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Bridging Haunted Places

Performance and the Production of Mostar

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It is this bridge [the Stari Most] which became Mostar's symbol. Around this magnificent Old Bridge, the nucleus of the town developed forming a single architectural entity. . . . [D]espite all the misfortunes suffered, the Old Bridge has survived to grace the town to the present day. It is both a work of exceptional architectural beauty and a vibrant witness to the past.

Yugoslav Tourist Bureau, *Guide Book to Mostar*, 1989

On the 9th of November 1993, during the civil war, the bridge was destroyed by shelling, and, in a few hours, a masterpiece of the past times, an example of the ancient constructive technique, and an element of regional identity was definitely cancelled. . . . [N]obody, such as Bosnian people and Mostar citizens, is able to understand deeply the real meaning of such a loss.

M. Romeo and M. Mela, "Overview of Stari Most: Rehabilitation Design of the Old Bridge of Mostar"

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> *It's true that the city is being reconstructed, but bridges, buildings,*
> *and parks never made a town; what made it was the people*
> *living in it.*
>
>   Sonja Arsham Kuftinec, Scot McElvany, and
>   Geoff Sobelle, directors, *Where Does the Postman Go*
>   *When All the Street Names Change?* performed in Mostar, 1997

These three narratives, figuratively producing and reproducing Mostar's four-centuries-old Stari Most (Old Bridge), arise from a vast stream of rhetoric constituting the city's varied histories, cultural heritage, trauma, and projected recovery via the bridge. Like the stony fragments of the bridge, exhumed from the Neretva River for reconstructive analysis and later archival preservation, they tell a set of stories that reveal as much about those who use the bridge symbolically as about those who use it practically. The Stari Most figures tropologically as well as topologically in how individuals and the city identify, map, and remap themselves along the fault lines of a brutal internecine war.[1] As a multiethnic city located in Herzegovina, a region dominated in the early 1990s by the Croatian Defense Force (HVO), Mostar bore the brunt of two violent power struggles. In 1992, Bosnians with Croatian Catholic and Muslim affiliations fought together against aggressor Bosnian Serb forces. Shortly thereafter, the HVO turned against Muslims, destroying the Stari Most and resettling the city through an orchestrated campaign of terror. Following this campaign, the Neretva River, which once divided old east Mostar from its newer areas in the west, effectively divided Bosnian Muslims from Croats. This chapter works to illuminate the fault lines of this struggle, with particular attention to how spatial practices and stories—performance in the street and near the street—reshape the body and the body politic. The writing is fueled by my own past and attachments to a Croatian/Yugoslav ancestry, by memories of walking through Mostar, and by time spent forging performances such as *Postar (Postman)*—creating spaces of witness for others and attending myself to the stories that continue to haunt the city. I am driven to remember Mostar here by the question of how it will be remembered institutionally as well as through the bodies of those who continue to walk its streets and the most famous of its bridges.

It remains difficult to discuss the urban terrain of Mostar without referencing the destruction and reconstruction of the Stari Most, built under Turkish rule in the late 1500s. It is almost as difficult to avoid clichéd statements about the bridge's symbolic resonance. If the Stari Most had not been

destroyed by HVO artillery in 1993, it might have collapsed under the figurative burden it bore in the years leading up to and following the war. But this same figuration offers a way into the various constitutions of Mostar before and after the rupturing event of the 1991–95 war and consequent destruction of the bridge.

The first epigraph above, from a state-produced tourist guide to Mostar, was written in English in 1989, on the cusp of war within a still nominally unified Yugoslavia. While pointing to the Stari Most as an aesthetic object of craft and grace, the guide foregrounds the bridge via its representational function as both an image of the city and its unifying center. Physical location links to structures of feeling; Mostar is cohesive and organic, a cell with the bridge as "nucleus." The purpose of the bridge appears metaphoric (nuclear), metonymic (symbolic of the city), and anthropomorphically historiographic (the bridge as survivor of and witness to history). Significantly, though the bridge figures both as a link to the past and as a unifying locus, its purpose as either a physical or a symbolic connector between two distinct sides of the city is not mentioned. In this prior era of official South Slavic unity, when many Serbs, Croats, and Muslims lived side by side in Mostar, the city officially imagined itself as a unified whole.

After the war, and particularly after the Stari Most's destruction, external accounts rewrite the city's heritage as one of divisions bridged. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), a key sponsor of the Stari Most's reconstruction, refers to a population that "saw the bridge as a symbol of peace and reconciliation between the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina."[2] Reconciliation implies something already torn apart. The unified organism imagined by the state-produced guide is here read back into history and reconfigured as a link between separate entities: east and west, Bosnian and Herzegovina, Muslim and Croat. The bridge additionally moves onto the (Western) world stage as a way to make sense of a war that implicated, before it directly involved, Europe and the United States. An October 2003 *60 Minutes* piece constructs a fairly typical narrative (Safer, 2003). Before the war, the bridge stands for ethnic unity and integration, linking the east and west banks of the city. During the war, the bridge, "battered, broken, but still standing," signifies survival, endurance, and the possibility of reconciliation. The destruction of the bridge then signals the collapse of common history, as its reconstruction evokes the possibility of a reintegrated future, "rebuilding the city's lost past."

