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'THE THRILL OF ESTRANGEMENT'
ETHNICITY AND THEATRICAL REALITY IN *LES AMERTUMES , COMBAT DE NEGRE ET DE CHIENS* AND *QUAI OUEST* BY BERNARD-MARIE KOLTES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY DAVID HAMISH FANCY

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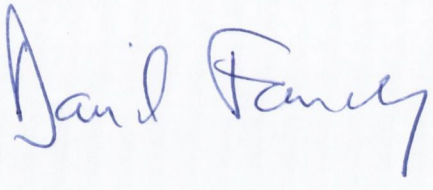

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SUMMARY

This thesis consists of an analysis of ethnicity and modes of theatrical reality in three plays by French dramatist Bernard-Marie Koltès, made possible by a convergence of critical strategies from postcolonialism, phenomenology and semiotics. I trace a variety of progressions related to questions of the representation of ethnicity and theatrical reality from Koltès' earliest play, *Les Amertumes*, through to the first two of his plays staged by French director Patrice Chéreau, *Combat de nègre et de chiens* and *Quai ouest*. The analysis of *Les Amertumes* consists of an exploration of how certain important tendencies related to essentialist protrayals of identity in the later two plays are very present in Koltès' earliest creative project and vision. Most significantly, Koltès' early work as a theatre practitioner, and his expectations about how his audiences should receive the theatrical event, are explored with a view to understanding their bearing on his later playwrighting. I bring to bear a variety of theoretical models on the text and evidence from the productions, including discussions of semiotics, phenomenology, and logocentrism in the history of acting theory. Special emphasis is placed on *Les Amertumes'* central character, Alexis, who shares many traits with the central characters of the later plays.

In the second chapter I apply postcolonial theory to a discussion of *Combat de nègre et de chiens* and to evidence from the various voyages that inspired Koltès to write the play. I suggest that the play's central black character, a dramaturgical descendent of Alexis from *Les Amertumes* named Alboury, bears the markings of a hegemonic representation of 'blackness' which has resulted from the colonial discourse. I explore how, despite Koltès' expressions of anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism in interviews and in written statements, 'blackness' in his plays is invariably both mythologized and pathologized. In the second half of the second chapter, I discuss the representational import of Patrice Chéreau's staging of the text, in particular Chéreau's apparently intended implosion of theatrical reality, and the way in which he helped create the role of Alboury extended in many ways to representational tendencies evident in the text.

The third chapter investigates the progressions that take place in both Koltès and Chéreau's representation of 'blackness' and ethnicity in the text and staging of *Quai ouest*. Although Koltès was dissatisfied with the exoticism and romanticism in the production of *Combat*, I extend upon the explorations of the preceeding chapters to demonstrate that any changes in the schema of the representation of ethnicity in *Quai ouest* serves simply to further promote a mythologizing and pathologizing vision of blackness and non-white ethnicity. I discuss how the central black character of Abad bears close resemblance to Alboury and Alexis before him.

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INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation, I will analyze the representation of ethnicity and models of theatrical reality in three plays by Bernard-Marie Koltès (*Les Amertumes*, *Combat de nègre et de chiens*, *Quai ouest*) through a convergence of critical strategies from the fields of postcolonialism, phenomenology and semiotics.

In a series of what Heiner Müller described as "enormous texts" (1990, 12), French playwright Bernard-Marie Koltès (1948-89) orchestrated encounters between characters determined to a significant extent by their ethnicity. These characters include: the mix of 'black' African and 'white' European characters in *Combat de nègre et de chiens* (1983), the 'black' African, 'white' European, Asian, Hispanic, 'mixed race' and 'aboriginal' South-American characters in *Quai ouest* (1985), the 'black' and 'white' duo in *Dans la solitude des champs de coton* (1986), and the mix of Arabic, North African, 'white' and 'black' French characters in *Le Retour au désert* (1988).[1] Koltès' novels, *La Fuite à cheval très loin dans la ville* (1984) and *Prologue* (1991) also deal in some cases at length with questions related to ethnicity. Moreover, an important monologue entitled *La Nuit juste avant les forêts* (1988) consists of the lengthy address of an Arabic man to an invisible interlocutor. A variety of earlier dramatic texts, which Koltès would later disavow as juvenalia[2], present situations directly or indirectly involving notions of ethnic difference. Even Koltès' final completed play, *Roberto Zucco* (1990), although it stages few encounters between characters of varying ethnicities, features underlying constitutive dynamics within the (white) character of

[1] I include here the opening paragraph of Roger Little's recently published survey of relationships between black men and white women in Francographic literature. Little's statement is equally appropriate for the study at hand: "WARNING: you are now entering a high-risk zone. This book picks its way as judiciously as it can through a mine-field of prejudice, myth and stereotypes. Most of its key terms require qualifying quotation marks: 'black' (shades of brown), 'white' (pink and blotchy, when not red with anger, green or grey with sickness or blue with cold), 'race' (supposed subdivisions of the one and only human race), ... and so forth. Constant reminders would be tedious, however, and the inverted commas will generally be taken as read after the first few occurences" (2001, 1).

[2] These include *Les Amertumes* (1998 [written 1970]), *La Marche*, (unpub. [written 1971]), *Procès ivre* (2001 [written 1971]), *L'Héritage* (1998 [written 1972]), *Récits morts* (unpub. [written 1973]), *Des voix sourdes* (unpub. [written 1974]), *Le Jour des meurtres dans l'histoire d'Hamlet* (unpub. [written 1974]) and *Sallinger* (1995 [written 1977]). Patrice Chéreau suggested recently that "Toutes les pièces qui ont été écrites avant *La Nuit juste avant les forêts*, dont *Sallinger*, Koltès ne souhaitait pas qu'on les monte ni même qu'on les lise, c'est ce qu'il me disait." [Koltès didn't want any of the plays that were written before *La Nuit juste avant les forêts*, including *Sallinger*, to be staged or even read, that's what he told me] (Chéreau 2001, 25).

Roberto Zucco which can be demonstrated to be informed by Koltès' career-long use of ethnic difference to heighten dramatic tension. Despite the many publications devoted to Koltès, most of which have appeared in France, the implications of the role ethnicity plays in the texts with which this study will be dealing remain insufficiently discussed.[3]

An exhaustive study of the representation of ethnicity in Koltès' work could not, I believe, be accomplished in the number of pages available for this dissertation. However, essential groundwork for such an eventual and more complete study can be usefully undertaken by beginning with the study of the representation of one of Koltès' recurring and consuming interests: the black man. Indeed, he asserted in 1986, following the production of *Quai ouest*, a text that revolves in many ways around the presence of a silent black character, that:

> Il me semble qu'ils seront, inévitablement, présents, jusqu'à la fin, dans tout ce que j'écris. Me demander d'écrire une pièce, ou un roman, sans qu'il y en ait au moins un, même tout petit, même caché derrière un réverbère, ce serait comme de demander à un photographe de prendre une photo sans lumière.(1986b, 63)
>
> [It seems to me that [black people] will be inevitably present in everything I write, until the very end. To ask me to write a play, or a novel without including one, even a very small one, even one hidden behind a lamp-post, would be like asking a photographer to take a picture without any light.][4]

Isaach de Bankolé, one of Koltès' friends and the actor who played the role of the black character in the 1985 première of *Quai ouest* as well as later roles from Koltès' repertory, spoke recently of Koltès' fascination with blackness. He noted in 2001 that Koltès' interest served as a locus for the playwright's own ability to endure the marginalization suffered as a homosexual and person living with AIDS, as well as a means to invoke the powerful unconscious connection with experiences from his youth:

> The non-white person, particularly the black person, appears in Koltès as a kind of mirror that reflects a significant portion of his own feelings and emotions. The stranger is this reflection, his reflection, that he perhaps needed because he felt 'cornered' in France, 'cornered' with respect to his origins, his society... He was anxious in the face of the Western world and was therefore very attached to and interested in societies where metaphor and myth are part of reality... It seems to me that Africa and Africans were a significant part of Koltès' fascination for so-called 'primitive' cultures. This 'exoticism' was a way for him to bring to the surface emotions that were buried in

[3] Some major critical texts devoted to Koltès do refer to the question of ethnicity, but not with the type of sophistication I hope to apply to the subject. These texts include Gauthier (1996), Bon (2000), Bident (2000) and Desportes (1993), and will be further discussed when relevant.

[4] All quotations and texts by Koltès and Chéreau will, when indented, appear first in French and then in English in brackets. When not indented, translations will be provided within the text. Some major letters and subsidiary texts by Koltès appear in appendices following the conclusion. Texts by others, including actors, critics and journalists, appear only in translation. Unless otherwise noted, the translations of French text into English are those of the author.

his past, in his childhood. (Bankolé 2001, 51)[5]

This attraction to blackness seems to have even extended to the realm of envy. French director Patrice Chéreau, whose productions of four of Koltès' major texts played a significant role in the playwright's rise to prominence, noted that "Lui, il était capable de dire qu'il n'avait qu'une seule envie, c'est d'être Noir lui-même" [He really only had one wish, and that was to be black himself] (Chéreau 1991, 36). For his part, Isaach the Bankolé noted that "Koltès is a brother of mine. ... and sometimes I wonder if Bernard didn't choose me as a friend as a way of making a 'negative' of himself, as if he wanted to be born black" (Bankolé 2001, 51).

Regarding Koltès' vision of blackness as evidenced in his texts, Claude Stratz, Patrice Chéreau's assistant director for the French première of *Combat de nègre et de chiens* at the Théâtre Nanterre Amandiers (1983) explained that

> Il n'a pas écrit un théâtre militant, il n'a pas cherché à défendre les Noirs, il n'a pas parlé en faveur des Noirs, il a fait parler les Noirs. (1990, 23)
>
> [He didn't write politically radical theatre. He didn't try to defend blacks. He didn't speak in favour of blacks. He made blacks speak.]

The insight offered by Bankolé, Chéreau and Stratz brings certain general questions to the fore: what are the risks, for a white person, of representing blackness as a 'reflection' of one's self, as a quality proper to a 'stranger', or as something 'exotic'? Is there not a hint of a certain type of colonialism implicit in the notion that Koltès, according to Stratz, had the ability to 'make blacks speak', with the implication being that, before Koltès' intervention, they were incapable of speaking for themselves?

Following upon the spirit of these general questions, the major thrust of the analyses that follow will be to excavate a number of texts and productions for evidence of colonialist representational strategies and the exotification of non-white ethnicity, specifically blackness. I will proceed by unearthing what Edward Said has called the 'subterranean histories' (Walia, 6) of a number of texts and productions with a view to exploring what I will argue are the almost invisible subtexts that maintain attitudes supporting the larger phenomenon of imperialism and its after-effects. To this end, historical, cultural and biographical analysis will be integral in the discussion as a means of contextualizing the texts and productions. As Said suggests:

---

[5] Koltès spoke of his regard for Bankolé in an interview with Lucien Attoun of the Théâtre Ouvert: "Vous avez beaucoup d'amis?" [Do you have lots of friends?] asked Attoun "Non, très, très peu. Aucun dans le métier. En dehors d'Isaach de Bankolé. ... Il est magnifique. Il est magnifique dans tout. ... Je crois que c'est un très, très grand acteur" [No, very, very few. None in the business, Except for Isaach de Bankolé. ... He's amazing. He's amazing all 'round. I think he's a very, very important acting talent].(Attoun 1997, 38)

> Since the struggle for control over territory is part of that history, so too is the struggle over historical and social meaning. The task for the critical scholar is not to separate one struggle from another, but to connect them, despite the contrast between the overpowering materiality of the former and the apparent otherworldy refinements of the latter. (Said 1984, 331; in Walia, 65)

By focussing on Koltès' texts and their production 'texts' in the context of the wider theatrical and sociopolitical French spheres, I hope to determine exactly *what* Koltès made blacks 'say', and from *where* those voices may have come. Limiting the study to a number of plays in which black characters are prevalent can provide necessary and useful parameters. The two major mature plays and productions I will discuss are *Combat de nègre et de chiens* (1989 [first written in 1979]), and *Quai ouest* (1985 [year of completion]).

Inspired by a brief trip to Africa, the plot of *Combat* is anchored in an allegory of colonialism in which a particular vision of blackness emerges — the black African as a source of resistance to white incursion onto 'native' soil. A black man named Alboury, unwise to the ways of white Europeans, tries to reclaim the body of his dead brother killed under suspicious circumstances on a French-owned industrial site in post-independence French West Africa. Alboury is a no-nonsense individual characterized by his naive and primitivized speech patterns. He is persistent in his demands for the body from the white characters, an engineer named Cal, the compound manager Horn and his partner Leonie, in the face of their mendacity, cruelty and racism. Alboury is honest, firm and rooted in his people and place. He is unspoiled by the corrupt ways of the European characters and yet when he is pushed too far, retributory violence soon follows. The play finishes when Alboury's black comrades guarding the industrial compound shoot and kill the white man responsible for the death of their brother.

Produced two years following *Combat* in 1985, once again at the Théâtre Nanterre Amandiers, *Quai ouest* deals with a reversal of the incursion featured in *Combat*. Rather than tracing the fate of Europeans on African soil, *Quai ouest* stages the encounter between 'third world' populations on 'Western' soil. The plot concerns a group of first and second generation South American illegal aliens who are living as squatters in an abandoned warehouse in a derelict docklands neighbourhood situated in an unnamed "grande ville portuaire occidentale" [port city somewhere in the West[ern world] (Koltès 1985, 7).[6] The would-be immigrants act as vampiric hosts to a corrupt white business executive and his assistant who arrive at the beginning of the play, lost and confused, looking for the river. The executive is fleeing his own white collar crime and would rather drown himself than live to see his reputation destroyed. The non-white immigrants

[6] *Quai ouest* was translated by myself, Joseph Long and Alex Johnston for a production with the Bedrock Theatre Company in April of 1999 at the Project Arts Centre in Dublin, Ireland. I have drawn from this translation for the English versions of the text. I have not included page references to this unpublished translation.

target the white arrivals, conduct shady business deals, and vie to leave the warehouse. Many of their actions appear to be controlled and directed by a mysterious black immigrant named Abad who experiences abuse at the hands of the whites and the other non-white immigrants. In a conclusion similar to that of *Combat*, Abad finally kills those who most offend him.

Koltès' tendency towards the exotification of blackness that forms the basis for this extended critique is not necessarily supported by conservative or colonialist personal politics. Indeed, the recurring appearance of characters of varying ethnicities is complemented in his work — as is evidenced by the above plot sketches — by a series of general concerns proper to that of a European of counter-hegemonic inclination living in the last decades of the twentieth century, including

> the conditions of urban life, the disparities between rich and poor, natives and immigrants; ... relationships between first and third worlds and the global dimension of large commercial organizations that bind us all together, whether we like it or not; racism, crime, violence; fears of things falling apart... . (1997a, xvi)

In *Combat* and *Quai ouest*, Koltès wrote about a situation, still existing, in which the Western world is haunted by the ramifications and repercussions of the activity of imperial colonization. His orchestrations of characters of different ethnicities — characters who can generally find no grounds for productive communication — underscore what Anne McClintock described in the early 1990s as the "prematurely celebratory" quality of the once-hyphenated term 'postcolonialism' (1996, 256). By staging these frequently explosive encounters in highly metaphorical liminal locations — locations which are at once peripheral yet paradoxically pivotal — and by exhibiting points of convergence, disjunction and frequent eruption in the culturally inflected quality of his characters' speech, Koltès attempts to force the Western world to confront, as Homi Bhabha has suggested is necessary, "its post-colonial history, told by its influx of postwar migrants and refugees, as an indigenous or native narrative *internal to its national identity*" (1994, 6). The intricate figures of difference and identity, past and present, interior and exterior that Koltès weaves in *Combat* and *Quai ouest* deposit a complex legacy of representational and dramaturgical strategies for the reader and spectator to untangle and contextualize. In general terms, I set out to consider what Mireille Rosello calls the "nightmarish entanglement of left-wing and right-wing racism that sometimes find uncannily similar stereotypical expression" (1998, 118).

I have chosen to employ the term 'ethnicity' when discussing the differences in physiognomy and culture that are used to associate individuals with groups as well as to make distinctions between groups, rather than using the associated term 'race'. Although specific histories of each term will be explored when relevant, the term 'ethnicity' is generally recognized as containing a reflexivity regarding the constructedness of the

phenomenon of difference between human groups, as well as being more neutral than the term 'race' which resonates with echoes of the genocidal policies of the National Socialists, the simplistic nineteenth-century Tupperian triumphalism from the English tradition (Sollors, 275) or, from the French tradition, the earlier reductive biologism of Buffon's hierarchizing of humanity from his *Histoire naturelle* volume dedicated to man (Todorov 1993, 96).

A variety of recurring themes in work preceeding *Combat* and *Quai ouest* point towards questions of ethnic difference. As will be explored extensively in the body of the dissertation, an important aspect of Koltès' understanding of ethnicity is his belief that individuals from different heritages cannot generally get along. This inability to have mutually understanding encounters begins in his early work with the representation of constant strife between members of families, before it is universalized outwards in later texts to include notions of perennial struggle between members of the greater 'human family'. His first play, *Les Amertumes* (1998 [1970]), the *Procès ivre* (2001 [1971]), followed by *L'Héritage* (1998 [1972]), and finally *Sallinger* (1995 [1977]) all deal explicitly with this phenomenon of exploded families. A first chapter dedicated to *Les Amertumes* will explore this phenomenon in depth.

Foreshadowing his later assertion that he liked theatre because 'it was not life', Koltès frequently set his texts in nebulous locations with vaguely foreign sounding locations peopled by characters with non-French sounding names. The characters in *Les Amertumes* have vaguely Russian names, as do those in *Procès ivre*, a text inspired by *Crime and Punishment*, while *Sallinger* is set in a dreamlike version of the United States. It is especially in *Sallinger*, a play that features the fractious relationships within a family divided over questions of war, love and family loyalty, that characters begin making blanket assertions about other cultural or ethnic groups. For example, Henry, a friend of the family, speaks of his dislike of Americans:

> Les Américains me dégoûtent. Toujours à vous toucher, à vous filer de grandes tapes dans le dos, à éclater d'un gros rire amércain et sympathique, sans raison. Ils vous embêtent toute une soirée, veulent vous serrer la main, ou n'importe quoi comme cela, et après éclatent de rire, sans raison: parce qu'ils sont Américains. Les gens qui éclatent de rire me dégoûtent. Même les gens qui rient sans éclater, tout bas; même les gens qui disent: ce jour-là, à ce spectacle, ou en lisant cela, ou avec un tel, j'ai rigolé. On est entouré de gens qui veulent rigoler au mauvais moment. D'abord, ils commencent toujours par rigoler, pour montrer qu'ils sont ouverts et pleins de richesse intérieure. Le plus salaud des Américains rigole d'abord vingt fois avant de vous parler, pour montrer qu'il est ouvert. Les gens sympathiques et pleins de richesses intérieures me dégoûtent. (1995, 36-37)
>
> [I hate Americans: they're always touching you, giving you big slaps on the back, bursting into some big happy American laugh for no reason at all. They bother you all night: they want to shake your hand, or something like that, and then — they burst into laughter for the simple stupid reason that they happen to be American. People that burst into laughter make me sick.

> Even people who laugh without bursting into laughter bother me. You know: the ones that say "Oh, remember that day at the show", or "I read this or that" or "I talked to so-and-so and I had a good laugh". We're surrounded by people who just don't know when to laugh. First, they always start by joking around, just to show you they're some kind of walking bank account of inner riches. The dumbest fucking American will always chuckle at least twenty times before saying two words even — just to show you how open he is. I hate happy people full of inner fucking riches.]

In addition to emerging tensions between ethnicities and national groupings within the West, the beginnings of anxiety about the realities of the 'third world' begin to be heard from the characters in *Sallinger*. The Caucasian main character, Red [Le Rouquin] discusses the dangers of fighting wars in Asia to a friend when he explains that he will get "leurs maladies, dysentrie, amabiase, typhoïde, choléra, paludisme, fièvre jaune, maladies à secrets, surprises coloniales" [their diseases: dysentry, amoebiasis, typhoid, cholera, malaria, yellow fever, secret sickness, imperial surprise"] (ibid., 103-104), signaling the launch of Koltès' long-term exploration of the relatedness of foreignness and pathology, both literal and metaphorical, as well as references to France's participation in various colonial conflicts.

The question of foreignness as blight begins to become particularly apparent in *La Nuit juste avant les forêts* (1988 [1977]) which Koltès felt was the first 'real' piece of theatre he had written in his own voice (Bradby 1997a, 76). This sixty-three page monologue features the anxieties of an Arab living on the periphery of French society, desperately speaking of his marginalization, occasional ostracism and announcing his caricatured machismo plans for revenge. To deal with his experience of exclusion the nameless character calls for the formation of an international trade union that would protect people from being shuffled all over the globe in search of work:

> à coups de pied au cul ils te déménageront, le travail est là-bas, et encore là-bas, plus loin et encore plus loin, jusqu'au Nicaragua qu'ils te pousseraient, à l'aise, puisque ceux des pays comme cela, on les pousse bien au cul à l'aise et qu'ils débarqueront ici, ... tandis que le travail, lui, il est toujours ailleurs. (1988, 48-49)
>
> [see ya, a kick in the ass and you're gone, where the work is: out there, farther out, even farther than that even, they'll kick your ass to Nicaragua, easy like, because people from countries like that, they get their asses kicked all the way here... while the work is always somewhere else]

The character's nostalgia for the solidarity of trade unions points towards an important social trend in France at the time in which Koltès wrote the piece. Whereas earlier generations of immigrant workers had been socialized in part by participation in unions which gave them a role in a larger community, post-industrialized France was no longer organized around the opposition between workers and employers, making integration even more difficult (Toner, 160). Moreover, while immigrants to France in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were frequently Catholics of European origin (Polish, Belgian, Italian), immigration from the 1950s onwards had been in many cases

from former African or Arab colonies, contributing to the immigrant's physical 'visibility' to the white European '*français de souche*' (ibid). Indeed, Koltès' writing on the alienation experienced by this individual was both true to the spirit of the time[7] and prescient of more inter-ethnic conflict to come, as attested by a variety of recent publications on the crisis of France's multicultural society with titles such as *Une Société fragmentée?* (Wieviorka, 1996), *La France éclatée* (Jelen, 1996) and *Pourrons-nous vivre ensemble?* (Touraine, 1996).

In the midst of the "bordel" [fucked up mess] (1988a, 63) of a world in which he is ostracized for his ethnic difference, the character in *La Nuit juste avant les forêts* is desperately looking for something pure, "quelque chose qui soit comme de l'herbe"[something that would be like grass] (ibid.). His search for renewal, his evocation of questions of exclusion and the references to international labour distribution are some of the textual realities which lead to questions of the play's inherent 'politics'. When asked if it was indeed a 'political play' Koltès replied:

> Non.. Mes deux pièces, en fait, se situent dans un contexte idéologique, c'est clair. Mais en même temps ce n'est absolument pas ça qui m'a fait faire quelque chose. Comment dire? Ce n'est absolument pas ça qui puisse être générateur d'un texte. Ce qui est générateur d'un texte, c'est clair, c'est l'émotion, c'est le désir, des choses de ce type et rien d'autre.
> (Prique 1997, 240)

> [No... My two plays [including *Combat de nègre et de chiens*] are in fact situated in an ideological context, that's evident. But at the same time that's absolutely not been a motivation for writing. How could I say this? That absolutely cannot be what generates a text. It's evident that the thing that motivates a text is emotion, it's desire, it's things like that and nothing else.]

His further assertion that *La Nuit juste avant les forêts* is an "expérience de langage pur" [experiment with pure language] (ibid.) that is simply rooted in, rather than marked by, a political context recurs over the course of his career with reference to a variety of other plays. This belief in the non-political nature of his work will serve in the main body of the dissertation as grounds for investigations of the issue of the ethics of representation of otherness.

Koltès further explored the search for a place 'qui soit comme de l'herbe' beyond the restlessness and alienation of exclusion, both familial and societal, in a novel entitled *Prologue* (1991). The story revolves around the search for the history of Mann, a vaguely indeterminate character who begins the novel sitting under a tree in a dreamlike post-biblical Babylon shortly before he is given his name by a visiting American tourist. An occasionally scientific tone in a first person narrative suggests a mock ethnographic account of Mann's genesis: his unlikely 'virgin' birth by Nécata, a prostitute who

[7] Stolcke notes that from the ealy 1970s owards "France was beginning to experience racism as ever-growing numbers of immigrants arrived from its ex-colonies" (2).

practises only anal sex, and the man who adopts him, Ali, a bongo player and employee at a Turkish bath who helps usher large groups of arrivals to deaths they appear to be seeking. After a long description of the distinguishing characteristics of a variety of ethnicities (a Jamaican's dreadlocks, a German's particularly dry fashion of speaking, the immigrant Senegalese's love of the game of Georgia Slim) (ibid., 52) the narrator describes Mann's own ethnic mix as being "un conglomérat d'incertitudes" [a conglomeration of uncertainties] (ibid.). The reader may wonder whether this multi-ethnic individual, the son of an ironic reversal of the Virgin Mary, "naquit pourvu d'atavismes si compliqués qu'ils s'annulèrent entre eux" [born with such complex roots as to annul each other] (ibid., 53) is a kind of incarnated hope for a peaceful future beyond the violent images of ethnic strife and visions of death camps evoked by the dying masses arriving at Ali's Turkish bath. However, the narrator-ethnologist searching for Mann's roots recurringly asserts that Mann does not in fact exist, that he may simply be a myth (48, 54, 69), suggesting Koltès' skeptical undercutting of his own utopian drives (Lanteri 1997, 116). What remains at the end of the narrator's quest is the atemporal and universal sound of Ali's bongo, a language beyond languages whose memory, unlike Mann's, exists in

> le coeur de l'homme, dans le claquement des feuilles contre les branches, dans le silence glacial du vide avant la création et dans les explosions du cosmos qui rempliront peut-être l'éternité. (69)
>
> [the heart of man, in the clattering of leaves against branches, in the glacial silence of the void before creation, and in the explosions of the cosmos which may continue for eternity.]

One central component of Koltès' notion of the utopian, an urge prevalent throughout his work, is that of a central character, like Mann, the nature of whose identity makes him bearer of some kind of greater authenticity. The importance of this aspect of Koltès' work for understanding his conception of ethnicity cannot be understated, for the increased authenticity of later central characters is determined to a significant extent by their ethnicity. As will be discussed at length in the second and third chapters, colonialist representations of ethnicity generally emerge from such binarist conceptions of the heightened value of one ethnicity over another, which historically have frequently been a convenient means of justifying the subjugation of one ethnic group by another.

In view of the centrality of this concern, I have dedicated the first chapter to Koltès' very first play, *Les Amertumes*. Evidence from its initial staging by Koltès in 1970 indicates that a character with a higher level of ontological 'authencity' attempts to heighten that of the audience by means of a poetico-spiritual emergence of the same flavour as the 'cosmic explosions' referred to by Koltès in the last lines of *Prologue*. Studying the 'emergence' of the central character will be central to understanding how later black central characters in *Combat* and *Quai ouest* operate *theatrically* with heightened

authenticity, in an embodied form, in addition to their textual reality.

Koltès' recognition of the ephemerality of the utopian, especially as it relates to this search for what Anne-Françoise Benhamou has aptly described as a Barthian 'désir du neutre' beyond all struggle (1991), will recur throughout *Combat* and *Quai ouest*, as well as in later texts. This vision of a kind of neutrality is one which, if actualized, would permit the avoidance of the inevitable relationships which constitute the very actuality of ethnicity, for as Werner Sollors has indicated, "It makes little sense to define 'ethnicity as such,' since it refers not to a thing-in-itself but to a relationship: ethnicity is typically based on a *contrast*" (288). The fulfillment of Koltès' utopian drive would place his characters in a situation in which they would not need terms such as 'ethnicity', for identifications between ethnic groups "rest on antitheses, on negativity" (ibid.). In that the term 'ethnicity' contains an ambivalence between its inclusive (people in general) and exclusive or dissociative meanings (other people), there is a risk that unless the inclusivity is stressed when dissociation is identified (black people are not white people, but both groups are still people), one of the groups, usually from the group to which the speaker does not belong, is rendered implicitly or explicitly less than human (ibid.).[8] I will discuss this type of distinction, seemingly necessary for any form of identification of otherness, in later chapters, both with particular reference to its dovetailing with the Manicheism at the heart of colonialist ethnic distinctions that Koltès' mature work adopts, as well as by challenging this self-same binarism with the application of certain tools from post-structuralist thought.

