a broader and perhaps more useful representation

of the entire event, which conventional theatre cannot provide because of the structural restrictions of traditional narrative and its realistic representation. Groupov and Hotel Modern have taken vastly different approaches to portraying genocide while at the same time allowing for fragile viewings of the past. The productions represent genocides which occurred thirty years apart and in different sections of the world. Their mutual goal in expressing an event too traumatic to understand gives a broader scope to the questions surrounding the representation of genocide and the human need to understand these events.

The term “representation” is also problematic as it implies an original event to *present* on stage whereas the *original* genocide is impossible to pinpoint as discussed in the coming chapters. Thus, the term representation is used as a critical convention to signify theatrical stagings based on real events. Vast amounts of research and libraries have been created both on the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide, and some might question what more there is to say. Yet, the vast dialogue and continuous research indicates the need and desire to learn more about these events. *Rwanda 94* and *Kamp*, in fact any production or research alone, cannot encompass the questions and tragedy surrounding these events but these reflect and encourage brief moments of clarity amidst the convoluted and incomprehensibility of genocide and our need and desire to deal with it.

## **Chapter 1: Methodology**

Theodor Adorno said that art after Auschwitz would be barbaric because it would be not only impossible to fully capture the emotion, pain, and the tragedy of the event, but in doing so, would also be irreparably reductive of the enormity and systematic nature of the event:

To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today.

Absolute reification, which presupposed intellectual progress as one of its elements, is now preparing to absorb the mind entirely. Critical intelligence cannot be equal to this challenge as long as it confines itself to self satisfied contemplation. (34)

Adorno's words continue to echo over the past 60 years as genocide continues to occur and the arts community continues to respond to these events in various ways. Adorno's sentiment suggests an impossibility in the representation of genocide and a fear the art "might dislodge from Holocaust literature its vital nexus to the life/death process that was the nucleus of its inspiration" (Langer 78). Adorno would later go on to revise his statement after controversy surrounding his words. However, the debate continues whether these events are possible to fully represent, the vast amount of literature, not only on the Holocaust but also the growing research on genocide in general, is testimony to the fact humanity continues to try to grapple with these events. This study then moves beyond Adorno's ethical and aesthetical conundrum and looks squarely at existing performative discourse in response to genocide. I pivot my approach on

performance theory and abjection theory. Psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva, posited her theory of abjection in the early 1980's. The theory revolves around the idea that abjection is that which does not respect borders (Kristeva 4). This theory has intrigued theatrical artists who want to deconstruct the idea of the body and the barriers placed upon it. Using Kristeva's theory of abjection to analyze the representation of genocide sheds light on the abject nature of genocide, as well as serves as a referent to the problems of staging genocide. Several questions arise when looking at the staging of genocide in performance: why do we try to represent genocide?, what are the problems and complexities of representing genocide?, and what does it mean to witness these events?

The theatrical staging of genocide poses problems of authenticity, silencing, and a responsibility to ensure the "real past" or the "truth" of the event is told, both in its details as well as in its wholeness. If too large, or too horrifying an event to represent, why do artists continue to tackle the representation of genocide both in performance and literature? The most common answer to this question is the cry "never again"! Seemingly, in order for these tragedies to cease occurring, looking at the past is a search for understanding and through understanding, to limit the possibility of reoccurrence. There are two components to the idea of understanding. The first is understanding in the hope that such an event does not happen again. The second, is a hope for survivors to face their past. French professor Christian Biet notes the first stage representations of the Holocaust in the 1960's were "staged only to lead the audience to a humanistic and universal understanding of the difficulty every human must face in the

struggle to remain human, especially in the circumstances of the Holocaust” (1046). There is hope and reassurance in understanding the *un-understandable* because this knowledge then exists to prevent it from happening again. Literature assists in compacting this un-understanding and provides a type of “knowing” as Dori Laub suggests, “The emergence of the narrative which is being listened to – and heard – is, therefore, the process and the place wherein the cognizance, the ‘knowing’ of the event is given birth to” (57). As literature unpacks details of individual events, a slow picture of the larger event begins to be pieced together. This larger picture is never complete and as details come into focus, other details fade into the background. It is a never ending puzzle which literature and performance tries to unpack. It is the constant focus and fade which allows fragile viewings of genocide to come into focus to catch a small glimpse of what we cannot understand: “...it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet” (Caruth 3). The acknowledgement of the intersection between what we can know and what we cannot is at the crux of trying to understand an event too massive and complex to become knowable. The “...trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on” (4). In writing sections of the event in literature, the details of events come into focus and some scholars suggest

survivors can begin to heal from a trauma which cannot be reconciled. The urge to represent these events propels the act of knowing as events are placed on stage in a concrete and visual way.

The justification for telling these stories to understand in order for healing for the survivors is a complex issue. For survivors, the event does not end when the official historical date is announced. The Holocaust did not end in 1945 and Rwanda did not end in 1994. These events still have resounding effects for the survivors and the cultural identity of those subsequent generations. Because of this, “trauma survivors live not with memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every respect” (Laub 69). Not only do the survivors live with the reality of their past, but it is a complicated past which those outside the trauma cannot understand. Trauma survivors, therefore, are put into a position in which history constantly repeats itself because it has no closure: “to undo this entrapment in a fact that cannot be known, cannot be told, but can only be repeated, a therapeutic process – a process of constructing a narrative, of reconstructing a history and essentially, of *re-externalizing the event* – has to be set in motion” (69). Survivors need a way to express their stories in order for any healing to begin. If Adorno was right in saying poetry could not exist, Lawrence Langer expands this idea to include the idea that what happens is actually a tension between the “desire to keep silence and the desire to speak” (78). Survivors are caught between the need to speak and the desire to never look at the

past again. However, in the ability to speak or tell a story, "...it rather helps us to restage and restate the effort to remember what is lost. The descriptions remind us how loss acquires meaning and generates recovery – not only of and for the object, but for the one who remembers" (Phelan 147). The process of remembering and telling allows for the survivor to continue to live in the present and allows for a different kind of healing; a healing that does not forget the past but allows for the survivor to repossess their life (Laub 85). In speaking their own narrative, their story, and having someone listen to them, a survivor begins the journey to heal.

A dialogue with the past also feels for many like an obligation to the dead who cannot speak their stories. The dead cannot speak and telling their stories is the present connection with them. To remember is a complex act because "remembering *is* an ethical act, has ethical value in and of itself. Memory is, achingly, the only relation we can have with the dead" (Sontag 115). Memory is all survivors have of the people they have lost and the experiences they have been through. Groupov's title, for instance, *Rwanda 94: An Attempt at Symbolic Reparation to the Dead, for Use by the Living*, shows the very paradoxical relationship with the dead while acknowledging the *attempt* at the portrayal of these stories. The idea, use for the living, shows the nature of the importance that the living must tell the dead's stories lest they be silenced forever. However, Groupov has recognized the futility of trying to understand the stories of the dead. The production gives these voices a haunting memory, constantly interrupting the present. The voices serve as a reminder of what was lost.

Many look at the representation of genocide as an affirmation of survival and a hope for the future. In looking at the past, it shows what humanity has suffered but also what they have survived. Sontag looks at photographs and suggests, “photographs of the suffering and martyrdom of a people are more than reminders of death, of failure, of victimization. They invoke the miracle of survival” (87). Literature and performance often show pictures of the past with a type of nostalgia. However, representations of genocide rarely show a happy picture of the past. What is often seen, however, is the brutality of the event contrasted with a hope for survival. Many depictions show this by contrasting death with reuniting lost loves thought dead or celebratory music at the end of a film. For example, in the film, *Life is Beautiful* (1997), the innocence of a boy believing he is playing a game with his father contrasts the brutality and harshness of the camps. When the boy’s father dies, we see the swooping American heroes riding in to free camps and the boy is reunited with his mother. These narratives and stories of trauma, which are a typical structure of popular filmic representations of genocide,

... far from telling of an escape from reality – the escape from a death, or from its referential force – rather attests to its endless impact on a life... At the core of these stories [stories of trauma], I would suggest, is thus a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival. (Caruth 7)

The oscillation between death and life is a unifying theme, which brings back these stories of ultimate triumph in spite of vast amounts of destruction. People want to know humanity beat the odds. For the survivors, it is not such a simple story, not a Hollywood film, because their minds cannot face their own potential deaths and their struggle is a struggle to understand their own survival.

These reasons to represent genocide are by no means exhaustive. As Biet notes in regards to early stage representations of the Holocaust, “the main purpose was to present a way for humanity to escape the trauma, by creating a link between people and affirming the possibility of the future” (1046). Many representations today do not try to forget what happened but remember and look forward to the future. The future has changed because of the past and by looking at the past, the future continues to change. Erik Ehn, studying the Rwandan genocide, indicates, “I am not certain reconciliation is always possible, or necessary to peace; we have said that peace and joy are not obliged partners; there is so much to recover in Rwanda that the country cannot even be said to be rebuilding – it is *building*” (34). Identity is revisited and revised because of events that change entire cultures. Performance and literature assist in creating new ways for cultures to begin building again. The discussion in the arts community around the representation of genocide has shifted as “the debate about the Holocaust is no longer centred around the question whether this event can or should be represented but deals with *how* it *might* be represented...” (Le Roy 251). The dialogue within the arts community shifts from if or should to how which is reflected in the growing number of unconventional staging methods of

genocide. This new engagement with the representation of genocide, while providing different solutions, still does not provide solid answers to the problems of trying to represent an event which is “unrepresentable” or impossible to understand.

In order to formulate a dialogue or discourse with the past in the present, in order to try to understand what happened, a framework needs to be put in place. Freddie Rokem suggests in his book, *Performing History*, “History can only be perceived as such when it becomes recapitulated, when we create some form of discourse, like the theatre, on the basis of which an organized repetition of the past is constructed, situating the chaotic torrents of the past within an aesthetic frame” (xi) and Barthes: “History is hysterical: it is constituted only if we consider it, only if we look at it – in order to look at it, we must be excluded from it” (65). To perform history then, is to problematize the view of history itself and how we represent what we know as people outside of history. The stage provides a way to organize the past so the event is contextualized in the present. Felman indicates,

... it is only art that can henceforth be equal to its own historical impossibility, that art alone can live up to the task of contemporary thinking and of meeting the incredible demands of suffering, of politics and of contemporary consciousness, and yet escape the subtly omnipresent and the almost unavoidable cultural betrayal both of history and of the victims. (34)

and Rokem agrees, “The theatre performing history, . . . can become such an image, connecting the past with the present through the creativity of the theatre, constantly ‘quoting’ from the past, but erasing the exact traces in order to gain full meaning in the present” (xiii). These scholars suggest art is the way, perhaps the only option, to connect the present culture to the past without completely skewing the view of the past. The stage allows for an event to be bracketed within a certain space and then examined. This bracketing of an event brings up several problems of limiting the past and selecting what is deemed important to the artist.

At the crux of representing genocide is its abject nature. Kristeva’s theory of abjection can be split in three categories in terms of the stage: events, the body, and language. She begins *Powers of Horror*, her seminal text on abjection, by describing, “there looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but cannot be assimilated” (1). The abject is inherent in the body, and subsequently society, and lies in the in-between. It is the “thing” which is just under the surface, waiting to come out, a constant threat to the self. By its very ontology, abjection resists definition because of its ambiguity and resistance to borders. The abject is a loss of distinction between subject and object. Kristeva suggests, “the abject has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to *I*” (1). A child experiences abjection the moment he or she separates and creates a border from the mother. The child acknowledges its own subjectivity and places the mother as “other”. If the distinction between subject

and object is lost, when a person is no longer identifiable as both subject and object, abjection occurs. Kristeva describes the abject person as “a *deject* who places (himself), *separates* (himself), situates (himself), and therefore *strays* instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing” (8 - brackets in orig.). The abject person exists in terms of “where am I” instead of “who am I” and resists the definition of either subject or object (8). From this, it could be assumed that the abject is only a psychological disposition, an abstract idea a person feels and becomes rather than shown or demonstrated. The abject is fundamentally a breach in borders.