But to focus on the bridge as either an architectural or a symbolic entity that can be physically and historically reconstituted neglects it as a void or site of trauma, a wound in memory surpassing rational understanding and descriptive language, denying the possibility of healing without a scar. The

Engineering Workgroup's narrative of events on its reconstruction Web site evokes this loss but does not seem to know how to build it into their reconstructed bridge (Romeo & Mela, n.d.). Michael Ignatieff, a cultural theorist speaking on *60 Minutes,* indirectly acknowledges their flaw, and that of the United States in pushing the bridge's reconstruction as a form of nation building. "Don't think you can impose reconciliation. Bitterness runs very deep, you can't plaster over that stuff." Personification of the bridge in various accounts further underlines the trauma suffered by Mostar's citizens. An anonymous comment on Mostar Online (1998) on the damage done to Mostar during the war slips between depiction of the city's symbolic rape and the actual rape and destruction of its citizenry. The writer records his inability to document the destruction witnessed, feeling as if he were taking a photo of a woman who had been brutally raped and butchered. He castigates those who would erase these wounds of memory in a blindly optimistic goal of reconciliation. "Now the foreigners come telling [Mostar's citizens] don't worry, be happy, live together again and be reconciled." But you can't plaster over this stuff. A rebuilt bridge won't heal a traumatic wound.

In response to the dilemma of resisting the total erasure of unrepresentable absence, architects such as Daniel Libeskind and Lebbeus Woods have structured voids into their edifices. Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin and design proposal for a new World Trade Center both conjure that which can be neither represented nor forgotten. Inaccessible yet visible columns of space loom throughout the Jewish Museum. The tension between memory and movement grounds Libeskind's WTC design, which seeks to emerge from rather than replicate the destroyed towers. In his essay "No-Man's Land," Lebbeus Woods (2000) refers to voids as "spaces of crisis" where "the entire elaborate superstructure of social and personal relationships, built up over lifetimes, is called into question" (p. 199). Woods speaks from a perspective familiar to human geographers who propose that *who* we are intimately connects to *where* we are, construing space as a network of relationships and connections rather than as a set of boundaries and exclusions. Phenomenologists such as Yi Fu Tuan (1977) cite place as space transformed by memories and feelings accrued over time. For Mostarians, the Stari Most embraces a series of attachments, rituals of walking, the feel of stone under feet, the sensation of height over the river below. The violent rupture of those perceptions and relationships, coupled with the material destruction of place, physically and psychically remapped the city.

Trauma can lead to at least temporary psychic erasure, an effort to repress the memory of the wounding event. Woods (2000) implies that spaces of crisis may, in contrast, lead to revelation rather than erasure. The collapse of a structure can lay bare its inner workings. Within Mostar's dissolution the

cultural, legal, and political disciplinary systems struggling to forge new identities and histories through the city were rendered visible. At the same time, individual, tactical resistances to these systems emerged, particularly relating to the control over and production of space.

Michel de Certeau (1984) proposes a distinction between these kinds of tactical resistances and more authoritative strategies in analyzing the relationship of behavior to power and place. Strategies refer to those actions undertaken by subjects within a "*propre*" (p. xix), a physical location established in part by discourses of legitimacy (a proprietor, a city). Strategies to define (or redefine) Mostar include the printing of city maps, the establishment of a postal service and its limits, and the renaming of city streets. Strategic power, however, is bound by its very visibility in space, as in order to function effectively, this kind of power must be easily perceived. Tactics, in contrast, depend on time, on subjects without a "proper" place recognizing opportunities for interventions to play in the foundations of visible power, to literally walk a different path from that which is formally laid out. Henri Lefebvre suggests that these authoritative foundations and frameworks negotiate among various modes to produce space.

In *The Production of Space* (1991), Lefebvre posits that space is actively created through negotiations among the conceived, the perceived, and the lived. He identifies conceived space as dominant, tied to the production of order. This is the realm of strategies: of urban planning, bureaucracy, and surveillance, of maps, capital, and visual control. In Mostar the struggle for power over conceived space revealed itself in hastily constructed official maps of "Croatian" west Mostar, visibly erasing the city's mostly Muslim east side. Perceived space, produced by memory, routine, and social relationships, remains the traditional focus of human geographers such as Tuan. Lefebvre details this mode as the domain of spatial practices that "secrete society" (p. 33) by forging routes, networks, and patterns of interaction among locations of work, play, and leisure. The performance of everyday life in Mostar both conformed to and tactically resisted the boundaries delineated by the west side's conceptual maps as individuals chose to cross or avoid particular streets and bridges.

Lived space overlays physical space; it is the locus of "passion, action, and of lived situations" that conceptual space seeks to dominate and rationalize (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 42). Within lived space, the cultural geographer Edward Soja (1996) identifies what he terms a "thirdspace" of struggle and resistance to the conceived order. The thirdspace embraces the realm of art, in which representations of power signal the power of representation. When the real and the imagined intersect, as in the space of theater performed in the city, a "counterspace" may emerge in relation to the centrally ordered

conceived space. Michel Foucault (1986) describes this kind of counterspace as a heterotopia, a site related to other sites in a way that reflects and inverts them, "a simultaneous mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live" (p. 24). An outdoor theatrical performance such as *Where Does the Postman Go When All The Street Names Change?*, which I co-directed in 1997, most directly inhabits this counterspace of myth and materiality. Yet Lefebvre's understanding of how intersections of the conceptual, the perceptual, and the corporeal produce space suggests multiple roles for performance as a paradigm and particularly as a practice. These include performance in everyday life, performance as a rhetoric of confrontation and resistance, performance as art, and combinations of all three. Apprehending the interactions among these various performances remains key to understanding the production of power and identity, as well as space, in Mostar.

"Producing" Mostar

Grounded in Marxist theory, Lefebvre (1991) proposes that the conceptual and material separation of spatial modes ensures mass consent. Neglecting the connections among conceived, perceived, and lived space obscures how the production of space also reproduces the status quo, thus eliding the intersubjective relationships that forge authority and power. A map of a city cannot exist without the authority to produce it and the schematics to read it. Lefebvre warns, however, that "once construction [of a certain kind of power and authority] is complete, the scaffolding is taken down," thus concealing its origins (p. 113). In a space of crisis, however, as in a state of war, the scaffolding as well as the inner workings of power may visibly reemerge.