Distinctions between various ethnicities, and the representations of these distinctions, are necessarily historically and socially bound and contingent. Soller's description of the very emergence of ethnicity as a category provides a context for beginning to understand the representation of ethnicity in Koltès' work:

[8] For comparative purposes, it may be useful to refer here to Stolcke's discussion of how "Modern Western racism rationalizes claims of national superiority or sociopolitical disqualification and economic exploitation of groups or individuals within a polity by attributing to them certain moral, intellectual, or social defects supposedly grounded in their "racial" endowment which, by virtue of being innate, are inevitable. The markers invoked to identify a "race" may be phenotypical or constructed. Racism thus operates with a particularistic criterion of classification, namely "race," which challenges the claim to equal humanness by dividing humankind into inherently distinct groups ordered hierarchically, one group making a claim to exclusive superiority. In this sense racist doctrines are categorical, concealing the sociopolitical relationships which generate the hierarchy. "Race" is construed as the necessary and sufficient natural cause of the unfitness of "others" and hence of their inferiority. Sociopolitical inequality and domination are thereby attributed to the criterion of differentiation itself, namely, "their" lack of worth, which is in "their" race. As a doctrine of asymetric classification racism provokes counterconcepts that demean the "other" as the "other" could not demean the "self." Mutual recognition is denied precisely because the "racial" defect, being relative, is not shared by the "self." And that is the point. By attributing unequal status and treatment to its victim's own inherent shortcomings, this doctrine denies the ideological character of racism itself." (7)

> Together with nationalism (a similar phenomenon which, however, stresses territoriality), ethnicity has spread with particular intensity since the times of the American and French Revolutions and remained a powerful force in political history ever since. ... Ethnicity and ethnocentrism may thus be described as modern Europe's and North America's most successful export items. The process of modernization and urbanization which weakened specific forms of familial, vocational, and local belonging strengthened the commitment to more abstract forms of generalizing identifications such as ethnic and national ones. (Sollers, 289)

One of the results of the aftermath of imperial and colonial aggression is the amplification of the importance of the very notion of ethnicity in determining difference between groups of individuals, a phenomenon described by ethnopsychoanalyst George Devreux as 'antagonistic acculturation' (Sollors, 289). The second and third chapters will deal in part with this amplification of notions of ethnicity in colonial and post-colonial contexts, particularly the 'barriers' between ethnic groups, as they pertain to *Combat* and *Quai ouest*, plays based in part on Koltès' own experience of encounter with different ethnicities during travels to Africa and the United States.

However, even before his extensive travels of the 1970s and 1980s Koltès experienced some of the remarkable ethnic tension of his day as a child living in Metz, in eastern France. In 1958, a number of high-ranked military officials, led by General Massu, attempted a coup as a desperate final measure against the impending emancipation of Algeria, then a French colony. The coup failed and Massu and his paratroopers were sent to Metz by De Gaulle, inaugurator and President of the Fifth Republic. Tensions were high between the paratroopers and Arabs, leading to fighting, acts of terrorism by both Arabs and the Organisation de l'Armée Secrète (OAS), events to which Koltès would return in his second-last full-length play, *Le Retour au désert* which I will discuss briefly in the conclusion. Koltès would note about this period that

> Il y avait cette violence-là, à laquelle un enfant est sensible et à laquelle il ne comprend rien. Entre douze et seize ans, les impressions sont décisives, je crois que c'est là que tout se décide. Tout. Moi, évidemmment, en ce qui me concerne, c'est probablement cela qui m'a amené à m'intéresser davantage aux étrangers qu'aux Français. J'ai très vite compris que c'était eux le sang neuf de la France, que si la France vivait sur le seul sang des Français, cela deviendrait un cauchemar, quelque chose comme la Suisse. La stérilité totale sur le plan artistique et sur tous les plans. (1999a, 115-16)
>
> [There was that violence, to which a child is sensitive but cannot understand. Impressions experienced between the ages of twelve and sixteen determine a lot. I think that at that age everything is decided. Everything. As far as I am concerned, it seems clear that it was this type of encounter that made me more interested in foreigners than in the French. I learnt young that they were France's new blood, and that if France were to depend on the blood of the French alone, things would become a nightmare, something like Switzerland. Complete sterility on the artistic level, and on every level.]

The events to which Koltès had been witness as a young man in Metz were part of the Algerian War, officially ending March 17th, 1962 with the peace treaty of Evian and the

eventual emancipation of Algeria, a French colony since 1830. The conflict had undermined with finality the values that "for so long had defined French national identity: those of greatness and her liberating and civilizing mission" (Gildea, 29). This mission can be traced back to French Enlightenment thinkers such as Condorcet who proposed schemas by which to measure other societies, taxonomies which could distinguish "people close to their origins... from people who tend towards perfection" (Todorov 1993, 253). Tzvetan Todorov posits that Condorcet's vision was exemplary of the spirit of the age as he proposed

> progressive unification of the universe: he dreams of a uniform legal code for all nations, a homogenization of humanity. The way to achieve this universal and homogeneous State is by spreading enlightenment... And this is how the modern colonialist project is born, a project that resembles missionaries' dreams more than the practices of the sixteenth-century conquistadores. Its goals are not to occupy and subjugate but to integrate the colonized countries into a universal project, and to raise them by this means to the level of the motherland. .... It is the noble mission of the European nations to eliminate savagery from the face of the earth.
> (ibid., 254-5)

For a variety of reasons, the reality of the civilizing project was different from what had been imagined by the philosophers. Chief among these was the ethnocentric presumption that the proposed 'universals' would be taken up without challenge by the colonized. Although it took place two centuries after Condorcet's proposals, the Algerian war was arguably a result of the same type of thinking. Even the socialist government of Guy Mollet elected in 1956 argued, against what might be expected and even more ardently than parties and intellectuals of the Right (Gildea, 22), for the universal liberating and civilizing mission of the French Republic to continue in North Africa. Mollet's socialists asserted that "it was the responsibility of the French Republic to provide individual liberty, democracy which progressively brought Muslims into the fold of citizenship, secularization instead of religious fanaticism, civilization instead of medieval backwardness" (ibid.).

In addition, the means used to carry out such a project were often in flagrant contradiction with the core objectives of the project itself. With respect to France behaving in Algeria like the occupying Germans had done fifteen years previously in France, one socialist wrote in 1957 that "It is abominable to hear said by some twisted minds that there is some sort of comparison or analogy between the present Algerian rebellion and the former French Resistance... It is beyond all doubt that the French army is the logical continuation of the action of the French Resistance as a whole" (ibid).[9] The

[9] This stunning contradiction, a subordination of morality to politics accompanying an assertion of the need to subordinate politics to morality, is not without precedent in French throught and history. In his landmark study of France's relationship with the rest of the world, Tzvetan Todorov discusses de Tocqueville's nineteenth-century argument against slavery which, ironically, depended quite heavily on an argument for colonization. De Tocqueville felt that if slaves had a right to freedom in French colonies, colonials also have the right not to be economically ruined by their freedom. He became one of the first promoters of colonialism by asserting that freed slaves should remain subjugated. (1993, 194)

documented number of deaths of Algerian liberationist sympathizers[10] and other civilians indicates the inherent and fatal contradictions of the civilizing project adopted by successive French governments. Koltès explores the core of such contradictions and the paternalist and greedy impulses that fuel them through a variety of characters in both *Combat* and *Quai ouest*, and once again later in *Le Retour au désert*.

What representations of so called ethnic 'otherness' had appeared on France's stages before Koltès? The representation of what is called ethnicity, specifically blackness, has a long history in French theatre. Sylvie Chalaye informs us that "During the 1960s and 1970s, the first important work on the representation of the Black in France appeared in literary studies... While many studies have appeared on English language theatre, to date, and as far as we know, no systematic study has appeared about the representation of the Black in French theatre" (1998, 12).[11] Chalaye's work provides a rough history of the representation of blackness on French stages from 1550 until Genet's *Les Nègres*. She discusses how representations of blackness in late medieval European literature and drama were heavily influenced by what had preceded them: occasional references to black people in classical literature as those with 'burnt faces', as well as the medieval characterizations of 'Ethiopians' (blacks met on crusades) as monstrous cyclops, horned devils or creatures prone to spontaneously changing their own sex. Africa was generally seen as a location resistant to Christianity, therefore most likely the home of Satan, and thus fifteenth-century French court dances are recorded to have featured black dancers embodying the infidel North African Muslim (ibid., 17-27). In an important trend, blacks were used as counterpoint to whites in Baroque art and also as a means of titillating the curious higher society, while the increase of the slave trade in Africa in the early

[10] Gildea describes one particular series of events: "An article of the constitution of the Fourth Republic, which restated that of the constitution of 1791, promised that France would never undertake a war of conquest or use force against the liberty of any people. The methods used by the French to reimpose colonial power suggest either that colonial wars were not envisaged by this profession of faith or that the inhabitants of French colonies were not considered to be people. When the French blocked the demands of moderate nationalists in Algeria, the initiative passed to the radicals under Messali Hadj. The French deported Messali on 25 April 1945, which provoked demonstrations on 8 May 1945. At Sétif riots broke out, during which over 100 French settlers were massacred. The French replied with brutal represion, killing between 1,500 and 8,000 Algerians according to French sources, 45,000 according to Algerian ones. At the end of the same month the French bombarded Damascus, killing hundreds. The bombardment of Haiphong on 23 November 1946 killed about 6,000. The repression of the insurrection in Madagascar, which began in March 1947, killed 11,200 officially, and possibly between 100,000 and 200,000. As in the French revolutionary wars, the French brought 'liberty' and 'fraternity' at the point of a bayonet and from the barrel of a gun." (Gildea, 18)

[11] She continues: "This field of enquiry was first opened by Roger Mercier's seminal research on early images of black Africa in French literature which was published in 1962 and is devoted to the eighteenth century [Roger Mercier, *L'Afrique noire dans la littérature française: les premières images* (XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles) Université de Dakar, 1962], then the work of Léon Fanudh-Siefer on colonial literature since Loti, in which the researcher studies Loti's influence on the development of the negro myth [Léone Fanoudh-Siefer, *Le Mythe du nègre et de l'Afrique noire dans la littérature française de 1800 à la 2e guerre mondiale,* Klinckieck/Ed. du CNRS, Paris 1968; réed. NEA, Adjidjan/Dakar/Lomé, 1980].

seventeenth century led to various representations of blacks as tragic victims of an irremediable malediction, particularly in Elizabethan theatre and the Spanish theatre of the Golden Age (39-42). An important anonymous French text that emerged in the seventeenth century presages some of Koltès' emphasis on revenge in his representations of blackness by featuring an angry slave wreaking vengeance on the family of a former owner. Seventeenth-century stage representations of blackness generally avoided showing the plight of the enslaved African, but rather showed black princes or cherubims, projections more appealing to the aristocratic eye. With regard to representations of Africa itself, Corneille situates some of his texts in Ethiopia (*Andromède*, 1650) or 'la Numidie' (*Sophonisbe*, 1663) (61) without making much reference to the specificity of surroundings, as will be the case more than two centuries later with Koltès' *Combat de nègre et de chiens*.

Black characters generally appeared more frequently in eighteenth-century French literature and philosophy as Enlightenment writers and thinkers pondered their plights, but these figures were rarely, if ever, given the status of character in French drama which pursued exoticism and the contrast of savagery with 'civilized' values (69). Marivaux's inclusion of two black characters in *La Dispute* (1744) is a case in point, as they represent purity and virginity as far as matters of civilization are concerned (78). Rare attempts at portrayals of blackness that might do justice to the material reality of blacks in Europe, such as Olympe de Gouge's tale of escaped slaves, *Zamor et Mirza, ou l'heureux naufrage* (1781) were suppressed by institutions such as the Comédie-Française (90-101) for seasons before finally only running very briefly and to much protest. Following the French Revolution, the events leading to the abolition of slavery in 1793 produced a variety of texts which argued for emancipation. Not surprisingly, these texts did not show blacks in their pre-slavery social context, but, as always already tainted by the experience of slavery (110, 141). The practice of slavery was re-established in the colonies in 1802 as a response to labour unrest and growing liberationist movements, such as the independence movement which would result in freedom from Napolean's rule being claimed by Haiti in 1804 (150-51). As a result, the black character became almost taboo on the French stage so as to avoid embarrassing displays of the bloody colonial struggle. Early and mid-nineteenth century theatre featured plays about the questionable practice of slavery (such as George Ozaneaux's *Le Nègre*), but there was much concern from organizations such as the Ministry of the Interior about the danger to the colonies in having such texts staged (158). Texts which demonstrated blacks to be submissive, such as the figure of Friday in Brazier, Dartois and Rougemont's staging of *Robinson dans son île*, were supported by the government (159).

The first black actors appeared, to a certain amount of critical disbelief, onstage in France

in 1847 in a comedy entitled *Malheureux comme un nègre* which ridiculed the French colonists in Africa. A number of reviewers suggested that the use of actual black actors was preposterous and the experiment was not repeated anytime soon after (220). The staging of a variety of versions of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, very popular with the public and press, generally promoted the notion of blacks as simpletons and children in need of being civilized. Twenty years later after France's defeat by the Prussians in 1870, the country turned to its colonies with hopes of renewed wealth and glory. An entire generation was bathed in images from works such as Jules Verne's *Cinq semaines en ballon: voyage de découvertes en Afrique*, which showed the continent to be savage, empty and full of wealth for the taking (257-8). The first half of the twentieth century was witness to exotification of France's African colonies and their populations, from pseudo-African dancing at Montmartre, to black boxers at the circus, through to the exoticism of Apollinaire, Raymond Roussel, and André Gide.

Although critically simplistic,[12] the final chapter of Chalaye's book, covering the years 1945 to 1960, provides a historical synopsis useful for situating Koltès in relation to his direct theatrical antecedents. Chalaye discusses how France's defeat in 1940 demystified the country in the eyes of its African colonies, and indeed on the extent to which de Gaulle depended on Africa for the organisation of the Resistance. As was the case in Algeria, France's eventual liberation had many African intellectuals and activists such as Senghor and Boigny wondering why Africa did not deserve the same liberation from occupation that France had achieved (367). In response to such questions, a kind of colonial guilt set in among French intellectuals and the representation of French blacks beyond the private *théâtre de boulevard* became increasingly limited following 1945. Colonialist representation of French blacks was displaced by images of American blacks victims of racial segregation and lynchings in plays such as *Requiem pour une nonne* (1956), (Camus' adaptation of Faulkner); Boris Vian's *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes* (1948) (a novel which Vian wrote under the pseudonym of an invented black American activist, then adapted for the stage); *La Putain Respectueuse* (1946) by Jean-Paul Sartre; and *Negro Spiritual* (1954) by Yves Jamiaque (ibid 371).[13] Emphasis was placed

[12]Chalaye's critical naiveté can perhaps best be measured by the extent to which she feels that the post-war advertisements for Banania, a popular breakfast food which used to be advertised by the stereotyped face of a black man, are actually devoid of echoes of colonialist representations. She writes that "Rather than being realistic the design is comprised of geometric forms and colour effects. The radiant smile is idiotic, a holdover from colonialist imagery. There are no colonialist or paternalistic clichés, as marketing campaigns can no longer rely, as they once did in the past, on understandings shared in a nation where everyone has the same colonial and racial prejudices." (369)

I would side with Rosello's more convincing argument about the residual racism in these advertisements which are discussed at length in Chapter 2, section 15.

[13] For its part, the *théâtre de boulevard* generally perpetuated colonial stereotyping of black characters during the same post-war period (Chalaye 1998, 370), although some notable work, such as *La Petite Hutte* by André Roussin joined in the questioning of blackness and what it represented that characterized the experiments of the public theatre.

on American cruelty and hypocrisy in these texts, with a polarity evident in Sartre and Camus because of the extent to which social issues were overtly politicized. Sartre's work was accused by the press of being too polemical, and critics condemned simply staging black characters as a way of giving voice to his anti-American sentiment;[14] in some cases Camus avoided questions of ethnic tension and he was, as Koltès would be almost thirty years later, quite determined to aquaint critics of the fact that he was not dealing specifically with issues of ethnicity and race when writing for the stage. "It's true that one of the characters, a servant, is a negro" as he is reported as saying by Paris Presse of *Requiem pour une nonne* (Chalaye, 380) "But the play does not propose to deal with the question of race. Faulkner is too great an artist not to be universal."(ibid).[15]

Even the famous *L'Etranger* features a white person's sense of alienation in the face of the world, echoing a Sartrean sense of metaphysical 'nausea' when the 'thingness' of the world feels overwhelming, when other human beings simply appear to us as objects, or when one feels a disparity between one's self and one's own body (Lazere, 152). The term 'étranger' itself was introduced during the revolutionary period to indicate political enemies and traitors to the revolutionary cause and has maintained ever since its connotation of political disloyalty, particularly during times of war (Stockle 9). It began to be used increasingly to designate immigrants and foreign nationals after the introduction of the first French nationality code in 1899, which differentiated between *francais de souche* and those of Germanic, Dutch, Polish or any other European origin (ibid.). If we read Camus' Meursault to be 'l'étranger', as opposed to the 'Arab' he murders on the beach, the connotative aspects of the term 'étranger' reserved for questions of ethnic difference is diminished in favour of reference to the more apolitical metaphysical strangeness of Meursault's self-alienation. Camus' thoughts concerning what he felt was the novel's most evident conclusion, *ie* that Meursault is punished not for killing the Arab but rather for not weeping at his mother's funeral, suggests the use of the potential inequities of the French legal system when foreigners are concerned simply as a backdrop for explorations of the individual existential angst of the white subject.

Although any grounded assertions regarding the question of Meursault and *L'Etranger*

[14] Jean Paul Sartre's writing about blackness and emancipation was, despite his deferring to other geographical locations, deeply genuine.There is, for example, Sartre's introduction to *Orphée noir* in the prelude to the *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de M.L.S. Senghor*, (PUF, Paris, 1948) in which he states: "What did you expect when you took the muzzle off all of those black mouths? Who was going to sing your praises? Did you really think that all those eyes all our forefathers had lowered by force, were going to gleam with adoraion? These black people have stood up, they are looking at us, and I hope you are experiencing, as I am, the sensation of being watched." (Chalaye, 382)

[15] Chalaye reports that "Camus had in effect completely evacuated the *négrité* of the character of Nancy, the servant who killed the daughter of her mistress, and the blond Tatiana Moukhine who played the role barely had her face blackened... It became clear: Camus had largely changed the focus of Faulkner's novel by reducing the racial antagonism present in this tale of a black woman who murdered a white child" (380).

warrant a full examination, this exploration of the alienation of the white subject (also arguably a central concern in a variety of Camus' other works such as *Caligula* [1945]) is a particularly useful framework in which to understand Koltès' work. There is, to begin with, the experience of the perpetual alienation of travel with which Koltès was personally familiar and which he staged in his exploration of three white people in an industrial compound in French West Africa in *Combat*. Indeed, I will be investigating the extent to which Koltès, in his role as artistic tourist, consciously and unconsciously projects colonial stereotypes onto the black subjects of his work. In addition, it is also worth considering the question of a feeling of estrangement for the white *français de souche* living in a multi-ethnic society. Fred Toner recently explained that "Interestingly, the presence of the immigrant population in France and their increasing visibility has had the effect of bringing to the dominant population an experience of 'alienation' in some ways similar to that of the immigrants" (Toner, 164). This particular form of alienation is one which Koltès mines significantly in *Quai ouest* in his staging of the experience of two white people who find themselves lost in a remote urban location infested with threatening immigrants. My investigation of the play, like that of *Combat* before it, will focus on the ways in which Koltès invests non-white ethnicity with a certain quality of exotic 'authenticity' as a counterpoint to the vacuity of the whites, who have now become as foreign invaders in the settlement of their own country. The study of Koltès' representation of blackness will demonstrate the extent to which he struggled with questions and risks surrounding exoticism, and how even when writing *Quai ouest* he attempted to move beyond exoticist representations of the authenticity of black otherness which there is evidence to suggest he felt had infiltrated *Combat*.

As I will demonstrate, the 'authenticity' of the three main characters in the plays under discussion in this dissertation is based in part on their ability to 'act' more authentically. Since these actions can be understood to result from choices made under difficult circumstances, the work and thought of Sartre, in addition to that of Camus, can also serve to contextualize Koltès' concern with 'authenticity'. Ted Freeman has described the way in which these two were writing in the midst of calls to commitment and engagement from leftist critics (Freeman, 216). They emphasized the role of the individual conscience as the perspective from which the "stark brutality" (ibid.) of the age was witnessed, despite accusations of bourgeois individualism leveled against them by left wing critics. The individual had to make a choice, frequently in a borderline or extreme situation when facing death, about how best to commit to one's freedom. This choice often involved deciding whether or not to endanger the lives of others (ibid.). Camus, as *directeur de conscience*, "sees the human voyager as utterly alone and with nothing to rely upon except the compass of his own mind and heart" (Scott, 13). In the face of such an absence, Camus asserted that individuals "should accept it lucidly, creating their own values in the absence of both God and pre-ordained purpose" (Bradby 1991, 47). Sartre,

who developed an entire theory of individual consciousness in *L'Etre et le néant*, emphasized not the practical struggle for individual emancipation, but rather the liberation of the consciousness through the exercise of individual free will.[16] The following chapters will build an argument that the inherently violent choices made by the three central characters in *Combat* and *Quai ouest* confirm Koltès' dependency on colonialist representations which affiliate blackness with savagery and suggest that black action necessarily results from the thoughtless, brutal enactments of the primitive unconscious.

It is also of import that Camus' and Sartre's plays were in the tradition of *théâtre dialogué* called to task by Artaud in 1947, a tradition which would also soon be challenged by the experimental theatre of Beckett, Ionesco and Adamov (Freeman, 223). Koltès' work is notable for its return to plot and the extensive use of dialogue after the explorations of these last dramatists that generally left such traditional narrative devices behind. It will become evident, however, in the discussion of *Les Amertumes* that some significant elements similar to the work and thinking of those such as Artaud, and the directors' Kantor and Wilson, are also present in Koltès' first play.

When one discusses the theatrical representation of authenticity as it relates to ethnicity, questions surrounding the nature of the 'reality' of the stage images presented come to the fore. Such considerations immediately invite comparison between Koltès and Jean Genet, two dramatists with many convergent interests and concerns. Like Koltès, Genet is reported to have wanted to be black. He is reported to have said to William Burroughs, on a trip to the United States in 1968 to cover the Democratic convention for Esquire Magazine, "I wish I were black. I want to feel what they feel" (White, 515). Indeed, Genet's fascination with 'otherness' was grounded in what he described in one of his later writings, *Le Captif*, to be the 'metaphysical uprising of the native' (Said 1995, 239). Genet's affiliations with oppressed peoples, as evidenced by his support of the Black Panthers and Palestinian causes through much traveling and active participation in a variety of political actions, were manifestly more political than those of Koltès (see White 526-546, and Said 1995), whose more distanced stance vis-à-vis political causes will be addressed in the second chapter.

Genet's plays are comparable to those of Koltès in that "they derive their special theatrical richness from the fact that they all depict people who are oppressed struggling for liberation at a mental, spiritual and imaginative level" (Bradby 1991, 172). However, unlike Koltès' characters who struggle forward by means of strife with, or flight from, one another, the prisoners, maids, rebels, Algerians and blacks in Genet's plays struggle with their oppressive circumstances on "an imaginative rather than an objective plane"

[16] Bradby describes how Camus eventually leaned less to the political left in his assertions than Sartre, and the two split, but "during and after the Occupation both were pre-occupied with the individual's response to his discovery of the absurd" (1991, 48)

(ibid.). In *Les Nègres* [*The Blacks*] (1958)[17], the black characters, led by their master of ceremonies, Archibald, question, by means of ritual and ceremony, the nature of the widespread belief of the superiority of whites over blacks. Archibald explains to the black actors on stage the way in which the difference between theatre and 'real' life can be made more evident: "We shall increase the distance that separates us— a distance that is basic—by our pomp, our manners, our insolence—for we are also actors" (1960, 12).

Genet was particularly aware of the reality of white European culture projecting its desires and fantasies on black people and cultures. *Les Nègres* is designed in such a fashion as to force the audience to recognize the constructedness of these projections. "When we see Blacks," Genet wondered, "do we see something other than the precise and sombre phantoms born of our own desire? But what do these phantoms think of us, then? What game do they play?" (Bradby and Sparks, 68; in White, 494). Indeed, the major investigation of the play, and its major dramaturgical strength, is that not only does Genet denounce clichés associated with blackness, he sets about to destroy those images using the same means that led to their construction: by questioning the nature of representation itself (Chalaye, 385). In view of Genet's understanding of the theatrical *constructedness* of representations of otherness, the explorations of Koltès' representation of blackness will involve a discussion of his vision of representational and theatrical reality. Koltès' lack of self-awareness about the risks of representational exoticism, as well as the interpretation of roles by 'authentic' black people, will impact quite heavily on the eventual portrayal of blackness, and ethnicity in general, in his work. François Regnault, Chéreau's dramaturg, noted that:

> Jean Genet, for love of black people, did not want one black person playing in *Les Nègres*, for fear that they would be drowned in our theatrical corruption. But Roger Blin went his own way. Years later, Bernard-Marie Koltès, who put black characters in (almost all of) his plays, demanded that they be played by black actors, so that no white person would soil the characters. (331)

A number of years before Koltès had his decisive encounters with black people in New York and in Africa, and when he began writing for the theatre in the early 1970s, the French theatre was experiencing the rise of the power of the director, a phenomenon made possible by the protests of 1968 (Bradby and Sparks, xxxiv). A result of this trend of the decade would be "lavishly costly stagings which drew on Surrealism, on painting, architecture, scultpture, installation art, film, opera and dance, as much as on dramatic traditions of play making" (ibid.). The 1970s were a difficult period for dramatists in general, not only because the rise of the director's theatre gave a certain critical focus to stagings rather than texts, but also because the success of devised or collaborative performances meant that fewer scripts were getting to the stage, not to mention a concurrent crisis in the theatre publishing industry (ibid., 40).

[17] Roger Blin's production was the first major theatrical production in France to use only black actors (Théâtre de Lutèce, 1959).

In addition, that *Les Amertumes* was written two years after the student and labour protests of May 1968 is indicative of the extent to which Koltès was, on the surface at least, at odds with some of the dominant aesthetic and social trends of his time. The influence of Brecht had been significant after the war, encouraged by the support of critics such as Bernard Dort and Roland Barthes in the *Théâtre Populaire* movement, who emphasized theatre's role in provoking public revulsion against injustice and tyranny (Freeman, 224). This spirit of theatre as social critique emerged once again with force after 1968. At the time of the student and labour protests, Roger Planchon had invited all theatre practitioners to the theatre he ran in Villeurbanne to discuss the ways in which theatre could respond to the crisis in the country. Koltès' quasi-mystical interest in ontological authenticity in *Les Amertumes*, not to mention his formalism, was almost diametrically opposite in spirit to the statement released from the Villeurbanne gathering which called for manifest political purpose for all forms of art and the implicit recognition that culture is something which can and must change existing sociopolitical relations (Bradby and Sparks, 20).[18]

It is during the ensuing decade when Koltès would write half a dozen plays that his eventual long-term creative collaborator, director Patrice Chéreau, rose to prominence as a result of a number of important productions, such as his staging of Marivaux's *La Dispute*, or Wagner's *Ring Cycle* at Bayreuth, productions which both stressed the modernity of the pieces (ibid., 49). Koltès had been inspired and impressed by Chéreau's work and set out to have the director stage his own, and eventually became well known in Europe as a result.[19] And during the mid 1980s, at the time when Chéreau and other directors such as Ariane Mnouchkine had developed close working relationships with particular authors (Helène Cixous in Mnouchkine's case), "the collaborative relationship [Koltès and Chéreau] enjoyed was the exception rather than the rule" (ibid., 100).