The idea of abjection and the breakdown of borders is typically associated phenomenologically with putrid, disgusting bodies. The breakdown of the body in terms of secretion and eating is loathsome as Kristeva mentions “food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection” (2). The abject body occurs with the breakdown of the borders of the skin. Since skin encloses the body, keeping the inside from outside, then the act of the inside coming out is a destruction of the border the skin has in place. Similarly, putting food into the body is a break of the boundary between that which is outside the body and the skin. The idea of “border” or law is integral in the theory of abjection and the breakdown of the body is only one aspect of the abject rejecting borders. The abject is an ideological force and, “it is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules” (4). Nicholas Chare summarizes Kristeva’s theory:

Julia Kristeva understands the abject to be that which we banish in order to be, that which, from its no-place of banishment beseeches 'a crying out'. ...It is the pain of the desire to touch the untouchable. It is the knowledge of the impossibility of fulfilling this desire. It is the wanting. Abjection, if not noise, is perhaps on the path back to noise. It is the experience of an unsound self, the experience of losing experience, of losing the shape that is an experience, of almost attaining the non-experience of unbecoming. It is a falling back towards annihilation of self but a not quite arriving there...It is the border between the I and that which was before it. (52)

The abject is an event and a process, which exists in an in-between state. It exists on a border, and this border is a disruption of norms and laws.

Genocide, therefore, is an abject event because it cannot be contained within borders – genocide breaks the homogeneity of a society while at the same time trying to enforce it. The lack of containment is demonstrated both linguistically and physically when discussing genocide. Kristeva defines language in two parts: the symbolic and the semiotic. The symbolic being that which is contained within language: grammar, sentence structure. Semiotic refers to the rhythm and intonation that is not contained. This is discussed further on in this chapter. In the concentration camps the semiotic and symbolic were not balanced which created the abject and the borders of normal social order disappeared. Chare uses Kristeva's definition in his book concerning the abjection of the Holocaust,

Auschwitz was a world without edges. In the everyday we abject ‘what disturbs identity, system, order’ whereas in the camps what disturbed identity became all pervasive, with shit and death everywhere....The self became an aspect of horror, a piece of shit, a suppurating skin, a marasmic body, a death-in-life, an identity unravelling. The symbolic, the realm of thought which is usually in the ascendant, was no longer dominant in the camps....[the camp] was a semiotic universe. (108)

People physically became abject because the borders of their skin were breached with wounds and diseases and that which made them subject and object disappeared through the disintegration of their bodies. The perpetrators created an environment in which the victims embodied the ideology forced upon them thus perpetuating the justification for the removal of the abject people. Kristeva says “In the presence of signified death – a flat encephalograph, for instance – I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theatre, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live...There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being” (3).

Surrounded by death in the concentration camps people were forced to acknowledge their own condition as a living being that would die and could not create a barrier that pushed death aside. Death was visible. The same can be said of the Rwandan genocide as bodies piled up and people were forced to watch family members and friends cut down by machetes. The magnitude of death and the breach of borders promulgate genocide as an abject event. The abject is an acknowledgement “that the boundaries and limits imposed on it are really social

projections – effects of desire, not nature” (Gross 90). The body in society has rules and regulations placed upon it based on social construction, which regulates behaviour. The abject body does not have a place in society because it does not respect the rules. The genocide of millions is a break in the socially constructed borders which, cannot be contained. Genocide inherently is abject because it breaks socially and culturally established laws and borders.

To represent the abject and death on stage in a way that does not trivialize requires imagination, stylized representation, or the actual event. The actual event is impossible as the real act of dying on a stage no longer becomes a representation of death but death itself. Therefore, the problem comes when “audiences expect that at some level literature will be true to the life that it seeks to represent. The problem of Holocaust representation arises when such art, as Adorno saw early, must also be true to the kind of death that it seeks to portray” (Langer 84). How can the representation of death be true to the actual event? The discourse surrounding death is difficult because “no one, strictly speaking, can know what he/she is talking about. And death is not only difficult to experience; it is difficult to conceive” (Kanter 11). Because death, and by association genocide and the abject, is ontologically impossible to stage in a *real* way, the imagination is key in trying to depict these events. Genocidal art “seeks ways to simulate the original loss, pressing the reader or spectator to define his or her own role in the encounter between the imagination and the representation of historical truth” (Langer 91). The audience requires imagination in order to begin understanding these events and the horror they invoke.

Because genocide is an abject event, the language used to describe genocide is problematic as language struggles to describe what cannot be defined. The breakdown of language is integral in Kristeva's theory of abjection as she states, "But if one imagines...the experience of *want* itself as logically preliminary to being and object – the being of the object – then one understands that abjection, and even more so abjection of self, is its only signified. Its signifier, then, is none but literature" (5). People are beings of want because they experience want before they are defined as subject/object. Literature and therefore language, points to that abjection, the want of human beings. Genocidal literature is an unsuccessful voicing of the abject event because language creates a structure contradictory to the structure-less abject. The literature created is not simply an expression of what happened for language cannot contain or "do justice to this inner compulsion. There are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time, and never enough listening or the right listening to articulate the story that cannot be fully captured in *thought, memory* and *speech*" (Laub 78).

Nicholas Chare uses Kristeva's idea of language as a starting point in his research on the Holocaust in order to describe what happens to language when discussing genocide. The symbolic aspect of language is that which respects the borders of language whereas the semiotic cannot be completely contained. The symbolic and the semiotic are both within literature and to lose either would mean to lose the self and therefore become abject (Chare 3). He states, "as Kristeva elaborates in *Revolution*, language possesses both symbolic and semiotic aspects.

Its semiotic face is composed of the ‘rhythm, intonation, and echolalias of the mother-child symbiosis’...The symbolic aspect represents that place within the Symbolic order wherein the subject can take up a position” (2). Typically, writing toward an abject event or writing abjection requires playing with semiotic and symbolic language. Kristeva states, “the writer, fascinated by the abject, imagines its logic, projects himself into it, introjects it, and as a consequence perverts language – style and content...Writing them [texts] implies an ability to imagine the abject, that is, to see oneself in its place and to thrust it aside only by means of the displacements of verbal play” (16). Thus, to become abject or to write abject literature is to write away from the symbolic toward the semiotic and to change the way the audience understands language in order to imagine the abject.

Elizabeth Gross explains,

Abjection is the underside of the symbolic. It is what the symbolic must reject, cover over and contain. The symbolic requires that a border separate or protect the subject from this abyss which beckons and haunts it: the abject entices and attracts the subject ever closer to its edge. It is an insistence on the subject’s necessary relation to death, to animality, and to materiality, being the subject’s recognition and refusal of its corporeality.

(89)

The symbolic aspects of language create a distance between the abject and the subject. In genocidal literature the horror, while contained in language, is presented to the reader or viewer. As Noelle McAfee, in her book about Julia Kristeva, suggests, “...often these literary products show a dark side of humanity,

the side that finds foreigners “unclean” and wants to banish anything that is either unfamiliar or, more often, uncannily too familiar” (57). Abject literature, as Gross explains, creates the border that prevents a person from reaching the point of abjection. Literature seeks to unfold the ideas of abjection in order to place it safely in the societal boundaries to prevent the abject from creeping into the constraints of society as well as create catharsis for those affected: “by definition, genocide annihilates everything, including the myths, symbols and language that define a community and its people. Theatre has the potential to encourage performers and the audience to envision new imagery, new language, and to reconnect with rituals” (Kalisa 518). The question then remains how a theatrical performance can represent genocide, an abject event, when the stage continues to elude the abject. The language used within performance highlights the inability to show the indescribable.

The writer is in a state of conflict when using language to describe genocide. Language is broken down, the author feels a loss of subject/object, and the socially and culturally constructed barriers are put into question. Chare uses Kristeva’s idea of the chora to comment further, “The drives, arranged as they are by the various constraints imposed on the body...The chora can be posited in language, shaped by words, it is written of here, but it will never fit in these words. It is too uncertain. The chora is out of time and space, out of narrative....The chora is analogous to vocal or kinetic rhythm” (114). The abject is placed into language, into words but cannot fully be explained with words. The only way to write the abject is to pervert language and, after imagining the abject,

to push it aside through language. Therefore, language is not abject because it signifies abjection. It points toward but never is. Writing can never hope to contain the reality of the event. Chare states, “In secular society, writing provides ‘the ultimate sublimation of the unsignifiable’. This unsignifiable, the abject, haunts us all. It is the *no thing* out of which we became, something we are intimate with yet which we cannot know, which ‘lies there, quite close’ but ‘cannot be assimilated’” (5). Language ultimately fails when trying to discuss genocide.

Kristeva sets up the abject as ambiguous. It is an ambiguity that fascinates because of its abstract nature and “othering” or distancing that occurs. The ambiguity of the abject prevents the abject from appearing on stage and complicates the ability to grasp the “narrative” of genocide because the spectator attempts to assign meaning to everything on the stage. Terry Eagleton mentions in his critique of phenomenology, “The world is what I posit or ‘intend’: it is to be grasped in relation to me, as a correlate of my consciousness, and that consciousness is not just fallibly empirical but transcendental” (49). The spectator, watching a performance, is continually conscious of what happens on the stage as a performance and perceives from this perspective as well as mediating from their own cultural background. Performances are “...always shaped and managed by historical and cultural norms. Loss is a shared experience and, therefore, one in which the many institutions that regulate cultures have a stake” (Kanter 6). When artists represent genocide, they look at the past from a privileged position in the present which affects the techniques used for

representation as well as what they choose to represent. The “truths of history are culturally mediated. In thinking about the past we are always already living in the present, finding ourselves immersed in culture; and all of that presentist perspective must also be part of the stories – historical, testimonial, or simply fictive – that we recover” (Spargo 7). Reflecting on the stories of the past are viewed with the knowledge of what happened after these stories as well as an overarching knowledge of the event. In viewing the Holocaust or the Rwandan genocide, artists interpret events based on what they know of how the event began, finished, and specific stories they have heard. Because of this privileged view of the past, the way in which artists represent the past is also privileged and complex. As the artist forms a performance by sifting through the facts and details of the event, they inherently assign meaning to what they choose to present and therefore limit the ambiguity of the object. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty says, “It is through my body that I understand other people, just as it is through my body that I perceive ‘things’” and “behaviour creates meaning which are transcendent in relation to the anatomical apparatus, and yet immanent to the behaviour as such, since it communicates itself and is understood” (186, 189). Therefore, if Merleau-Ponty is correct, if the object were placed on stage, it is the behaviour of bodies interacting with the surroundings which tries to create meaning regardless of how the object event appears. Karen Jürs-Munby asks specifically of the body, “Will the materiality of the body and voice not inevitably exceed the dramatic text when the linguistic sign system of literary theatre is translated into the sign system of bodies in time and space” (24)? When object

literature or events are translated to the stage, it inherits the sign system of the material body. People understand the world through their experiences and try to create meaning based on these experiences. If there is ambiguity in a performance, the spectator assigns meaning to the ambiguity based on their experiences in order to understand the world of the stage and the material body placed within it. For example, while watching *Kamp* the spectator gives the puppets life as the puppet moves within the space. The materiality of the puppet and the language used, framed within this stage world, are assigned meaning based on what is seen. However, in assigning meaning to bodies, items on stage, and language, the spectator can begin to imagine the abject. Instead of complete understanding of the event, all that can be expected is that the spectator move closer in their understanding of genocide as abject. Kristeva reflects,

In the dark halls of the museum that is now what remains of Auschwitz, I see a heap of children's shoes, or something like that, something I have already seen elsewhere, under a Christmas tree, for instance, dolls I believe. The abjection of Nazi crime reaches its apex when death, which, in any case, kills me, interferes with what, in my living universe, is supposed to save me from death: childhood, science, among other things.