In the mid-1990s Mostar could be perceived as a palimpsest of spatial contestation that rendered visible operations of power within the city. Hastily redesigned urban architecture and changing street names (conceived space), redefined pedestrian routes (spatial practices), and a youth theater festival reappropriating bombed-out buildings and street corners (spaces of representations) negotiated the production of space, meaning, and memory in Mostar. The destruction of the Stari Most is only the most obvious, symbolically laden example.

Spatial control in Mostar can seem deceptively easy to read if one accepts notions of bounded, cohesive ethnic identity, a corollary to assuming clearly defined nation-state borders. The 1993 bridge shelling did work to enforce division within the city, but only when accompanied by aggressive resettlement and the forced rethinking of identity. This physical violence, coupled

with symbolic violence, draws attention to the complexity of identity in Mostar and the persistence of enforced taxonomies of difference.[3] Assumptions of equivalence between subject and label, territory and ethnicity, make little sense in Bosnia. This systemization reflects the thinking of a "Classical" episteme, which Foucault (1970) describes as obsessive in utilizing difference to establish identity. But differential systems held little currency in the actual practice of forging relationships and self-identities in former Yugoslavia. Before the war, few of the youth I worked with even knew the religious affiliations of their peers; under Marshall Tito's totalitarian socialist regime (1946–80), few urban Bosnians actively practiced their religions. The youth saw themselves less as Croat or Muslim than as Bosnian or Yugoslav, or, more frequently, as poets, musicians, spurned lovers. But violence can remake even the most hybrid and open identities.[4]

While the bridge's destruction marked a split between "Muslim" east and "Croat" west Mostar, social and spatial practices continued to complicate this reading. Intermarriage, prewar friendships, and the presence of Muslims in west Mostar, and Bosnian Serbs on both sides, rendered enforced conceptual boundaries more fluid. Spatial practices also continued to defy conceptual mapping as old "Muslim" Mostar, and Mostarians crossed the Neretva, spilling onto the "Croatian" west side of the bank. Additionally, an urban site on the conceived west draws a different line through the city—the front line of the war fought between nominally Muslim and Croat forces. This street of bombed-out, crater-marked building shells runs parallel to the Neretva, marking with blood and bullet holes the city's division against itself.

The shifting names of a street near the front line offer yet another site from which to read the dynamics of change in the city. Before 1992, the street was known as "Santiceva," after a Serbian poet. Following the Bosnian Serb army's aggression against the city in 1992, Mostar's then Muslim-Croat coalition renamed the street "Ricina," after a former community leader. After nationalist HVO forces claimed the west side of the city, they renamed part of the street "Dr. Mile Budaka," after a Croatian man known as a hero to nationalist Croats and as a fascist war criminal to others. Yet, as Tuan notes, attachments to place can supersede their official conception, and differential usage marks both the persistence and erasure of meaning as each name haunts the others. Nationalist Croats inscribe their affiliation by renaming the streets of west Mostar with their heroes. Others persist in calling the streets by their prewar Yugoslav names or by their remembered use. Each practice defies the others, disrupting efforts to maintain or erase a cohesive past.

Absences and presences such as these evoke the Derridean notion of "hauntologie," in which present meaning and use are always already haunted by a past, by the attachments of memory (Derrida, 1994). The street

once had a very different use value, serving as a main thoroughfare and pedestrian route in the city. By 1997 it stood as a "no-man's land," a void haunted by the presence of potentially live grenades in its ruins. The former everyday performances that defined the street as a thoroughfare, a route from home to school, ghost its present decay, just as the shell of a school bus once carrying children of both "sides" to undivided schools shadows the street, a material sign of both unity and division.

Conceptual and practiced remappings of the city accompany its physical reconstruction, underlining interactions between the material and the symbolic, the pedestrian and the political. Jean Baudrillard (1983) discusses this interaction in terms of the "precession of the simulacra," in which symbols become detached from and potentially redefine their social contexts and references. Baudrillard suggests that in this world of the "hyperreal," the simulacrum guides the reformation of that which it purports to represent: "the map precedes the territory" (p. 2).

This dominance of conceptually produced space had material consequences for all Bosnians. Following a 1992 conference in London to work toward a peace negotiation, the international community appointed Lord Owen of Great Britain and former Secretary of State Cyrus Vance of the United States to work out a plan for the reconstitution of Bosnia. In October 1992 Vance and Owen drew up a map of Bosnia-Herzegovina that divided the country into 10 regional cantons. When they presented their map at the Geneva Conference in early 1993, the cantons had been labeled "Serb," "Croat," and "Muslim," with one "Muslim-Croat" canton and one "mixed" canton around the capital city of Sarajevo. While appointing policing powers to each individual canton, the Vance-Owen plan also called for the return of refugees. Thus, in their thinking, the cantons were not to be pure ethno-religious states but simply "under the control" of the groups labeled on the maps. Rather than representing any kind of present or historical reality, however, the map preceded the territory.