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[18] Bradby and Sparks note that: "From this conference there emerged a large measure of disillusionment about the achievements of the decentralization movement and the expansionist cultural policies of Malraux. ... Two things were necessary, it was argued, and these were set out in a document known as *La Déclaration de Villeurbanne* (The Villeurbanne Declaration). The first was to go out in search of all those people who still thought theatre was not for them; they were baptised 'the non-public'. The second concerned the performances which were to be taken to this newly identified constituency. Rather than the old formula of the the classics with a few modern plays by Brechtian writers, the demand was for a more pro-active conception of culture. In future, the only worthwhile touchstone of cultural value was to be its usefulness to the dispossessed of society:

'Any cultural activity now seems to us to be entirely in vain if it does not have the avowed aim of *politicisation*: that is, to ceaselessly invent, in view of the 'non-public', opportunities for them to raise their poltical awareness, to make a free choice for themselves, to transcend the feelings of impotence and absurdity constantly aroused in them by a social system in which human beings are almost never enabled to invent *together* their own humanity.'" (20)

[19] Chéreau, Jacques Nerson explained, has an ability to bring renown to those he works with: "Just as Midas transformed everything he touched, so does Chéreau who, on account of being currently such a star, immediately turns the authors he works with into stars." (Nerson, 1986b)

Chéreau found affinity with many qualities in Koltès' plays and attitudes, and spoke of Koltès' perpetual restlessness with the status quo:

> Le souvenir que j'ai de lui, c'est d'une rébellion permanente, il aura toujours été contre '*l'establishment*', contre les gens arrivés, contre des gens qui ont du pouvoir. Lui s'est toujours situé de l'autre coté, avec plus qu'une tendresse, une passion radicale pour les gens qui sont rejetés et marginaux. Donc, c'est au-delà d'un point de vue sentimental. C'est un point de vue de rébellion permanente. C'est ça qu'il était. (Bansard 1994, 174)
>
> [The memory I have of him is one of permanent rebellion; he was always against the establishment, against successful people, against people with power. He always positioned himself on the other side, with more than simply tenderness, but with a radical compassion for the rejected and the marginalized. And so he was beyond simple political stances. It was beyond a sentimental point of view. It was a total rebellion. That's what he was about.]

Such affinities moved Chéreau to do what he had rarely done before: stage the work of a living contemporary author. He has stated recently that "Jusqu'à ma rencontre avec lui, je croyais que le théâtre n'était pas, ou plus, accessible au contemporain, ne pouvait pas raconter le monde actuel. Je me trompais." [Until my encounter with him, I thought that the theatre did not, or could no longer, speak to that which is contemporary, could not tell the actual world of today. I was wrong] (Chéreau 2001, 20). Indeed, Chéreau had staged a production of Jean-Paul Wenzel's *Loin d'Hagondange* in 1977, but this was his only foray into staging a play from one of the movements of dramatic writing at the time: the *théâtre du quotidien* featuring Wenzel, Michel Deutsch and Michel Vinaver. Such playwrights were nourished by French translations of a generation of German playwrights, including Achternbusch, Fassbinder and Kroetz, who were influenced by the "critical and subversive" (Mancel, 18) legacy of Büchner, Brecht, Fleisser and Horvath. This new group of German writers had set about to extend the "clinical and poetic exploration of 'the little guy' (the reincarnation of Woyzech and Shweyk), of the 'little woman' (the Brechtian 'mothers') and of ordinary people in general" (ibid.). One hundred years after the naturalism of Antoine, their French contemporaries dealt with 'everyday' concerns of social alienation, the permeating influence of corporate life and the construction of daily speech by social institutions. Such themes were pursued at a much less formal level of poetic density than that employed by Koltès and frequently without the use of plot; in other words, these dramatic strategies were of less interest to the classically inclined Chéreau. Indeed, although Koltès uses slang and familiar turns of phrase in most of his writing, this language usage is, in a sense, emancipated from minimalist realism and invested with "spirit, with a breathless quality that uproots them from their original genre" (Mancel, 19). Mancel continues to articulate this combination of qualities which most likely was of significant appeal both to Chéreau and his audiences:

> Therein probably lies the great force and dialectical energy of the Koltès style of playwrighting: it is the tension between 'art of less' (or 'art of little'), with its everyday words, and the tendency of 'more', of the excess and over-indulgence which the choice of lyricism induces. (ibid)

The examination of Chéreau's staging of Koltès' work in Chapters Two and Three will illuminate the resonance between their theatrical sensibilities and an exploration of the extent to which Chéreau staged the signifying networks regarding ethnicity existent in Koltès' texts. Chéreau's assertion that Koltès and Genet both knew how to "donner la parole à l'autre, savoir faire parler le Noir ou savoir faire parler l'Arabe" [give voice to the other, to know how to make the Black or the Arab speak] (Chéreau 1995, 63) suggests that the director is at risk of the type of exoticism to which Koltès was also prone.

This study of the representation of ethnicity, and specifically blackness, in a portion of Koltès' work will permit me to conclude with some summarizing statements and a vision of the research and reflection necessary to accomplish a full study of ethnicity in his work.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 'Les Amertumes'

Although *Combat de nègre et de chiens* was perhaps Koltès' first play to become well-known in European theatre circles, he had already been writing for the stage for more than ten years when *Combat* was staged in 1983. Koltès explained that "La première fois que je suis allé au théâtre, c'était très tard, j'avais vingt-deux ans. J'ai vu une pièce qui m'a beaucoup ému, une pièce que j'ai oubliée mais avec une grande actrice, Maria Casarès." [The first time I went to the theatre, it was quite late on, I was twenty-two years old. I saw a play which moved me incredibly. The play was forgettable but there was a very talented actor in it: Maria Casarès.] (1999a, 9). The play performed was *Médée* [*Medea*] by Vauthier directed by Jorge Lavelli and staged in Strasbourg in January 1968; and Koltès credited Casarès for motivating him to drop immediately his study of music and journalism and plunge directly into writing for the stage. He wrote to his mother in May 1968 on the subject of his future career:

> Pour le moment — pour moi —, vingt ans, c'est l'âge d'une grande décision; c'est l'âge où je risque ma vie, mon avenir, mon âme, tout, dans l'espoir d'obtenir plus; c'est l'âge où je travaille 'sans filet.' ... Je ne souhaite qu'une chose: c'est d'être capable toute ma vie de prendre des risques et de ne jamais vouloir m'arrêter en chemin. ... Me voici par exemple à la veille de me mettre au service du Théâtre. (1999b, 55-56)
>
> [I'm twenty years old right now. I'm at the age where I have to make a big decision: I have to risk my life, my soul, everything, in the hopes of getting there. I'm at the age where I have to live without a safety net. ... I only want one thing: and that's to be able to take risks all my life. ... Here I am on the threshold of devoting myself to service of the Theatre.]

In 1970, Koltès was twenty-two years old, living in Strasbourg and studying journalism. It was at this point in his life that he set about writing his first play, inspired by Gorki's *Enfance* [*My Childhood*] entitled *Les Amertumes* [*The Bitternesses*]. Koltès staged the play with a group of friends who called themselves the Théâtre du Quai in November of 1970 at two venues in Strasbourg, one of which was St. Nicholas church. Koltès had, at the time, also initiated a correspondence with Hubert Gignoux, the director of the Théâtre National de Strasbourg. At Koltès' invitation, Gignoux attended the staging of the text. Gignoux was impressed by the production, and encouraged him to continue his efforts. "Il m'a dit: "'Continuez! Continuez!' Il a insisté. J'ai écrit une autre pièce. Très

mauvaise d'ailleurs, il me l'a dit. Et puis ainsi de suite. J'ai écrit, j'ai écrit." [Keep on writing!' he told me" Koltès later explained, "He was insistent. So I wrote another play. A very bad one by the way, and he told me so too. And so on. I wrote and wrote.] (Attoun 1997, 27).

Despite Koltès' reservations, Gignoux invited him to study at the school of the Théâtre National de Strasbourg. As the school offered no programme to train writers, Koltès had to study stage management. He would continue to write a number of plays, again based on other works, including plays inspired by Dostoevsky, in such a way that he felt he was training himself in his craft (1999a, 10). The productions of these early texts received scant attention, however, from the professional circuit to which Koltès hoped to gain access. It was the "golden age of the director" in France, as Antoine Vitez would say of the 1960s and 1970s, and less attention was given to new writing than to directors' visions of existing texts, frequently neoclassical ones. Indeed, although Koltès would write a number of other plays between 1970 and 1974 (*La Marche*, *Procès ivre*, *L'Héritage*, *Récits morts*, *Les Voix sourdes*), none of them generated significant interest.[1]

French theatre historian Anne-Françoise Benhamou suggests that Koltès' first production fit very much within the framework of the aesthetic experiments of the time, such as Armand Gatti's Artaudian-inspired 'total theatre' work on the fragmented stage space of ritual, ceremonies and dreams (2001, 46). *Les Amertumes* included a variety of pantomimes and a short ballet that corresponded to the prevalence of image-based rather than text-based theatre in the early 1970s in France (Benhamou 1996, 12). In fact, Koltès was cautious even to call it a play, but rather referred to it as an '*essai*' or an 'attempt' which he hoped would be shaped by a "metteur en scène-guide" (1995a 13; app. B,1).[2] It was most likely a mix of modesty, uncertainty, and the ubiquity of the 'metteur en scène' in the theatrical culture of the time which would make Koltès hesitant to consider *Les Amertumes* a play. He wrote to Gignoux that *Les Amertumes*:

> n'est pas une pièce donc, puisque je ne m'attache pas au texte; tout au plus le texte constitue-t-il un point d'appui dont les interprètes pourront se passer lorsqu'ils n'en auront pas besoin, ou

[1] *Les Voix sourdes* was, however, produced for and aired on radio, featuring the voice of Casarès, the actor who had initally inspired him to write. Yet once again, the play did not generate much interest. Despite their inital lack of visibility within the theatrical community les Editions de Minuit has recently set about gradually publishing, since Koltès death, the four texts written between 1970 and 1974. Bernard-Marie's brother François writes in the opening notes of the 1998 publication of *Les Amertumes*: "We have decided to publish texts from ... 1970-1974 for which a variety of more or less authentic copies are circulating. We felt it was important to publish the original version annotated and corrected by the author" (1998a, 7).

[2] A number of extracts from letters and texts appear both in French and English in the appendices following this dissertation. I will reference both the text, eg. (1995a, 13) and the appendix, eg. (app. B,1) which stands for Appendix B, Item 1. See table of contents for directory of appendices.

transformer lorsqu'il le faudra. (ibid)

[is not a play, because I'm not really attached to the text; at the most the text will constitute a point of support that the performers can abandon when they no longer have use for it, or change if necessary.]

Gorki's original story deals with the first eight years of his life (1868-1876) in a small Russian city now named after him. He describes how everyone in his family was "choked by a fog of mutual hostility" (Gorki, 6) and where "life is one nightmare after another" (ibid., 9). The novel tells of his encounters with various rich characters from his early life, and evokes the world as seen through a small child's eyes by means of a sustained emphasis on the sensations of touch, taste and smell. Koltès' adaptation consists of sixteen brief, intense and occasionally nonsensical tableaux revolving around the explosive tensions experienced within a family, a number of whom have Russian names such as Varvara, Tziganok or Maxime which Koltès took from the novel. Other characters bear names which indicate their position within the family, such as La Vieille and Le Vieux [the Aging Parents]. The piece begins with the funeral of the father. Together, the Aging Parents then struggle to deal with the death of Maxime, Gorki's young brother in the original. The Aging Parents also attempt to protect Varvara from the prying eyes of the Le Boucher de Tombe [The Gravedigger] and the Voyeur. Varvara is hysterical, the parents are cruel and inconsiderate, and Mikail the son complains about wanting to leave the family. Every subsequent scene contains some form of fight or argument, most of which are not resolved by the end of the play.

Alexis, the first of Koltès' central characters, and clearly an adaptation of Gorki's own first name Alexei, acts as a mute onstage observer to the action of *Les Amertumes.* Koltès informed his spectators in the programme notes to the production that, because of his capacity as an observer, Alexis was the figure through whom the audience could enter deeply into the experience of the show (app. A, 1). The text for the sixteenth and final tableau, featured below, indicates that the play finished when Alexis suddenly emerged in a gesture of a final revelation of significance by appearing bathed in "violent" red light, while the other characters "stand frozen" (1998a, 60):

SEIZIEME TABLEAU

Les personnages sont fixes, éclairés par des flashes de plus en plus rapides sur les trois différents lieux.
Soudain, la lumière est violente et rouge sur l'ensemble, et c'est

ALEXIS (ibid.)

[SIXTEENTH TABLEAU

The characters stand frozen, lit by increasingly rapid flashes of light on the stage's three spaces. Suddenly, the light shining on the group is violent and red, and we see

ALEXIS]

Les Amertumes bears traces of the theatre of the absurd, with the strange discordant behaviour of the characters echoing the way in which the theatre of the absurd "rejected the familiar drama of rational debate or conversation in favour of raw images making a direct assault on the sensibilities of the *spectateurs*" (Bradby and Sparks, xxiii). Moreover, the text can, for purposes of contextualization, be usefully juxtaposed with Samuel Beckett's *Play* in that the beginnings and endings of the characters' fractured speech are occasionally dictated by an external light source. Alexis' role as observer and judge of the action serves as an embodiment of the type of scrutinizing force suggested by the lights in *Play*, although the stage directions for the lights in *Les Amertumes* are not as consistently specific as those of Beckett's piece. At the beginning of *Play*, for example, the stage directions provide instructions for how the lighting is to be carried out for the entire production.[3] In comparison, the instructions for lighting in *Les Amertumes* are specific at the beginning and at the end of the text, at which points they call for lights to alternate rapidly between the action on the different platforms. Also, Koltès' instructions do not call for the types of consistent interruptions of speech that characterize the illumination for *Play*. Although the lights for *Les Amertumes* are not as structurally inquisitorial as those illuminating the three urn-bound characters in Beckett's piece, nonetheless a similar claustral and infernal quality haunts both texts. Unlike earlier texts by Ibsen and Sartre (such as *When the Dead Awaken* and *No Exit*), neither *Play* nor *Les Amertumes* begin with 'realistic' action that gradually erodes to reveal some state of frustrated imprisonment underneath. These plays expose their theatrical marrow from the start.

A major distinguishing feature between *Play* and the text for *Les Amertumes* is that Koltès' characters are not locked into Cartesian isolation and sheer retrospection necessitated by their purgatorial state, but rather are engaged in unceasing struggle. Words and actions are not dissociated, and past hauntings lead to a physically active response in the present, a response which the text indicates takes place by means of dances and rituals. This type of perennial activity and struggle, carried out by characters who are frequently strident and largely unaware of self, is significant in that it would serve as the theatrical lifeblood for much of his subsequent work.

It could not be said that there was a traditional plot joining the struggles within the production. However, the short piece initially appears to have had the qualities of an

[3] For a comprehensive discussion of Beckett's *Play*, see Whitaker (1999), 118-123.

allegory as a result of the variety of the dramaturgical devices used.[4] These qualities included both Alexis' role as a cipher for the spectator as well as the pared-down characters embodying, like Jonsonian humours, fear, desire and need. Such creative approaches combined to give the reader/spectator the impression that the action was taking place, not in the outside or 'real' world, but in some imaginary world which, in view of Alexis' role as perpetual observer of the action, could very well be an inner mental one. It is not immediately evident what the allegory actually referred to, although Alexis' emergence at the end of the initial production must have had an important function. A central task of this first stage of the inquiry will be to determine what larger situation or 'problem' this allegory embodied or referenced. In that the full functioning of the allegory was dependent on the production of this 'essai' of a text, I can now turn to deciphering the fuller nature of Koltès' expectations for how the production would bring the text to life.

1.2 The proto-model

In addition to the text proper, Koltès outlined in some short but revealing programme notes a proto-model of his understanding of theatrical reality (1998, 9-11; app. A, 1).[5] This proto-model included specific insight into Koltès' vision at the time of the

[4] Roger Fowler defines an allegory as an extended metaphor in which "characters, actions and scenery are systematically symbolic, referring to spiritual, political, psychological confrontations. ... The 'hero' is typically a cipher, or proxy for the reader, because the action is assumed to take place in the mind and imagination of the audience; 'characters' other than the hero are, rather like Jonsonian humours, demonically possessed by fear, desire, or need (It is often misleadingly suggested that they 'represent' vices and virtues, but when successful they *are* jealousy, greed, modesty, etc. with intervals of neutrality where they get the plot moving or are spectators to the obsessions of others). Allegory's distinctive feature is that it is a structural, rather than textual symbolism; it is a large scale exposition in which problems are conceptualized and analyzed into their constituent parts in order to be stated, if not solved." (1987)

[5] The question of theatrical reality, Pavis informs us, "has been a subject of debate since the days of Aristotle, but no final or definite answer has been found"(1998, 399). For the purposes of this investigation I will proceed in agreement with Matthew Causey's assertion that "The theatre has always been virtual, a space of illusory immediacy" (1999, 383). Causey calls on Herbert Blau, who writes in *The Eye of Prey,* "There is nothing more illusory in performance than the illusion of the unmediated. It can be a very powerful illusion in the theater, but it *is* theater, and it is *theater*, the truth of illusion, which haunts all performance whether or not it occurs in the theater, where it is more than doubled over" (1987, 164-65).

Historically, the question of theatrical reality has been very closely tied to that of verisimilitude, a concept rooted in spectator reception and one which, in classical dramaturgy from the time of Aristotle, has asked "the playwright to invent stories and motivations that will produce the effect and illusion of truth" (Pavis 1998, 431). He later states that, contrary to the classical beliefs, "there is no such thing as an immutable verisimilitude that can only be defined once and for all. There is only a set of codifications and norms that are ideological and are tied to a historical moment, in spite of their apparent universal nature" (ibid.,432).

The general process by which theatrical reality is created can be understood in theoretical terms to be the result of an effect of palimpsest, in which different elements, which have been made overt or ostended, work together to create a density of signs apprehended by the audience according to their individual and cultural horizons of expectation.

possibilities for the production and reception of meaning in the theatre and contains, as will be explored, early evidence of his restrictively foundationalist conception of human identity. The clearly presented schema was supplemented by statements made in the other texts surrounding the production, including introductory texts to the printed version and stage directions (1998a, 13-15; app. A, 1-3) as well as a series of letters about the text that Koltès wrote to Hubert Gignoux, a mentor at the Théâtre National de Strasbourg (1995a; app. B, 1-2). The programme notes and surrounding material reveal how Koltès invited his first audience, into the specificity of theatrical experience as he envisioned it for *Les Amertumes*, and also how he hoped to direct spectators as to the best way of interpreting that theatrical experience.

Years after the production of *Les Amertumes,* when Koltès had stopped directing his own work and wrote for director Bruno Boeglin, actor/director Yves Ferry or Patrice Chéreau, his thoughts concerning the production and reception of theatrical meaning became less systematic than they were at this early stage in his writing career. His considerations then frequently took the form of laconic, poetic or anecdotal meditations. Despite many refinements and much evolution over the course of his writing life, the proto-model of theatricality presented within *Les Amertumes* was the one in which all subsequent theatrical experimentation would, in one way or another, find its source. Indeed, a full understanding of the proto-model will permit an exploration of the way in which the black characters in later plays, dramaturgical descendent of Alexis from *Les Amertumes*, are very much tied to creative objectives Koltès made evident early in his career. At the core of the model, as will be demonstrated, is the possibility of 'authentic' and fundamentally *revelational* encounters between the stage and the audience based on an essentialist conception of human identity.

As the first staging in a church basement was not filmed, we do not have the benefit of even the recorded traces of the actual event. Instead, the actualization of the theatrical model Koltès proposed must be sought by reconstituting the performance text, with the available limited evidence of text, letters and programme notes. This reconstitution will be pursued in order to articulate a few major principles of the staging. Limitations imposed by the lack of evidence will result in the relative impossibility of a full investigation, one which would "[take] into account the situation of enunciation and evaluation of the interpreting subject" (Pavis 1998, 168).

Such limitations do not, however, restrict the usefulness of the investigation of *Les Amertumes*. Just as Grotowski suggested that Artaud was a poet of the possibilities of theatre, so we can understand *Les Amertumes* to be a poem about the possibilities of Koltès' subsequent writing. Indeed, Koltès himself was aware that he might not accomplish what he set out to bring to life: "Voilà ce que je voudrais réaliser" [This is

what I'd like to achieve], he explained to Hubert Gignoux with reference to his creative project in a letter dated January 14th 1970, "en dépit des difficultés que je rencontre" [despite the difficulties that I'm encountering] (1995a, 13; app. B,1). Whether or not Koltès actualized the proposed model is less significant to the study at hand than the nature of the intentions motivating his proto-system. It is perhaps at the beginning of his career when Koltès was untraveled and inexperienced in the theatre that certain grounding conceptions of identity and of theatrical reality, which would continue to play an important role in his work, are most clearly articulated.

1.3 Initial tensions evident in the proto-model: the first binary

There are a number of tensions and contradictions within this proto-model, first outlined in the production's programme notes, which repay close examination. Koltès began this first public written statement about his chosen form of expression by asserting that "Le théâtre est un jeu" [Theatre is a game], and that in order to participate:

> il faut en connaître les règles, les accepter, s'y conformer, faute de quoi on se trouve inévitablement dans la position stupide d'un adulte jeté dans le filet compliqué des jeux d'enfants dont il ignore la trame, et auxquels il ne pourra jamais se mêler ni rien comprendre. (1998a, 9-10; app. A,1)
>
> [you must know the rules, accept them, conform to them, or else you will inevitably find yourself in the stupid position of an adult thrown into complicated children's games he doesn't understand, that he will never be part of, and that he will never figure out.]

Koltès then went on to assert that the most essential of these rules is to "se purifier au maximum des encombrements de l'intelligence" [purify oneself of any encumbering intelligence] in favour of "de retrouver les facultés de perception premières, et d'autant plus profondes qu'elles sont premières" [regaining the faculty of first impressions, ones which are all the deeper in that they are first impressions] (ibid., 10; ibid.).

In this fashion, the initial dynamism evoked by the game metaphor quickly gave way to Koltès' suggestion that one may accede, through "perceptions premières" [first impressions] to "la compréhension parfaite" [perfect comprehension] of the production, "c'est-à-dire celle qui ignore l'exégèse et la justification" [that is to say one which ignores exegesis and justification] (ibid.). He continued by suggesting that the spectator remember that the production, with its dances and explosive encounters:

> se situe dans l'immédiat, — dans l'expérience immédiate — et, de ce fait, devrait interdire, je crois, toute espèce d'appréciation, en ce sens que l'expérience aura lieu ou n'aura pas eu lieu. (ibid.)
>
> [occurs in the immediacy of the moment, in immediate experience, and this fact should, I believe, justify the interdiction of any kind of studied appreciation. The experience will simply have taken place or will not have taken place.]

In addition to the possibility of an unchanging Parmenidean and self-sustaining one

"compréhension parfaite" [perfect comprehension], Koltès proposed the inadmissibility of investigative appraisals of the work. Beyond the simple reception or non-reception of the event, Koltès asserted that "rien ne vaut la peine" [nothing else is worth envisaging] (ibid.).

The possibility of the reception of the dramatic event as a static and perfect state was, Koltès explained, facilitated by the central character, Alexis. He was the "Démonteur du mécanisme" [the one who 'exposed the mechanism'] and the "explorateur des règles du jeu" [explorer of the rules of the game]. Indeed, it was through Alexis by which one could "entrer dans les limites de l'expérience" [enter into the depths of the experience], discovering "l'essence du jeu" [the essence of the game] and "la fragilité des conventions sur lesquelles il est établi" [the fragility of the conventions upon which it is established] (ibid). In this fashion, Koltès appeared to set out a means of bypassing 'intellectual' discussions of reception and proposes a plan for collapsing the spectatorial moment into a kind of 'pure', 'immediate' reception unfettered by the 'cumbersome' density of signs which is conventionally understood to comprise so much of the act of theatrical reception.[6] Despite Koltès' apprehension that his own inexperience as a director, as well as the abilities of his actors, might make the "choc envisagé" [intended impact] of the first production of *Les Amertumes* less than forceful, he affirmed in a letter to Gignoux that "du moins pourrons-nous, je pense, faire entrevoir au public un peu du déferlement poétique, en ayant évité la tentation - et l'écueil - psychologique ou intellectuel" [At least we'll be able, I think, to present the public with a flood of poetic images and words, while having avoided psychological and intellectual pitfalls] (1995a, 14; app. B,2).

The 'immediatist' receptive tendencies in the programme notes reveal that Koltès' articulated convictions on the matter of audience reception were clearly not a 'system' in a sense which would imply a coherent structured analysis of the natures of identity, receptivity and spectatorship. Indeed, it can safely be assumed that Koltès would have been quite pleased if his thoughts were perceived *not* to be systematic, for he had little interest in thinking about phenomena or issues with what he felt was the discursive fashion proper to discussions of 'theorists' or 'specialists' of theatre, writing, or human emotions.[7] As has been indicated, Koltès even disliked discussion of the staging event

[6] I do not want to neglect the more visceral or corporeal modes of reception -- the libidinal and kinesthetic ones -- which can also work in 'opposition', or perhaps more specifically as a complement to the potentially more 'intellectual' semiotizing drives. The phenomenological question is, as I will argue, particularly well-geared towards what I intend to demonstrate to be the contemplative quality of the receptive mode Koltès proposed for his audience.

[7] "Je ne sais pas ce que c'est le 'sujet' d'un livre" [I don't know what the 'subject' of a book is] he would state in an interview in 1984: "je n'ai jamais écrit quelque chose sur un sujet quelconque" [I've never written anything whatsoever on a particular subject] (1999a, 41). He also noted in 1983 with reference to *Combat* that "Je n'aime pas les définitions et je ne veux pas faire de théorie. Sinon, on risque d'écraser la pièce" [I don't like definitions and I don't want to talk theory. Otherwise, you might risk crushing the play" (Thébaud, 1983).

("The experience will simply have taken place or will not have taken place"[1998a, 10; app. A,1]). Although Koltès, somewhat paradoxically, felt strongly that the staging of *Les Amertumes* should be guided by "une idée" or "un but" [an idea or goal] (1995a, 13; app. B,1), it is clear that he felt that any protracted investigations of his production in search of this goal would result most likely in a reduction of the fullness of the experience of the production and, by extension, its potency. A sophisticated theoretical apparatus becomes imperative for describing closely, and yet not reductively, what Koltès suggested could occur within the theatrical reality he was proposing for *Les Amertumes*.

1.4 The relevant critical framework

Despite their lack of sophisticated differentiation, Koltès' concerns about his audiences' search for significance by means of immediacy in his first production point towards the major theoretical debates surrounding the production and reception of meaning in the theatre. Determining the specificity of the receptive drives that Koltès both encouraged and discouraged, discussed by means of their fuller articulation in the fields of semiotics and phenomenology, will allow a mapping of the relationship between them as they manifest themselves in the receptive recipe for his first production. I will demonstrate to what extent Koltès wanted his audience to relate the series of 'moments' making up the production (phenomenological drive) to the wider system of signs operating within the production (semiotic drive) in order to better follow Alexis' trajectory and final revelation.