(4)

In Kristeva's experience, items that remind or imply safety from death and are suddenly placed as foreign or threatening, can instigate the feeling of the border of the abject. The same can be said of performance. Items on stage take on new meaning within the context of a performance. For example, puppets are often

associated with children and innocence but within the context of *Kamp* the puppets inherent an entirely different meaning as they portray a day in the life in Auschwitz. So while language and objects may seem to fix meaning on experiences, there is no fixed meaning unless the spectator assigns meaning to what is on stage and what they experience within the theatrical space. Even then, there are performances in which the spectator must accept the absence of meaning, in the ambiguity of what is presented or the overwhelming lack of meaning. The use of language may help to explain certain features on stage but also limits what is represented. All representation is an interpretive response to events based on what is seen, heard, and refracted through a cultural lens and then presented on stage in an effort to produce meaning.

Traditional staging structures using narratives to follow certain people or one event only allows for a limited view of the past. Films such as *Schindler's List* (1993), *The Boy in the Striped Pajama's* (2008), or *The Pianist* (2002) rely on the realistic narrative structure to make an impact on audiences by using an individual's story. These stories try to deal with genocide by looking at a section rather than genocide in its entirety, possibly because it "fits" into the narrative structure audiences are accustomed to. As Rokem suggests, the theatre "quotes" from the past and "erases the exact traces", which is actually threatening to those for whom the event is not only a story from the past but a reality. Erin McGlothlin notes in her research on the Holocaust,

Chief among these is the fear that depicting suffering in conventional literary genres might "serve to domesticate it, rendering it familiar and in

some sense even tolerable, and thereby shearing away part of the horror”.

In this view, the Holocaust becomes just another topic that serves the grist mill of literature (or film or art) and the suffering experienced by its victims is transformed into a trivial plot in a normalized canon. (211)

The danger in using stories of genocide for performative means is the trivialization or sensationalism these stories evoke. Creating a piece of work for the purpose of a “good story” or to attain spectators diminishes the personal narrative of a survivor. Alexandre Dauge-Roth, in his study of the representation of the Rwandan genocide, states the act of remembering and retelling the past “performs a silencing gesture and a ‘symbolic violence’ by positioning itself as ‘the true’ representation of the past” (*Passing on Voices* 85). The representation becomes the face of the past reality, because in order to represent genocide, the enormity of the event is reduced to a manageable state. Reducing the event allows the story to be told in a manner that adequately explains the events according to a conventional narrative structure, giving genocide a conclusive ending. However, a reduction of events processes each past detail as either significant or insignificant resulting in a coloured view of the past. Dauge-Roth says,

Since no mediation of the past can say or show everything...That is to say how what is portrayed as reality is produced through a scripting and screening that attempts – or not – to hide its selective positionality, historical omissions, and ideological silencing...Through their respective choices, the cinematic representations of the genocide select the facets of

this traumatic and contested history worthy of memory, but in so doing, they edit and naturalize that which passed in silence. (*Writing and Filming* 178-179)

Therefore, what is or was never said, can never be remembered or presented. Those moments are pushed aside as what is represented comes to the foreground and eventually, looked at as the so-called true history of the event. In adjusting or deleting events to fit the structure of a concrete narrative, our view of the past changes and therefore our interpretation of what happened and how we talk of the past. The interpretation of a single survivor's narrative is also shaped by the idea of an "official" narrative which is presented by the media: "the public narrative of the genocide also is omnipresent, promoted in official governments speeches, in school textbooks, even in community theatre" (Blair and Fletcher 23). This list is only a fraction of the modes of communication which give versions of official narrative. The official narrative given to the world can overshadow what the individual has experienced as the audience compares what they know of the genocide to what they are hearing. This official remembering silences survivors as the official narrative is placed as the "true representation" of the event in which survivors must find a way to put themselves into the socially recognized past (Dauge-Roth *Passing on Voices* 85-86). However, the official narrative and individual narrative is complex because "both the origins and the logic of the killings remain unresolved, making it awkward and even dangerous to converse about the genocide in ways that depart from the agreed-upon details" (Blair and Fletcher 24).

Another challenge of narrative story telling in genocide, however, is that it is a horror which cannot be understood in terms of symbolic language as defined by Chare and Kristeva. Chare uses this as a basis for explaining genocide as an abject event. Language and, more specifically, words within the concentration camp ceased to have meaning. As Chare points out, “thirsty” in the camps was an empty word because these words were “too familiar” (112). Language within genocidal literature both expands and contracts because of this differentiation:

It is not just every fragment of language but every sound, every noise that is at once resonant with meaning and wholly indeterminate in meaning: the innocent ‘tap-tap of the raindrops on the foliage’ may instead by ‘the rhythm of distant footsteps’; the ‘metallic scraping sound of very dry leaves falling on the leaf-strewn forest floor’ is repeatedly mistaken for ‘the click of an automatic loader introduced into a German rifle breech.’ (Scarry 135).

The multiple meanings of words and sounds cause a problem when trying to portray or speak of genocide on the stage. In a narrative each word expands and contracts disallowing any concrete form of storytelling.

Many narratives revolving around genocide combine both fact and fiction raising questions of authenticity regarding the original event. Combining real stories with fictional narratives challenges artists to examine how those narratives intertwine. Ehn asks, “At the core of artistic ideas of representation: How does fiction represent a very real reality? What does it have to offer that adds to direct testimony? Also – *fiction is complicit* in the realization of genocide – it is

complicit, through the articulation and popularization of ideology” (72). Theatre as metonymy for real life melds the real and the unreal in such a way in which the historical nonfictional narrative is indivisible from the fictional narrative.

Spectators go to the theatre or the movies and assume what they see is a product of an artist’s imagination. Even stories “based on real events” are only loosely related to the historical event, which at times seems more of an inspiration for the artist than the basis. Documentary film representations are viewed as fact because real people and real events are being shown. However, these films and theatrical representations are still open to interpretation by the creator in how they choose to show the audience the truth, which testimonies to incorporate, and what footage is relevant. The opening pages in Yann Martel’s book, *Beatrice and Virgil*, demonstrate the complexity of even marketing a piece of work which contains both fiction and nonfiction, concluding the crux of the problem is, “A novel is not an entirely unreasonable creation, nor is an essay devoid of imagination. Nor is it how people live. People don’t so rigorously separate the imaginative from the rational in their thinking and in their actions” (6) and “a work of art works because it is true, not because it is real” (10). Therefore, narratives “work” because the piece speaks to a truth of human existence not necessarily because of historical accuracy. Representation “asks its reader or audience member to embody the ideas at the center of the text” (Kanter 12). While this may be a comfort to the artists trying to speak to the truths of genocide, it poses problems for those who survived it as their experiences are barely recognizable amidst the imaginary version of what happened. Ehn describes this complex situation:

Art is made of metaphor. Text and subtext, the second and third dimensions, the narrative and the still, the random and the deliberate, live in inconceivable identification. This unreasonable, volatile, perfectly risky space of metaphor, is peace. In all our outrage and manifesto, contradiction and yearning, peace is the house we occupy and open, like breathing opens, a place where even painful wisdom pushes to possibility, to knowledge past reason and affinity across divides. (73)

Instead of trying to overcome the ontology of art and its complex contradictions in trying to find what is real and what is fiction, living within the contradiction is where answers are found and “mediating trauma might then entail wandering between representation and experience, creating a mixture of identification and reflexivity” (Le Roy 262). Artists and audiences cannot expect what they create or see will be an exact replication of historical events nor should they strive for immaculate accuracy. As Martel suggested, it is the truth behind a work which makes it real.

Representation places a border around the event in order to fit into the cultural or “ideological” framework according to the makers. The act of representation forces the object back to a place society can deal with or understand it. Kristeva expands:

For, when narrated identity is unbearable, when the boundary between subject and object is shaken, and when even the limit between inside and outside becomes uncertain, the narrative is what is challenged first... In other words, the theme of suffering-horror is the ultimate evidence of such

states of abjection within narrative representation. If one wished to proceed farther still along the approaches to abjection, one would find neither narrative nor theme but a recasting of syntax and vocabulary – the violence of poetry, and silence. (141)

To approach abjection and the dialogue with genocide then is to try to destabilize the traditional forms of narrative and representation. “The hallmark of the ‘linguistic revolution’ of the twentieth century, from Saussure and Wittgenstein to contemporary literary theory, is the recognition that meaning is not simply something ‘expressed’ or ‘reflected’ in language: it is actually *produced* by it” (Eagleton 52 original emphasis). Thus, in genocidal literature, the narratives produced are trying to create meaning of the event by putting it into language. However, “to give up narration, to give up story, is itself an acknowledgement of the limits of language and expression” (Fridman 110). While Groupov and Hotel Modern do not specifically give up the ability to narrate, they give a broader meaning to the word “narrate” by incorporating fact, fiction, puppets, video, projection, or other elements of performance. Instead of trying to generate meaning solely with language, they allow for the space to question the language and the way genocide is presented.

The complexities of staging genocide indicate the challenges both teleologically as well as ethically. While creating a representation of genocide the creators become witnesses to the event which forms an obligation to the survivor to limit silencing and editing of the event in order to prevent the survivor from being alienated from their own past. Laub recognizes three levels of witnessing:

“the level of being a witness to oneself within the experience; the level of being a witness to the testimonies of others; and the level of being a witness to the process of witnessing itself” (75). The artists become witnesses to the event because the act of performing the event is metonymically contiguous to the event, and thus becomes the event. The theatrical audience watches in silence as the story unfolds. While the audience rarely responds verbally to the stage, their attentive gaze offers support to what is being told. To be a witness is then to see, hear, and weigh the truth of what happened or happens during an event (Laub 80). The audience is not passive in the viewing of the representation of genocide as they bring with them their own interpretation and understanding of events which affects and informs how the audience understands what is represented. In order to witness in such a way as to limit the silencing of survivors, “The listener must be quite well informed if he is to be able to hear – to be able to pick up the cues. Yet knowledge should not hinder or obstruct the listening with foregone conclusions and preconceived dismissals, should not be an obstacle or a foreclosure to new, diverging, unexpected information” (Laub 61). The audience member and creators should refrain from projecting past experiences and stories onto the new information or narrative presented. This allows for a new way of viewing to happen.

The challenge in representing and therefore witnessing these events and stories ethically, is the survivors are often still mourning what happened. These are the stories of real people who cannot forget and are struggling to work through their trauma. Thus, “when examining performances about the Shoah, however, it

seems that the creative energies are to a large extent determined by the still ongoing processes of mourning in the social extratheatrical spheres” (Rokem 13). The process of mourning is fragile and varies depending on the person. To work on the representation of a real story requires an acknowledgement of the fragility between manipulating a story and creating a story, a fine line between silence and narrative. “In mourning, loss is countered by the forgetting of loss, while the melancholic subject ‘incorporates’ its loss, staying attached to it. Mourning infused with melancholia doesn’t erase but bears the traces of loss” (Le Roy 261). Witnessing these events is also witnessing the process of mourning and assisting in creating a space where mourning is possible.

Therefore, the representation of traumatic events is a fragile line between fiction and reality that does not further silence or alienate survivors but allows for a space to demonstrate the truth of the event and recognition for the survivor. “Narrative enables the traumatized subject to recount the experience that at first resisted all language. Narrative is thus a vital element in the difficult process of moving from the ‘denial’ and ‘acting-out’ to the ‘working-through’ of trauma” (Le Roy 260). In narrating their own stories, individuals can be placed as agents rather than victims of their own stories thus giving back the subjectivity and agency in their own lives (Fitzpatrick 61). A part of witnessing these traumatic events, then, is the appropriation of part of the survivor’s trauma. While the “pain inflicted by one wound of trauma, is your own pain, and nobody else’s” (Le Roy 257) the witness can also come to experience part of the trauma themselves. As Laub notes, “By extension, the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a

co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself” (57). The listener becomes a participant in the trauma and also in part feels what the victim does while also being separate from the survivor:

The listener, therefore, has to be at the same time a witness to the trauma witness and a witness to himself. It is only in this way, through his simultaneous awareness of the continuous flow of those inner hazards both in the trauma witness and in himself, that he can become the enabler of the testimony – the one who triggers its initiation, as well as the guardian of its process and of its momentum. (Laub 58)

The artist creating a piece of work around a survivor’s testimony is put into a position where what they say or create is a reflection of the pain and trauma they have heard. This position of carrying on a survivor’s testimony is not taken lightly as the complexities of representing genocide mentioned previously.