The map unintentionally encouraged further land grabbing that essentially cleansed cantons of inhabitants other than those labeled as the majority. Ethnologist Michael Sells (1996) asserts, "[W]hen the [Bosnian Croat forces] saw that the Serb army would be [territorially] rewarded for its [cleansing of Muslims], it began copying them" (p. 101). According to Sells, after the Bosnian Serbs rejected the original Vance-Owen map, Thorvald Stoltenberg and Owen produced a new map that, in Owen's words, recognized "reality on the ground" (p. 100). This "reality," marking Serb and Croat-held territory in Bosnia-Herzegovina, was in fact preceded and guided by the Vance-Owen map. By September of 1995, the territory again matched the map. Reporters Laura Silber and Allan Little (1997) affirm, "The map

that emerged from September's battles—or, at least, the share of territory that it allocated—was consistent with the peace plan that had been put together by [U.S. diplomats]" (p. 368).

The map produced by west Mostar shortly after the U.S.-sponsored Dayton Peace Accords offers yet another example of symbolic power and the production of conceptual space. One of the principles signed by the Bosnian representatives in Dayton called for the reunification of Mostar. From license plates, to currency, to language, schooling, and maps, not a single official sign in the decidedly separate west Mostar conformed to this principle. Instead of reconnecting what had been blown apart, west Mostar officials sought to merge with the pseudostate of Herceg-Bosna, a unified string of municipalities in Herzegovina with its own armed forces. Founder Mate Boban imposed Croatian-style government and schooling; the Croatian dinar (later kuna) became the official currency of the territory, and "Croatian" its official language.[5] While the Dayton Accords formally erased Herceg-Bosna, its not-so-spectral remains continued to haunt Mostar and the de facto reality of the accords.[6]

Baudrillard (1983) elaborates on the paradoxical relationship between simulation and reality, pointing out that simulated illness can produce "real" symptoms (p. 5). In the case of Herceg-Bosna, simulations of its existence combated the international community's dissimulation, or pretense that the para-state did not exist. Herceg-Bosna did not in fact legally exist. Nor was it internationally recognized as a state. Yet in 1997 simulations of its existence and ties to the Croatian government were literally everywhere, situating and defining both Herceg-Bosna and "west" Mostar. ID cards issued on the west side identified individuals as living in Herceg-Bosna. Radio and television stations announced news "from the Herceg-Bosna region." The Croat Sehovnica, a red-and-white checkered crest, hung from lamp posts and in shop windows and was stamped on buildings. Cars registered on the west side sported Croat rather than Bosnian license plates. Banks announced themselves as "Croatian National" and changed kuna, deutsche marks, and most major international currency but would not change these currencies to Bosnian dinars. Xeroxed photos posted around west Mostar celebrated the ultranationalist Bosnian Croat Mafia Godfather "Tuta" as "our hero." Police officers from the west wore Herceg-Bosna patches.

Yet despite efforts to create a Herceg-Bosna and Croatian west Mostar, everyday spatial practices and representations of space also participated in the ongoing production of Mostar. Traces of traumatic memories broke through their repression, reemerging in ghost-written graffiti that challenged officially conceived space. A sign near the absent Stari Most warns pedestrians, "Don't Forget." The bridge reappeared in representational forms

sketched out on the city walls with a caption insisting, "Ovo je Mostar!" (This is Mostar). Pedestrians as well as politicians remapped the city. While most inhabitants changed their spatial practices during the war, altering patterns of walking to conform to officially enforced divisions, the presence of a multiethnic youth center in west Mostar defied the conceptual border drawn between Mostar's teenagers.

Though located on the "Croatian" west side of Mostar, Mladi Most functions as an open center for youth of all backgrounds to mix in a social setting. The name, meaning "Youth Bridge," references the center's purpose as it recalls the absent "Old Bridge." In 1997, when I worked with youth at the center, Mladi Most incorporated a game room, weekly meals and movies, football tournaments, a magazine, and theater workshops, all of which blended "Croat" with "Muslim" and "Serb." In all of these lived spaces, the youth made a point of not asserting divisions of identity among themselves. These less bounded social relations, alongside the spatial practices of gathering at the center, threatened those whose power and identity derived from the city's division. They assaulted Mladi Most with rocks, verbal insults, gunfire, and grenades. In a personal e-mail (Feb. 2, 1997), volunteer Scot McElvany reported, "Tonight we were threatened by a crazy drunk bastard roaming the streets shouting, 'This is Croatia! I want to see a Croatian flag in front of your house in 15 minutes or I'll call everyone I know in the Croatian Defense Council!" This cry for a marker to clearly define "Croatian" Mostar once again draws attention to the need for power to locate itself strategically—visibly and symbolically.

While Mladi Most thus functioned as a resistant oasis to conceived spatial authority, it also led to the production of an even more provocative countersite. A theatrical heterotopia represented, inverted, and reproduced Mostar while simultaneously reflecting on the city's dissolution. This imagined construction of the city, *Pisma (Letters)* or *Where Does the Postman Go When All the Street Names Change?,* premiered at Mostar's International Days of Youth Theater Festival in August 1997. Presented near the street, outside any officially constituted theatrical places, with selected debris from the city its only stage props, *Postar (Postman)* worked to simultaneously engage an actual and a fictional Mostar, reproducing and producing the city through a set of stylistically varied spatial stories.

Performance Near the Street: Reproducing Mostar

I had been creating original performances with youth in the Balkans since 1995, when the idea for *Postar* arose from a walk in the city. As I stood with

McElvany, my artistic collaborator, on a small stone bridge overlooking the city's remains, we discussed theater as a site of remembering, envisioning an original performance that could momentarily put together Mostar for participants and audience. Over several months in 1997, McElvany and I worked with eight youth from Mladi Most and a third collaborator, Geoff Sobelle, to develop a piece that bore witness to the youths' experience while seeking to avoid a replication of their trauma. As architects of the project, we worked to build a performance with a void.