In addition, and very significantly, it will be possible to explore to what extent the theatrical 'game', as Koltès proposed it, involves 'rules' which connect systems of signs internal to the theatrical experience to the world beyond which informs the game. Understanding the relationship that Koltès proposed between, what for simplicity's sake can be called theatrical and non-theatrical reality, will be essential for a number of reasons. Central among these will be a discussion of the extent to which Koltès desired or rejected a historicization which would lead the characters in *Les Amertumes* to be contextualized within the wider cultural frameworks from which the text and production emerged. Specific attention will be paid to which elements of the 'Russianness' of Gorki's original text have been transferred to *Les Amertumes*. This model for understanding the function and representation of ethnicity within the specificity of Koltès' theatrical world can then be extended and applied to *Combat* and to *Quai ouest*.

1.5 Immediate reception of 'Les Amertumes': the phenomenological attitude

Koltès introduced the 'neo-expressionist[ic]' quality of *Les Amertumes*, to borrow a

term Bert States employs (1992) when discussing phenomenology in relation to the reception of the theatre event, in the first letter the playwright sent to Gignoux:

> L'essai que je vous propose m'a été suggéré à la lecture d'*Enfance* de Gorki: la succession gigantesque de scènes d'images, de mots, empreintes de démesure et qui impressionnent un Gorki réceptif, comme la lumière un papier photographique. Loin de m'attacher à la lettre, j'ai cherché à transposer cette série de chocs, mettant les spectateurs à la place de l'enfant, dans l'attente de la même réceptivité. (1995a, 13; app. B,1)
>
> [The attempt that I've sent you was inspired by Gorki's *Enfance* (*My Childhood*), in particular the gigantic succession of outsized scenes, images and words which impressed themselves upon a receptive Gorki, in the same way light impresses itself upon photographic paper. Far from being literal about my borrowing, I tried to transpose that series of forces, putting the spectators in the place of children, who are naturally in a similar state of receptivity.]

This statement, with its central metaphor of the passive reception of light by photographic paper, resonates with Koltès' wishes for immediate reception. The phenomenological tendency in Koltès' system is initially more in evidence than one which promotes a thinking through of the relationships between the signs visible in the production, and so presents itself as an evident first point of inquiry.

Bert States suggests that the term 'phenomenological attitude' is useful when discussing the "mode of thought and expression the mind naturally adopts when questions relating to our awareness of being and appearance arise" (States 1992, 378). He also distinguishes the tendency of the 'phenomenological attitude' from more positivist notions associated with the 'science' of phenomenology. States discusses how Percy Bysshe Shelley explains that those in whom such a tendency "exists in excess" are poets, asserting also that the attitude is both a poetic and critical tendency, in that it is a means of experiencing and expressing the interaction between phenomena and consciousness. This 'attitude' would appear to be universal in human beings' experience of reality, and can be differentiated from the use of the term phenomenological in its deployment in the critical philosophical writing of thinkers such as Husserl or Heidegger. Although the term 'phenomenological' did not exist in Shelley's time, the phenomenological attitude manifested itself in the poet's description of a liberating "ability to see through 'the film of familiarity' which blunts 'the scene of things' through its reiteration" (ibid., 369).

The applicability of the term 'phenomenological attitude' to instances of both production and reception of meaning (and the elaboration of that reception through criticism) suits the purpose of this overall inquiry which deals with both Koltès' experience in the face of the phenomena about which he writes, as well as his expectation of how his audiences would receive the events. The resultant mapping will provide a sense of, as Shelley describes it, the continuum of interactions between "existence and perception, and ... between perception and expression"(States 1992, 337) and, as might be usefully added in this discussion of the reception of *Les Amertumes*, back to perception again. The last

two steps on this continuum as pertains to theatrical production and reception will be the subject of what follows: namely, the way in which Koltès attempts to model the audience's experience through a specific understanding of theatrical reality, and how he directs spectators to apprehend his creation.[8]

We hear a strong strain of the phenomenological attitude in Koltès' desire, as he explained it in the programme notes, for his audience to "regain[...] the faculty of first impressions" which are "all the deeper in that they are first impressions" (1998a, 10; app., A,1). Koltès' programme notes suggest that he would like his audience to share with him his ability, as States emphasizes is the case of those in possession of, or in pursuit of, the phenomenological attitude, "to put into perceptual brackets 'the accident of surrounding impressions' and see what phenomenologists call 'the things themselves'" (1992, 369). Audience members motivated by what could be characterized as a phenomenological drive in their reception of *Les Amertumes* would, to borrow States' description of a similar encounter, "[posit] a stopping place, as it were *at* the starting place, not of all meanings but of meaning and feeling as they arise in a direct encounter with the art object" (ibid., 370). Koltès' adoption of what can be described as the precepts of the phenomenological attitude can be conceived to be motivated by desire for his spectators to experience a *subordination* of what he felt were the psychological and intellectual 'pitfalls' of meddlesome interpretive spectatorial drives in favour of a more direct and sustained immediatist perception.

In what way do the texts reveal that the adoption of such an 'attitude' and the implied subordination, or even substitution, of one order of reception into another by his audience will augment their experience as spectators? And in what way does this relate to the allegorical qualities of the piece?

In the stage directions to *Les Amertumes* Koltès outlined a schema for the way in which the subordination or even substitution could occur.[9] Koltès explained that there are two essential elements in the production. He introduced the text of *Les Amertumes* as an "Essai de mise en scène, d'une part d'un 'élément impressionnant' et d'autre part d'un 'élément impressionné' [attempt at a mise en scene, one part of which is an 'effecting

[8] Koltès' emphasis on the phenomenological attitude for his writing practice (the first step in the artist's mind from 'existence to perception') is something that will be discussed in more length in subsequent chapters with regard to the locations that inspired *Combat* and *Quai ouest* .

[9] From now on, I will simply use the term 'subordination', an entirely more likely outcome of Koltès' attempts to change reception behaviour than full 'substitution.' I would ask the reader, however, to remember that substitution of one order of reception with another would appear to have been Koltès' objective at this stage.

element'", 'and the other part, an 'affected element'][10] (1998a, 13; app. A,2). Koltès continued by specifying that the effecting element is an ensemble of forces released from the interaction of the characters, while the affected element is the mute Alexis. As we have seen, Koltès wished to situate the audience in such a fashion that its members receive the forces coming from the stage in a state of receptivity like that experienced by children, serving also to imply a bond between Alexis and the audience. By examining the schema Koltès outlined, it is possible to follow how the proposed subordination of certain receptive drives was to take place and discuss its implications for Alexis as well as for the audience.

1.6 The 'effecting' element: Koltès and the logos of identity; the 'forces' animating the 'fragile substance' of his characters

The quality of the interaction of the characters was something about which Koltès wrote extensively in his letters to Gignoux in the period leading up to the production of *Les Amertumes*. Koltès proposed the basis for a *logos* or grounding of identity and presence in his second letter to Gignoux dated April 1st, 1970 (1995a, 14; app. B,2). This basis was, he explained, equally appropriate for conceptualizing the manner by which the identity of both human beings and dramatic characters functioned. Clarifying the issues raised by this letter, a communication designed to help Gignoux understand the text of *Les Amertumes*, can permit the beginning of a differentiation among the variety of functions fulfilled by characters in the still unspecified allegory at the heart of the text and production. Such clarification will also serve to expose the foundationalist assumptions governing the conception of identity embedded in the play's characters.

Koltès' understanding is based on the distinction between what he considered to be 'superficial' psychology and the greater authenticity of characters grounded in what he felt were deeper 'forces' and 'fragile substances'. In the letter, Koltès addressed the 'formalist' quality that Gignoux noted when first reading *Les Amertumes*. In response, Koltès explained that the "raison profonde" [deep reason] for this quality was that "c'est que le personnage psychologique ne m'intéresse pas" [the character based on psychology doesn't interest me] (ibid). Koltès felt that psychologically based characters "au sens traditionnel du terme - c'est- à-dire des combinaisons plus ou moins complexes de traits psychologiques définis" [in the traditional sense of the term, that is to say more or less complex combinations of definite psychological characteristics] (ibid.), were not to be

[10]Koltès employs the terms 'impressionnant', and 'impressionné' which suggests a more comprehensive type of causality (and one within the discourse of 'sense impressions') than the perhaps somewhat more clearly defined channels of cause and effect suggested by the terms 'effecting' and 'affected'. Note also how the connotative difference between the two systems of terms (impressions and effects) relates to the different procedural qualities of phenomenology and semiotics. 'Effecting' and 'affected' will be used for purposes of efficacy without neglecting the investigation of the resonance of more ample channels of reception suggested by 'impressionnant' and 'impressionné'.

found in his text. Therefore, a reader or viewer could not hope to trace "dans quelle mesure tel trait l'emporte sur tel autre, et comment tel trait s'allie à tel autre" [how one (psychological) trait impacts on another, how one trait is related to another]. Koltès asserted that to present characters in such a way, and to demand that actors study either their character or themselves in such a fashion, was to waste energy on "ce qu'il y a de plus petit, de plus mesquin, de moins original en soi" [that which is the littlest, most petty-minded, and least original part of one's self] (ibid.).

How far does Koltès go, in this first *essai* for the theatre, towards creating a type of character, such as those previously seen in the experiments of symbolist drama of Maeterlink or Strindberg in which the psychological specificity of the character is dissolved into a matrix of "shadows, colours and sounds that correspond to each other", and in which "dream and reality are intermingled" (Pavis 1998, 47-48)?

At a first glance, Koltès, like many twentieth century dramatists before him such as Ionesco or Beckett, derided the notion of psychological coherence associated with the classic realist text. Indeed, with such statements about the character as those above, Koltès took up a challenge, first broadly manifested in the twentieth century, to what could be called the 'traditional' dramatic character, an entity which is, as Pavis suggests, "at least in its most precise and definite form, [..] bound to a bourgeois dramaturgy that tends to view it as a mimetic substitute for its consciousness" (ibid., 47). Such coherence also acts as the foundational structure of identity supporting the liberal humanist understanding of the individual. This particular understanding of the individual "claims," in a view currently under attack by ardently poststructuralist critics, "to be the unified autonomous author of his or her own choices (moral, electoral and consumer), and the source and origin of speech" (Belsey 1991, 148).

Instead of, as he describes it, a 'psychologically' based theory of identity, Koltès proposed the intriguing notion of the forces as an alternate theory of identity. At first viewing, the theory implies that these 'forces' that can be equated to the unconscious in

that they seem to emerge from somewhere deeper than the conscious mind:[11]

> En fait, les personnes et les personnages m'apparaissent d'une toute autre manière. L'ensemble d'un individu et l'ensemble des individus me semble tout constitué par différentes "puissances" qui s'affrontent ou se marient, et d'une part l'équilibre d'un individu. (1995a, 14; app. B,2)
>
> [In fact, people and characters seem to me to be comprised in an entirely different fashion. The ensemble of an individual and the ensemble of individuals seem to me to be constituted by different 'forces' which confront as well as combine. Both the equilibrium of an individual and the relations between people are shaped by these forces.]

Koltès' metaphorical exteriorization of these forces from the individuals who experience them can be read as an introduction of the notion of a collective unconscious as well as serving to conflate any distinction between unconsciousnesses of a personal or collective nature. When describing the source of the forces, Koltès suggested that that which motivates them is not destiny, a paradigm which "apparaît trop schématique - et trop simple" [seems too schematic, and too simple] (ibid.), but proposed instead an analogy of "deux bateaux posés chacun sur deux mers" [two boats sitting side by side in two stormy seas] which are "projetés l'un contre l'autre" [projected against one another]. Koltès concluded by noting that the resulting impact "dépass[e] de loin la présence des moteurs" [exceeds in great measure the strength of their individual engines] (ibid.). It would appear then that individuals have 'engines' which provide some of the energy

[11] The terms 'conscious' and 'unconscious' have a complex history and an equally complex range of possible applications. Françoise Meltzer opens a very informative article entitled 'Unconscious' by stating that : "The difficulty with this term is so great that it is already in the title of this essay. If the title read 'The Unconscious', then the term would be a noun — a substantive, a ***thing***. But there is a good deal of controversy about this, and many argue that the unconscious is never a thing, nor a place, and that the term can therefore only be used as an adjective: for example, 'unconscious activity' (but never, the activity of the unconscious)" (147). For the purposes of the investigation at hand, again following Meltzer, the term is best understood to indicate activities within an individual which he or she may not be aware. Any substantive use of the term is not meant to suggest that 'the' unconscious is a thing or an object, but simply arises from a syntactical inevitability.

The history of humanity, as well as the specific histories of religion, literature, psychology and philosophy, are marked by discussions of powers or forces attributed to sources beyond consciousness which affect the behaviour of human beings. Notions of the 'unconscious' became very popular in the nineteenth century as a result of the work of Rousseau, Goethe, Hegel, Schelling, Coleridge, the early German romantics and Von Hartmann, even though the term itself was not always specifically used. Sigmund Freud took up the term in the late nineteenth century and began to postulate a variety of models which 'mapped' the unconscious, including the descriptive model (one from which emerged the 'topographic' metaphors in Freud's work: spatial notions of place and layers), the dynamic model (a complementary model in which the unconscious is determined by the flow and block of energies across the repression barrier dividing the conscious from the unconscious) and the systematic (which he initially left rather vague). The systematic model would later become the tripartite model, with its id, ego and super ego, which some of his later followers, most notably Lacan, understood to be a model which was fundamentally repressive. Lacan felt that the third and synthesizing figure of the super ego denied Freud's earlier more dynamic dialectical model which did not repress the existence of the unconscious. Freud's model has also been criticized by theorists such as Karen Horney and Melanie Klein because of a variety of simplistic descriptions of female sexuality and the assertion that little grls are less civilized than little boys (Meltzer 1995, 147-162).

Further discussion of notions of the unconscious, a very important term for the study of literature and theatre, will be included when necessary.

driving their 'forces', but individuals are largely at the whim of forces originating from outside or deep within them.

This articulation of 'forces' recalls Nathalie Sarraute's use of the notion of 'tropismes', a term borrowed from the biological sciences as early as 1939 "to convey the impulses, emotional, physical or psychological, which precede linguistic expression, and which give rise to both our words and actions" (Bradby and Sparks, 54). Sarraute's stories feature the instinctive interaction of individuals reacting to external impulse and stimuli described in a somewhat scientific tone. *Les Amertumes* seems to be a kind of staging of the hidden substrata of Sarraute's stories which "do not generally contain much action in the conventional sense, but beneath their calm exterior intense activity is taking place which may be extremely violent. They are 'veritable dramatic actions concealed beneath the most ordinary conversations and the most everyday gestures. They constantly bubble up to the surface of appearances which serve both to mask and reveal them" (Sarraute 1956, 9; in Bradby and Sparks, 54).

The discussion of the 'effecting element', with its emphasis on these forces, raises issues of how dramatic effects are generated between characters and between actors for the benefit of the audience and the witnessing Alexis. What is the nature of the theories of identity, acting and presence implicit in the proto-system which can then be verified by evidence from Koltès' working methods and from the production?

Koltès' thoughts can perhaps be most usefully contextualized with the help of Philip Auslander's discussion of logocentrism and difference in performance theory featured in a text entitled "Just be Your Self" originally published in 1986. Auslander's work examines the acting theories of Stanislavski, Brecht and Grotowski in light of Derrida's deconstructive critique of what the post-structuralist thinker described as the "metaphysics of presence" in Western philosophy. Using two concepts central to Derrida's project, *logocentrism* and *differance*,[12] Auslander convincingly explicates the

[12]I include here Auslander's concise explication of these two terms: "Logocentrism is 'the orientation of philosophy toward an order of meaning — thought, truth, reason, logic, the Word — conceived as existing in itself, as foundation' (Culler 1982:92). Derrida, who denies the existence of such a foundation, points out that every mental or phenomenal event is a product of difference, is defined by its relation to what it is not rather than by its essence. If nothing can legitimately claim to possess a stable, autonomous identity, then there is nothing which can be invested with the authority of *logos*. In his discussions of language and linguistics, Derrida refers frequently to Saussure's double hypothesis that because the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary, the production of meaning derives from the interaction of lingusitic units, not from additive arrangements of nuggets of meaning contained in words. 'The difference which establishes phonemes and lets them be heard remains in and of itself inaudible' (1982:5); meaning is produced by the action of something which is not present, which exists only as difference. Derrida demonstrates that meaning is generated by a productive non-presence he calls *differance*, defined as 'the playing movement that 'produces' but does not precede, differences' (1982:11). The purpose of signification produces its own significance; there is no transcendent *logos*, no order of meaning which grounds the activity of signification, no presence behind the sign lending it authority" (Auslander 59).

work of the three cited practitioner/theorists. He concludes his arguments by demonstrating their general allegiance to one of two responses that Derrida proposes one can have "to the realization that all is difference, to 'the lost or impossible presence of the absent origin'".[13] By indicating Stanislavski, Brecht and Grotowski's dependence on logocentrism, Auslander suggests that contemporary performance theorists generally react to the pervasiveness of difference, as Derrida describes metaphysicians' reactions in his discussion of philosophy, by feeling "saddened, negative, nostalgic" and "guilty." As a response, they propose concepts of originary and foundational notions of self and presence as a means of proposing, to quote Derrida again, "a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign" by acceding to a "full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of the play".[14] Let me note that the inquiry into the existence of a grounding *logos* of human identity in Koltès' writing and early practice is not pursued with the objective of preparing to reject it. Understanding the specific nature of Koltès' proto-system and the *logos* embedded within it simply serves to demonstrate that Koltès' understanding of identity is subject to the limitations of the foundational metaphysical assumptions on which it is based.[15]

For his part, Koltès expressed in poetic terms the functioning of the foundational 'deeper forces'. He explained that in both people and characters a kind of "force venant du dessus pesait sur une force venant du sol" [force coming from above presses down on a force coming from below] and catches the individual between them "tantôt submergé par l'une, tantôt submergé par l'autre" [first submerged by one force, then by the other] (1995a, 14; app. B,2). Koltès affirmed to Gignoux that in such an understanding of the formation of identity the "poids plus ou moins lourd ... modèle avec force et inévitabilement une matière première fragile" [more or less heavy weight ... inevitably shapes, with some force, a primary fragile substance] (ibid.). In his move away from supporting the authenticity of what in Derridean terms could be described as the 'play' of what Koltès referred to as the superficial and "more or less complex combinations of psychological characteristics" (see above), the playwright posited the more profound authenticity of the 'forces' and the 'fragile substance' upon which they effect themselves.

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[13] Auslander in Zarrilli (66), includes quote from Derrida (1978:292).

[14] The second response, Derrida suggests, is not tied to a Western metaphysics but accepts that "Play is the disruption of presence" (1978, 22 quoted in Auslander, 66) and, as Auslander confirms, that an "affirmation of the play which makes meaning at once possible and impossible 'is the alternative to the yearning for presence'" (66).

[15] Auslander makes this point about his study of Stanislavsky, Brecht and Grotowski (1994).

As the eventual representations of ethnicity in later productions, whose allegorical schema will be demonstrated to bear a striking resemblance to that of *Les Amertumes,* must be understood in the context of its enunciation in performance, a clear map of Koltès' assumptions, their limitations and the trajectory of their development will permit a more sophisticated understanding of these same representations in the staging of later texts.

In addition to the foundational or essentialist roots of the identity of the characters in *Les Amertumes*, there seems to be a suggestion of a *hierarchy* within Koltès' understanding of the various ways of conceiving of identity. Indeed, Koltès' system posits a gradual increase of authenticity of identity dependent on how far one is distanced from identity conceived or experienced as psychological traits. In that they are the 'effecting element' who press down on Alexis, the characters other than Alexis in *Les Amertumes* enact the role of 'forces' in relation to the 'fragile substance' of Alexis, the affected element. The other characters, then, can thus be conceived as forces who also are animated by forces running through them; they are in a sense forces *within* forces.

Alexis is assaulted by the seemingly inexorable parade of combative and violent energies resulting from the encounter of the characters onstage to which he is witness. The nature of Alexis, the 'affected element', will be fully discussed following a discussion of how the 'forces' of the other characters operate in the text and production of *Les Amertumes*. In any event, it gradually becomes evident that the other characters manifest a less pure or less aware brand of unconscious energies than does Alexis, who manages to escape being a troubled 'force', and begins as a 'fragile substance'. The indications that Koltès provided about the 'fragile substance', which seems to be entirely unmoving and waiting to be affected, fulfill the criteria for *logos* in that the 'fragile substance' is pure, undifferentiated and thus has, as Derrida would describe it, unmediated 'self-presence'.[16] In other words, a general schema of essentialist 'authenticity' in the characters of *Les Amertumes* unfolds as follows: the fragile substance is more authentic than the forces which are in turn more authentic than simple psychological traits.

1.7 The consistency of Koltès' conception of identity between 1970 and 1976

Koltès' notion of 'perfect understanding', with its associated essentialist resonance, recurred in a letter in 1976, (app. B,4). The letter is particularly fascinating as it employs almost the same language as that which is used in the discussion of audience reception in the letters to Gignoux and, most importantly, includes an expanded schema of relations between human beings which can amplify our understanding of the proto-model. Briefly exploring this letter can help understand the types of deep reflective communication that Koltès hoped to engender between stage and audience, actor and spectator, by means of a variety of subordinations (of exteriority by interiority, of gradual thinking through by immediatist reception, of superficial psychology by increased authenticity of identity)

[16] It is useful to note that the logic of identity governing the operation of thought throughout the West depends on a variety of key features. These include a) the law of identity ('Whatever is, is.'); b) the law of contradiction ('Nothing can both be and not be.' and c) the law of excluded middle ('Everything must either be or not be.'). These laws presuppose logical coherence and also point toward an essential reality, or *origin*, to which these laws refer. To sustain logical coherence the origin must be simple and undifferentiated, and therefore it must not contain complexities or impurities. (Lechte 1994, 106)

during the period of *Les Amertumes*.

In this 1976 letter, written to an unknown correspondent,[17] Koltès proposed that with perfect understanding one can grasp the perfect nature of identity. With specific reference to human relationships, we read Koltès writing about the importance of "une autre manière de penser" [another type of thinking] (1999b, 99; app. B,4) which he insisted must be learned. This other type of thinking is specifically contemplative and "ne cherche ni explication ni la compréhension" [seeks neither explication nor comprehension] and is without "sentiments superficiels" [superficial sentiment] (ibid.). He revealingly used the term "presence" and refers to physical sensation when describing in metaphorical terms the type of contemplation in question:

> C'est quelque chose qui ressemble plus à la manière dont, lorsqu'on a quitté une maison familière et qu'on se sent perdu, on cherche, on retrouve et on reconnaît, bien qu'on en soit loin, un mélange d'atmophère, de chaleur. de bruits et d'odeurs, de mouvement intérieur comme il y a dans le corps, et qui sent la présence. (ibid, 100; ibid)
>
> [It's something that resembles the manner in which, when you've left a house and you're feeling lost, you seek, find and recognize, even though you're far from the house, a mix of atmosphere, heat, sounds, odour and movements in the body which together give you the feeling of the presence of that house.]

The generation of meaning through this form of contemplation, Koltès proposed, is heavily dependent on sensory perceptions and perhaps the associations that accompany them. This suggested contemplation resonates quite powerfully with the phenomenological emphasis on extending the first moments of reception of the world into the consciousness. With respect to *Les Amertumes*, it is this other type of thinking (ibid.), applied to the audience/stage relationship, that Koltès has set about teaching his spectators through the deployment of forces while forbidding exegesis and justification (1998a, 10; app. A,1) in one's interpretive activities.

Koltès continued in this later letter by further articulating the distinction between the various levels of identity operating in the proto-system proposed in 1970. When people have been in love, he explained, they know that "il y a au moins deux plans sur lesquels se fixent les liens" [there are at least two levels on which bonds are made] (1999b, 97; app. B,4). The first of these is the "anecdotique" [anecdotal] level, which includes "la formation d'habitudes, la constitution d'un passé, l'expérience d'une foule de sentiments secondaires tels que la jalousie" [habits, the sense of a past, the experience of a host of secondary emotions such as jealousy and aversion] (ibid., 97-99; ibid.). Very frequently, Koltès asserted, "on noie dans les interminables bavardages intérieurs sur les péripéties, qui finissent par envahir tout l'esprit" [we drown in this interminable interior twisting and turning chitchat that ends up invading our entire mind] (ibid., 99). This level is less

[17] The Koltès estate has released some letters without releasing the names of all the correspondents.

enduring in the schema outlined in Koltès' letter than the other deeper level which is "complètement inexprimable, toujours inexprimé, souvent ignoré" and "statique, indifférent aux remous de l'existence" [completely inexpressible, always unspoken, frequently forgotten" and "static and indifferent to the vagaries of existence"] (ibid.). On this deeper level, another type of relationship developed between people, a "lent[], silencieu[x], mais ... irréversible[]" [slow, silent but irreversible] bond which is "comme une excroissance qui pousse sur soi-même" [like an excrescence which grows from the self]. Such a 'growth', Koltès explained, can only be attained by plumbing this deeper, less busy level of one's being, which is not prone to the "accidents de l'existence" [accidents of existence] (ibid.).

If we combine evidence from both the 1976 letter and the earlier material surrounding *Les Amertumes*, it is possible to understand Koltès as having posited a form of continuum of increasing authenticity of identity which is marked by a decreasing level of activity. First there is the "interminable... chitchat of psychological activity" (1999b, 99; app. B,4); this is followed by the powerful forces like ocean waves which, although exterior to individual identity, confront each other and combine to create both the equilibrium of an individual and the relations between people (1995a, 14; app. B,2); next are the slow growths, like excrescences from the self, which occur at a level which is static and indifferent to the vagaries of existence (1999b, 99; app. B,4); finally, at the end of the progression one arrives at the foundational 'primary fragile substance'. The silence of the mute Alexis acts as the modeling behaviour for those who would receive his revelation.

1.8 The interactions of the moderately 'authentic' 'force'-based other characters comprising the effecting element of 'Les Amertumes'

How does this foundationalist schema of identity that Koltès put forward operate for the characters other than Alexis in the section of the text before Alexis' final emergence? Unavailable are what Pavis terms the semantic aspect of the characters, by which he means the here-and-now qualities of the reality-effect and the presence of the actor generated by the text in production (Pavis 1998, 50), factors which could add breadth to any remarks on the subject. In the absence of such means of anticipating the forces, other models of investigation can be useful, the first of which involves close scrutiny of the text. The application of an actantial model, which explores the relationship between character and action to the text of *Les Amertumes* can provide a plotting of some of the vectors of the 'forces', and their relative 'authenticity', between characters on a structural level. Such an exploration of the dialectical view of the character in action can permit the tracing of a number of the action's major itineraries as well as provide a discussion of some of the characters' qualities, from the general to the specific (Pavis 1998, 50).

With the application of an investigative and taxonomizing actantial model which emerged from the scientistic and occasionally positivistic work of the semiotician Greimas, it is clear that this investigation is moving far beyond the restrictive receptive precepts proposed by Koltès.[18] His emphasis on the first moment "in which an object or an image establishes itself in our perception as something, as Shelley puts it, the first moment that 'creates for us a being within our being [and] compels us to feel that which we receive'" (States 1992, 369), is accompanied by the rejection of other more intellectually-based forms of reception from the system. In distinction, this contextualizing discussion (written by someone who did not see the production) will point towards some systems of signs related to the interaction of the character operational within the text. The insights gathered here will eventually contribute to demonstrating what could be termed a kind of (disingenuous?) naiveté in Koltès' assertions that *Les Amertumes* and future texts cannot and should not be read in reference to their broader sociohistorical contexts.[19]

Broadly speaking, the dynamism of the forces animating the characters in *Les Amertumes* is characteristic of most encounters between characters in much of Koltès' ensuing work. The text's sixteen tableaux, concerned with the difficulties experienced

[18] In fact, by simply proposing to discuss this event 'which will either have or have not occured' (Koltès 1998a, 10; app. A,1), Koltès' initial wishes have been transgressed!

[19] It will be useful to clarify some of the differences between the 'phenomenological attitude' emphasized by Koltès and the study of signs within the texts and productions pursued by this investigation. Understanding the points of convergence between these two drives will save this investigation from promoting the facile and dubious distinction that phenomenology is the province of artists, and semiotics that of critics. These clarifications will also permit an understanding of the limitations of the actantial model about to be applied.