In conclusion, while not an exhaustive list of the complexities of representation, the iteration of such an event as genocide poses many questions for both the creators of the piece as well as those witnessing the performance. As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, the theatrical stage both offers small solutions to these issues while also highlighting problem areas in terms of language and visuality. “The inability to frame trauma in and of itself lends the form almost naturally to a process of visualization as expiation. Put simply, we do not picture without always already framing simultaneously” (Saltzman and Rosenberg xii). The theatrical stage combines language and visuality with the

aesthetic experience, and in the case of representing genocide, the inability to stage and frame trauma is foregrounded.

## Chapter Two: *Rwanda 94*

In 1994 images and news reports flashed across televisions to tell of the violence between the Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda and the growing conflict resulting in the mass murder of close to one million Rwandans. Six years later, Belgian based group, Groupov, premiered *Rwanda 94: An Attempt at Symbolic Reparation to the Dead, for Use by the Living* in Liège and subsequently continued to perform the piece all over the world for several years. *Rwanda 94* is a kaleidoscope of images, stories, fiction, and live footage, in which the only through narrative is the story of Bee Bee Bee, a journalist trying to understand how this tragedy could happen. *Rwanda 94* does not try to assume to tell a cohesive narrative of genocide. The length of the production, over four and a half hours, testifies to the inability to contain adequate information in a single production. The combination of fact, fiction, music, and language results in a unique way of performing genocide and creates a multi-faceted way of looking at the event.

Groupov is a Belgian based group first created in the 1980's by Jacques Delcuvellerie (Debroux 110). Following the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, Delcuvellerie and Marie-France Collard, along with Belgians and Rwandans interested in the project wrote *Rwanda 94: An Attempt at Symbolic Reparation to the Dead, for Use by the Living* which first premiered at the Théâtre de La Place in Liège, Belgium in March 2000 and spent the next several years touring all over the world including Canada and also Rwanda for the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the genocide (Dauge-Roth *Writing and Filming* 35).

*Rwanda 94* weaves together a series of vignettes to portray and tell the 1994 Rwandan genocide through the fictional story of Bee Bee Bee, a reporter looking for the truth behind the event. My critique of *Rwanda 94* is based on the filmed version of the production with English subtitles, which was made specifically for film by Collard and Delcuvellerie and was recorded at the large Théâtre de la Place à Liège in 2005. The production opens with a 45 minute monologue by genocide survivor Yolande Mukagasana, sitting on a lone chair in the middle of the stage, describing her experience of the genocide. Her testimony includes the murder of her husband, children, and neighbours, and her struggle to escape the genocide. Following Yolande's testimony, understood by the audience as her true telling of the past, several cast members come in from the audience to whisper the stories of the dead. These cast members, herein called "witnesses," stay on the stage for the duration of the production, seen as the dead watching the proceedings. Bee Bee Bee struggles to understand why the genocide happened, an answer no one can sufficiently give. Her quest for the truth is instigated by the showing of historical news clips, interrupted by faces of the dead. The news clip ghosts, according to an interpreter, are angry with the world for the devastation in Rwanda. Bee Bee Bee searches for an answer or a justification for what happened. Her role on the stage is multi-faceted as she often instigates the action as a narrator and commentator. Her comments and questions preclude and set up the next section of the production, but she also is a participant within the action. She serves as a medium for the audience to understand the questions surrounding the Rwandan genocide as well as a fixed person to empathize with and relate to.

Bee Bee Bee encounters several people on her quest including an old man, a Holocaust survivor, whom she asks to join her. Together, they attend a lecture given by Jacques Delcuvellerie detailing the background of the Rwandan culture and the suggested origin of the designation Hutu and Tutsi. Disturbed by the answers she is receiving, Bee Bee Bee encounters three hyenas who represent the West, and they attempt to justify the lack of prevention and intervention in Rwanda. Unable to accept their ability to shrug off suggested guilt, Bee Bee Bee has three visions, which implicate different sectors: the church, the UN, and the French President. Determined to do something about the lack of justice in Rwanda, Bee Bee Bee presents a nine minute video to her boss with the intent of broadcasting it on her news show. The video shows footage of broken and mutilated bodies, and the effects of the destruction in Rwanda. There is no sound to the footage except the occasional interjection of a propaganda song. Bee Bee Bee and her boss argue about the public's reception to the graphic footage and eventually, Bee Bee Bee does not broadcast the film. Ironically, the audience has seen the footage, the evidence of what people would prefer to ignore or brush aside for fear of being implicated as silent accomplices in the genocide. The cast of witnesses stand and mourn the lack of justice for the dead:

Through us humanity looks sadly at you. We, who died an unjust death hacked, mutilated, dismembered, today already forgotten, denied, insulted. We are the million cries that hang over the hills of Rwanda. We are forever the cloud of accusation. We will forever repeat our demands, speaking in the name of those who are no more, and those who remain....

I am dead. They killed me. I am not sleeping. I am not at peace.

(Groupov 132)

The epilogue of the performance iterates a narrative of a battle between the Hutus and Tutsis as the Tutsis try to defend themselves on a hill. The witnesses narrate the story accompanied by live music. Much of the set is rendered ambiguously and the location of meetings between Bee Bee Bee and those she encounters are vague and left to the imagination of the audience. The lighting is striking, and often focused on those speaking, leaving darker sections of the stage.

Groupov does not make a clear distinction between what is fact and what is fiction and as such, there is a tension throughout the piece between knowing and not knowing what is based on survivor's stories and what has been added to create a cohesive whole. Genocidal literature diverging too much to fiction is often considered unethical:

Adorno's famous words that no poetry is possible after Auschwitz does not only refer to the ethical taboo already mentioned, but also to the inadequacy of poetry and the failure of language when one wants to express what can not be expressed...more often, though, problems are to be located in the relationship between text and reality, between the text and the writer, and between facts and fiction. (Kerstens 95)

Genocidal literature, as pointed out in the first chapter, inherently contains a tension between fact and fiction because it is typically written after the event and thereby skewed by memories and circumstance. The audience assumes Yolande's story happened because they recognize her as a survivor instead of an actor – a

fact she mentions at the beginning of her monologue. The rest of the production is haunted by this memory of Yolande's testimony as fact and fiction spin together. *Rwanda 94* is written by Collard, Delcuvellerie and a group of other writers and they have chosen which facts to present, which facts to ignore, together with the structure of their presentation which foregrounds as well as obfuscates aspects of the historical conflict, memories, commentary, and subsequently affect – including the affect of the production itself. Bee Bee Bee's story is portrayed as the fictional narrative chosen to hold this production together. Her narrative juxtaposes Yolande's in her search for the truth, a search the audience also shares while watching fact and fiction collide. Groupov highlights and challenges the assumed infallibility of the media and the spread of information. The witnesses perform a litany of questions many of which begin with "will they say" or "will they remember" in a challenge for those in the audience to do something and question what they know. The witnesses question the information spread through the media: "Listen to them, be on your guard. Look at them, but don't trust them. These machines which spread information infect hearts and pollute minds. A cunning hyena starts to bellow like a cow. We are in their lair. Please, be careful" (Groupov 55). The witnesses ask the audience to question also what they see and hear while at the same time referring to the manipulation of media in Rwanda prior to the genocide. The audience trusts Yolande's story is fact, and Bee Bee Bee's is fictionalised because of cultural norms – one believes a genocide survivor's story to be true while a theatrical production is only an interpretation of the actual events. Groupov takes

away this stable notion in order for the audience to be skeptical of what they see and hear and therefore challenge what they think they know.

The tension between Bee Bee Bee's story as fiction and Yolande's as fact gives the audience permission to question official and individual narratives given during and after the genocide. Yolande's testimony stands out as one person's experience but clearly cannot speak for what happened to anyone else. Her narrative is limited in its ability to express any form of universality, but the spectator understands

...each individual memory is shaped by the personal relation the survivor seeks to establish between his traumatic past and his present situation.

Because of his specific scars, trauma, loneliness, hopes, and desires and also because of his conscious or unconscious use of culturally connoted tropes and politically loaded metaphors, no single survivor's voice *alone* can pretend to tell the *whole* truth of the events by claiming a metonymic status. (Dauge-Roth *Writing and Filming* 173).

In *Rwanda 94*, Yolande is not expected to portray a universal or even an official narrative of the Rwandan genocide but to explain a part of it. Her testimony, almost a prologue for the performance, is an initial invitation for the audience to view the genocide as a personal experience, in spite of its political dimension, and stress the ongoing need for justice. Yolande concludes her testimony:

May those who do not have the will to hear my words reveal themselves as accomplices to the genocide in Rwanda. ...I wish neither to terrify, nor move you to pity, especially not move you to pity. I simply wish to bear

witness. Those men who caused me such awful suffering, probably till the end of my life, I neither hate nor scorn them. I even pity them. (Groupov 25)

The audience is invited to view the performance and bear witness to the facts and complicated nature of genocide through personal narrative.

Since Bee Bee Bee is the only narrative which flows throughout the entire performance, there is an “absence of any master narrative and perspective with which we could identify, we are compelled to filter critically the various readings of the Rwanda genocide and postpone our desire for hasty and reassuring judgement” (Dauge-Roth, *Passing on Voices* 96). *Rwanda 94* provokes the audience to question and absorb various ways of telling that do not limit the genocide to one narrative, thus challenging the idea of any official narrative. The iteration is a challenge to the audience’s opinion of any form of official narrative including *Rwanda 94*. Dauge-Roth notes the stage can never pretend to be the actual event and is continually presented through one or more people’s perspective:

...the stage – like the page and the screen – functions as a figuration of the world, which is not the world, even though it establishes a specific mode of communication with an audience who is part of the world. Thus, what is enacted never equates to a ‘presentation’ of reality but has to be approached as a ‘re-presentation,’ which does not attempt to substitute itself for the experience it ‘re-presents,’ since it confers a visibility to

historical events and social interactions that are culturally marginalized if not ideologically censored. (*Writing and Filming* 36-37)

Typically, a story the survivor tells and the way the story is presented is told so that the events are compressed in order to make sense; the survivor edits in order to tell *their* (and not *the*) story. When Yolande shares her testimony, the audience does not know which facts are exaggerated, or highlighted, or left out or if the order of events has changed. Kristeva says, “but the most normal solution, commonplace and public at the same time, communicable, shareable, is and will be the narrative. Narrative as the recounting of suffering: fear, disgust, and abjection crying out, they quiet down, concatenated into a story” (145). The abject is placed within the borders of the story, quieted down, in order to be communicable for the audience. Formulating genocide as a traditional narrative within language structure limits the scope of what can be told in one story. These stories do not tell the entirety of the event and it would be futile to assume any form of narrative could: “No survivor can speak for all and no understanding of the genocide can be based on a single testimony” (Dauge-Roth, *Passing on Voices* 94). Groupov resists the idea of an official narrative by expressing an incredulity to the narrative. For example, the use of several modes of representation – music, testimony, storytelling, performance - allows a tension to emerge which forces the audience to question their own role in forming stories and the world’s way of viewing this event before, during, and after the genocide. Groupov directly attacks the media’s way of selecting which stories are broadcasted to the world. Near the end of the performance, after showing the graphic video of images, the

producer Monsieur Uer, from EBU states firmly to Bee Bee Bee, “The world has its laws. Television does too. Viewers shouldn’t be brutalized, or demoralized! Nor made to feel guilty. What happens in Africa isn’t their fault” (Groupov 129). Monsieur Uer’s defence of the media demonstrates one way of thinking among those who present news. Groupov challenges the media presenting “official” information during this argument regarding whether to air the graphic footage of the Rwandan genocide. Where is the truth in media or in performance? What is the role of those charged with showing these events to the public?