In generative workshops, participants decided that the piece would be about Mostar without directly referencing the city or the war that had divided it. A simulacrum, a "not-Mostar," would take Mostar's place, as the structure of the piece followed life in "the City" before, during, and after an event that was "not-the-war." This mythic Mostar, performed in the "real" Mostar, evolved around signs of the city and communication within it: maps, street signs, and the delivery of letters. *Postar* thus engaged conceptual, perceived, and lived space, alluding to while often inverting a variety of sites in the city. Stylistically, the piece worked to defamiliarize individuals, objects, and signs of power. Actors created archetypal characters, masked figures, transformative images, and enactments of their own histories in a sometimes chaotic mix of the allegorical, expressionist, symbolic, and surreal.

As relative outsiders to the city, we as directors tried to point toward the operations of our own power in constructing the piece, to maintain some of the show's scaffolding. We each entered the stage space at select moments to add costume pieces, manipulate props, or narrate a particular passage from inside an empty television set, further framing the fictional terrain through our introduction and construction of archetypal characters. The ensemble developed these characters with broad physical gestures and little psychology, featuring exaggerated movements that drew attention to vocations rather than inner lives. A Map Maker and Sign Maker signified the city's conceptual space-makers. A mafioso-like Café Owner, a Banker, and Woman With Money stood for systems of capital control within the city, the People With Influence. A Herzegovine Housewife and her Street Kid daughter represented the everyday life of the city. And an Everyman Postman navigated his way through its shifting terrain.

In the "pre-event" section of the piece, the Postman established the representational space, setting up character relationships through the delivery of letters. While he was instrumental in mediating this space, events soon undermined the Postman's agency. Other actors donned masks and variously represented their character/archetypes and past selves, while the Postman remained the one figure who did not undergo a physical transformation. He seemed acted upon rather than acting in the events surrounding

him—similar to how the young participants had themselves experienced the war. Too young to fight in or to comprehend events, they could only bear witness to the moment when their identities violently shifted, when the war ruptured their senses of belonging. One particular shared memory served as the basis for representing this shift in *Postar:* our effort to point toward a traumatic break without directly reproducing the experience for participants.

According to ensemble members, even during fighting in other areas of Yugoslavia, no one in Mostar believed there could be a war. One actor, Kenet, explained, "We used to go outside and wave at the JNA [Yugoslav army] airplanes as they passed overhead. This was our army, and we were so proud of it. How could our army shoot us? We never believed it would happen until it did." Violence transformed Kenet's metonymic identification of the planes with Yugoslavia, from "our army" to "our enemy." Reference to this shift and the consequent sense of absurdity experienced by partici-pants commenced in *Postar* with a comic brawl. The Postman's delivery of letters not only established an initial setting and social relations in the piece but also reflected the external rise in tensions leading up to the war, partic-ularly over the control and production of space. The Banker and the Café Owner disagreed over the naming of the café: Would it signify conceptual, capital control (the Banker, Lana's Café) or lived, proprietary control (the Owner, Bambo's Café)? Other characters aligned themselves with opposite sides of the dispute until a physical fight broke out. The Street Kid bran-dished her squirt gun, the Sign Maker threatened all with her menacing paintbrush, the Banker and the Woman With Money hauled chairs above their heads as the Sign Maker and Map Maker swung two wooden boards up toward each other. At this point, the action slowed to reveal an image of the Old Bridge, constructed from pieces of the set that were themselves debris from the city. The image held for a moment until the Street Kid shot three times at its center. As the bridge collapsed, the Street Kid picked up a paper airplane, one she had constructed earlier from a letter stolen from the Postman, and floated it toward the now cheerily waving crowd. The sound of the plane transformed to a menacing drone as formerly waving hands began to shield faces. The crowd stumbled backwards, knocking over ele-ments of the set and scattering pieces of the city, while donning featureless masks for the "after event" portion of show.

The violent transformation of identity experienced by participants, signaled by the masks, arose from a representational rupture. In the terrain of memory, the JNA plane had stood in for the country, for a unified, pro-tective state of Yugoslavia founded on Tito's platform of unity and brother-hood. In the spatial story related by participants and alluded to in *Postar,* the jet as metonym was displaced from an association of the individual with

a particular national identity ("our army") and veered instead toward an association of absence, to a voided identity.[7] This metonymic shift from "Yugoslav" to "Other" signaled not only a transference of signification but also a manipulation of ideology. The newly produced conceptual space of Yugoslavia literally and figuratively displaced young Bosnians.

As an emblem for the individual loss of control experienced by ensemble members during the war, the Postman referenced this shift in identity and the violence that produced it. At the same time, the character alluded to everyday impacts on communication in the official drive to segregate and conceptually reproduce Mostar. After fighting and mapmaking in the early 1990s effectively partitioned Bosnia into three political entities, telephone and postal systems split up as well. Phone companies charged international rates for calls across Mostar's east/west border, and letters from one side of Mostar to the other were rerouted through distant cities in Serbia and Croatia. Postmen in Mostar had to navigate the city's changing street names. It remained challenging for a theatrical representation to match this level of everyday absurdity, but we tried. In *Postar's* representational space, the Postman had a nightmare following the brawl, in which the People With Influence transformed into more surreal, threatening figures, opening and discarding all of his letters. The Postman awakened to find himself in a pile of undelivered mail. He tried desperately to distribute the letters, but changes within the city thwarted his efforts. Mailboxes no longer functioned, everyone had moved (or been moved), and all of the street names had changed. The Map Maker stoked the Postman's mounting frustration by handing him an updated city plan each time he passed. After finally resorting to calling names aloud, the Postman eventually stumbled across three letter recipients: Iris, Lana, and Hajdi. They proceeded to remove the signs of their archetypal characters to read these letters as "themselves," as other ensemble members reconfigured the stage space with their bodies.