As I have discussed, the phenomenological attitude involves a concern with the immediacy of experience. Although in the context of this investigation the phenomenological attitude has to this point been the tool used to describe the drive within Koltès' proto-model for the production and reception of meaning, it can also be applied as a critical tool. When this attitude is concerned with commentary on experience, it is "highly mimetic" in its methodology in that "like phenomenology itself—[it] tends to rely strongly on some variation of figural description, or 'proof' by metaphor" (States 1992, 370). The language used to describe the "transaction between consciousness and the thickness of existence" (ibid. 378) is necessarily very subjective in that the objectification of such experience through its codification or patriation with pre-existing significatory systems has the effect of pulling observers away from the immediacy into which they may be attempting to plunge. Therefore, the phenomenological attitude can be understood to be concerned with "an attempt to forestall the retreat of the object into signification." (ibid.) States suggests that a desemiotization of the experience both catches and frees the essence of that experience "in a radical defamiliarization that names without defining and pictures without limiting" (ibid.), as in an experience itself.

The introduction of an actantial model used to tease out the vectors of force presented by Koltès' "forces" at this stage of the investigation does not suggest a rejection of the benefits of the phenomenological attitude as applied to critical practice. It is brought on by the absence of a staging to examine (a source for the necessary 'immediate experience'), and also as an important step towards the overall objective of this investigation to demonstrate that, despite Koltès' assertions to the contrary, his work is very much grounded within the theatrical and cultural contexts within which he created his work. The echoes of the phenomenological attitude in the critical practice of this investigation will be invoked whenever the taxonomic potential of the semiotically grounded analytical tools risks alienating us too extensively from our sense of the audience's encounter with the work of art.

within a family, are punctuated with frequent and largely unexplained explosions of tension coupled with mercurial reversals of temper and 'motivation.' Varvara, a young woman, begins the play by appearing on one of three inter-connected platforms Koltès calls for in the stage directions, at first brushing her hair over a corpse, then panting and sweating profusely while sniffing the body. The body is that of Maxime, whom Varvara refers to as her love. A character called the Gravedigger digs on another platform and the Aging Parents stand dressed in black on another. After an initial rapid alternation of focus from one platform to another, an effect, according to the stage directions, to be generated by lighting effects, the parents try to calm their daughter. She speaks to the corpse and complains of a growth in her womb. The parents try to hide the scene from a character called the Voyeur, explaining to him that she is not ill, but that she is simply pregnant. A procession with the body to the Gravedigger's platform follows and, despite her parents' entreaties, Varvara refuses to speak.

From this first scene the reader quickly gathers that there is no pre-existing conflict-free environment that is suddenly troubled by the irruption of a field of action outside the characters' experience. Commentator Bernard Desportes notes of the ensemble of Koltès' work that "his characters inhabit hostile locations and engage in continuous combat consisting of violent and sudden conflict linked to fundamental, perennial and unexplained rivalries" (Desportes 1993, 55). Such systemic strife is supported and sustained, in the first scene, by the spatial and temporal implosion of a variety of intersecting locations and times that collapse representations of birth and death into a singular pivotal moment. The density of this compression works alongside the release of heightened emotion, resulting in an almost hallucinogenic displacement of so-called 'psychological' reality. Immediately following the rapid changes of light introducing characters on their various platforms accompanied by the sound of croaking frogs and wailing, the spoken text begins with:

> *Dit très haut, très fort:*
>
> VIEILLE. — Patience, patience, patience; au nom du père et du fils, patience, Varvara.
> VARVARA. — J'ai mal au ventre. J'ai un cadavre dans le ventre.
> VIEILLE. — Varvara, ma fille; tout cela est très normal. Prends patience.
> VARVARA. — Le ventre, le ventre.
> (1998a, 18)
>
> [*Spoken very loudly:*
>
> OLD WOMAN. — Patience, patience, patience! In the name of the Father and the Son, have patience Varvara.
> VARVARA. — I have a sore stomach. I have a corpse in my stomach.
> OLD WOMAN. — Varvara, my dear, all this is very normal. Be patient now.
> VARVARA. — My stomach, my stomach!]

How does development of dramatic tension operate within the context of this densely

poetical and disjointed text? "In the actantial model," Pavis states, "the obstacle is the opponent, who prevents the subject from reaching the desired object".[20] The obstacles which operate within this oneiric environment to oppose the characters' actions and generate the systematic conflict are rooted in a number of specific factors. In *Les Amertumes* the internal obstacle of each character is not, as in classical French dramaturgy, self-imposed by the character, but rather seems to be a kind of all-pervasive psychic grief in part generated, or at least sustained, by the restrictive proxemic circumstances of the staging. The manifestations of this grief are the foregrounded tensions and amplified inconsistencies of behaviour within the immediate family: Varvara's hysteria and grief, punctuated by a gleeful admission that she has been a whore for three years; the Old Man's simpering request for sugar from the Old Woman before he savagely beats her; the tableau in which the father and son sit facing forward complimenting each other effusively before turning to face one another and prepare to fight in a ritualized fashion.

As they are by Koltès' account largely animated by 'forces', it follows that the characters seem to be ignorant of the origins of their suffering, although an observer of a psychologizing bent might surmise that the suffering derives from the infinite layering of interpersonal cruelty that one imagines to make up their invisible history. In other words, internal obstacles are closely related to the exterior obstacle of the opponent, for each character seems to be an opponent to the other at some point in the 'narrative'. At no stage do any of the characters articulate their resistance to either interior or exterior obstacles in a language of psychological sophistication which might permit some time for self-reflection and the accompanying possibility of character evolution. This dynamic prevents any traditional character development of the type found in classic realist texts and each character is left stranded in a perpetual reenactment of his or her own generative angst. In addition, language is not spoken into a 'present', in the sense that this particular vision of theatrical reality sets out to represent day-to-day reality. As a result, Koltès' characters' identities are inscribed through speech into an atemporal location replete with heightened tension, and thus rendering that speech as one less revealing of psychological reality.

The cruelty and incoherence of the characters arrange themselves in somewhat structural relationships of submissiveness or dominance within the family and the group of individuals gravitating around it. A particularly good example is Mikail's lack of prospects and financial indebtedness to his father, the Old Man, and his desire to want to cross the river to the 'other side' to begin a better life. We witness the Old Man interrupting his son's daydreams of escape with a reminder of how much money Mikail would have to pay him before he ever left. After ten or twelve small interruptions the Old

[20] Pavis describes the obstacle as "the structural element that serves as an exchanger between the system of characters and the dynamics of the action" (1998, 241).

Man intrudes completely:

> Vieux. — Cinq cents kopecks au moins, qu'il vous manque pour vous établir à votre compte. (*Temps.*) A présent, vous êtes chez moi, vous êtes à moi, et vous vous partagez déjà ce que vous n'aurez jamais. Vous parlez de quitter cette maison; dès que vous auriez passé le seuil, vous devriez mendier. Vous êtes mort, si je vous mets à la porte. (1998a, 23-34)
>
> [Old Man.— You'd need at least five hundred kopecks to even up your debts. (Pause) Right now, you're living at my place, you are mine, and you're already sharing part of something you'll never have. You talk about leaving this house — as soon as you go crossed the doorstep you'd have to beg. You're finished, if I put you out in the street.]

Mikaïl is left fuming but a number of tableaux later he and his father are speaking to one another, both facing out toward the audience, voicing all manner of platitudes:

> Vieux. — Je suis ton père protecteur, ton père compréhensif, ton père expérimenté, ton père indulgent. (*Temps.*) J'incarne pour ton coeur le foyer, la lumière, le repos, la science, l'éternelle compréhension.
> Mikaïl. — Je suis l'enfant étonné et confiant qui, le soir, saute sur tes genoux, et, caressant ta barbe grise, écoute avec attention et avidité les sages maximes de ton expérience insondable. (ibid., 40)
>
> [Old Man. — I am the father who protects you, the father who understands you, your experienced father who indulges you. (Pause) In your heart I embody the home, light, rest, science and eternal wisdom.
> Mikaïl. — I am your surprised and confident child who jumps up onto your lap in the evenings, who strokes your grey beard, who listens with attention and avidity to the unplumbed depths of your wisdoms.]

The hyperbole continues with gusto until it is punctuated by the wail of the mother which prompts them both to square off, face one another and finish the tableau by trading obscenities. A recurrence of such scenes demonstrates that there is no clearly unfolding narrative in *Les Amertumes*, but rather layering and amplifications of the difficult relationships between characters who remain in fixed holding patterns of tension.[21] The forces within these characters, who themselves are forces in relation to Alexis, are volatile and yet predictable in that their reversals permit the continuation of the dramatic tension Koltès established at the outset.

Following my intention to demonstrate the essentialist and foundational quality of Koltès conception of identity in *Les Amertumes*, reading these characters in terms of Greimas' theory of the levels of existence of the character as interpreted by Pavis (1998, 50) can be

[21] One tableau involves the Old Woman telling a long story which nicely captures the feeling of non-development and blocked tension that occurs throughout the text. In the tale, a warrior in the employ of an evil governor has been ordered to kill a generous monk. The monk asks the warrior to wait until after he has finished his prayers before killing him, to which the warrior agrees. The monk kneels to pray and keeps on praying until the end of time, locking the two of them into a frustrated and forever fixed and unresolvable battle. (Koltès 1998a, 25-27)

useful in pinpointing the 'source' of the forces shaping them. The Greimasian model provides a broad scale of differing degrees of reality of character which range from 1) 'individuals' to 'actors,' both of whom, Pavis specifies, should be understood "in the technical sense, not in the sense of players or performers", but as characters who are "individualized figurative entities," (Pavis 1998, 7) to 2) allegories and actants ("general, non-anthropomorphic and non-figurative entities" such as "peace, Eros, political power") and many intermediate positions.

At what point along this continuum are the characters in *Les Amertumes* situated? A number have actual names, such as Varvara, Mikail, Piotre and Igocha. As they are not written with psychological verisimilitude and are animated largely by a kind of energized morosity, yet are more than the "individualized figurative entities" (Pavis 1998, 7) with no personal names, they would appear to be what Greimas refers to as humours. Figures such as the Old Man, the Old Woman, The Fiancé, The Body, The Gravedigger, and The Voyeur are figurative and animate entities whose naming does, however, suggest that they are "general and exemplary" in some fashion, and thus can be considered actors, roles or types. Their naming suggests that they are part of both the deep narrative structure and the surface of the text, but does not provide them with any stereotypical behavioural qualifiers. Their behaviour is, however, characteristic of certain expectations of type. That of the Old Man, for example, follows from a certain vision of an old man: cantankerous, occasionally charming, needy, while the Old Man's own idiosyncrasies define him as a specific type of 'old man,' namely one whose cantankerousness frequently explodes into violence and cruelty.

In an uncanny fashion, most of the characters share similar motivating forces, or in Greimasian terms, similar actants: either that of 'survival', or 'escape.' Imprisoned on the small squares of stage that Koltès has set out for them, they struggle to create identities which they can then use as weapons on one another. When this is not possible, they try to envisage some way of physically removing themselves to more propitious situations. The communality of their concerns is demonstrated quite strikingly during the sixth tableau when they stop fighting and dance together before resuming their arguing. The stage directions suggest that in the first of the dance's four movements entitled "approche" [approach], the central characters:

> avancent comme des moustiques vers une bougie, indirectement et par saccades. Jeu d'échecs sans joueurs, ils se dépassent, se heurtent, se croisent, se mêlent et se démêlent (1998a, 31)
>
> [move forward like mosquitoes towards a candle, indirectly and by fits and starts. It is like a chess game where the pieces move by themselves: they pass each other, crowd into each other, cross over one another, get mixed up and then separate.]

After the second and third movements, respectively entitled "Communion" and "Meditation", comes the last movement called "ardente et étrange gaieté" [strange and

ardent gaiety] (1998a, 31) which "est comme une cérémonie secrète" [is like a secret ceremony] (ibid.) for a mysterious cult of ecstasy. For a brief moment, the looks on the characters' faces, which have previously been "crispés" [tense] (ibid.), are at the dance's completion "fatigués et resplendissants" [tired and radiant] (ibid., 32). However, the pause does not last, and soon they are fighting once more.

The evidence from the text suggests that the source of the forces animating the characters, which we have seen Koltès describe metaphorically as the 'rough seas' leading to the collision of 'boats' or characters, can perhaps be described as violent externalization of unconscious frustration in the face of constricting and unresolved circumstances.[22] These circumstances generally relate to oppressive interpersonal relationships fueled by hyperbolized dominance and submission, frequently complemented by restrictive spatio-temporal constraints. A general result of such dramatic circumstances is a kind of levelling effect where the characters, despite their age or 'station,' demonstrate very similar patterns of behaviour. These patterns of behaviour are comprised of frequently 'rebellious and appalled' lyrical outbursts, perennial suspicion, pessimism and recurring escapist visions of utopian other places. This corresponds with Koltès' implied suggestion that they are less than authentic in the grand hierarchy of being. Despite their moment of collective surrender during the dance into an apparently relaxed and enlightened state, their perennial struggle continues inexorably. The catalyzing moment of their fighting is beyond their control just as are the movements of colliding boats on stormy seas with which Koltès compares the activity of the forces.

1.9 Staging the forces

Exploring the method by which Koltès proposed to stage the 'forces' embodied in the 'effecting' characters is necessary for further understanding of their intended operation. Indeed, as specified early in the chapter, Koltès intended the text for *Les Amertumes* to be used simply as a template for a "metteur en scène-guide". In order to impress the desired dramatic effects upon the audience through the witnessing Alexis, Koltès explained that he wanted to extend into the stage work the type of formalism with which he initially envisages the creation of character through writing.[23] This, Koltès specified,

[22] Such a violent externalization of frustrated or 'repressed' energy can be usefully contextualized by the brief presentation of the history of the term 'unconscious' included in footnote n.11 earlier in the chapter. Specifically, the most useful way of discussing these 'unconscious' energies is with the help of Freud's *dynamic* understanding of the unconscious. As Meltzer describes it, there are times when "Freud views the unconscious as a series of involuntary reflexes and an ebbing and flowing of energies" (151). These forces are, in Koltès' understanding, beyond the control of the 'boats' or individuals, just as the unconscious is beyond the control of the individual subject in Freud's understanding.

[23] Yves Ferry, who would later play in *La Nuit juste avant les forêts*, related in 1990 his memories of the production: "Already, you had the feeling of witnessing a particular 'voice'. The actors were all amateurs, but what was amazing was the way the production held together, the rigor of the writing and of the staging." (1990 109)

would include the presentation to the audience of specific gestures, positions and gazes scheduled for specific times within the performance. A type of choreography was proposed, one which was not to be determined by the character's psychology, he stressed, "mais par le rapport des puissances qu'ils ont en eux" [but by the relation of forces they have within them] (1995a, 14; app. B,2). Koltès described the bodily manifestation of the forces suggested by the texts to be "le geste fixé de tout temps" [eternal gestures] (ibid.).

Koltès was not concerned whether the initial schema of gestures was "compris ou non compris" [understood or not understood]. The explication of the choreography for *Les Amertumes* came during the second phase of rehearsals: "A present ... j'essaie, par un travail plus parlé, plus explicatif, ... d'amener le comédien à comprendre" [Now ... I'm attempting, by means of work based more on talk, more on explanation, to bring the actor to a certain level of comprehension]. Essential for the actor in his or her further understanding of the role, Koltès explained, is a "desire" to fill the 'eternal gestures' with meaning. The main modus for creating such meaning was to have the actor "lutter contre" [struggle against] the eternal gestures which allowed the actor to "fill" them with significance (ibid.).

Koltès' assertion completed an internally consistent model in which the generation of tension between what he conceived as a 'fragile material' and 'forces' is pursued in the staging through a struggle between the 'actor' and 'eternal gestures.' The source or grounding for the gestures is not discussed, which recalls the limited fashion in which the source of the 'forces' is only explained insofar as they are described as not being within the realm of what Koltès proposed to be 'superficial' psychological traits. The observations of Yves Ferry, the man for whom Koltès would later write *La Nuit juste avant les forêts*, concurred with Koltès' thoughts on acting when he explained Koltès' direction of actors in the early 1970s by saying that: "He didn't speak to us about psychology, about 'beats', any of that kind of crap. He was the kind of director who worked with vectors of force. I remember the energy that the actors used, tracing straight and vertical lines... . There was nothing realistic about it, we were in a genuinely individual and poetic universe" (Ferry 1990, 109).

Very little evidence of the specifics of Koltès' directing style exists (save for the relevant portion of an interview with Ferry), and Koltès would quickly abandon directing in favour of writing (ibid.). A brief glimpse ahead, however, to Koltès' time with Chéreau suggests that the director's work complemented Koltès' interest in 'vectors of force' and that this factor was essential in attracting Koltès to Chéreau: "One thing I really learned from Chéreau," explained Matthew Jocelyn, Chéreau's *assistant* on a monumental staging of *Hamlet* at Avignon in 1988, "was how to reveal deep energies in a text and

characters through being very sensitive to the quality of the entrances and exits, as well as stage positioning and movement in general. ... This was a quality Koltès was very attracted to in Chéreau, I think. There was something in the movement which Koltès felt had an almost spiritual quality to it, a kind of revelation of something deep and important" (Jocelyn, 2000).

It is important to remember that, at this stage in his career, Koltès was the director of his own text. As the metteur-en-scène of the piece he was motivated by certain assumptions about acting, the theoretical substructures of which can be investigated. Auslander suggests that the theories of Stanislavski, Brecht and Grotowski, although widely divergent in their specificity, can be neatly summarized by Joseph Chaikin's assertion that "acting is a demonstration of self with or without a disguise" (Chaikin 1980, 2). Too protracted a comparison with Stanislavski, Brecht and Grotowski might not be productive in that the statements made by Koltès are not a full system based on extensive practice. Briefly differentiating among their approaches can, however, establish the context within which Koltès' thoughts on acting can be further investigated.

Auslander explains that all of the practitioners he is discussing "assume that the actor's self precedes and grounds her performance and that it is the presence of this self in performance that provides the audience with access to human truths" (Auslander, 60). The disguise to which Chaikin refers in the above quotation must, for Stanislavski, be based on the actor's own emotional experience. Brecht called for the separation of the character from the actor's own persona, while Grotowski believed that a revelation of a true self is possible when the disguise of the roles is used to cut away a disguise imposed by socialization. Despite their differences, each of these thinkers posits the actor's 'self' as some means for acquiring the 'truth' necessary for revelatory stage work.

Contextualizing the effecting 'forces' of the characters other than Alexis in the assertions of these practitioners leads to some interesting observations. With the emphasis placed on the 'individual and poetic universe', Koltès seems to have asserted in an essentialist or fundamentalist fashion that, with the help of universal gestures, a plunging into the unconscious can permit the actor contact with 'forces' unsullied by social or political 'indoctrination'. Indeed, like Stanislavski, Koltès paradoxically posited that the unconscious cannot be known but that its perceived presence must serve as the basis for performance. In this light, Koltès' precept is closer to Stanislavski's than to Brecht's. Koltès emphasized the performative manifestation of an unconscious, even if it is a depersonalized one, while there is nothing in his proto-system (for the characters other than Alexis) which encourages the actor to be present as him/herself in the role, or for the actor's persona to carry more authority than the role as is generally the case in Brecht (Auslander, 63).[24] In addition, Ferry's and Koltès' indications of the staging seem to

[24] Neither is there any suggestion in the characters' behaviour, as we shall see, that there may be a 'happy' denouement or rational resolution of difficulties and tensions in *Les Amertumes*.

suggest that there was no discussion of the relationship between the characters and the production or the surrounding cultural and social environment.

Therefore, scrutiny of Koltès' system supports Auslander's assertion *vis-à-vis* an implicit designation that runs through the work of Stanislavski, Brecht and Grotowski, namely that "the self is not an autonomous foundation for acting, but is produced by the performance it supposedly grounds" (ibid.). With this understanding, any more searching for the *source* of the forces becomes unnecessary, and Koltès' use of metaphors such as 'rough seas' and 'fragile substance' can, through a derridean lens, be understood to contain the seeds of metaphysical solipsism.

An additional question which becomes important at this stage is the following: which aspect of the actor or character's foundational and transpersonal 'self' is Koltès attempting to stage? Stanislavski believed that, although initially beyond comprehension, unconscious energies could be inscribed into the present in such a way as to make them *comprehensible*. Auslander provides a contemporary theoretical understanding by explaining that "Stanislavskian acting can be seen as a form of 'writing' in the expanded sense of that word which Derrida uses to describe psychic functions as well as the recording of language."[25] Koltès' forces are constituted differently, however. If they can be equated with some notion of the unconscious, neither actors, nor characters nor, it would seem, the audience, have any means of comprehending them in any complexity. They are to be manifested in their originary simplicity onstage. Further comparison with Stanislavski shows Koltès' system to be without the differentiation between the character and actors as autonomous entities with different souls that Stanislavski asserted to be essential to their conceptualization. As we have seen, Koltès fears that anything more than direct apprehension of the forces, such as their precipitation into psychologically realistic characters, for example, will result in reduction of the magnitude and 'reality' of the experience for the spectator. The roots of the forces are seemingly beyond control and thus, according to Koltès, cannot be understood in a fashion permitting their differentiation without indulging in representational mendacity.

The avoidance of day-to-day psychology would seem initially to resonate with Grotowski who, during the Theatre of Productions phase of his explorations, attempted to "destroy social roles" (Sciaratta, 101 quoted in Mitter, 82) so that both the actor and the spectator could "achieve a true self-realization" (ibid.), allowing people to simply 'be'

[25] Auslander continues with "In his reading of Freud, Derrida asserts that the making conscious of unconscious materials is a process of creation, not retrieval: 'There is then no unconscious truth to be rediscovered by virtue of having been written elsewhere' (1978, 211). The process of recording unconscious materials itself creates those materials which exist only as traces in the unconscious, not a fully formed data. Thus, 'everything begins with reproduction' (ibid., 211) and 'we are written only as we write' (ibid., 226). The unconscious is not a source of originary truth — like language, it is subject to the vagaries of mediation." (Auslander 1995, 61)

by "struggling with one's own truth" in order to differentiate between a lying exterior and an underlying honesty. However, Koltès did not pursue any project of self-awareness through *self-reflexive* lucidity for the actor, for characters other than Alexis or for the audience. Koltès' desires for revelation moved away from a focus on the individual self that he felt to be the realm of limiting psychological understandings of reality, and attempted to anchor the self back into the stormy 'seas' from which it emerged.

Early in his career, then, Koltès pursued a kind of depersonalization of the psychologically conceived notion of identity (of both the individual and the dramatic character) which operated in tandem with a foregrounding of the essence of some form of more authentic forces (sometimes internal, sometimes external, sometimes both). These deep 'forces' act, in turn, upon the foundational fragile substance of the originary self. Having examined the material thoroughly, we see clearly that Koltès' pursuit announces a second subordination, following the first subordination of reflection into immediacy of experience discussed earlier, namely, a subordination of meddlesome psychological reality into the authenticity of what are the various gradations of a more 'authentic' unconscious. What effects were these various subordinations engineered to create within the context of the proto-model?

1.10 The affected element

An overall objective of the production, Koltès explained in a letter to Gignoux, was to have the spectators confront "la même angoisse, la même incompréhension, la même stupéfaction" [the same anguish, the same confusion, the same stupefaction] (1995a, 13; app. B,1) as the child in Gorki's autobiography. We have seen how the functioning of the various elements in the 'effecting element' work together to allow the possibility of the creation of effects such as 'anguish', 'confusion' and 'stupefaction.' More specifically, Koltès explained in his frontispiece to *Les Amertumes* how he hoped to create "spectateurs-témoins" [spectator witnesses] (1998a, 13; app. A,2) in his audience "à travers" [through] Alexis (ibid.), the central figure who serves as a "trait d'union" [hyphen] (ibid.) between the production and the spectators in order to encourage the interpretive stance related to the phenomenological attitude Koltès wished his audiences to pursue. The way in which these spectator/witnesses will be generated by the mediation of Alexis would appear to be dependent on two things. The first of these is his performative positioning as a proxy audience member on stage:

> Il n'est mentionné à aucun moment, mais il est toujours présent. Il regarde, se détourne, s'introduit, s'oppose, encourage, sans que jamais les faits soient transformés, sans que jamais les personnages ne le reconnaissent et, du même coup, ne se rendent compte de l'importance de ce qu'ils sont et de ce qu'ils font. (1998a, 15)
>
> [He is never mentioned, and yet he is always present. He watches, turns around, works himself

into situations, confronts, encourages, without any of the characters ever recognizing him. At the same time, the other characters don't recognize the importance of what they are and what they are doing.]

Alexis' presence onstage induced audience/Alexis parallels on a structural level. By equating the audience to an observing character, Koltès moved to reduce the exteriority of the audience to the phenomenon occurring on stage and induce an extra level of connection between the two. In this fashion, the spectators may perhaps have identified with Alexis' status as observer, and his presence onstage may have caused some spectators to consider his relationship to the action in the context of their own relationship to that same action.

The text informs us that Alexis' general relationship to the action was, as the name of his function indicates ('the affected element'), of being 'affected' by it. He was ground into life by bearing mute witness to what Anne Françoise-Benhamou suggests "could be snippets of memories or of his fantasies" (1996, 12) :

> Comme l'acide sur le métal, comme la lumière dans une chambre noire, les amertumes se sont écrasées sur Alexis Pechkov.
> Elles l'ont aggressé avec la violence et la rapidité de la grêle et du vent, sans qu'un trait de son visage n'ait frémi.
> Arraché, brûlé, debout enfin, il a arrêté les éléments comme on souffle une bougie.
> Et sa voix a cloué le silence.
> (1998a, 10-11)
>
> [Just as acid burns metal, or light brightens a blackened room, so the bitternesses crushed down on Alexis Pechkov.
> They crushed him with the violence and speed of hail and rain, without disturbing his face in the least.
> Ripped up, burnt, and finally standing, he arrested the elements as you might blow out a candle.
> And his voiced nailed the silence shut.]

Koltès drew parallels between Alexis' journey and that of the audience by explaining to Gignoux that Alexis, who is only "en fait qu'un spectateur de plus" [really just another spectator], is special in that through "extériorisant sa réceptivité, stimule celle des autres éléments du public" [exteriorising his receptivity, stimulates the receptivity of the rest of the audience] by means of a performance which is "libre ... [et] profondément personnel" [free ... [and] profoundly personal] (1995a, 13; app. B,1), an exteriorization in the form of expression, proxemic arrangements, rhythmical and gestural signs.

To extend the discussion of the sources of the forces, it becomes evident that in fact Alexis' presence allows the forces to exist, in that Alexis' witnessing allows the unseen to be seen. He 'generates' the forces which would otherwise be invisible to the spectator, recalling the earlier discussion of Stanislavski and the paradoxical necessity of accessing a hidden unconscious reality by performing it. Alexis is the central agent of magnification in the stripping bare of realistic pretense whose presence enlarges everything witnessed

in order to expose otherwise hidden dynamics, forces which then have an effect on him.

Before his exposure to the action, Alexis was initially the foundational 'fragile substance' but eventually arrives in the final scene to present himself to the audience as a fully realized being. Koltès suggested that at the end of the play, Alexis, who had been "au côté" [beside] (1998a, 13; app. B,1) the audience in the metaphorical sense that he is their projection and companion, and in the literal sense that he may have walked among them, then "se retourne contre eux" [turns to face the audience] (ibid.):

SEIZIEME TABLEAU

Les personnages sont fixes, éclairés par des flashes de plus en plus rapides sur les trois différents lieux.
Soudain, la lumière est violente et rouge sur l'ensemble, et c'est

ALEXIS (1998a, 60)

[SIXTEENTH TABLEAU

The characters stand frozen, lit by increasingly rapid flashes of light on the stage's three spaces.
Suddenly, the light shining on the group is violent and red, and we see

ALEXIS]

The stage directions explain that Alexis' "révolte finale et irrationnelle' [final and irrational revolt] is the "accomplissement de tout ce qui (extérieurement à lui) l'a précédé" [fulfillment of all the activity exterior to him that has preceded him] (1998a, 15; app. A,3). Koltès described this 'revolt' as an arrival at the culminatory point of what we can understand to be the character's *telos* which began with the 'fragile substance', was followed by exposure to a struggle of immense proportions (consider the metaphors of 'forces,' 'storms' and 'waves') to then to achieve a final 'grandissement' or 'growth'. Understanding this character, Koltès asserted to Gignoux, is no less than to be present for "la composition d'un être réel, assister à la décomposition de la psychologie" [the making of a real being, for the unmaking of psychology] (1995a, 14; app. B,2).