Groupov acknowledges the complex relationship between language and the abject nature of genocide by incorporating different facets of performance in *Rwanda 94* and iterate the facts of genocide rather than try to represent them. In *Rwanda 94*, the words convey images of death and destruction but the words describe ideas of abjection rather than embody the idea. These words are familiar to the spectator but the content is illusive; the images and ideas the words signify are of machetes and mangled bodies but are not iterable. The language points toward the abject, as defined by Kristeva in the previous chapter, without embodying it. In *Rwanda 94*, language does not break down the symbolic as defined by Chare and Kristeva, which would help iterate the inexpressible nature of genocide. Language is integral in Kristeva’s theory of abjection and it is modern literature which “writes towards the abject, approaching symbolic collapse, not in order to resist it but rather to unveil it...literature works to articulate the abject and thereby void it” (Chare 9). Groupov’s language does not approach symbolic collapse; the language used is coherent and serves to articulate

the details and ideas surrounding the event and points out what abjection is. Groupov combines hauntingly beautiful music and language juxtaposing the beautiful arrangement with the disturbing nature of mass murder. For example, the epilogue describes a terrible scene of hundreds of Tutsis dying on a hill while melancholy music is played in the background. If one only listens to the music, they could hear the artistry and skill involved in playing, but as soon as one also hears the meaning of the words spoken, the tension between abjection and literature is revealed. By combining language with another art form the subject is both contained in the structure of language and music but also unveiled by the intersection and articulation of words and music.

Yolande, a genocide survivor, paints pictures in spectators' minds as the audience tries to understand where she has been and what she has experienced. But language fails her as well as the audience as it will continue to do throughout the performance. Dauge-Roth sheds light on the inability to understand, "Accurate representation of trauma can never be achieved without recreating the event, since, by its very definition, trauma lies beyond the bounds of 'normal' conception" (quoting Kali Tal *Writing and Filming* 44). The conception of Yolande's traumatic experience begins with her, and she cannot understand what happened to her, which affects how she retells the experience to an audience. This is in part because she uses symbolic language to express her story – to express the abject event. Thus, understanding oscillates between wanting to understand and realizing one cannot fully understand: "the narration of traumatic historical events is thus caught on the warp of pressures both to tell and to

disavow that telling, to integrate and to disintegrate, to establish factuality and, at the same time, to expose the fiction of that project, and in so doing, to recover the experience in its fragmentary nature” (Fridman 104). Because of the length and episodic nature of the piece, Groupov also foregrounds the fragmentary and fragmenting nature of genocide itself.

*Rwanda 94* addresses the limitations of language through the concrete example of the Kinyarwandan language which, according to some anthropological views, has no word for “ethnic group” because the Rwandan culture views cultural identity differently than Western culture. According to Groupov, a substitute word, Ubwoko, which means “clan” was substituted to indicate “race” and dictated a split between Hutus and Tutsis not originally intrinsic in their culture, though this is debated by scholars (Groupov 87-88). During his hour-long staged lecture *Delcuvellerie* himself explains the theory that the Belgian colonizers came to Rwanda and defined who the Hutus and Tutsis were based on supposed physical attributes and wealth (86-102). According to Groupov, arguments and battles between Hutus and Tutsis prior to colonization revolved around land dispute rather than racial tension. Language is therefore culturally specific, and at times does not translate to different audiences or cultures and even to a survivor’s own culture. Dauge-Roth says, “My reading of Groupov’s five-hour play highlights the difficulties and the conditions of possibility in passing on survivors’ *ob-scene knowledge* given of the social and *cultural scene* of their audience” (*Writing and Filming* 29). The survivors’ knowledge of their specific trauma is impossible to communicate to their spectators, not only because of the

limitations of language but also because of the social and cultural identities of their audience. Dauge-Roth utilizes Chambers' definition of "ob-scene" which indicate both what is known, and at the same time not readily acknowledged, and is therefore both a fascination and repulsive which mirrors the abject (48-49). The shift in understanding based on cultural background is evidenced when Groupov performed *Rwanda 94* in Rwanda 10 years after the event to an audience living with the consequences of the genocide. Christian Biet reflects on the reception of *Rwanda 94* when performed in Rwanda and the effect on the initial or "intended" purpose of the production as a symbolic reparation to the dead:

And the shift of the reception led to a shift in the meaning of the play itself, as the people of the audience in Rwanda were necessarily reminded of the dead they knew closely, the massacres, rapes, and horrors they saw, and the fact that they were survivors. So by performing in Rwanda, the Groupov had to deal with the idea that the show was no longer – or not only – a symbolic reparation to the dead, but also a work of mourning, an expression of the duty of memory accompanied by emotion, pathos, and tears. And these tears did not simply represent the classical and easy emotion that weeping can sometimes be in Europe; they were the expression of Rwandan memory itself. (Biet 1051).

The reception by the audience differs depending on the cultural background of the audience. As Biet described, the performance shifts in meaning, which only serves to highlight the ob-scene nature of language and the act of iterating genocide as fluid.

The Rwandan genocide is the ultimate abject event and, because of this abjection, begs the question how this can be shown performatively - physically or linguistically – on the stage - as with putrid bodies unraveling the borders of the body. Lesa Lockford suggests, “the abject body in performance destabilizes audience comfort and passive consumption, and potentially the taken-for-granted assumptions that perpetuate onerous hegemonic conditions” (58). Lockford’s abject performance would certainly have the audience realize the cultural and social systems surrounding them and foreground the hegemonic conditions of culture. Yet, the question must be asked: can the abject body physically appear on the stage? Can the audience watch the subject/object break down in representation? The phenomenology of the stage disallows the body to become completely abject in performance. Bert States says, “but in the theater something is *also itself* as well...More complexly, however, in the theater we see an object in its ‘embodied form’ as having a double aspect, one of which is significative, the other...self-given...” (69) and Kristeva agrees, “significance is indeed inherent in the human body” (10). In placing a body within the confines of a performance, the audience inherently places signification on the body regardless of what happens on the stage to try to disassociate meaning or borders.

In *Rwanda 94*, Bee Bee Bee has three visions which are indicated by massive puppet heads that replace human heads. The puppet/people are abject because their bodies are contorted, their heads overly large for their bodies, and their mutation provokes a sense of revulsion. However, despite any sense of revulsion a spectator might have, there is also a vast amount of signification

associated with these people, which is fascinating to the audience. The context of the scene and metonymy of the stage forces meaning upon the bodies. When three men enter the stage each with the head of a hyena, the audience associates the culturally accepted stigma, which assumes a hyena is violent and untrustworthy. The body in performance is both a signified object as well as a material object. The border is the stage and the body cannot undo the reality of its performance which keeps it from becoming truly abject. Kristeva describes the experience of the abject as initially an experience of the performative: "... as in true theatre, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live... There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being" (3). In the true theatre, paradoxically, the true liminoid status of the abject is questionable, the abject body on stage is framed thus avoiding being truly abject but the audience is brought to the edge of the object/subject divide without crossing over. Terry Eagleton discusses Husserl's 'intentional' theory of consciousness which "suggests that 'being' and 'meaning' are always bound up with one another. There is no object without a subject, and no subject without an object" (49). The act of performing in front of an audience and "being" implies a context for the position of the body which refuses the ambiguity needed for abjection as the body is wrapped in signification. The material body creates signification for itself.

Groupov's lack of abjection on stage does not take away from their performance of the Rwandan genocide but serves to highlight the inability to represent the event. The abject can only be glimpsed when Groupov utilizes a

surrealist approach in Bee Bee Bee's visions on the stage and when graphic footage of the genocide is projected on stage. Bee Bee Bee's visions, as mentioned previously, incorporate puppets and extreme lighting. These evoke the imagination to create correlations between what is seen on stage and concepts the spectator associates with genocide. It allows the spectator to create connections otherwise not typically implied when performing realism. For example, in one of Bee Bee Bee's visions, a bishop has the head of a bird with a long beak and discusses at length the role of the church in the Rwandan genocide and tries to remove any potential guilt for killing innocent people. The bird-like head of the bishop combined with the eerie voice used gives new meaning to the sacredness of the church and challenges the justification the church gives for genocide. The beaky, imposing bishop seems to squawk and cry in a futile way showing the ridiculous aspects of his argument. The use of these puppet heads, hyenas and bishop, provokes the imagination and allows the audience to accept the grotesque nature of the enlarged heads because it is within the context of a vision. The stylistic device of the puppets creates a sharp contrast to the documentary footage of the Rwandan genocide projected near the end of the performance. Where the puppets are grotesque in their obvious man-made materiality, the footage of the film is strikingly not manipulated by artistic creation except for the editing. The footage shows images and film of mutilated, bloated, bleeding, and crushed bodies, and lasts nine minutes and lacks any sound except for the interjection of a propaganda song sung in English celebrating the carnage and destruction. The images juxtaposed with the silence haunts the audience and are the point of

contention for Bee Bee Bee's producer. Fridman suggests, "The cry that cries out ever more urgently only to fade away into silence, projects a materiality of the body that anticipates this very fate, this fading into nothing and silence" (118). The onslaught of images and the lack of noise approach abjection but contain it within the confines of a film. The lack of words after three hours of speaking creates a tangible absence for the spectator, enforcing the vast gone-ness associated with genocide. The long minutes of presenting image after image without reprieve is a terrible realization and indication that the *actual* act of genocide is impossible to show or represent. Because of the combination of various forms of representation "...the play exposes us to spatial and temporal encounters that challenge our conventional sense of liminality and, thus, performatively inscribes the 'ob-scene' of the genocide within our cultural 'scene'" (Dauge-Roth, *Passing on Voices* 91). The lack of abjection, in this case, serves to highlight Groupov's intent to implicate the West in their own role regarding the genocide. Karen Jürs-Munby emphasizes the drawbacks to this approach:

... the representation of Semiotic content has to be carefully managed in such a way that the imagination can deal with it – either by mixing it with beauty, by a move from image to text..., or by subduing it in the visual representation...In the case of the 'thoroughly abject', however, this is not possible: the horrible or the disgusting...or outright screaming causes a collapse of the difference between nature and imitation and leads to the real sensation of repulsion and a refusal to identify. The 'thoroughly abject' therefore has to be banished from representation altogether. (28)

Jürs-Munby stresses the impossibility of representing the “thoroughly abject” because it is only possible with the complete breakdown of performance and is thus no longer representation. Representation is an imitation of the real and evokes the imagination. The thoroughly abject can only be viewed when mixed with other visual aspects in order for the spectator to engage with it. She notes the thin line created between the semiotic and symbolic. By weaving various forms of representation together, Groupov sidesteps this problem. The tension exists, however, between the theatrical representation of the puppets and the inclusion of the filmic footage of the effects of the genocide. The footage projected appears more real and abject than representational, and the use of the film highlights the performative aspect of the abject on stage as it contrasts with the persons and language used throughout the production. The images elude any necessary imagination to evoke the abject and seem to point toward the abject more than the language or persons on stage. That being said, the filmic images are still placed within the confines of both the filmic medium as well as the stage thus avoiding the abject once again.

In conclusion, the representation of genocide is inherently linked to Kristeva’s theory of abjection although the representation does not necessarily include the abject as evidenced by *Rwanda 94*. As Fridman points out, “like a series of snapshots..., a story or narrative provides a powerful illusion of the trajectory of an experience. The illusion is different from the experience, is informed by the experience, and, indeed, is in dialogue with the experience. But, it is not the experience. It is separate from the experience” (130). *Rwanda 94*

challenges the spectator to think about and engage in the dialogue surrounding the Rwanda genocide and the role of the West, but the theatrical experience does not come close to presenting the horrors of genocide. In representation the theatre artist makes specific choices both before and during the rehearsal process – and indeed, during the performance – thus creating a selective/limited way of viewing the stage which negates the ability to fully encompass the lack of/destruction of structure inherent in abjection. However, just as meaning is inherent to the stage, so signification can also guide the spectator to see the border abjection sits on and create the catharsis Kristeva indicates is possible in literature. Groupov's *Rwanda* 94 highlights the impossibility of representing genocide by using multiple forms of representation and, as Chare indicates, “voids” the abject to focus on the symbolic reparation for the dead, and challenge and implicate the audience in their own part in the Rwandan genocide.