McElvany and I had worked over several years with participants to create allusory performances rather than direct testimonials, in part because of the ineffectiveness of language to access the past several years. "So much of the experience was impossible to articulate, impossible to describe," explained Mesa, the actor portraying the Postman. Physical metaphor became a way for participants to express impressions rather than recreate experiences, with associative resonances beyond individual stories. In *Postar,* for example, Iris created an image expressing both the physical location of her imprisoned brother and the emotional separation she felt from him. Four women wearing featureless masks stood side by side with arms raised as another actor peered through, searching for but unable to meet Iris's eyes. This image, like others generated for *Postar,* arose from workshops focused on letters, objects

of communication signifying physical absence. We asked participants to bring in their favorite line from a letter that they felt comfortable sharing with the group. Working with masks and physicality, we developed and incorporated several of these moments into the show, all of which represented the difficulty of communication across boundaries during and immediately after the war.[8]

One ensemble member, Lana, received her letter after a brief visit with a friend from across the city's new dividing line. During the war, the Red Cross intermittently set up a tent in the border zone, allowing women only to meet in this literal no-man's land. Visitors had to follow strict procedures, signing in and getting stamped and numbered before spending a few minutes with each other, a strategy that defined them within their distinct, proper spaces. But Lana's theatrical retelling resisted that which was deemed proper. In her impressionistic representation, two young women located each other across a distance, then came together to collapse into each other's arms, taking in details of each other's faces, and finally exchanging letters. Time allowed them this moment of resistance, conceived space forced them to separate, and they reached for one another while moving backwards out of the tent space, defined and guarded by two masked officials. In this spatial story and its retelling, the letter bridged a void while remaining a template of division. Hajdi's scene worked more directly with physical metaphor to tell a story of political separation from and momentary connection to an actress she had worked with from the Bosnian Serb Republic.[9] The ensemble created a linked wall through which she and the letter writer struggled to grasp hands. As they touched, the wall broke briefly apart. Hajdi (as herself) and Minja (as Sanela) then shared lines from Sanela's letter about the difficulty and importance of communicating across borders. The wall snapped back into place as the two young women backed away from each other, eyes locked. Both stories produced a kind of relational topography, mapping out and acting out the connection between two politically separated individuals. Their representation provided an opportunity for the letter writers to experience the space they had written into, to create a tangible connection to that which separated them, and to experience in representation that which was impossible to articulate, impossible to describe.

Letters functioned as witnesses to absence and as efforts to transcend conceptual borders—as real objects laden with symbolic attachments. But *Postar* also worked with what theater director Tadeusz Kantor (1993) refers to as "REAL OBJECTS." Kantor, a painter, writer, and director in post–World War II Poland, insists that abstraction "disappeared in the period of mass genocide" (p. 211). Mere representation lost its power, and artists had to work with the "Real or POOR object," one "almost bereft of life," about to be discarded, functionless, and therefore artistic (p. 211). Kantor offers

several examples of such objects: a cart wheel smeared with mud, a decayed wooden board, a scaffold spattered with plaster, a kitchen chair. Without having read Kantor before developing *Postar,* we happened upon a selection of remarkably similar objects discovered in Mostar's streets: a rusted bicycle wheel, two decayed wooden boards, a paint-smeared stepladder, two kitchen stools, and a broken picture frame. These poor, real objects hearkened toward rich, lived space that existed outside the representational frame, but also to a past life that existed only in memory. Thus, while Kantor's objects retained their tangible object-ness, we chose to suggest a possibility of transformation in our space of representation. The stepladder served as the Housewife's window, the Postman's bookshelf, and a giant chicken in the Postman's nightmare. The window frame changed from the Woman With Money's mirror, to a picture in the Housewife's home, to the Housewife's new doorway after "the event." The objects brought pieces of Mostar into the theatrical counterspace, suggesting through their imaginative transformations various possibilities for rebuilding the city. In the final scene, the actors proposed both a material and a social reconstruction, using pieces of the set as well as verbal set pieces from the show to call for a mutually enacted rebuilding.

After establishing their sense of displacement, the nightmare that followed the war, and fragmented attempts at meaning making through a series of spatial stories told through undelivered letters, the actors removed their masks. Together they picked through assorted debris on the stage—broken boards, an old television, envelopes, a ladder on its side. They reconstructed the demolished set, and as they did so one actor stood to recall lines from a poem that had opened the show (translated from Bosnian):

> What is this city? City of poets, jokers, thieves . . .
> It is true that the city is being reconstructed,
> But bridges, buildings, and parks never made a town;
> What made it was the people living in it.

The poem arose from a workshop exercise about Mostar that led to a depiction of the city, and its theatrical simulacrum, as a negotiation of history, architecture, and daily activities—of lived, conceived, and practiced space. To the ensemble members, the city embraced Turkish and Austro-Hungarian occupation, elements of eastern and western European culture and design, swimming upstream in the Neretva River, the art of wit and verbal trickery, and the ongoing practice of living its borders. The poem called for this lived spatial practice to continue, to produce a new city. In performing the

poem, the actors extended their address to *Postman's* audience, crossing the representational frame to call for a practiced reconstruction of Mostar. They asked the audience to transfer their agreement, the agreement that allows for the production of fictional space, to produce a nonfictional space. Working together outside the representational terrain, this counterspace of possibility, audience, and actors might together produce a different "real" Mostar.