Once again, one can hear strong assertions of Koltès' desire for the artistic experience he planned to offer to his audiences to be one which allowed them to transcend what he felt was the mundane and superficial aspects of existence. Indeed, in 1970 Koltès affirmed that conceiving of the generation of identity in such a fashion would permit audiences to go beyond reductive psychological understandings prone to change and understand that individuals and dramatic characters who, specifically in the case of Alexis, would emerge "plus ou moins rayonnant, plus ou moins torturé, mais de toute façon révolté, et encore et indéfiniment plongé dans une lutte qui le dépasse" [more or less radiant, more or less tortured, but in any case rebellious and appalled, and still indefinitely plunged into the

battle which exceeds him] (ibid.).

The programme notes describe how the production was geared to have the audience accompany Alexis on his 'expansion' or 'growth' (his "grandissement"), in the sense that his identity asserts its foundational, even mythological, qualities. He was also similarly reduced in complexity through the disavowal of any contribution that differentiation or 'psychologization' might make to the 'authenticity' of subjectivity which, at the conclusion of the play, opens out onto the universal. This state of being 'appalled but alive' seemed to be a most revelatory one for Koltès in that it is one in which contradictions are manifest and struggle is ongoing, but one that also has a quality of completeness. This particular quality resonates both with the initial 'fragile substance' and the seemingly impossible hope for such unity beyond strife in the future, a 'radiance' which permitted the character's total apprehension by the audience. The self is privileged, not in a way that leads to its explication, but to its revelation.

Like an enigmatic pre-Socratic philosopher-cum-dramatist, Koltès presented a proto-system where the 'fragile substance' of identity, a foundational, sensitive and malleable *tabula rasa*, is revealed in different fashions both at the beginning and ending of the staging process proposed. Indeed, Koltès asserted that the major objective of the audience's posited "perfect comprehension" is to be able to understand, presumably at that final moment, the prelapsarian vision of Alexis, Koltès' central but mute character. "La clé" [The key], Koltès wrote to Gignoux:

> c'est de prendre ce personnage avant : avant l'entrée en effervescence des forces qui l'entourent, vide, mort, inexistant, et d'assister au travail des puissances, de le voir se faire, se broyer, s'accoucher, naître enfin, et, tout en dernier, vivre. (ibid.)
>
> [is to take this character before: before the arrival of the seething forces which surround him, when he is empty, dead, inexistant, and to witness the work of these forces, to see him being made, ground into being, given birth to, and in the end, living.]

What did the audience of *Les Amertumes* experience? Without evidence from the staging it is impossible to be precise as to important proxemic, gestural or rhythmical cues which would allow for a fuller exploration of this emergence as pertains to its effects on the spectators. We do know that, contrary to Koltès' suggestion, the audience, at least according to the stage directions, never specifically saw Alexis' pure and untainted 'fragile substance' *before* the tableaux which comprise the production. The programme notes indicate that "Alexis se situe hors de l'action" [Alexis is outside of the action] (1998a, 10; app. A,1), that the audience accompanies "son 'grandissement'" [his 'growth'] and that he is the figure through which "le spectateur peut entrer dans les limites de l'expérience" [the spectator may partake of the whole experience] (ibid.) but

there is no demonstration of his being in any originary state.[26] This evidence from the plot reveals the difficulty of enacting, onstage, the proposed *logos* of identity. The implication is that in order to 'understand' Alexis as he was when he was the fragile substance, we must witness him at the point of his emergence at the end of the play when his heightened embattled state contains an echo, however fraught, of his originary and more universal 'self'. What of the echoes of the 'originary self'? In line with the earlier discussion of logocentrism in performance theory, the only defensible position is that these 'echoes' of the originary self were only apprehensible in performance. This is paradoxical, in view that Koltès supposed the existence of the originary substance to *precede* and therefore *permit* its visibility through performance. At best, Alexis' absence of speech, and Koltès' insistence on the actor playing the part to engage in a "profoundly personal" performance may have allowed the audience to witness what States describes as "the actor's first person", the person who "appears before us *as* the character, the being that has, in effect, no voice of its own but whose very presence and way of appearing constitute the act of direct speech within the indirect speech in the enacted event" (1995, 23).

Despite the material impossibility of witnessing the 'fragile substance', it is important to understand what Koltès thought the audience were to gain by witnessing Alexis in the state of being appalled but alive.

1.11 The ethical import of Alexis' witnessing and transformation and the audience's choice

Alexis' journey, indeed his presence on stage, has ethical import within Koltès' proto-model. Koltès felt that by witnessing, and in a sense 'absorbing', the activity of the 'effecting' element' on stage in such a fashion, Alexis the witness renders the violent activity on stage justifiable. Without his presence (which paradoxically permits the 'forces' of the other characters to be visible and the action to occur), Koltès explained that the cruelty between the characters would simply be a "vain et écoeurant gigotement" [vain and nauseating flailing] (1998a, 15; app. A,3). In other words, Alexis both gives life and has been given life through his experience of witnessing, and the act of his witnessing saves the representation of what he has witnessed from being simply a

[26] This slight discrepancy between Koltès' discussion of Alexis in a letter to Gignoux and the actuality of the production of *Les Amertumes* will become pivotal to understanding the later texts in which, as will be discussed in the second and third chapters, the characters of Alboury and Cécile will embody, in a variety of fashions, a vision of a simple and untroubled past.

gratuitous display.[27] In a similar fashion, Gorki had wondered about his youth:

> When I try to recall those vile abominations of that barbarous life in Russia, at times I find myself asking the question: is it worth while recording them? And with ever stronger conviction I find the answer is yes, because that was the real loathsome truth and to this day it is still valid.
>
> It is that truth which must be known down to the very roots, so that by tearing them up it can be completely erased from memory, from the soul of man, from our whole oppressive and shameful life. (8-9)

Very significantly, the ethical import of Koltès' theatricalized version is first directed back towards the other characters, imprisoned and immobile at the end of the play in the flashing white lights behind the *avenging* Alexis. This is an extension of Gorki's ethics of detraumatization through recording, hence distanciation. In the repetitive and dilatory quality of *Les Amertumes*, an understanding of characterization of those other than Alexis as part of a *telos* is abandoned in favour of staging recurring tensions, which has the effect of generating identity in the observer. The mutual generativity of identity between characters other than Alexis is reduced to an exacerbatory dynamic by constricting parameters of imploded spatio-temporal references, narrative disjunction and familial tensions with what seems to be an archetypal and insurmountable quality. Tensions are hyperbolized by all these factors in order that forces can be generated which might bring Alexis, the originary spectator, 'to life,' in Koltès' words. Koltès described how, in the face of this tension, Alexis, who is "mentionné à aucun moment, mais il est toujours présent" [never mentioned, but always there] (1998a, 15; app. A,3), becomes nothing less than a figure of judgment, an omniscient conscience for the rest of the characters. Alexis has become "celui par lequel chaque déglutition, chaque ricanement, chaque crime" [the means by which each act of swallowing, each snigger, and each crime] carried out by the other characters "devient un acte lourd et démesuré pour celui qui l'accomplit" [becomes a significant and excessive act for he who is carrying it out] (ibid.).

In this way, it would seem that through his shapeless and personal performance, Alexis is sacrificing himself for the audience (or rather sacrificed by Koltès for the audience) through the acceptance of the painful stimulus of the forces to which he is subjected. There is no specific evidence from the production to support the notion that Koltès worked with the actor playing Alexis to aid him to strip away his 'social mask' in such a fashion that would encourage us to think of the 'personal' performance Koltès called for as an act of Grotowskian self-exposure and self-sacrifice. However, the notion that Alexis and the actor playing him suffer so that the audience may experience life more

[27] The solipsistic quality of this interrelated series of phenomena within Koltès' "personal and poetic universe" (Ferry, 109) (related to the discussion of his notions of ontology and identity) is born out in the fashion in which the sentence preceeding this footnote could actually continue like a mobius strip forever insofar as the potentially gratuitous display is concerned. These are actually events which, according to the system Koltès proposes, Alexis has created through the act of wtinessing them.

deeply is present, at least in metaphorical terms.[28]

If the characters other than Alexis have been 'punished' for their strife-ridden inauthenticity by being frozen in flashing white light, what of the audience? In view of Alexis' role as observer, the role which generates his capacity as an 'ethical' witness and judge, the 'life' he has been given is inflected not only with the ability to transcend and also punish the cruelties which he observes, but also to invoke others to do the same. In the face of this moment of genesis Koltès explained that audiences have a fundamental choice to make regarding the level of their involvement in the production. He suggested that at the end of the play, Alexis, when turning to face the audience, does so "pour leur lancer le défi — ou leur proposer le choix schématique — de l'adhésion à l'un ou à l'autre des éléments" [to throw down a challenge — or to propose a schematic choice — to join one or the other of the elements presented] (1998a, 13; app. A,2).

When Koltès qualified the 'challenge' he throws down by adding "ou leur proposer le choix schématique" [or present them with a schematic choice] (ibid.), it served to temper somewhat the magnitude of the challenge he lay at the audience's feet. This modulation also served better to structure the decision they were being asked to make, a decision which, unfortunately, is left, as are its consequences, unexplained by Koltès. The sense of urgency remains however. Indeed, Koltès' somewhat incredible proposition confirms his fundamental commitment to his audience's ethical transformation through the experience of his work. Was Koltès suggesting that one could, following the production, become galvanized by what one has 'witnessed' and choose to become part of some different mode of existence or of some kind of action? But if one did choose the side of the 'effecting element' or the 'affected element', what kind of mode of action or existence was one choosing? Was an audience member somehow to choose between perpetual tension or the act of observing such tension which promised to bring the spectator to life? But has the spectator, simply by being part of the audience and witnessing, not already

[28] In a manner that recalls the assumptions about acting called for in the creation of the roles other than Alexis, Koltès, in his discussion of Alexis, also echoed some of Grotowski's precepts when he differentiated between mendacious quotidian psychological reality and the deeper self. Grotowski, Auslander indicates, was "concerned with the relations of the 'mask of lies' we wear in everyday life to the 'secret motor' behind the mask" (Grotowski 1968,46,52; in Auslander, 64). However, with his call in a letter to Gignoux for "the unmaking of psychology" in Alexis, Koltès' work circumvents the Grotowskian exploration of self in the actor as a way of exposing truths and instead promotes an approach which immediately privileges the exposure of the now embattled fragile self resonant with echoes of its former, pure, undifferentiated qualities.

In this way Koltès remained unconcerned with the relationship between the 'forces' and the individual's 'psychology,' and pushed beyond any consideration of the 'social mask' in favour of an exposition of the more universal self that Alexis is now purported to embody, the ground of an unconscious beyond strife. The "profound and personal" (1995a, 14; app. B,2) performance that Koltès calls for from the actor playing Alexis would appear to be resonant with the explorations Grotowski undertook in the more depersonalized Theatre of Sources period which followed the Theatre of Productions and Paratheatre phases. This period generally involved less psychological self-scrutiny on the part of the actor/participant, and more opening onto an infinite other and the divine. (See Grimes, 1997)

performed that choice? And indeed how could Koltès understand them as having a choice if he had already designated the audience to be as passively receptive to the show as a piece of photographic paper would be to light?

I have discussed how Koltès established this entire system to facilitate the positioning of the audience "as children" in order that they could experience the production with the same level of receptivity as he felt young people would.[29] This system depended on two major trends in the dramaturgy: attempts to bypass notions of exteriority in favour of interiority (or the subordination of one by the other), and the transcendence of what Koltès felt were inauthentic psychic and even ontological states in favour of a more authentic grounding *logos* of identity. By establishing a model dependent on eluding a frontality[30] repellent of intimate contact in order to best channel a spectator's 'choice', Koltès would appear to have taken the paradigm of increasing and decreasing authenticity operating on a vertical axis, and both complemented and transfixed it with a continuity of communication enacting a kind of porousness between interiority and exteriority which operated on a horizontal axis. In other words, the audience could benefit from 'choosing', as Koltès described it, to be open to an injection of (vertically) more authentic identity by accepting a (horizontal) interpenetration of their identity with that most authentic of beings — Alexis, after his 'grandissement', or growth, at the point of

[29] In Lacanian terms, Koltès has attempted to present the audience with a means of returning back through the mirror phase of language, out of the 'Symbolic' order that language brings along with it, and back into the prelinguistic order of the Imaginary. Only by rejecting language and the interpretive strategies necessary for and entailed by its functioning can the character, spectator and actor see the world fresh, "as children", and thereby accede to a more complete presence characterized by the increased authenticity Koltès believed was brought about by absence of chitchat (or, as Lacan would describe it, the 'prelinguistic phase').

[30] A brief exploration of this notion of 'frontality', taken from phenomenology, will supplement the discussion of the phenomenological attitude from earlier in the chapter.

Koltès' emphasis on phenomenology in the proto-model encourages the subordination of exteriority by interiority both by stressing immediacy of reception at all costs and by providing a means of puncturing the repellant surface or meniscus of experience. Koltès emphasized, through his guiding receptive precepts, the importance of what could be described as the Husserlian concept of the epoche, the brackets around an experience, so that its essential qualities could be apprehended at once during the "moment of suspension of all presuppositions about the nature of experience" (States 1992, 351). In pursuing this objective so ardently, Koltès attempted to remove what phenomenologists refer to as the 'frontal' quality of experience and language. An example provided by States is useful to understand the notion of the attempted evacuation of frontality. He paraphrases Husserl's description (1960) of the experiments undertaken by Adolf Reinach, a student of [Husserl], who is said to have spent an entire term studying the ways in which one can experience a mailbox:

> If I could see all sides of the mailbox at once, if I could perceive its interior, its composition, its angles and curves, its materiality, its field of world relationships, its functions, its vicissitudes, its history, and its deteriotation in one grand cubistic glance, in what sense can it be said to be exterior to me, of the world rather than of myself? Such 'vision' could only occur at what we may safely call the 'Divine Standpoint'. Moreover, if inside the mailbox we should discover a letter written by God containing a definite description of all that a phenomenologist could possibly — ideally — want to know about a mailbox, we would be no better off because language itself contains an even more virulent form of frontality. (States 1992, 371)

his final revelation — brought to them by means of a situation of enunciation geared towards immediatist reception which facilitates this type of exchange.

It follows that the choice presented to the audience is not actually a choice between either an effecting or an affected agent. Given the fundamental ambiguity of the source of the forces and the 'fragile substance', Koltès' system does not seem to present the opportunity for becoming an effecting agent as Koltès defined it.[31] The challenge thrown down is whether or not the audience will and/or can enter into the experience of the production to such an extent that they become affected the way that Alexis does: the unmaking of a psychological concept of identity and a trajectory that leaves him forged anew.

The challenge presented by Koltès echoes Brecht's call for active involvement from the audience in the reception of a production:

> If one wishes to achieve artistic enjoyment, it is never enough to want to consume comfortably and at little cost the result of an artistic production; it is necessary to take part in the production itself, to be productive oneself to a certain extent, to incur a certain expense of imagination, to associate one's experience with or oppose it to that of the artist (Pavis 1998, 305).

As has become apparent, however, with the suggestion that the audience be as passively receptive as a piece of photographic paper, productive response would appear to be difficult, especially when one considers, on the evidence of the 1976 letter, that deep bonds between people are, at any rate, unavoidable.[32]

Beyond the entreaty to 'take part', the comparison with Brecht must end here, for Koltès does not invite the audience to participate in such a fashion which would necessarily lead to the revelation of the socio-economic mechanics of the world outside the theatre.[33] The nature of the choice Koltès presents the audience by confronting them with Alexis gaze, which up until that point in the production has been a stand-in for their own spectatorial gaze, was *to what extent* one should let one's self go into this world of forces and augmented selves, this world beyond the quotidian restrictions of a normative 'psychology' and day-to-day 'chitchat' of the day to day that Koltès so vigorously

[31] The effecting agent is the series of forces that surround the fragile substance of a person and shape that person.

[32] In a sense, Koltès' one-way model, and his suggestions and demands about the audience's state of receptivity, are flavoured by a soupçon of an expectation of the work's rejection by the audience.

[33] That *Les Amertumes* was written two years after the student and labour protests of May 1968 is indicative of the extent to which Koltès was, in some respects, at odds with some of the major aesthetic and social trends of his time. During the 1968 crisis, Roger Planchon had invited a large number of theatre artists to the theatre he ran in Villeurbanne outside of Lyons to discuss the ways in which theatre could best respond to the political situation at the time. Koltès' quasi-mystical interest in ontological authenticity was quite different from the statement released from the Villeurbanne gathering which called for manifest political purpose to all forms of art and the implicit recognition that culture is something which can change existing sociopolitical relations between human beings (Bradby and Sparks, 20).

rejects.

Rather than encouraging a Brechtian-style distancing, Koltès' proto-system attempted to offer for the spectator the similar type of fusion with the actors on stage called for by Artaud in his writings on theatre and cruelty, a fusion dependent on resoundingly essentialist or foundationalist conception of human identity. Derrida has described Artaud's project as one which "is not a representation. It is life itself, in the extent which life is unrepresentable. 'I have therefore said 'cruelty' as I might have said life'" (Derrida 1978, 234). In Artaud, the frontality of representation is eschewed in favour of a more direct type of 'emanation', similar to Alexis' 'turn' towards the audience. One can hear echoes of the attempted removal of the experience of frontality in Koltès' proto-model when we read Derrida describing how in Artaud's vision "the stage will no longer *represent*, since it will not operate as an addition, as the sensory illustration of a text already written, thought, or lived outside the stage, which the stage would then only only repeat but whose fabric it would not constitute ... It will not even offer the presentation of a present, if present signifies that which is maintained in front of me. Cruel representation must permeate me" (1978, 237).

Alexis was the protagonist with whom the audience identified, not as a result of any heroic feats on the level of manifest action (remember, he was present "without the facts ever being changed" [1998a, 15; app. A,3]), but as a result of being a phenomenological and narrative free agent whose consciousness interacts with the progenitorial moments he witnesses, resulting in his own genesis. Indeed, like the artist who observes the unruly disruptive elements of life and whose presence, interpretive action and revelation through his or her work make sense of or redeem the absurd difficulties of life, Alexis' presence, observation and final revelation serve to redeem what Koltès described would otherwise be the "vain and nauseating" action on stage. The proto-system would appear to have encouraged the possibility of an inexorable association between Alexis and the audience, similar perhaps to the 'completely inexpressible, always unspoken, frequently forgotten' and deepest level of identity proposed in the 1976 letter, leading perhaps to the "slow, silent but irreversible" type of bond which "grows like an excrescence from the self" that these reflections on identity propose (1999b, 99; app. B,4).

Koltès' proto-model suggested that a spectator's association with Alexis could result in an emergence similar to the central character's, and perhaps even Koltès' own emergence. This would allow the audience, as he explained to Gignoux, to be present "à la composition d'un être réel", [for the making of a real being] which is themselves, and to witness "la décomposition de la psychologie" [the unmaking of psychology] (1995a, 14; app. B,2), namely their own, that they may stand as a witness in a state of revolt, embattled, but still alive. This state of vibrant and troubled authenticity on the level of being and identity proposed in the proto-model is an almost spiritual one, similar to a

gnostic awakening of ecstatic awareness, with the challenge being to remain in the confines of the heightened awareness that the awakening has produced.[34]

The choice that Alexis proposes resonates heavily with the type of commitment or engagement proposed by the existentialists such as Sartre and Camus who suggested that, since existence is arbitrary and no outside force can be counted on to help one make important decisions, one had to exercise one's freedom of choice within the parameters of any given situation (Bradby and Sparks, 9). Bradby explains that:

> Sartre gave a lecture in 1946 under the title 'forgers of myths', in which he linked the new philosophy of Existentialism with the tragic urge by saying that the plays of authors such as Anouilh, Camus and himself constituted a rejection of the realistic psychological theatre of the inter-war period, and a search instead for a 'theatre of situations' that would present the contemporary realities of suffering and death with the force of ancient ritual. In these plays, he argued, the emphasis was all upon the moment of choice, stressing the existentialist belief that men are not created, but create themselves by their choices: 'a small number of characters, not presented for their individual psychology, but thrown into a situation which forces them to make a choice'. (Bradby 1991, 34)

Koltès departs from the aforementioned existentialists by instituting an ontological system which, while not basing itself on a deistic logos, roots the 'choice' to be made in an essentialist conception of identity which presupposes higher and lower orders of existence to which the audience may potentially accede. Indeed, if an ethical stance was proposed for the audience in Koltès' allegory,[35] it demanded that the spectator answer Alexis' call, illuminated as he is in a "red" and "violent" light, to become an embattled, authentic '*révolté*', purified and essentialized on the level of being, observing and somehow making sense of the flux of experience, a judge and witness whose presence causes "chaque crime" [each crime] committed on stage to become "un acte lourd et démesuré pour celui qui l'accomplit" [a significant and excessive act for he who is carrying it out] (1998a, 15; app. A,3). Koltès' early differentiation between the effecting element and the affected element (the 'forces' of the characters who take the form of 'humours', and Alexis) appears to have been moot in the sense that Alexis himself, although both more individual and more universal than the 'forces' of the characters, was an affecting element in that he is subject to the forces around him, but also very much an 'effecting' element himself in that he created meaning from his experience.

1.12 The third step: Koltès' relationship with his audience

At this stage, further exploration of Koltès' relationship with his protagonist can be helpful in understanding the playwright's relationship with the audience. If Alexis is the

[34] See Zweig (1970).

[35] It is useful to remember at this stage, with regard to the kinds of intentionality that can be embedded in allegories, Roger Fowler's observation that in allegories, "problems are conceptualized and analyzed into their constituent parts in order to be stated, *if not solved.*" (My emphasis) (Fowler, 6)

'hyphen', the interpretive guide, between the stage and the audience, the one who creates meaning from his experience of what he observes in his (stage) world, is he not performing a very similar task to that performed by Koltès in his role as artist? A thinker who has done significant investigation in the area of an author's relationship with his or protagonist is Mikhail Bahktin, and it can be helpful to consult his work briefly. One of Bahktin's recent commentators, Tzvetan Todorov, suggests that Bahktin believed early in his career that "a life finds its meaning, and thereby becomes a possible ingredient for aesthetic construction, only if it is seen from the outside, as a whole." For the characters in (dramatic) fiction "that someone else is of course the author". This position of exteriority is called the author's "exotopy" (Todorov 1987, 74).

Two issues become evident when this model of exotopy is applied to *Les Amertumes*. The first is that Koltès is highly 'exotopic' at this early stage in his career, with a full asymmetrical relationship of exteriority and superiority to all the characters in the play which, at least with regard to questions of exteriority, echoes the first person narrative of Gorki's original autobiographical account. Although Koltès would not necessarily pretend to understand the origin of the forces animating his characters, he did explain the general schema by which they operate, and also proposed a means by which one can gauge the superiority of one type of character over another. This would appear to follow Bahktin's early assertions, in the words of Todorov, that "aesthetic creation is thus a particularly well realized example of one type of human relationship, in which one individual completely engulfs another, thereby completing that other and endowing him with meaning" (ibid.).

The second issue that becomes evident is that, in the model of aesthetic creation proposed by the early Bahktin, Alexis is not only the perfect spectator, but also a stand-in for Koltès, a hyphen between the artist and the audience. It is clear from the proto-model that what Alexis is witnessing would not exist without his presence and so he is creating it. Alexis made sense of, not to mention morally justified, the representation of acts which would otherwise have been senseless. Both Koltès, and by extension Alexis, supply what Bahktin describes as the necessary "transgredients" for artistic creation, which Todorov defines to be "elements external to consciousness as it conceives itself from the inside, yet necessary to its constitution as a whole" (ibid.).

If we are to accept the consonance between Koltès and the role of Alexis, then the proto-model can be understood ultimately to propose that the audience join Alexis and, by proxy, Koltès, to be an emancipator of meaning, an artiste *engagé* who, if not engaged with the world outside of the theatre, is profoundly involved with the depths of aesthetic and spiritual intensity of his or her own creation.[36] This in-depth involvement is not

[36] Again, the words of Derrida on Artaud: "And non-representation is this original representation, if representation signifies, also, the unfolding of a volume, a multidimensional milieu, and experience which produces its own space." (1978, 237)

without its risks, however, particularly on a psychic scale, especially when one considers all the subordinations of categories to which the audience of *Les Amertumes* may have been witness: the subordination of exteriority by interiority, of inauthentic being by authentic being and of dramatic character by individual person. The dramatization of Gorki's autobiography permitted Koltès a means of enacting, in a concrete way, Gorki's assertion from *My Childhood* that:

> Life is always surprising us [...] not by its rich seething layer of bestial refuse — but by the bright, healthy and creative human powers of goodness that are forever forcing their way up through it. It is those powers that awaken our hope that a brighter, better and more humane life will once again be reborn. (11)

Alexis' final revelation, the potentially terrifying culmination of the series of subordinations, unveils the mystery of the nature of the allegory which the play enacts. It would appear that *Les Amertumes* was an allegorical staging of 'authentic existence,' with the humours played by the other characters "frozen" at the end in their volatile trajectory of inauthenticity. Koltès' proxy Alexis, the spiritualist or artist, has withstood the terror brought about by categorical collapse, he has completed his creative, ontological and moral growth (his 'grandissement') and beckons the audience, through the flames of the violent red stage lights, to do the same.

1.13 Final considerations and questions.

Koltès' proto-theory includes the desire for the audience's direct apprehension of the production. The stage directions to *Les Amertumes* inform us that the character of Alexis serves to 'expose[...] the mechanism' and 'explore the rules of the game' (1998a, 10; app. A,1). However, we have seen how with the insertion of Alexis as interpretive guide or model spectator, Koltès created a one-way model of generation of identity, one which is animated by strong convictions regarding the validity of the experience of certain levels of reality. In that the most authentic level is one which is determined by a kind of troubled stasis and its general absence of manifestation in quotidian life, Koltès enacted a kind of essentialism reminiscent of philosophical and religious tendency as old as Plato's theory of Forms.

With a rather ambitious faith in the power of his own interpretive directives, Koltès' one-way model also depended on an elision or evacuation of certain types of receptive behaviour. Pavis explains that "the process of semiotization takes place as soon as we integrate a sign into a signifying system and establish its aesthetic function," when an element of performance "appears clearly as the sign of something" (Pavis 1998, 332). By forestalling the retreat of the object into signification for an indefinite period, the spectator is urged to remain with the "first four seconds" of perception, as States describes it (in a

metaphorical rather than durational sense), in order to generate the 'deeper' types of bonds. These deep bonds are those excrescences of the self which Koltès believes to be more real and more enduring. Indeed, Koltès had asserted that Alexis is 'himself the beginning and end of the game' and that 'the action exists only in opposition to him' (1998a, 10; app. A,1). The implied dynamism which ghosts the "game" model, one which intimated the potential for an audience's involvement in a system of signs which related to the world exterior to that moment of perfect encounter Koltès strove for, in all likelihood did not materialize, and the overall balance of receptive modes necessarily stayed within the realm of the phenomenological attitude.