### Chapter Three: *Kamp*

Traditional genocidal narratives focus on telling the story of the past through language. The language used often narrows the story to specific individuals, and the past is framed from within their context. These narratives describe details of the stories of one or two people whom are often the protagonist. Looking through the lens of only one or two people clearly limits the scope of the actual event. Hotel Modern's *Kamp* avoids these limitations by placing the emphasis on the visual aspects of the Holocaust reproducing a "day in the life" in Auschwitz through the use of puppets and film. The phenomenology of the stage and the aesthetics of performed violence allows for *Kamp*, through the use of puppets and live video projection, to expand the narrative of genocide instead of limiting the representation to the view of specific individuals.

Hotel Modern is a company based out of the Netherlands, founded in 1997 by Pauline Kalker and Arlène Hoornweg, and were joined a year later by Herman Helle. The company's works often deal with issues of war and they created *Kamp* in order to grapple with the reality of the horror of humanity. They wanted "literally to face this truth about humanity, and to share it directly, in order to search for a way to deal with it. The production is also a kind of ritual and a memorial" (*Kamp* Portfolio 91). Hotel Modern first performed *Kamp* in 2005 and since that time, proceeded to perform the piece around the world. The following analysis of *Kamp* is based on a video of a performance filmed for documentary purposes on December 20, 2006 at The Rotterdamse Schouwberg (*Kamp*). The camera in this filmed version is not stationary, but also moves around to provide

close up shots which the spectator would not see. Within the filmed version, the camera filming the performance is shown in colour whereas the camera intentionally used in performance to show the audience close up shots is projected in black and white. This differentiation between colour and black and white allows those watching the filmed version of the performance to understand the difference between what is manipulated by the filming of the performance and what is actually projected within the performance. *Kamp* occasionally tours, including a recent performance in Toronto, Canada in May, 2013.

*Kamp* depicts a day in the life in Auschwitz. The forty-five minute performance generally takes place with in a large space with the stage and audience relationship set as a proscenium. In front of the audience is a large white tarp where the set is placed prior to the beginning of the show. Using archival photographs of Auschwitz, the set was constructed as a miniaturized, but authentic model of the camp. In reality, Auschwitz is about twenty times the size of what is rendered but the company chose to highlight key buildings within the camp. Instead of utilizing live actors, Hotel Modern created 3,000 puppets, each roughly eight centimetres tall. Each puppet was built for a specific purpose within the production. Some puppets stand in large groups on flats which are used for crowd scenes. Other puppets are used for specific roles such as carrying sand bags, digging in the dirt, or standing guard with a gun. The puppets are each created with an individual expression on their clay faces but their material bodies are similar in structure, wearing either the German uniform or striped clothing. From a distance, all the puppets look identical except for their task within the

camp. The puppets are manipulated using thin metal or wood attached to appendages or bodies by Pauline Kalker, Arlene Hoornweg, and Herman Helle.

Throughout the piece, neither the manipulators nor the puppets speak. There is no language used except for the resonate phrase “Arbeit macht frei” (“work makes you free”) written across the entrance gate, and a short song sung in German by the soldiers at the beginning and approximately half way through the performance. The soundscape for the piece consists of noises related to movement from a contact microphone, or from sounds Hotel Modern pre-recorded in Auschwitz. For example, the sound of dirt as it is picked up by a shovel or the sound of a can scraped across concrete comes from the contact microphone and the sound of wind comes from a recording taken when visiting Auschwitz.

On the wall facing the audience, as a backdrop to the set, is a large white curtain where a live video projection is seen by the audience. The projection is a live feed from a small camera, which follows and highlights the main action. The camera provides a close up view of the puppet’s faces and the action happening on stage. At times, the hands or knees of the manipulators can be seen on the large screen. The feed is projected in black and white possessing a grainy quality reminiscent of the historical documentation of the actual event. When the actors are moving the stage and setting it up for the next “scene”, the camera ceases to project and the audience watches as the actors meticulously transform the stage. *Kamp* does not offer a form of recognition with one individual but documents the

daily routine of the camp: getting off the train, eating, working, the burning gas chambers, and the final turning off the lights at the end of the day.

The visual representation of genocide is extremely complex because of the phenomenology of the stage and the sign systems it creates. As mentioned in the previous chapter, phenomenologist, Bert States indicates in theatre objects in their embodied or material form have a double aspect: one significative and the other self-given (69). An object placed on stage is both material and significative. In *Kamp*, for example, the audience sees the puppet first as a material object with a face moulded out of clay, a small body covered in thin striped clothes, and then as “something else” – as representative of prisoners and guards. Henryk Jurkowski, one of the most influential contemporary writers on puppetry, recognizes this “double aspect” in puppets by labeling iconic signs as the material characteristics of a puppet and the other as a “virtual” character which is how the puppet acts or moves and therefore what it signifies (99). In the case of *Kamp* the puppets indicate prisoners in Auschwitz partly because of how the puppets appear but also because they are situated in a camp with barbed wire and buildings.

The live puppet on stage inherently relates to humanity. Spectators perceive the puppet as being alive and assign meaning to the puppet body that are normally assigned to the human body; “there seems to be an implied definition of puppetry here, which runs: if the signification of life can be created by people, then the site of that signification is to be considered a puppet” (Tillis *The Art of Puppetry* 185). The puppet is the sign for humanity because of the similar characteristics of a person. Jurkowski expands,

The puppet as metonymy is a real thing. It does not delude the public by means of a pretended life, because all the power of delusion is given to the performer. The performer also is the most real presence, showing the process of manufacture (sometimes) and of operation (always) of the puppet. This serves to create a “second-level” world – this time a world of fiction, which is also a world of reality as a product of the performer’s acts. (103).

The puppet serves as a representation of a human because of the metonymy of the stage. The actions and design of the puppet closely resemble that of a human. Metonymy is based on the closeness of the object to what it represents. In the case of *Kamp* the audience can quite easily substitute the material puppet for the idea of a human because of the close relation between the two in terms of physicality as well as the actions of the puppets. Merleau-Ponty says, “It is through my body that I understand other people, just as it is through my body that I perceive ‘things’” and “behaviour creates meaning which are transcendent in relation to the anatomical apparatus, and yet immanent to the behaviour as such, since it communicates itself and is understood” (186, 189). The movement of the puppets and their basic materiality – the “anatomical apparatus” – is recognized as metonymic of the human body because their bodies are able to perform actions recognizable as actions the human body can do. For example, the puppet with a shovel can scoop up stones and toss them into a truck. Spectators can relate the puppet to a human because of the proximity between the puppet’s action and the action typically associated as human.

Despite the close association between the human body and the puppet body, the puppet still retains the sign system for a puppet. Steve Tillis defines three different general sign systems of the puppet: design, speech, and movement (*Toward an Aesthetic of the Puppet* 7). These sign systems are what create the idea of life for the audience but are at the same time “abstracted from life, and are now presented by something without life of its own” (7). Despite the association of signs with humanity, it is important to note what portrays life is not technically alive, but the sign systems allow the audience to imagine the puppets as living. The audience lives within the tension of viewing the puppet as both alive and an object. These sign systems will be discussed in greater depth further on but it is important to note the puppets in *Kamp* are able to represent humanity *in general* because of their ontology. While quoting Obratsov, Tillis makes note “the power of the puppet ‘lies in the very fact that is inanimate. . . . On stage, a man might portray another man but he cannot portray man in general because he is himself a man. The puppet is not a man and for that reason it can give a living portrayal of man in general’” (45-46). This complex relationship with the audience allows for the set up of several realities which overlap to create a window for *Hotel Modern* to generate a scene associated with not one individual but representative of all those in the camps.

Just as the puppet on stage has several sign systems for the audience to interpret, so the use of live projection also adds echoes of modern society’s understanding of war. The use of the small camera, projected on the screen, shows the audience the digital feed similar to images of war projected on

televisions in their living rooms. Marvin Carlson discusses the idea how the ghosting of the stage allows voices to speak for others, “the present experience is always ghosted by previous experiences and associations while these ghosts are simultaneously shifted and modified by the processes of recycling and recollection” (2). Through the use of the camera, the audience remembers other visual representations of the Holocaust or other representations of violence on screen and brings these past visual images to inform what they see. People understand the world through their experiences and create meaning based on these experiences (Eagleton 48). The spectator brings their understanding of war and applies it to the representations they watch. The grainy, black and white quality of the live projection also echoes the minimal, fragile documentation currently available of the Holocaust, as well as the quality of film available in the 1940’s. Thus, because visual markers always mean *something* the aesthetic and visual representation of violence and genocide becomes problematic. The puppets and film on stage present several meanings and because the audience is informed by their own experience, the idea of “true representation” will always fall flat. However, in combining the use of puppets and film, *Hotel Modern* creates a space which allows for the continually expanding representation of genocidal performance without enforcing or projecting a stereotypical idea of the past and invites the audience to reflect on the manipulation and detail of genocide.

The visual representation of genocide poses a problem in that it creates a beautiful representation of a horrible event. McGlothlin notes that victims of genocide “share a common fear that literature is not only unable to do justice to

the extreme agony and anguish of the millions of Jews, Roma, and Sinti as well as religious, political, and homosexual victims, but also threatens to violate the truth of their painful experience altogether” (212). The act of creation is beautiful and unique in technique and beauty seems to violate this truth of a painful experience. According to Susan Sontag, one of the problems of visually representing genocide is that finding “...beauty in war photographs seems heartless. But the landscape of devastation is still a landscape. There is beauty in ruins...photographs tend to transform, whatever their subject; and as an image something may be beautiful – or tarrying, or unbearable, or quite bearable – as it is not in real life” (76). The act of taking a picture or making a film is beautiful in spite of the reality being something quite the opposite, because of the manipulation required to produce the photograph or film. In *Kamp* the materiality of the puppet produces a particular aesthetic which may well be called beautiful. The details of the individual puppet, and of the space, the miniature set, the angle of the camera shot, and the art of projection are, in themselves, fascinating because they work together to create a whole. The manipulation by the creators of the whole creates a unity that is beautiful. However, because of what the stage and the images signify, the audience can also imagine the horror of what is being presented as well as glimpse the extreme planning and detail involved in the act of genocide in analog to the planning involved in the dramaturgy. Lawrence Langer suggests, “All Holocaust art involves a transaction between fact and imagination, between the details of destruction and various techniques for facing or effacing their grotesque features” (78) and later, “Art is a mediation between what happened and our

striving to envision it” (82). The audience is under no illusion what they are seeing is real but is rather a creative and artistic act. The performance is a struggle to envision the past. Thus, the imagination is pivotal in viewing representations and, in the case of *Kamp*, is heightened by the act of viewing the puppets as representative of humanity. Lisa Fitzpatrick agrees with Langer, “When performing violence, trauma or pain, the imagination of the audience is a potent tool, allowing the spectator to enter into a physical or affective empathetic relationship with the character to vicariously engage with his/her pain, distress or emotional suffering” (63). Fitzpatrick alludes to a conventional narrative structure guided by one or select characters to engage with. *Kamp* does not allow for the connection with one specific character but looks at the magnitude of the event. Despite being unable to enter into an empathetic relationship with one individual, the power of the puppets allows for empathy on a larger scale. Langer continues his discussion on art, “...a main aim of Holocaust representation is to implicate its audience in the difficult but essential tasks of imagining an absent pain and mourning an unending loss” (92-93). *Kamp* heightens the idea of absent pain because the audience cannot connect with the individual on the stage but searches for a way to understand the vastness of the loss. Thus, despite the beauty of a created piece of art, the audience’s imagination allows for the reality of the past to come into focus and the beauty of the image turns heartbreaking. *Kamp* allows for both the beauty of the aesthetic experience and the horror of the past to invoke the audience’s imagination through the complexity of the ontology of puppets as well as the use of the camera.