Audience makeup and reaction to the show rendered this potential agreement even more possible. Though the performance and festival took place in east Mostar, several of our actors and their friends lived on the west bank. *Postman* thus brought together individuals from both sides of the city and indeed from throughout Bosnia, eliciting a series of spatial practices that resisted the new order in Mostar and Bosnia. Over the summer, McElvany, Sobelle, and I had worked in the Bosnian Serb Republic as well as within the Muslim-Croat Federation, using theater as a means to bring together youth, mainly through shared videotapes of their performances.[10] The process had proved difficult, particularly in the more ultranationalist and closed areas of the Bosnian Serb Republic. When invited to attend our Mostar performance, Kile from Banja Luka, who had served in the Bosnian Serb army, claimed that he would require a battalion of tanks to accompany him. Danka from Srbinje ("place of the Serbs") had not left that city for six years and cited fear of Muslims and Croats as the reason she would not be present at our performance. Much to our surprise, both Danka and Kile appeared at the show's opening, their attendance helping to yet again reimagine Bosnia. They joined youth from Sarajevo and other areas of Federation Bosnia, German students, international volunteers working in various organizations in Mostar, and teenagers from east Los Angeles participating in the festival.[11] This diversity of attendance at least temporarily remapped the conceptual dividing lines of the city. The audience makeup also conspired with location to further negotiate identity and meaning in Mostar. We performed on the steps of the newly rebuilt puppet theater, which was haunted by its past as a Jewish synagogue. The hillside location overlooked the Neretva River and west Mostar: All of Mostar framed *Postar* as the show reciprocally framed and potentially reproduced the city.

Producing "Mostar"

Our performance was not, of course, the final word on Mostar's ongoing production. In a peculiar addendum to *Postar,* a documentary film about our rehearsals produced yet another version of the city. The filming of our practice

occurred as part of a contest for two-minute features about European countries. In this somewhat unconsciously poststructural event, the most semiotically dense production of place would triumph. The Sarajevo film-maker Benjamin Filipovic required even more extreme visual density for his two minutes, as he documented eight different border-crossing youth projects in Bosnia-Hercegovina for 15 seconds each. He framed our project in Mostar with four shots, averaging less than four seconds apiece.

Filipovic began by shooting our ensemble walking down the street, bear-ing masks and musical instruments, as Spanish tanks carrying deadly serious soldiers drove beside us. We proceeded to our outdoor rehearsal space, a shelled statue conveniently located next to Mostar's frontline street. Filipovic then cut to a shot of ensemble members Mesa and Hajdi crossing this border from east to west Mostar in order to join our rehearsal. The next shot featured a performer drumming as two tanks pulled away behind him. In the fourth shot Mesa and Hajdi crossed a rebuilt chain bridge, temporarily filling the space of the Stari Most, just as a young Mostarian jumped from its tremendous height into the chilly waters of the Neretva below.

We conspired with Filipovic to fake almost every element of this docu-mentary. To "establish that we were a theater group," we grabbed whatever instruments and props we found in our indoor rehearsal space. We never worked outdoors in the west, as this could have endangered our mixed group of participants, but ensemble members had agreed to a one-day sus-pension of this rule. The tanks, conveniently passing by as we strode to our conveniently fragmented space, had actually been precisely directed. The sol-diers, who normally lounged lazily atop the tank, smoking and chatting with passersby, now performed a sterner, more "soldierly" stance, rifles raised to attention. When we reached our fake site, the tank driver radioed his col-leagues so that two other armored personal carriers would pass through the next shot. Though Mesa lived in east Mostar, and indeed had to cross the frontline street to reach rehearsal, Hajdi lived on the west and did not. Finally, Filipovic paid the young man to jump from the temporary Old Bridge at the precise moment that Mesa and Hajdi began to cross to Hajdi's nonexistent home. Despite the illusions and fakery, the resultant documen-tary, replete with gutted buildings, armored tanks, fragments of the old bridge, and theatrical border crossings, conveyed "Mostar" more strongly than any 15-second framing of real time in the city would.

But what is this city?

Filipovic had neither the time nor the capacity to wait for Mostar to emerge, so he forged an image of Mostar predetermined in his imagination, reproducing a space that had already been mediated by mapmakers and

image makers. The pedestrians and performers in this movie had no choice in the path laid out, the audience no input into Mostar's future. The filmic image froze the city through an illusion of movement.

Postar was not innocent of image manipulation. Like the conceptual production of space, theater achieves its power by declaring one thing another, by changing signs and names. Mostar becomes "the City." The space in front of the puppet theater becomes a living room, a café, a nightmare, a jail, a memory. This infiltration of space does not guarantee resistance; indeed, the theater often operates strategically as a cultural institution fashioning and reinforcing a particular identity and heritage, an operation that requires visibility, stability, and often a theater building. One of the first edifices to be constructed in west Mostar was a national theater. In a village near Mostar, amateur performers revived a historical play hearkening to and forging ties to a particular Muslim past. In its "proper" place, theater creates and maintains culture. Outside this propriety, performance can invert official culture in a more nomadic, tactical manner; performance can become a practiced space of resistance.

Prior to the war, the Youth Theater of Mostar had sponsored an International Theater Festival. For two decades the festival had brought together performers from throughout Europe and Yugoslavia in Mostar's numerous theater buildings. After several years' hiatus the festival returned, though the proper places for performances, the theater buildings, had all been destroyed. So performances borrowed space in the haunted shells of former Mostar: a bombed-out cinema, the husk of a luxury hotel, the steps of an old synagogue. Playing in these gutted foundations, the festival celebrated a different conception of the city, temporarily envisioning a new space. As part of this festival, our performance of *Postar,* of a postwar *Postman,* played with the foundations of power, producing a variety of spaces filmic, theatrical, and imaginary. But was it just an exercise?