In attempting to create a suitable receptive state within his spectators by drawing parallels between Alexis and the audience, Koltès in effect proposed a break in the audience's own hermeneutic trail. Koltès staged for the spectator a means of deep communion with the stage event through Alexis which entailed the denial or neglect of the spectator's previous experiences, ones which might serve to contextualize his or her apprehension of the production. With regard to the choice presented to the audience, it has been discussed that Koltès does not present any schematic outlining of a particular political program[37] to which spectators could patriate themselves. In addition to a manifest lack of historicization, Koltès' perfect spectator (Koltès' initial description of Alexis, and by extension those in the audience who have answered his 'challenge') was at once 'submerged in the forces which exceed him' but also very much a receptive free agent. He was not rooted in history but paradoxically liberated from all considerations by the 'forces' which gave birth to him. "Il est sans âge" [He is ageless], Koltès explained, "sans pesanteur encore, situé loin de l'irréalité, mais plus loin encore du grouillement brûlant et coloré dans lequel il est placé" [without weight, far from unreal, but very distant from the bright and burning swarming in which he is placed] (1998a, 15; app. A,3).

There is also the difficult question, not broached by Koltès, of why some of his characters are initially more authentic than others. Did he conceive of them as having previously failed a 'choice' similar to one offered by Alexis at the end, only to find themselves being caught in a sea of disturbing forces beyond their control? Did he understand them to be in a terminal phase? Were they without hope of ever accessing the contemplative phase of existence that somehow allowed the exposure of their own originary fragile substance? If only Koltès and his stand-in Alexis had the necessary exteriority to engage in meaning-making activity (Koltès frequently discussed the parallels between living individuals and dramatic characters), does this mean that there are those in the audience, who, like the characters other than Alexis, may come together, as those characters do, for moments of reprieve brought about by intense physical closeness, but could never hope for the type of salvation that Alexis proposes? How

[37] I am not suggesting that this would be desirable.

much of the world, as Koltès understands it, is doomed to ignorance or, in other words, damned?

In *Les Amertumes*, the trend of collapsing binary distinctions by eradicating one side of a dichotomy (exteriority, inauthenticity, character) in favour of the foregrounding of its opposite (interiority, authenticity, person) does not in any fundamental way attempt to circumvent binary understandings of phenomena. Theorist Vivian Patraka (1992, 163; quoted in Schneider 1997, 13) has discussed how such categorical subordinations could, if the categories upon which the binaries were based were actually challenged by the subordination, serve to incur "binary terror" in a person experiencing or witnessing the phenomenon, an effect which Rebecca Schneider has described as "the terror unleashed in the collapse of binary distinctions" (1997, 13).[38] As such a collapse can unsettle accepted ways of knowing, it can provoke terror in a witness or participant. However, the subordinations of category do not challenge the structures of the binaries themselves, but simply propose that one part of the double equation be done away with in favour of the other. As the observer/intervener/moral arbiter Alexis figure in the next play to be studied is a black man, the question of the foundational authenticity of blacks versus whites, as represented by all the other characters, becomes pivotal. In Koltès' early dramaturgy, the ground is clearly prepared for an essentialist representation of ethnicity that risks solidifying existing stereotypes.

In *Les Amertumes*, the *tradaptation* of a short story from Russian for the French stage, the representation of ethnicity is not particularly complex or indeed discernible. This chapter has dealt with how Koltès sought to effect a certain type of aesthetic shock in his audiences by distancing them from day to day reality by various dramaturgical means. One method that Koltès would recurringly employ throughout his career is the use of foreign spaces, more evocative as a result of their foreignness. The names Alexis Pechkov, Varavara, Mikaïl, Tziganok, Maxime and Igocha listed in the opening pages of the text invite the reader or spectator into a romantic world far different from that of 1970s Strasbourg. Names of places such as Kounavino and the river Oka, as well as the mention of Russia (1998a, 21) confirm beyond a doubt the situation of the text elsewhere than in France. It is difficult to say with any certainty whether Koltès associated the tortuous family dynamics, or the Old Woman's Christianity, with a particular form of ethnicity. In fact, considering that Koltès has significantly rarefied the theatrical setting and removed the narrative thread from the story, the only defining characteristic of ethnicity is the names used. Although a variety of ethnicities are not encountering one another, the reference to Gorki (in the programme and in the text) and the Russian names are sufficient to evoke a matrix of 'ethnic' otherness in the French text and production.

[38] Schneider asserts that as a result of the generally binarist Western metaphysical assumptions underpinning and generating systems of discourse and representation, the binarist/dualist tendency manifests itself in socially sanctioned binaries (self-other, black-white, mind-matter) which are "sacred to our Western cultural ways of knowing" (13).

In view of the simplicity of the ethnicity evoked, and the absence of evidence from the production, it is difficult to posit an answer to any of the following questions which emerged from the investigations of this chapter, questions which can be more productively applied to *Combat de nègre et de chiens* and *Quai ouest*. What processes of reception are being lost when the proto-model posits that, beyond the simple reception or non-reception of the event, 'nothing else is worth envisaging?' (1998a, 10; app. A,1). If the phenomenological attitude, according to States, "accepts what it sees," what exactly did Koltès see and stage? In other words, if, as Pavis suggests, perception is already an interpretation, what has Koltès perceived and recreated in his translation and adaptation of a Russian story for the French stage? What kind of ramifications did Koltès' early and ardent essentialism, perhaps best characterized by its particular brand of phenomenological universalism, have on the representation of ethnicity?

CHAPTER TWO

2.1 Koltès and Chéreau

> Mais en vérité, puisque j'écris en français, la seule mise en scène à laquelle je m'intéresse vraiment, que je considère comme une réalisation finale de mon travail, c'est celle de Chéreau.
> (1986b, 63)
>
> [But honestly, since I'm writing in French, the only staging that really interests me, that I consider to be a final carrying out of my work, is that of Patrice Chéreau.]

Anne-Françoise Benhamou has recently suggested that Koltès experienced the beginnings of an "aesthetic revolution" (2001, 46) when he repeatedly attended Chéreau's *La Dispute* in 1976. The play, written in the eighteenth century by Marivaux, consists of a nature versus nurture 'experiment' in which a group of youths are separated from their parents. They are placed in the wilderness in order to determine if they will naturally grow up to be 'civilized' human beings or creatures displaying the bestial qualities of wild animals. In oblique reference to this, his 'fetish' production, Koltès would state years later in an interview that:

> Pour que je n'y m'emmerde pas [au théâtre], il faut que je sois saisi par une beauté ravageuse et indiscutable, et combien de fois cela vous arrive dans la vie? (1999a, 144)
>
> [If I'm not going to get bored to death [in the theatre], I have to be struck by a beauty which is ravaging and undiscussible, and how often does that happen to you over the course of a lifetime?]

Benhamou posits that the aspect of this 'ravaging beauty' that influenced Koltès most significantly was Chéreau's theatrical aesthetic which combined both concrete[1] and metaphorical[2] qualities (2001, 49), and thus offered Koltès the opportunity of envisaging his own future dramaturgy with these possibilities in mind.

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[1] I advisedly use the term 'concrete' as opposed to the term 'realistic' in that, as will become evident over the course of this analysis, elements of Chéreau's stagings and Koltès' writing can be 'concrete' without necessarily evoking realist staging or writing practices.

[2] I understand here a metaphor to indicate a naming or descriptive practice in which a thing is spoken of as being that which it only resembles. Koltès, Chéreau and a variety of their commentators seem to use the term metaphor and allegory with a certain interdependence. When I use the term allegory, I take it to mean a form of extended, augmented or amplified metaphor, in which a narrative, picture or other work of art is intended to be understood symbolically. Specifying the way in which the 'extension' of the metaphor manifests itself, Roger Fowler notes that "Allegory's distinctive feature is that it is a structural, rather than textual, symbolism; it is a large-scale exploration in which problems are conceptualized and analyzed into their constiuent parts in order to be stated, if not shown" (Fowler, 6).

Indeed, this quality of what I will call the 'allegorical real' had, for some time, been a central objective of the collaborative team of Patrice Chéreau and his longtime designer, Richard Peduzzi. As early as 1973, Chéreau had sketched the following aesthetic trajectory for himself and his team:

> Je pense de plus en plus à definir pour mon usage une catégorie esthétique qui serait l'allégorie, au sens où l'entendaient certains peintres du XVIième siècle ou certains auteurs (Lope de Vega, quand il met en scène l'Hérésie et de l'Espagne). Je crois paradoxalement que le théâtre est l'endroit où l'on peut voir le plus les idées et les abstractions, où les ideologies deviennent concrètes. (Chéreau 1973, 11-12)
>
> [I'm thinking increasingly of qualifying, for my own usage, an aesthetic category which would be the allegory, in the way in which it was understood by certain sixteenth-century painters or authors (such as Lope de Vega, when he stages the Heresy of Spain). I believe paradoxically, however, that the theatre is a location where you can see ideas and abstractions most clearly, where ideology becomes concrete.]

The notions of the concrete and the abstract, as well as the real and the metaphorical, are parameters within which we can discuss Chéreau, and actually contextualize Benhamou's appraisal of *La Dispute*. Patrice Pavis described in a 1983 article how Chéreau had provided a revolutionary re-reading of Marivaux's text by adding a long prologue, consisting of a reorganization of sections from other Marivaux plays arranged and supplemented by dramaturg François Regnault. This rearrangement served to contextualize and expose hitherto untapped (and unstaged) significance in the text proper. By having extra characters onstage observing the action of *La Dispute*, the full text of which was presented following the collage of the prologue, in Pavis' estimation Chéreau had performed a paradoxical marriage of "the concrete and the abstract". This fusion was accomplished by "illustrating a thesis from the Enlightenment about the origins [of identity]" and to "individualize that thesis, by the work of the actor and the design, into one sole theatrical event" which was "visible and concrete" (1983, 366). If, as Chéreau described above, ideology becomes concrete in the theatre, Pavis suggests, with specific reference to the production of *La Dispute*, that "the theatre has the power to incarnate [that ideology] in the material and the image of the stage, all while elevating the qualities of abstraction and generality" (ibid).

2.2 Koltès' progression towards the realist hypothesis

When looking back on the writing of *Combat*, and during the period when he was writing *Quai ouest*,[3] Koltès explained in an interview that:

[3] It is essential to note at this juncture that I will be referring to translated texts of *Combat* and *Quai ouest* over the next chapters. I recognize, as I hope I have made amply evident in the introduction, that translation is by no means an ideologically transparent or creatively uninflected activity. I will draw attention, in the examples I draw from the texts to support arguments, to any shifts and slippages resulting from the act of translating the text which have significantly impacted on culturally specific resonances in the representation of ethnicity.

> Devant un sujet qui nous paraît tout à coup immense et compliqué, il me semble bon d'utiliser, et éventuellement de fabriquer, pour le saisir, des instruments à notre mesure. (1983b, 37)
>
> [In the face of a subject which is at once immense and complicated, it seems to make sense to use, and eventually to build, in order to capture (that subject), instruments made to our measure]

Koltès specified that in the case of *Combat*, these 'instruments' were "un début, une évolution, des règles à peu près strictes" [a beginning, an evolution, and rather strict rules]. Such rules could, he thought, permit him as much grounding as possible in a representational mode familiar to the audience:

> J'ai cru comprendre que c'était seulement si ce que je racontais avait l'apparence d'une 'hypothèse réaliste' que la métaphore prenait son sens et ne devenait pas une simple fantaisie. (1983b, 37)
>
> [I believed that it was only if what I was telling had the semblance of 'a realist hypothesis' that the metaphor would take on meaning and not become a simple fantasy.]

In his writing following *Les Amertumes*, up until his encounter with Chéreau, Koltès had vacillated between the major tendencies that became evident in the study of his first play in the preceding chapter. These included evocations of the type of troubled dreamscape in which all the 'humours' of the characters other than Alexis lived, such as the dreamscape which manifested itself in *Les Recits morts* (1973, unpub.), and a specific location suggested by the 'Russian' qualifiers present in characters and location, an emphasis evident in a text such as *L'Héritage* (1998b, [written 1972]).

The quality of the 'allegorical real' in Chéreau's stagings served as a way for Koltès to begin to extend and merge these two preceding tendencies in his writing. For example, this quality was present in *Sallinger*, a play featuring a revenant haunting a family, written at the commission of Bruno Boëglin in 1977. This play incorporates elements of the physical space of the theatre for which it was created in the stage directions, including the occasional appearance of one of the characters in front of the curtain. The combination of fantastic, transportative textual qualities in juxtaposition with a concern for an eventual staging and set location was also evident in Koltès' creation of *La Nuit juste avant les forets* (1988). This text, written for production at the Avignon 'Festival Off' in 1977, consists of an anxious, vaguely delusional monologue by an individual sitting at a table. This simple design very much suited the type of festival staging necessary for which the play was written.

The emergence of the 'realist hypothesis' which underlies the creation of *Combat* would seem to manifest itself in Koltès' growing interest in the specificity of the setting of his plays beyond considerations of the performance space for which they were destined. Indeed, the increased specificity of location of *Combat* was fueled by a visit to a French-

owned industrial site at which he stayed while visiting friends in Nigeria. In a fashion that echoed Chéreau's work on *La Dispute* in 1973 and 1976, Koltès, while discussing what he called such 'privileged spaces', described a fascination with how "une chose vue de loin" [a thing seen from afar] (1983b, 35), such as the interactions of white European bourgeois in an industrial compound, becomes "deplacée, devient parfois plus symbolique, parfois plus déchiffrable" [displaced, and more symbolic sometimes, more decipherable] (Koltès 1983b, 35). He would describe his experiences such as his trip to Africa and the few nights he spent in the New York City warehouse as ones characterized by the 'thrill of estrangement' (Lamont 1982, 11). Such experiences, which mix attraction and repulsion, are situations which he would qualify as ones of *déracinement* or 'uprootedness'.[4] Indeed, even the thematic concerns of Marivaux's text of *La Dispute*, that of a unique social miscrocosm severed from its wider social surroundings, reappeared both in *Combat* and *Quai ouest*. In a passage from a 1983 interview reprinted on the back of the published text of *Combat*, Koltès described how the play's setting provides the broad metaphorical grounding for the themes in the text:

> On rencontre parfois des lieux qui sont des sortes de métaphores, de la vie ou d'un aspect de la vie, ou de quelque chose qui me paraît grave et évident, comme chez Conrad, par exemple, les rivières

[4] "On ne peut parler d'histoire qui ne rende pas compte d'un déracinement" (You can't tell a story without telling the story of some form of uprootedness] (1999a, 30).

This experience of uprootedness was, in general terms, a familiar one to Koltès. Early in his adult life Koltès had warned his mother of his intention of following a path which would result in his being in a form of perpetual yet generative flux: "Je ne conçois un avenir (comment te l'expliquer) que dans une espèce de déséquilibre permanent de l'esprit, pour lequel la stabilité est non seulement un temps mort, mais une véritable mort." (1999b, 68) [I can only conceive of my future (how can I explain this to you?) in terms of a permanent disequilibrium of the spirit, for which stability is not simply dead time, but actual death.]

Moreover, he would actively promote his own *déracinement* in order to provide himself with a better perspective on a variety of things, with one of the first manifestations of this desire for uprootedness being his commitment to travel:

"I think it's essential to travel after your secondary schooling. You learn things that serve you your whole life. If you don't force eighteen year-old guys to see the relative place they occupy in the world, they'll go their whole lives thinking they are very important, and that their career is important. If you learn young, you don't forget. As for me, at the age of twenty, travel put everything in doubt..." (Klausner and Salino, 1989)

In a letter to his parents in 1968 he explained that his trip to New York was important, as "Je rapporterai aussi beaucoup de *tolérance,* des jugements de moins en moins catégoriques et une toute autre notion des idées que l'on a en Europe." (1999b, 32) [I will also bring back lots of *tolerance*, fewer and fewer categorical judgements and a whole other understanding of ideas than we have here in Europe.]

The broad form of experiencing the 'thrill of estrangement', such as travel, is comprised of a cumulative series of the more complex and sophisticated drives which motivated Koltès' creative practice. He would speak in 1982 of his overall creative project:

"Pour ma part, j'ai seulement envie de raconter bien, un jour, avec les mots les plus simples, la chose la plus importante que je connaisse et qui soit racontable, un désir, une émotion, un lieu, des lumières et des bruits, n'importe quoi qui soit un bout de notre monde et qui appartienne à tous." (1983b, 37)

[As for me, what I'd like to be able to really do well some day, with the simplest language possible, is to tell the story of what I know well and can be told — a desire, an emotion, a location, lights and sound — whatever happens to be a little piece of our world and which belongs to us all.]

qui remontent dans la jungle. (1989, cover)

[Sometimes you encounter places which are, I wouldn't say recreations of the world exactly, but kinds of metaphors about life, or an aspect of life, or something that seems serious or obvious, like in Conrad for example, with rivers going up into the jungle.]

The 'seriousness' of the location in which he chose to stage a story would seem to speak to his conviction that what he witnessed needed to be told in some fashion. The location's 'obvious' quality may well have provided the clarity necessary to respond to what I intend to demonstrate was his frustration regarding the complexity of the neo-colonial[5] situation to which he was witness on his African trip. Additionally, he despecified the text's setting by explaining that the play: "parle simplement d'un lieu du monde" [simply tells about a place in the world] (1983b, 35). This use of the word 'simply' suggests an interest in the broader metaphorical or allegorical qualities of his African encounter, as opposed to insights resulting from the investigation of the location's specificity. Such a degree of simplicity in the text's symbolic discourse can serve to increase the possibility for immediate recognition and understanding of that symbol and its referent(s) in the wider discourse in which the text is embedded.

Koltès felt that, in addition, such locations permitted different types of social arrangements among his characters. With specific reference to the New York docklands

[5] In this paper I will be using the terms *colonial, postcolonial, post-colonial, neo-colonial* and related terms. Generally speaking, the hyphenated term 'post-colonial' refers to historical circumstances while the term 'postcolonial' refers to the discourse emergent from and sustained by those historical circumstances. Although I will provide increased clarification of these subjects throughout the paper, I will supply a few essential precisions at this stage.

I use the term 'post-colonial', a popular misnomer, as well as 'neo-colonial' when referring to the historical period following the freedom of states from their European colonial 'parent' state. This historical period began in the 1940s and gained momentum throughout the 1950s and 1960s. I will proceed by understanding a postcolonial critique to be a critical 'looking back over' the period of broad European colonization since the 16th century. This backward glance is undertaken with a view to understanding how colonialism inflected itself, and continues to inflect itself, in discourses relating to many subjects, and particularly in the case of this study, in discourses related to ethnic identity.

The difference between colonial and postcolonial discourses, as well as the differences between colonial, post-colonial and neo-colonial historical situations, remain complex and contested. It is important to recognize that "the term 'postcolonialism' has become so heterogeneous and diffuse that it is impossible to satisfactorily describe what its study might entail" (Loomba, xii). Loomba describes the broad reasons for the inherent challenges of theorizing colonialism and postcolonialism:

"Modern European colonialism was distinctive and by far the most extensive of the different kinds of colonial contact that have been a recurrent feature of human history. By the 1930s, colonies and ex-colonies covered 84.6 per cent of the land surface of the globe. ... Such a geographical and historical sweep makes summaries impossible. It also makes it very difficult to 'theorize' colonialism — some particular instance is bound to negate any generalization we may make about the nature of colonialism or of resistances to it. There is always a certain amount of reduction in any attempts to simplify, schematize or summarize complex debates and histories, and the study of colonialism is especially vulnerable to such problems on account of colonialism's heterogeneous practices and impact over the last four centuries." (ibid. , xiii)

Another major team of writers remind us that "The indiscriminate and often unhelpful proliferation of the term 'postmodernism' has prompted a healthy skepticism towards the rapid and often merely fashionable adoption of easy labels" (Barker, 4).

warehouse that would inspire the writing of *Quai ouest*, Koltès wrote:

> Dès que l'on y pénètre, on se rend compte que l'on se trouve dans un coin privilégié du monde, comme un carré mystérieusement laissé à l'abandon au milieu d'un jardin, où les plantes se seraient développées différemment; un lieu où l'ordre normal n'existe pas, mais où un autre ordre, très curieux, s'est créé. ... J'ai eu envie de parler de ce petit endroit du monde, exceptionnel et, pourtant, qui ne nous est pas étranger." (1983b, 36)
>
> [As soon as you go inside, you realize that you're in a privileged little corner of the world, like a piece of ground in the middle of a garden mysteriously let to grow on its own, where the plants developed differently; a place where the normal order of things doesn't exist, but where another order, a new one, a very curious one, has emerged. ... I wanted to tell of that little corner of the world, one which is entirely unique, but which is not unfamiliar to us.]

In contradistinction to the texts influenced by Chéreau's stagings, critic Anne Françoise Benhamou suggests that the earliest text, *Les Amertumes*, had not proposed any other playing space for its staging than the playing space itself. The insights arrived at in the first chapter demonstrate this assertion to be technically defensible. It is useful to press a bit further, however, and note that the 'ethnic' and foreign-sounding qualifiers of the characters' names in *Les Amertumes* (Varavara, Mikail, etc) operate in tandem with the fact that Koltès advertised the source text's 'foreignness' in the programme. Together, these two factors suggest that the stage space evoked a definitive 'somewhere else'. However, the increased specificity of the industrial compound location proposed in the text for *Combat* does, as Benhamou suggests, indeed actualize to a significant extent the earlier tendency apparent in *Les Amertumes*. With *Combat*, an actual location which inspired Koltès is identified. In an accelerated evolution rather than a completely fresh departure, Koltès, motivated to a significant extent by having seen Chéreau's production of *La Dispute*, realized in *Combat* the power of resonance that a 'concrete' location both removed from the world yet emblematic of an aspect of the world, can bring to a text set within it.

It can be very useful to conceive the locations that inspired Koltès and their ensuing fictionalized milieus to be *contact zones*. This term is defined by Pratt in a discussion of cultural exchange to be:

> the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict. (Pratt 1992, 6)

Using such a definition of the space of encounter, one with an already theatrical resonance in view of its emphasis on relations of conflict in a limited space, need not de-aestheticize metaphorical locations Koltès has created. Understanding *Combat* to be a 'contact zone' can permit the elaboration of how the encounters within this location operate, and how those encounters affect the audience (to be discussed in the second half

of the chapter). This approach resonates to the elaboration in the first chapter of the rules of the theatrical game that Koltès proposed in the proto-model of the generation and reception of meaning in *Les Amertumes*.[6]

In addition to Koltès' concern with how the setting of *Combat* would resonate with the play's content, he had become interested in additional types of anchoring specificity. These types of specificity were ones beyond questions of setting and location, and served to balance out the more archetypal significance towards which, as I intend to demonstrate, the systematized allegorical qualities of the text tends. Koltès felt that these additional so-called 'concrete' qualities manifested themselves in a number of specific areas, including language and narrative. He explained, for example, how when writing *Quai ouest* he felt he was dealing with concrete language which is like "un travail manuel, un métier où la matière est la plus forte" [is like manual labour, in which the material at hand is stronger than you] (1999a, 10). He asserted that a new phase of writing had been heralded by *La Nuit juste avant les forêts* and was fully operational by the time he wrote *Combat*. Specifically, Koltès felt he had come to a new understanding of the role his imagination played in his writing:

> Avant je croyais que notre métier, c'était d'inventer des choses; maintenant, je crois que c'est de bien les raconter. Une réalité aussi complète, parfaite et cohérente que celle que l'on découvre parfois au hasard des voyages ou de l'existence, aucune imagination ne peut l'inventer ... L'imagination, l'intuition, ne servent qu'à bien comprendre ce que l'on veut raconter et ce dont on dispose pour le faire.
> (1999a, 10)
>
> [Before, I thought our job was to invent things; now I see that what's important is to tell things well. A reality as complete, perfect and coherent as one might find sometimes on a journey or in one's existence cannot be invented by any imagination... Imagination and intuition serve only to really understand what one wants to tell.]

As a mark of this move towards 'concreteness' in *Combat*, he would assert that he wanted to provide his readership and audience with a greater power of understanding than a more traditional narrative structure could permit. Koltès explained that he needed to find a concrete form adequate to capture the allegorical power of the French industrial compound. To fulfill the realist hypothesis, Koltès needed a story.

2.3 'Combat de nègre et de chiens': the initial representations of ethnicity

What is the 'metaphor' to which Koltès referred, the metaphor which he proposed to

[6] As quoted in chapter one, Koltès would suggest early in his career that: "The theatre is a game [and] you must know the rules, accept them, conform to them, or else you inevitably find yourself in the stupid position of an adult thrown into complicated children's games he doesn't understand, that he will never be part of, and that he will never figure out." (1998a, 9-10; app. A,1)

concretize through his realist hypothesis? How does the story told in the play relate to this metaphor? In what way does the metaphor relate to the allegory of authentic existence at the heart of *Les Amertumes*? Is there a similar allegory at the heart of *Combat*? If so, what 'roles' do different ethnicities play in the allegory? And how does Albourey relate to all of this? The initial representation of ethnicity provides many revealing indications.

The title of *Combat de nègre et de chiens* (translated by David Bradby and Maria Delgado and published by Methuen as *Black Battles with Dogs*) is revealing of Koltès' general attitudes regarding different ethnic groups at the time at which the play was written. He admitted that "j'ai fait un choix émotionnel et en même temps radical en qualifiant les Noirs de bons et les Blancs de chiens, de cochons -- ce qui bien sûr n'est pas aussi simple; mais, une fois ce choix fait, j'ai pu commencer à aimer les Blancs." [I made both an emotional and radical choice in qualifying blacks as good and whites as dogs and pigs—and of course things aren't that simple. Once that choice was made, though, I was able to start liking the whites] (1999a, 35).

This initial casting of whites as the 'bad guys' and blacks as the 'good guys' is borne out in the manner in which Koltès balances the forces of what can for facility's sake at this stage be called 'good' and 'evil' in the plot. A brief plot summary can be useful for the discussion at hand. After Albourey's initial demand for the body of his deceased brother from Horn, we discover that two of the three whites, Horn, the site manager and the engineer, Cal have been working on the construction of a bridge for which development funding has recently dried up. In the face of the black man's demands for the body, Horn can only engage in obfuscatory tactics. As we discover, he does not actually know the body's whereabouts. Horn obfuscates and demands that Cal find the body which, although he has disposed of it earlier, he cannot do despite various attempts, including a swim in the sewers. Leonie, a white German woman expatriate living in France, arrives from Paris at Horn's invitation in order to become his romantic partner. Albourey and Leone meet, talk and begin to experience a certain degree of intimacy. Leonie angers Albourey, however, with her ultimately patronizing interest in him. Albourey spits in her face and leaves. Shortly afterwards, Leonie cuts her face out of guilt and shame in an act of self-mutilation in order to emulate his 'tribal' facial markings. Horn finally encourages Albourey to take his rage about his brother's death out on Cal. Cal is shot dead at the end of the play by one of the black men patrolling the walls of the compound during the tremendous fireworks display which Horn has gone to great expense to stage for Leonie.

Even from this summary, it is easy to glean that, because of his stolid refusal of compromise and his evocations of 'primal' strength, the black character in *Combat* generally appears to be the 'good' character. He appears to be 'good' in contradistinction to the mendacity, cruelty and/or wan dispiritedness of the whites. Such an account of the plot also suggests that the representations of blackness and ethnicity in *Combat* involve

questions of territoriality, colonial history and ethnicity, all revolving around the heightening circumstances of the inter-ethnic murder.

In the stage directions, the two white men are given simple character descriptions (Horn: "soixante ans, chef de chantier" [sixty years old, site foreman] and Cal: "la trentaine, ingénieur" [an engineer in his thirties]) that provide the reader with only their age and profession. Leonie is not qualified as having any profession or occupation. No mention is made of either Leonie's ethnicity or that of Horn and Cal, leaving a reader to assume that they are all white. Alboury is introduced as "un Noir mystérieusement introduit dans la cité" [a black man who has mysteriously gained entry to the camp] and at the bottom of the page his name is attributed to the "roi de Douiloff (Ouolof) au XIXieme siècle, qui s'opposa à la pénétration blanche" [king of the Duiloff (Woloff) in the nineteenth century who opposed white incursion] (1989, 7; 1997a, 3). The brief descriptions of the characters, all of whom have individual names and even professions, serve to provide an initial reinforcement of Koltès' assertions regarding the influence of the 'realist hypothesis' on the text. These characters are very different from those of more simple construction in the early text of *Les Amertumes*.