The violence of genocide is impossible to fully represent on the theatrical stage because the body in pain is very individual, and therefore removed from the gaze of the audience. Elaine Scarry argues that pain is very specific to each person; “To have pain is to have *certainty*; to hear about pain is to have *doubt*” (13). The pain of another individual can only be imagined as it is only the effect of pain which is shown on the body. The representation of pain creates another degree of separation as the audience has to imagine a pain that does not typically exist on the stage. For example, in *Kamp* a moment occurs when a puppet has fallen on the ground because the weight of a sand bag is too heavy to carry. A guard comes up beside the fallen puppet and begins to beat the puppet with a stick. The audience can see the guard puppet beating the fallen puppet and they watch as the stick continues blow after blow for almost a minute and a half. No sound is heard except for the stick hitting the puppet. The fallen puppet only moves because of the impact of the stick on its body. In this scene, the audience imagines the puppet to be in pain based on their knowledge that being hit hurts. The pain of a puppet obviously does not exist but the reaction for the audience is very visceral. Typically, and in contrast to realist film, pain on stage or “...visualizing the injured body in pain is both too real and too artificial – pain is so excessively real as to dissolve the neat border of imitation, and it is necessarily sustained in representation by considerable artifice” (Patraka 101). The stage creates the illusion of pain and violence that the audience is aware of. Thus, “conventionally, when dramatic theatre represents violence in performance, it frames it within the recognizable logic of the fictional world...” (Fitzpatrick 62).

Framing the violence in a fictional world allows the spectators to watch pain on stage without fear that the violence is real. Through the employment of the puppet medium, *Kamp* allows for a relentlessly extended and real beating. Hotel Modern takes the violence to a different extreme than typically portrayed on the stage, giving the audience a glimpse into similar events that would have happened in Auschwitz.

Violence and pain on stage also allows for voyeurism because of the inferred knowledge the act of violence is not actually happening. When the possibility of true danger exists for those on stage, it creates a reaction similar to watching the real event. Féral argues that true danger on stage takes the event out of its theatrical framework and brackets it within the confines of the performance. She notes,

It is the staging of another's death, which, much like in the Roman arena, elicits a voyeuristic fascination in the audience's gaze that thus externalizes their own relationship to the void and the violence that inhabits it. Of course, by creating the event on stage, this recourse to the real emerges as the way to circumvent theatrical illusion and representation, to instead elicit an immediate presence that eliminates the mediation of a story or dialogue spoken by an actor; it also eliminates illusion of any sort. (54).

When true danger or violence is present, the audience is both removed from the violence presented on stage, but also removed from the theatrical framework of the event. This removal creates an added presence of the event, removes the

“aesthetic distance”, and confronts the spectator with the reality of the event (53). This distance or elimination from the theatrical illusion only happens in extreme cases of violence and the audience is not removed from the knowledge that the space they are in is a performance space. Fitzpatrick expands, “The audience sees the representation of pain and suffering, and may experience a visceral response, but as long as the trappings of performance are present . . . , then the pain and violence usually stand for something outside themselves” (62). The pain and violence are removed from the spectator because of the fictional world created on stage. While watching the individual puppet being beaten by a guard, the audience sees extreme violence and equates it with the original event because of the metonymy of the stage. The “representation of violence, equally, can create a visceral or morphological response in the spectator through a momentary identification with the vulnerability of (all) bodies” (66). The audience identifies the beating of a puppet with the beating of a person and responds to the event but because the violence is still framed within the confines of a performance and a narrative, the audience continues to watch. The shocking reality is the puppet is actually being beaten and the paradox is though there is no live being in real danger, the length of time a helpless puppet is beaten makes the violence excessive.

In spite of being able to recognize a body in pain, there still fails to be a language which encompasses the ability to express pain. Hotel Modern’s *Kamp* does not include any linguistic language but relies completely on the aesthetic experience to represent the pain of millions. Scarry notes, “Physical pain does not

simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned” (4). The body is brought to a place prior to language and moves on instinct because “...physical pain – unlike any other state of consciousness – has no referential content. It is not *of* or *for* anything. It is precisely because it takes no object that it, more than any other phenomenon, resists objectification in language” (5). Most other states of consciousness allow the body and the mind to project onto something else. For example, love is often for an object or a person. The act of loving refers to someone or something else. However, pain does not allow for projecting onto something else. The body is pain and cannot dissociate from it:

The failure to express pain – whether the failure to objectify its attributes or instead the failure, once those attributes are objectified, to refer them to their original site in the human body – will always work to allow its appropriation and conflation with debased forms of power; conversely, the successful expression of pain will always work to expose and make impossible that appropriation and conflation. (Scarry 14).

When pain is finally able to be represented, the representation exposes the nature of the inability to express pain. Violence can be associated the same way. Once violence is represented the audience is fully aware of the methods used to create “real” looking violence as indicated earlier. There is no way to fully represent violence without actually performing the real thing.

The lack of language and the puppet's sign systems in *Kamp* heightens the lack of agency in the puppets and propels the idea of the inevitability of what will happen. The puppets – prisoners and guards alike – never speak throughout the 45 minute performance. This silence is unexpected given the historical emphasis on text in the theatre. However, the lack of language emphasizes what little decisions the puppets can make. Certain scholars believe that speech is the most important sign system of a puppet while others argue it is not necessary to the puppet performance (Tillis *Toward an Aesthetics of a Puppet* 146-8). While the differences are debated, the lack of speech for the puppets in *Kamp* shows a lack of agency and subjectivity. Take away someone's right to speak or ability to speak and they can no longer express themselves or their opinions. The puppets' decisions are taken from them. The puppets' lack of mutability, their inability to voice or react to pain and violence creates a haunting atmosphere on the stage. For example, when the puppet is beaten the audience would understand if screams or cries came from the puppet. Since there is only the echoing sound of a stick hitting the puppet, the lack of cries make the moment more profound as the spectator is confronted with the void of human expression and the inability to express the pain. This lack of agency can be extended to the guards as they too have little control over their actions. In this case, the audience becomes more aware of the mechanical process of the action in front of them, heightening the inevitable outcome of the events.

By placing violence on stage it is acknowledged that true representation of a violent act cannot exist, because this representation is performative. Féral acknowledges,

...all performative action calls upon theatricality. Theatricality is what gives it meaning and inscribes it within the symbolic. It is also what gives it its aesthetic dimension. The work may, of course, strive to erode this theatricality and try to eradicate it. The work may explore its confines, its limits, but theatricality endures, like the phoenix rising from its own ashes. (55).

The representation of genocidal violence on stage inherently creates meaning for the audience as the audience struggles to understand what they see. The aesthetic is framed by the stage and thus chained to its own theatricality. In this way, genocidal violence is not dissimilar to the futility in trying to represent individual pain on the stage. Patraka explains,

Representation, too, is inevitably about goneness, is itself a mark of goneness, and, in the case of the Holocaust, is the way in which we continually mark a spectacular and invisible absence in order to remember who once was and what once happened...That the goneness of the Holocaust can never be a fixed set of norms, or a closed narrative that can be wholly represented in the present moment, inherently foregrounds the constructedness of representations of these events. (4-5).

It is a sense of absence that representations of genocide try to convey through the use of narrative, a narrative that is doomed to fail in its representation. However,

the use of puppetry and film in *Kamp* helps point to the absence required in genocidal representation.

As noted earlier, the use of puppets allows for the audience to see the objects on stage not only as puppets but also as representative of life. The puppets are both wholly material as well as metonymically human which gives puppets the advantage of performing humanity in general. Patraka suggests this is one of the main reasons for utilizing puppets in the representation of genocide:

In more general terms, even the notion of violence to the collective, cultural body is a kind of framing and, in one sense, a displacing of violence to the individual body. And what happens when the actor's body is signifying not an individual death, which presumably all of us can conceive of, but a mass death, which basically none of us can conceive of? It may be that representing genocide theatrically means the absence/presence of the body and the ruining of representation that the absent/present body causes. Are live bodies the basis of theatre in a way that we can't get beyond? One way playwrights respond to this challenge is by replacing actors' bodies with dummies or puppets. (98)

By using puppets instead of live human actors, *Kamp* invites the audience to view violence in terms of a collective body instead of placing violence on an individual. Tillis, in his book *Toward and Aesthetic of Puppets*, explains, "As representations, the puppets are invested with any quality or quantity of abstracted signs, and this investiture encourages the audience to imagine the puppets as having life" (45). The ability of the puppet to assume more abstract signs than a

human body allows the spectator to see past the material body of the puppet and imagine the massive goneness of the event.

The ability to represent mass amounts of people also can be attributed to the design and movement of the puppets. Despite their individualized facial features, each puppet looks identical to the audience sitting at a distance. The way an individual puppet is highlighted comes from its movement or specific purpose in the camp, and of course it's enlarged projection. These sign systems highlight the homogeny created in the camps from a lack of identity as well as the machine-like structure of the work in Auschwitz. Not only do the puppets create a homogenized environment, but their lack of agency is enhanced further by the manipulation of the creators. The distance between the action and the audience as well as the small size of the set allows for the audience to see an overview of the proceedings. Dramaturge "Igor Dobricic described the effect of this set up as the uncanny experience of being invited to appreciate the perfection of the machinery, the beauty of the ground plan; the uncanny experience of being invited to appreciate the imagination and thinking behind it" (Bleeker 288). The individual identity that would give the puppets any agency or subjectivity is taken away at each turn. Not only do the puppets look like each other, but they are only seen from a distance by the audience and defined by their function.

The audience can only see the live action of the puppets from a distance as if they are overseeing the event. They are removed from the original site of the performance but the use of live projection provides for a close up view of the action. This camera work allows for a different view of what is happening on the

stage as it creates proximity and mirrors the familiar TV screen images in homes. The close up camera work highlights the visual aspect of the action. Sontag notes,

...Henry James, declared to *The New York Times*: ‘One finds it in the midst of all this as hard to apply one’s words as to endure one’s thoughts. The war has used up words; they have weakened, they have deteriorated . . . ‘ And Walter Lippmann wrote in 1922: ‘Photographs have the kind of authority over imagination today, which the printed word had yesterday, and the spoken word before that. They seem utterly real’. (25)

While she refers specifically to photography, the video lens in *Kamp* creates the same affect. Because spectators are accustomed to viewing violence through the lens of the camera, it can feel more real or true than what they see on stage.

Today’s culture is highly mediatized. The camera in *Kamp* creates a proximity to the live action and projects the visual in a way language could not while emphasizing the complex way of viewing genocide.

The use of the camera and increasing use of technology continually changes the way society views everyday life and understands the world. Western culture understands the world through technology; “In other words, our mediatized culture has become a *hyper-reality*, that is to say a world of signs that are more real than the objects, to which they seem to refer” (Kattenbelt 38).

Viewing pain on camera, on a television screen, can seem more real than when it is happening on stage because of the way society today is mediated and now understands the world through images instead of through writing. This is not to

say pain on camera is *more* representable than on the stage, merely that Western society views the pain on camera as seemingly more real because of special effects readily available. Sontag writes, “But once the camera was emancipated from the tripod, truly portable, and equipped with a range finder and a variety of lenses that permitted unprecedented feats of close observation from a distant vantage point, picture-taking acquired an immediacy and authority greater than any verbal account in conveying the horror of mass-produced death” (24). The production of photography and film created a society more attuned to visual data than verbal. The photograph catches the picture in a way that verbal description cannot compete with, because the camera is invasive and enlarges the visual to place the reality in the foreground with greater consistency than language. *Kamp* plays on the mediatized society by omitting language which allows the spectator to attempt to understand genocide in a universal language. Sontag continues,

Awareness of the suffering that accumulates in a select number of wars happening elsewhere is something constructed. Principally in the form that is registered by cameras, it flares up, is shared by many people, and fades from view. In contrast to a written account – which, depending on its complexity of thought, reference, and vocabulary, is pitched at a larger or smaller readership – a photograph has only one language and is destined potentially for all. (20).

Visual imagery is constructed by the camera and can affect vast amounts of people because it is not dependant on understanding the language. *Kamp* uses the

live projection to enlarge the puppets in order for the audience to see digitally up close what they cannot attain in person because of the distance of the action.