Seven years after our performance, the actor who had played the Postman posed this question as we walked the streets of Mostar. Now a published poet, translator, and teacher of the blind, the post-Postman turned to me and asked, "What do you really think about this performance? Was it just some kind of exercise?" We skirted bulldozers, upturned cobblestones, and forbidding fencing. The city was again under reconstruction in preparation for the July 23 bridge reopening, and there was so much symbolic residue to exhume on our journey. I thought about the last time I had seen Mesa cross the bridge, in a filmic reconstruction. I thought about our recent trip to Sarajevo and about a man who just keeps running, running through the city.[12] How can I answer such a question? It was an exercise, but not only that. It was an exercise in imagination, an effort to produce an image of the

city that did not preexist and was not officially conceived. This imagining undergirds the power of tactical theatrical representation.

The city is again changing, upended in preparation for the new Old Bridge's reopening. Pedestrians are now warned against crossing this bridge when they come to it, as the space must first be marked by official narrative before individuals initiate their own spatial practices. The material under-writers of the project, the United Nations, will feature prominently in defin-ing the new city through its new bridge. Secretary General Kofi Annan will narrate the bridge's reopening, marking its presence as part of a new world order of international reconciliation. George Bush may make an appearance, perhaps hoping that the image of a reconciliatory bridge between the west and its Muslim neighbors might replace that of tortured Iraqi soldiers. Whatever occurs, the city will be reproduced yet again, awaiting further pro-duction through performance, practice, and the exercise of everyday power.

Notes

1. The wars in former Yugoslavia were, for the most part, neither civil nor ethnic. Drawing on and responding to past conflicts, oppressions, and anxieties, the Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic acted in the name of the Yugoslav National Army to initiate aggression against the breakaway Slovene and Croatian republics in 1991, then later in 1992 against Bosnian Muslims and any Bosnian who supported Bosnia as an independent multicultural state. The differences among "Croats," "Serbs," and "Muslims" in former Yugoslavia stem from historical religious affiliations and impe-rial alignment rather than ethnicity; Croatians affiliate with Catholicism, Serbs with Eastern Orthodoxy. All are South Slavs, speaking basically the same language. Many Bosnian Muslims, who are mostly secular, now prefer the appellation *Bosniak*. The terminology I choose in this essay shifts depending upon context and the historical moment about which I am writing.

2. As might be imagined, delicate geopolitical negotiations are required to recon-struct the Stari Most, highlighted by the plethora of stolidly named international bodies associated with the project. Shortly after the bridge's destruction, UNESCO launched an appeal for its rebuilding. About eight years after this appeal, recon-structive work actually commenced. UNESCO oversees the project along with an International Commission of Experts (ICE) and the grudging support of the Project Coordination Unit (a carefully mixed board of Mostarians). Funds are provided by several European countries and managed by the World Bank. In 2002, the oversight committee selected an Italian design firm, General Engineering, to take on the mate-rial reconstruction of the bridge. By ICE mandate, General Engineering must work alongside a German construction company providing materials, a Turkish company in charge of geological surveys, and a Croatian company responsible for designing the bridge's towers.

3. The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1985) identifies symbolic violence as that which occurs when one group imposes a set of ideas and symbols on another through, for example, education, enslavement, or colonization.

4. Early one morning in 1992, one of the actors in our production of *Postar* was awoken by an armed Bosnian Serb militia group and informed at gunpoint that he and his family had five minutes to leave their home in Caplina, about 30 minutes south of Mostar. Mesa does not consider himself Muslim or practice Islam in any way; he sees himself as a partisan and poet. Though he did not identify himself foremost by his Muslim religion, it was for his name, Mesa—Mehmed, Mohammed—that he was forced to leave his home, his identity forged externally through violence.

5. Before the war, residents of Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia spoke regional dialects of the language then known as "Serbo-Croatian." After the territories descended into war, each region began redefining its language as "Serbian," "Croatian," or "Bosnian," often fetishizing minor differences among them. These efforts toward linguistic distinctions are complicated by the fact that Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats spoke the Bosnian rather than Serbian or Croatian dialect of the former "Serbo-Croat" language. Most Bosnian Serbs also wrote with Latin rather than Cyrillic script, though political authorities have now enforced changes in many Serb-controlled areas of Bosnia.

6. Though January 2004 marked Mostar's formal municipal reunification, and the Convertible Mark can now be spent throughout the city, west Mostar still maintains its own phone and primary school system.

7. The psychoanalytic theorist Jacques Lacan (1986) asserts that metonymy inherently implies a veering from signification, allowing for a displacement rather than replacement of meaning. In a system of power that relies on the production of signs, the ability to manipulate language becomes a key to discerning how power operates. Thanks to Geoff Sobelle for pointing me toward ideas about metonymic displacement and the infiltration of theatrical space.

8. Another communication difficulty we negotiated involved language. I speak a minimum of Bosnian, and co-directors Sobelle and McElvany speak practically none. We relied on English as a common language among participants and ourselves, though actors performed in Bosnian.

9. The Dayton Accords allowed for two political entities within the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina: the Bosnian Serb Republic and the Muslim-Croat Federation. Herceg-Bosna existed as an additional shadow state in federation territory.

10. For additional depiction and analysis of these workshops in the Bosnian Serb Republic, see Kuftinec (1999).

11. Co-director Geoff Sobelle, originally from west Los Angeles, commented on the parallel between Mostar and Los Angeles. Though there are no border guards, residents from east and west LA rarely mix.

12. There is an older man in Sarajevo who dresses in jogging gear from the 1980s and runs and runs all over the city with a piece of fruit in his mouth. He just runs. And, apparently, he has been doing so since the war ended. It seems to me an evocative emblem of the inexplicable trauma of three years of siege.

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