Though the eye of the camera allows for close up details in the live performance, it also limits what the audience can see because the nature of the camera is to edit the real in order to show the viewer something specific. The camera used in *Kamp* follows specific actions and guides the spectator where to look in order for the audience to see what is happening. For example, near the beginning of the performance several prisoners are hung. If the audience was only given the option to watch the live action in front of them they would see, from a distance, the actors place the puppets in the noose and then pull the box out from under the puppet, provided the spectator is sitting at the correct angle to see this occur. With the use of the camera, the entire audience watches in black and white, providing the spectator a point of view from the puppet. The camera scans the guards watching the hanging, then the puppets standing on the boxes with the noose around their necks, then the faces of the puppets who are being forced to watch the hanging. Next, the camera provides a close up of the torso and head of each puppet as the box is pulled from beneath them. The camera shows the audience specifics of the event and guides the spectator where to look. The camera provides an ancillary point of view, allowing the spectators gaze to vacillate between a holistic (distanced) view, and a specific (detailed) view. It is only because of the close up view of the camera the audience can see otherwise impossible details of the action. The camera is invasive and upfront about what it shows. The audience follows the close up of the moment the puppets are hung

while also being aware of the events not being shown as they are in miniature in front of them. The absence of what the screen does not show is very apparent, not only because of the vast stage present with the audience, but also because the camera shows the hand of the actor pulling the boxes away from the puppets. The act of the hand within the frame of vision acknowledges what the camera sees is not the entirety of the event.

While the camera allows for the distribution of close up images in order to see the action, the picture itself proves limiting. The camera chooses what image to show, what angle to take, how close to get to the subject. As noted previously, the camera, similar to photographs, is often criticized for creating an aesthetically beautiful picture, while distancing the horrible event depicted. But Sontag argues, “Images have been reproached for being a way of watching suffering at a distance, as if there were some other way of watching. But watching up close – without the mediation of an image – is still just watching” (117). *Kamp* gives the option of watching the puppets hang from a distance but also watching it close up. The eye of the camera is complex and “photographs of the victims of war are themselves a species of rhetoric. They reiterate. They simplify. They agitate. They create the illusion of consensus” (6). The eye of the camera is limiting and edits what action is occurring. However, it is only through this fragile way of viewing that the audience can perceive what is happening. Chiel Kattenbelt suggests the close up shot has benefits rather than simply limiting the view, “He [Balazs] identified the close-up as being particularly effective in breaking through the distance between perceiver and object, and the closed totality of the work of

art as a ‘microcosm’ on its own” (36). *Kamp* is at once both miniature and distanced from the audience. Filming the action allows for a proximity and intimacy with the audience, which would otherwise not be there. It also further reminds the audience of what is not shown as Sontag mentions, “And the pity and disgust that pictures like Hick’s inspire should not distract you from asking what pictures, whose cruelties, whose deaths are *not* being shown<sup>1</sup>” (13-14). The limiting nature of the camera, and the editing it inherently does, allows the audience’s imaginations to engage with the event, realizing the depiction of the event is not just about what is shown on camera or on the stage but also what *is not* shown. There is a tension between proximity and contiguity and distance in portraying the Holocaust that is very fragile. The “phenomenological perspectives recognise that medial transmission is a space for the interplay of the visible and the invisible, which is the other space, the other side of human perception” (Wagner 130). *Kamp*’s use of the camera fills this fragile tension by revealing the inability to see fully the scope of the whole stage.

A juxtaposition exists between what the audience views as real and what is real on the stage. The camera is an imitation, a copy of the original performance (Blau 250). Ontologically, the filmic projection is based on a series of numbers as it projects a world that has been modified through technology and simplified into binary code in order to project it as real. Peter Boenisch expands the idea that the projection is only a reproduction of the original by suggesting that “technically reproducing, or artistically representing, pre-existing realities as *the real*... is no more than an effect produced by observation. More generally, through connecting

their observers to their cultural, discursive, and historic circumstances, the media *generate realities* – rather than *the reality*” (109). The mediated copy the audience sees is a copy of the original. If Boenisch is correct, then despite the audience seeing a copy of the original on the projection, the camera allows the audience to see more than the projection but a reflection of the realities surrounding that projection. The Holocaust is an event involving a huge number of people and the representation of the event is problematic because of the vast amounts of people it affected and continues to affect. While the filmic projection is ontologically a mass of numbers used to create a picture, the dichotomy is it is the live action of *Kamp* which emphasizes the vast amounts of people. The distance given on the stage, with the ability to show 3,000 puppets, provides the audience the opportunity to visualize at least a small section of the real event, and the cross section between the projection and the live creates a way of seeing that expands the reality.

Typically, the use of film within a performance heightens the reality of live bodies on stage or the intersection between actors and technology. For example in the Wooster Group’s 2007 performance of “Hamlet”, the production included the 1964 filmed Broadway production of Richard Burton’s “Hamlet” (Parker-Starbuck 23). In this case, the audience focuses on the intersection between the current live production and the use of the 1964 version within the performance. The live and the mediated are in a constant battle over which gains precedence on the stage. However, in *Kamp* the audience is dependent on the use of film in order to see the action. The puppets on screen seem more alive than

those on the stage. The debate on liveness is structured on the idea of mediatisation. “Liveness, as Auslander treats it, can be understood as an effect of mediatisation, and television, in his opinion, is socially and economically more capable of creating an experience of liveness for an audience than the live performance” (Merx 79). The invention of media allowed for a liveness debate between bodies present on stage versus bodies on camera. Walter Benjamin noted the lack of “aura” associated with bodies present in photography because the bodies were captured on film and therefore only a copy of themselves because they were able to be reproduced (see also Tillis *The Art of Puppetry* 183). While Hotel Modern uses puppets instead of live actors, the lack of “aura” can still be associated with the puppets because “puppets cannot, of course, feel strange in front of a camera, but their lack of feeling does not obviate the estrangement that takes place when the actuality of their physical presence is reduced to a mere two-dimensional look-alike” (183). While Tillis refers to the material puppet’s inability to feel, the audience’s ability to see the puppets up close gives the perception the puppet is alive and thus allows the spectator to believe the object is living. Also, the metonymy of the stage gives human liveness to the puppets as the puppets are associated with real people. In *Kamp* the puppet’s two-dimensional copy is perceived as real for the audience regardless of any lack of “aura”. Sigrid Merx mentions, “It seems to me that the greatest potential of live video... in every live performance, is to install in us an awareness of the liveness of theatre. Live video in the live performance can remind us of the fact that ‘this is live’, ‘this is now’. Live video can make us remember that we are in the

theatre” (78). The ontological difference between the projection of the puppets and the puppets on the stage is “that film provides the illusion of reality (even in cases that we know that the represented world is everything but real), whereas theatre provides the reality of the illusion” (Kattenbelt 37). While live projection would typically enhance the liveness of those on the theatrical stage, the projection in *Kamp* gives the audiences a space to view the puppets so that they appear alive instead of simply manipulated. To the audience, the difference between the projection and the stage is the distance between the two. Boenisch notes, “...the ontological difference does not necessarily translate into an equal hierarchy for the observers when they experience it, because the experience of both factual and fictional worlds is also a most authentic one” (109-110). The contrast between the “aliveness” of the puppets in the projection contrasts with the live actors who manipulate the puppets on the stage. The invasion of the film in the live stage action brings the audience to a space in which the real, the interpretation of real, and the space in between swirls in complex juxtaposition. This is foregrounded when the audience can see the hand in the black and white projection, which moves the puppet.

In conclusion, the intersection between live projection and puppets allows for a fragile portrayal of the Holocaust. The camera edits an event that cannot be edited and through the use of close, invasive shots, guides the audience what to see. This tension between the proximity of the camera and the distance of the live action mirrors the reality of how the world was able to see the original event as Maïke Bleeker puts aptly, “the video images shot during the performance are

projected live on stage and confirm what we already know – or what our collective memory has taught us. It is as if the performance is an investigation using re-enactment to try to understand what must have happened there and then to produce these images” (287). The representation of the Holocaust is fragile and *Hotel Modern* allows for small glimpses of what the collective memories have taught.

## Conclusion

Performing any historical event creates a complex tension between fact and fiction. The representation of genocide, an event unable to quantify and because of its abject nature, is inherently problematic. As an event without borders, genocide resists the urge to be contained within a theatrical narrative structure and thus resists representation. “Performing history means to re-enact certain conditions or characteristic traits inherent in such historical events, presenting them to the spectators through the performance, but it can never become these events or the historical figures themselves” (Rokem 13). Rokem highlights the complex nature of performing historical events. *Kamp* and *Rwanda 94* barely scratch the surface of the events they try to represent, and the performances do not try to assume to be able to contain the past. Each production approaches the representation of genocide differently thus highlighting the varying ways to represent the event. Although they use vastly different techniques, Groupov and Hotel Modern manage to find fragile ways of viewing and representing genocide.

Groupov demonstrates the inability to contain one event in a single production as their performance is over four hours long. Instead of focusing on the inability to represent the Rwandan genocide, they instigate a dialogue surrounding the event:

And it is not reflective of a project of mourning, or a simple testimony, or a simple theatrical documentary, or even a historical record, but an ethical and political action. This theater, which was performed six years after the

disaster, is dedicated to the time represented, and to the people who continue to live after the catastrophe. (Biet 1049)

Biet refers here specifically to *Rwanda 94* and highlights the conversation surrounding the performance. In using Bee Bee Bee's investigation into the Rwandan genocide as the main narrative, Groupov focuses on the questions surrounding the genocide rather than rely on historically specific stories or events that occurred during that time. Groupov is not subtle in the questions they ask regarding the blatant lack of involvement from the West during the onset of the Rwandan genocide. Considering the production was mainly viewed by Western audiences, the production challenges the spectator to question his or her own role within the global context. Thus, Groupov approaches the representation of the Rwandan genocide through the questions and issues they address instead of specifically narrating a story with a concrete ending. *Rwanda 94* leaves room for more questions and more dialogue after the performance is over, which enforces the idea that the effects of genocide are never finished.

Likewise, *Hotel Modern* avoids the reliance on personal narrative common to many artistic representations of the Holocaust. While *Schindler's List* and *The Pianist* entrance the audience with an emotional connection to the protagonist, *Kamp* provides the spectator with an eyewitness overview of the realities of the genocide, focusing on the details and machine-like quality of the camps. In an interview with Tom Sellar, *Hotel Modern* discusses audience reaction:

Many of them [spectators] tell us that, although they knew the facts, our performance made them realize what the numbers and facts mean. You

cannot talk about things like this – in a way it's beyond words. That's why we wanted our performance to be wordless, with only abstract sound design. We do it as a routine, and the routine is still there, and if we told a story it would not be. (Portfolio 92)

The use of projections and puppets distance the audience which allows the spectator to analyze the vastness and scope of genocide as well as the intrinsic amount of planning involved in the Holocaust. In providing both distancing and proximity, *Hotel Modern* allows for a fragile viewing of the past.

Discussing both *Rwanda 94* and *Kamp* provides a scope of the complexity of performing genocide and the vast number of ways to approach the topic. These two approaches are clearly only a fraction of endless possibilities of representation but offer a small glimpse into both the magnitude of the event as well as the challenges of representation. Although both performances offer fragile viewings of genocide, they cannot give a complete view of the event, nor would any performance. One does not have to look too closely to realize that grief can defy words, and the depth of human emotion and experience is often too complex to grasp completely. However, the inability to fully express trauma has not deterred the arts community from trying. Storytelling is inherent in human nature as evidenced in small children as they mimic, interpret, and try to communicate without the vocabulary to do so. What happens when words fail; when there is no story to tell and no concrete way to tell it? We try anyway and we find new ways of trying. Performance is an exploration of trying to iterate what we cannot fully understand. It is the space between knowing and not

knowing in which artists must look in order to begin an attempt at performing genocide.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Sontag refers here to three colour pictures taken by Tyler Hicks and published by *The New York Times* on November 13, 2001. The pictures were of a Taliban soldier first dragged by his captors, pulled to his feet, and then the moment of death. Pictures such as these create outcries of shock or calls for peace or revenge or serve as a means for awareness. These pictures are a way of viewing another person's pain at a distance, removed from modern life but also can serve as a means to remember there are stories not told, not shown. (Sontag 13).

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