The title page describes the camp, to which Alboury has gained mysterious entry, as belonging to "un chantier de travaux publics d'une entreprise étrangère" [a construction site for a public works project of a foreign company] (ibid.). This Western enclave is full of stored construction material and houses a number of little bungalows decorated with bougainvillea.[7] Indeed, the specific location which inspired Koltès to write *Combat* was a Nigerian public works site on which he lived for a month in 1978 while visiting friends. In an extract from an interview (1983b) reprinted on the back of the French published version of *Combat*, Koltès describes "une petite cité de cinq, six maisons, entourée de barbelés" [a little compound with five or six houses in it] situated "en pleine brousse" [in the middle of the bush]. Within this compound, "se déroulaient des drames petits-bourgeois comme il pourrait s'en dérouler dans le seizième arrondissement: le chef de chantier qui couchait avec la femme du contremaître, des choses comme ça" [little bourgeois dramas were being played out as you would imagine them being played out in the sixteenth arrondissement (of Paris)... the head of the compound was sleeping with the overseer's wife, things like that] (1989, cover).

The stage directions on the opening page describe how beyond the compound sits a half-completed bridge, consisting of "deux ouvrages symétriques, blancs et gigantesques, de béton et de câbles, venus de chaque côté du sable rouge et qui ne se joignent pas, dans un grand vide de ciel, au-dessus d'une rivière de boue" [two symmetrical constructions,

[7] This flowering bush was initially procured by a French explorer in the South Pacific:"In the 1760s, after failing to get backing for a proposed expedition to the North Pole, [Louis Antoine de Bougainville (1729-1811)] made a three-year voyage of discovery around the world, bringing home the bougainvillea and leaving his name to grace two straits and the largest of the Solomon Islands." (Espy, 304-305.)

white and gigantic, of concrete and cables, which rise up out of the red sand, but do not meet, in a huge empty sky above a river of mud] (1989, 7; 1997a, 3). Koltès described in the interview on the back cover how his visit to Nigeria occurred shortly after the war with Biafra, and the region was dangerous since "des bandes de pillards sillonnaient la région" [bands of pillagers were roaming the region]. The compound itself was well protected by barbed wire and was complete with watch towers and armed black guards all around the perimiter. The stage descriptions indicate that the incomplete but manifest physical construction of the 'foreign' company exists in counterpoint to the ephemeral yet potent calls of these guards:

> bruits de langue, de gorge, choc de fer sur du fer, de fer sur du bois, petits cris, hoquets, chants brefs, sifflets, qui courent sur les barbelés comme une rigolade ou un message codé, barrière aux bruits de la brousse, autour de la cité. (1989, 7)
>
> [sounds of tongues and throats, of iron striking iron, iron striking wood, faint cries, gasps, whistling, brief chants which stream over the barbed wire like laughter or coded messages, blocking out the sounds of the bush surrounding the camp] (1997a, 3)

It was the activity of the guards stationed on the Nigerian compound's walls which struck Koltès most powerfully. He explained in the reprinted interview on the cover that "Les gardes, la nuit, pour ne pas s'endormir, s'appelaient avec des bruits très bizarres qu'ils faisaient avec la gorge" [To keep themselves awake at night, the guards called each other with strange sounds they made with their throats]. He went on to assert that "C'est ça qui m'avait décidé à écrire cette pièce, le cri des gardes" [It was the calls of the guards that prompted me to write this play]. It was also the strangely alienating call of the guards[8] which would appear to act as a defamiliarization device serving to ostend what he perceived to be the absurdity of the bourgeois existence of the neo-colonials:

> J'ai cru — et je crois encore — que raconter le cri de ces gardes entendu au fond de l'Afrique, le territoire d'inquiétude et de solitude qu'il délimite, c'était un sujet qui avait son importance. (1989, cover)
>
> [I believed, and still do believe, that to tell of the call of those guards heard from the depths of Africa, and the territory of anxiety and solitude that they mark, was a subject that had its importance.]

With a few brief but illuminating indications appearing on the play's cover, in addition to the first stage directions, Koltès laid the cornerstone for a microcosmic world in which white Western males with professional pretences to rationalist efficiency have invaded a foreign space. They have occupied it with their construction materials as well as

[8] Koltès' amazement at the 'code' of the guards' calls, entirely incomprehensible to him, recalls how Artaud was famously inspired by the Balinese dancing he witnessed at the 1931 world fair in Paris. Although the dancing was a codified language decipherable to the Balinese, Artaud was mystified by it and wrote extensively in *The Theatre and Its Double* about the alienating and transportative effect it had upon him. This is a classic example from twentieth century theatre history of orientalization of the cultural 'other' resulting from the limited and thus defamiliarizing understanding of a foreign cultural code or product. ("On the Balinese Theatre" in Artaud [1958], 53-67.)

accoutrements of conspicuous ease, such as "un massif de bougainvillées... une camionnette... une véranda, table et rocking-chair" [a growth of bougainvillaea... a van... a veranda, table and rocking-chair] (1989, 7; 1997a, 3). The juxtaposition of this domestic set-up with the wider location suggests that the installation may help keep the surrounding "territoire d'inquiétude et de solitude" [territory of anxiety and solitude] (1989, cover) at bay. The fundamental instability of this universe could be evoked by the fact that their site of bourgeois relaxation is within viewing distance of the curiously 'uncompleted bridge' whose looming symmetrical constructions 'do not meet'. The whites, it seems, have established an uneasy relationship of territoriality and ownership with the blacks. They are "entourées de palissades et de miradors" [surrounded by fences and surveillance towers] which, as the guards on those towers are black, may leave a reader wondering who is protecting who from whom or what.

Within this schema Koltès generally presents the blacks to be either 'mysterious' or invisible. One black man representing the nameless and strangely noisy mass, Alboury, has a name with a mythological association. The calls of the black guards are an alienating fusion of verbal and non-verbal sounds, fundamentally undecipherable yet demanding attention as a result of their strangeness. This defamiliarizing wall of sound has a seemingly magical capacity to 'block' any sounds coming from 'beyond' that 'territory of solitude and anxiety', province of the terrifying natives.

The title page of *Combat* and the interview extract printed on the text's cover extend the initial schema of Koltès' avowed (although as he suggests above, apparently tempered) dislike for the whites,[9] an attitude also evident in the cursory plot description. This dislike generally involves the presentation of Horn, Cal and Leonie as "*les chiens*" [the dogs] in contradistinction to the equally inflected '*nègre*' or 'black' used to describe Alboury. Koltès' use of the term 'nègre' points towards the complications that I will argue haunt the author's use of the black character as a source of native 'authenticity'. As Mireille Rosello indicates had become the case in France of the 1980s and 1990s, "most of the time, calling someone 'le nègre' is an extremely violent racialization, a doubly racist condemnation of the individual and the race itself" (Rosello, 140). Indeed, despite the emerging critique of the whites and the culture with which they are associated, the black characters (including the guards who are audible rather than visible) appear upon initial

[9] Recall the quotation with which the chapter opened: "I made both an emotional and radical choice in qualifying blacks as good and whites as dogs and pigs—and of course things aren't that simple. Once that choice was made, though, I was able to start liking the whites" (1999a, 35).

scrutiny to be inscribed within primitivizing[10] stereotypes[11] of authencity.

2.4 Koltès and discourse

Why, if Koltès admits to being tempted to dislike the white characters with such intensity, and if Albouy is enacting a resistance to the white characters on a narrative level, did Koltès' separation of blacks and whites lead to what clearly appears to be a primitivizing strategy directed against the blacks? What are some of the major implications of this trend on the overall representation of ethnicity?

Any discussion of the nature of the representation of ethnicity, and more specifically that of 'blackness', in the text and production immediately runs up against Koltès' career-long drive to stress the ahistorical and fundamentally apolitical nature of his work. "De quoi parle *Combat de nègre et de chiens*?" [What is *Combat de nègre et de chiens* about?]. Koltès would wonder rhetorically in an interview in 1982:

> Elle ne parle pas, en tous les cas, de l'Afrique et les Noirs — je ne suis pas un auteur africain —, elle ne raconte ni le néolonialisme, ni la question raciale. Elle n'émet certainement aucun avis. (1983b, 35)
>
> [It's not about Africa and black people, at any rate—I'm not an African author, it's not about neocolonialism, nor is it about racism. It certainly doesn't have a point of view.]

[10] Rebecca Schneider provides some important clarification with regard to the use of the term 'primitive' and other related terms: "Primitivism" — a Western obsession with, nostalgia for, and mimesis of forms and practices of racial/cultural Others (and particularly African Others) deemed less evolved or under-developed or closer to the wild than the civilized — is an aspect of the history of Western patriarchal thought, art and deed, not an aspect of an actual Other, the so-labeled primitive. The word 'primitivism' carries with it ethnocentric and pejorative connotations. William Rubin, editor of the Museum of Modern Art's two-volume survey of '*Primitivism' in 20th-Century Art*, justifies his use of the term by pointing out that "no other generic term proposed as a replacement of 'primitive' has been found acceptable to its critics; none has been proposed for 'primitivism." (Rubin, 5; quoted in Schneider, 203)

[11] I include here the useful definition of the 'ethnic stereotype' provided by Mireille Rosello in her study of ethnicity and representation in French cultures: "I suggest that the identity of an ethnic stereotype is a very abstract quality, a formal characteristic that we could conceptualize as a level or as an intensity rather than as content. That is, an ethnic stereotype is above all defined by a high degree of iterativity. An ethnic stereotype is like a form of contamination; it is a strong element of iterativity that insinuates itself like some sort of bacteria to a general statement about a group or a community. The stereotypical infection then turns this nondemonstrable statement into an instantly memorable formula that parades as common sense, truth and wisdom. In the next stage, the ideological content, supposedly descriptive element of the stereotype — that is, what the stereotype says about a certain ethnic group — then appears to be the stereotype itself. However, the fact that I focus on and react to what is said is another one of the ruses of this stereotyping machine. Behind the smoke screen of what the stereotype says about a certain ethnic group, the identity and immense resilience of the stereotype resides in its apparently indestructible degree of iterativity. (Rosello 1998: 37)

In another interview, also in 1983, he would stress that "toutes ces questions de racisme, de la violence politique en Afrique, tout ça, je n'en ai rien à foutre" [all these questions of racism, of political violence in Africa, all those things, they're not my bloody business, at all.] (Prique 1998, 243).

Koltès felt that reproducing on the stage the geographic or historical specificity of the Nigerian location which had spurred him to write the play was unimportant. Rather, he found himself using this and other inspiring locations as "métaphores, de la vie ou d'un aspect de la vie" [metaphors for life, or for an aspect of life] (1983b, 35). Such claims, which implicitly reject a historicizing criticism, raise many questions. *Combat*, like many if not all dramatic texts, is too sophisticated to espouse a united opinion on the ideological 'issues' of its subject material. Such 'issues' in this case are questions of neo-colonialism and racism which, despite Koltès' assertions to the contrary, emerge very quickly as being associated with ethnicity. Even though Koltès is unwilling to admit a thematic relevance to issues of race and politics, it is evident in his brief litany of what the play is *not* about (neo-colonialism or racism) that these subjects are unavoidably related, in some fashion, to the writing of the text and the creation of the production. Even a cursory reading of the plot indicates that if the play is to be discussed at all, issues of race, ethnicity, and colonialism as opposed to post-colonialism must be conceived as significantly informing the play. It is my contention that Koltès' assertions that the text is 'not about neocolonialism [or] racism' and that it 'certainly doesn't have a point of view' are not entirely defensible.

JanMohammed suggests in a text entitled *Manichean Aesthetics* that the days are gone when a critic could describe colonial authors such as Joseph Conrad, E.M. Forster and Graham Greene as being "as innocent of emotional exploitation of the colonial scene as they are critical of its political and economic exploitation." Assuming the potential for objectivity from what JanMohammed describes as "colonial ambivalence" leads, he suggests "to a complete circumvention of the motives, prejudices, conflicts, bitterness, and resentments that define the essential *colonial* relationship between the dominators and the dominated" (1983, 1-2). It also follows that it is not possible for writers of the 'Third World', as is suggested by N.M Mahood, one of the critics whose views are not shared by JanMohammed, to "quite distanced from the dominated side in the colonial encounter as the best expatriate writers are distanced from their dominating compatriots" (Mahood, 170-71). The colonial encounter, and the multiple post-colonial encounters that ensue from it, implicate people in their discourses whether they want to be involved or not.

Contrary to Koltès' assertions, a close examination of the text can begin to map the specific fashion by which *Combat* is very rooted in, and therefore bears the markings of,

its post-colonial socio-historical circumstances. A similar approach can be taken with the staging. Studying the text first respects the common-sense chronological order of the play's creation as text followed by its staging (including, of course, the discussion of the influence of Chéreau's stage practice on Koltès' writing). I do not intend to suggest, however, the precedence of the text as work of art over the text's staging as work of art.[12]

As with the work of any other playwright, the obvious fictional nature of Koltès texts "straddles the boundaries that separate external reality from the gestalt of the imaginary" and so "toys with both the conception of a non-given world and an interpretation of a social phenomenon" (Kincheloe, 70). A semiotic model based on the close reading of textual signs in tandem with a historical contextualization of the text and Koltès' experience can be used to demonstrate the channels of exchange between realities internal and external to the text. These realities correspond to the broad interpenetrating categories and palimpsests of fictional and historical/cultural narratives. The semiotic approach can bear evidence of how the text is a fertile site for ideological interaction, in particular, for

[12] The fact that Koltès asserted that they were to be read as well as staged does help justify the chosen research narrative. With regard to *Quai ouest*, for example, Koltès would note that: "J'ai pensé que le texte de théâtre ne devrait pas obligatoirement n'être qu'un materiau pour un spectacle, mais pouvait être lu, comme un roman, si on s'attachait à lui donner une forme à lire." [I thought that the theatre text should not necessarily be considered destined for production, but could be read, like a novel, if I set about giving it a form which would allow it to be read] (1999a, 47-48). Playwright Michel Vinaver corroborates this when he writes in a piece entitled 'Sur Koltès' [On Koltès] that "Koltès' plays like those of Shakespeare, of Marivaux or of Musset, of Buchner or of Kleist, are hybrids: they are objects of representation, and are as well literary works waiting to be seized by the act of reading." (1990, 11)

In studying the dramatic text dissociated from its context of production, one must take certain precautionary methodological steps to avoid a potentially reductive approach. By recognizing that the text does not necessarily have a primacy over stage elements which combine to make a theatrical experience for a spectator, one can remain unencumbered by what can be considered to be a characteristically Aristotelian, classical or even western logocentric bias. This historically significant prejudice characteristically understood the text to be the most significant element, deep structure and essential content of dramatic art (Pavis 1998, 354-55). Following the Copernican theatrical revolution (ibid., 354) at the end of the nineteenth century, when the systematization of the practice of staging began, much thinking about the theatre evolved beyond this assumption which had, up until then, generally dominated most formalized European or European-influenced theatrical activity, with the exception of popular theatre performances and performances based on spectacle (ibid.).

the purposes of this study, the interaction of signs pertaining to ethnicity .[13]

With the apparent primitivizing of Alboury as a locus of authenticity and strength, Koltès would appear to have enacted the reverse of the Manichean allegory. This complex model, which a variety of theorists have described as emerging from colonial situations, is based on a process of differentiation resulting from "a transformation of racial difference into moral and even metaphysical difference" (JanMohammed 1983, 61) and can be understood to trace the trajectory from colonialism to colonial discourse.[14] JanMohammed is one of those who describes how difficult it is to analyze, in critical terms, "the entire process whereby economic motives are transformed into social relations which in turn manifest themselves in literature". The channels connecting such manifestly colonial/neo-colonial practices as military intervention and resource extraction to the corollary discourses and aestheticizations that emerge from (and if not help sustain, at least justify) these practices can be generally characterized as follows: the connective channels are best understood to be the filtering of economic imperatives through the colonial system (legal, government, military). This then results in specific psychological relationships and social configurations linking the colonizer and colonized. For example, the evidence of the economic imperatives in the form of "population transfers, the policies of 'reserve', of gerrymandering, and of forced production, the negation of indigenous legal systems and religions and, ultimately, the denial of the validity of indigenous cultures—render colonialism at times "an act of social surgery"

[13] Generally speaking, a semiotic model based on the close reading of textual signs can be used to demonstrate the channels of exchange between realities internal and external to the text, realities which correspond to the broad interpenetrating categories and palimpsests of fictional and historical/cultural narratives. If the language and signs, as is suggested by the contemporary discourse theory associated with Foucault and the post-structuralism of the 1980s, "are the sites where different ideologies intersect and clash with one another", and dramatic texts are "complex clusters of [such] languages and signs", (Loomba 1998, 71) then Koltès' texts can be examined as fecund sites for numerous forms of ideological interaction, in particular the interaction of the signs pertaining to ethnicity.

This investigation can take place within an understanding of the broader socio-political context within which Koltès is writing, for as JanMohammed suggests, "the uniqueness of the colonial [and ensuing postcolonial] situations, due both to the trauma and confusion of its rapid social and cultural transformation and to the richness and complexity of its political and ideological contradictions, provides a fertile field for the study of socio-literary relations" (JanMohammed 1983, 2).

It follows that if representations of ethnicity both produce and are produced by culturally and politically-bound discourses of ethnicity then it is inevitable that Koltès' texts are always already inscribed with the 'markers', or the complex clusters of languages and signs, that can be understood to characterize and identify these same discourses. "All wordings are connected to the social networks of which they are a part;" writes Joe Kincheloe in a discussion of what he terms 'critical constructivism', and "as a result, narrative format helps construct the meaning of human living, knowing and feeling" (Kincheloe, 70). By extension, as a part of a wider social and cultural network (originating specifically in the discursive environment of France in the 1970s and 1980s), Koltès' texts contribute to the continuation and contestation of certain ways of representing ethnicity, which guarantee that the exegetical analysis of the formal structure of these representations is more than an apolitical exercise.

[14] "Michel Foucault describes discourse as a constellation of hidden historical rules that govern what can be and what cannot be said and who can speak and who must listen. Discursive practices are present in technical processes, institutions, and modes of behaviour and in their forms of transmission and representation." (Kincheloe 1997, 62)

(JanMoHammed 1983, 3). Such invasive operations, resulting largely from the colonizers' desire for territory and resources, lead to "profoundly antagonistic relations between the colonizer and colonized" (ibid.). This formalized antagonism engenders a state of perpetual latent crisis and social pathology, the evidence and residue of which are in evidence in fictional texts.

This social pathology manifests itself in the way in which the colonizers project their own anxieties and negative self-images onto the colonized in order to rationalize their invasive policies and behaviour. Frantz Fanon describes the situation thus:

> The colonial world is a Manichean world. It is not enough for the settler to delimit physically, that is to say with the help of the army and the police force, the place of the native. As if to show the totalitarian character of colonial exploitation the settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil... The native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. He is, let us dare admit, the enemy of values, and in sense he is the absolute evil. (1966, 41)

Such projections facilitate the feelings of superiority necessary to justify the continued dominating involvement, and include: "the inability of the natives to govern themselves and to develop their own natural resources, the black's tendency towards despotism, their ease in reverting to atavistic barbarism, their lack of intelligence, their hyperemotional and uncontrollable personalities" (JanMohamed 1983, 2). In the African context, such fantasies, JanMohammed stresses, are projected onto individual Africans as well as onto the entire continent. Considering the broad variety of discursive factors which predicate the subject position of an author, it comes as no surprise that JanMohammed concludes his discussion of the Manichean allegory by warning that "even a writer who is reluctant to acknowledge it and who may indeed be highly critical of imperialist exploitation is drawn into its vortex" (JanMohammed 1985, 62).

Koltès' own narrative technique *appears* to reverse the precepts of the Manichean allegory. Koltès' decision that whites are the 'bad' characters and the black man is 'good' is borne out in the overall schema for the representation of ethnicity of *Combat* as evidenced in the plot summary and introductory material. The initial investigation suggests that the primitive characteristics ascribed to the native remain, however. The negativity of the primitive characteristics as qualified by the Manichean allegory are also reversed. Alboury, the native, is the representative of superior ethical bearing seemingly related to his ethnicity. This indelible primitivization, elevated to higher status than the invading white characters, is in fact inevitable according to Tzvetan Todorov, who explains that the first person to "put exotic material before the literate public" was André Thevet in 1557 with his *Singularitez de la France antartique*, a largely ghost-written and fictionalized account of a trip to central America he only partially completed (1993 268). Todorov specifies that even though in theory two forms of exoticism exist — one

which denigrates and one which elevates the people being projected upon — in practice exoticism as a rule is always "necessarily accompanied by primitivism" (266).

With the initial schema of the representation mapped out, I will now explore the full text for evidence of Koltès' anti-imperialist critique, for the perpetuation of the distinctions generated by the Manichean allegory (despite the attempted reversal of it), as well as some of the myths of identity resulting from colonial activity. As the text of *Combat* consists largely of encounters between two people at a time, I will first discuss the proposed issue of the Manichean allegory in relation to the scenes between Alboury and Horn. This will be followed by a discussion of Cal's encounters with Alboury and Horn. Then, the play will be contextualized within the framework of Koltès' pertinent personal experience and travels. The biographical contextualization will permit a discussion of the ways in which Koltès internalized the post-colonial encounter. Finally, I will investigate Alboury's encounters with Leonie, in which more implications of the subscription to the Manichean allegory will become apparent.

2.5 Alboury and Horn: the reversed Manichean allegory

Alboury is the figure who acts as the moral agent in the extended metaphor of the colonial encounter around which the action of *Combat* revolves. He is the figure who mysteriously appears inside the industrial compound. He exposes the neo-colonial emissaries who demonstrate themselves to be variously superficial, corrupt, even evil. The black man arrives from the dark margins of the space "au crépuscule" [at twilight] (1989, 9;1997a, 5) to request his brother's body from the site manager, Horn. Alboury's first words reveal that his 'people' have a remarkable level of solidarity as well as an abiding respect for both ritual and the power of the primal maternal instinct:

> Je suis Alboury, monsieur ; je viens chercher le corps ; sa mère était partie sur le chantier poser ses branches sur le corps, monsieur, et rien, elle n'a rien trouvé ; et sa mère tournera toute la nuit dans le village, à pousser ses cris, si on ne lui donne pas le corps. Une terrible nuit, monsieur, personne ne pourra dormir à cause des cris de la vieille; c'est pour cela que je suis là. (1989, 9; 1997a, 5)
>
> [I am Alboury, sir; I have come for the body; his mother came to the site to lay branches on the body, sir, but she found nothing; and if the body is not given to her, his mother will wander through the village, wailing, all night long. A terrible night, sir, nobody will be able to sleep because of the old woman's cries: that is why I am here.]

Aware that Cal has killed the labourer in question and that the body is nowhere to be found, Horn responds to Alboury's direct if lightly primitivized appeal with mendacity, sentimentality and administrative authoritativeness:

> Une terrible affaire, oui; une malheureuse chute, un malheureux camion qui roulait à toute allure; le conducteur sera puni. Les ouvriers sont imprudents, malgré les consignes strictes qui leur sont données. Demain, vous aurez le corps; on a dû l'emmener à l'infirmerie, l'arranger un peu, pour une

> présentation plus correcte à la famille. Faites part de mon regret à la famille. Je vous fais part de mes regrets. Quelle malheureuse histoire! (1989, 9-10)
>
> [It's a terrible affair; a bad fall; unfortunately a truck came speeding through; the driver wil be punished. The workers are careless, despite the strict instructions they're given. You'll have the body tomorrow; it must be taken to the infirmary to be tidied up before being properly presented to the family. Please give them my condolences. My condolences to you too. What a sad business.] (1997a, 5)

It quickly becomes evident that Alboury will serve as a locus of resistance to the incursion of the whites. The black man refuses to leave the compound: "Moi, je suis seulement venu pour le corps, monsieur" [I have only come to collect the body, sir], he states, "et je repartirai dès que je l'aurai" [and I will leave as soon as I have it] (1989, 11;1997a, 6). Alboury may be unwavering in his desire to have the body returned, but he also demonstrates a fascination with Horn:

> Depuis que le chantier a commencé, le village parle beaucoup de vous. Alors j'ai dit : voila l'occasion de voir le Blanc de près. J'ai encore, monsieur, beaucoup de choses à apprendre et j'ai dit à mon âme : cours jusqu'à mes oreiles et écoute, cours jusqu'à mes yeux et ne perds rien de ce que tu verras. (1989, 10)
>
> [Since the site was opened, the village has been talking about you. So I said: here is my chance to see the white man up close. I still have much to learn, sir, and I said to my soul: run up to my ears and listen, run up to my eyes and do not forget anything you see.] (1997a, 6)

These sentences which are replete with primitive tropes such as 'village', 'white man' and the personification of the 'soul', all delivered with an atavistic rhetorical flourish, could be understood to provide Alboury with a naive quality that complements his respectful use of the word 'sir'.[15]

Shortly thereafter, Alboury demonstrates a technological backwardness to complement his already archaic flavour. He explains that he will not move away from the edge of the compound towards its middle on account of being unaccustomed to the lights which surround it. If such portions of text are delivered in an un-ironized fashion by the actor playing Alboury, it provides the impression that the character is unfamiliar with electricity: "Mes yeux ne supportent pas la trop grande lumière ; ils clignotent et se brouillent ; ils manquent de l'habitude de ces lumières fortes que vous mettez, le soir." [My eyes cannot take the glare; they blink and burn; they are not used to the strong lights you have at night] (1989, 13;1997a, 7-8). His resistance to the light also serves to anchor him back into the 'darkness' from which he has mysteriously appeared. Later, when he encounters Horn in Scene 13, Alboury asks him to turn his flashlight off, preferring to patriate himself with the darkness. The light, it seems, is something not to be trusted:

[15] Bradby and Delgado's use of the term 'Sir' has somewhat more formal resonance than Koltès' use of the arguably more familiar "Monsieur" in the French text.

Alboury. — (*dans l'ombre*) Eteignez!
Horn. — Alboury? (*Silence.*) Venez. Montrez-vous.
Alboury. — Eteignez votre lampe. (1989, 80)

[Alboury. — (*in the shadow*) Switch it off!
Horn. — Alboury? (*Silence.*) Come on. Show yourself.
Alboury. — Switch off the torch.] (1997a, 53)

Alboury's identity continues to unfold as that of dark primitive when he clumsily refers to Cal or Horn as "le Blanc" [the white man] (1989, 72;1997a, 48) and speaks of what he has heard about Europe:

Mais on dit aussi que d'Europe ce qu'on ramène, c'est ine passion mortelle, la voiture, monsieur; qu'on ne songe plus qu'à cela; qu'on y joue des nuits et des jours; qu'on attend d'en mourir; qu'on a tout oublié; c'est le retour d'Europe; c'est ce qu'on m'a dit. (1989, 30)

[People also say that when they come back from Europe they bring a deadly passion for cars, sir; and that's all they can think of; that they play with their cars night and day; that they expect to die in them, and that they've forgotten everything else; that's what I'm told they bring back from Europe.] (1997a, 19)

Despite the potentially *faux naïf* resonance to such statements, there exists at no point in the entire text any indication that Alboury has chosen to 'play native.' One could imagine that playing native for strategic reasons would perhaps allow Alboury to better ingratiate himself with Horn and thus reclaim more quickly the body he is seeking.[16] When Alboury confronts Horn in Scene 13 he maintains the folksy poetic rhetoric even when angry, suggesting that this register is his only mode of delivery:

La seule chose que j'ai apprise de vous, malgré vous, c'est qu'il n'y a pas assez de place dans votre tête et dans toutes vos poches pour ranger tous vos mensonges ; on finit par les voir. (1989, 83)

[The one thing I have learned from you, in spite of you, is that there is not enough room in your head or in all your pockets to hide all your lies; in the end they all come tumbling out.] (1997a, 55)

His primitive naïveté continues to play out in the dramaturgical structure of *Combat*. Alboury begins the text as the manifestation of a kind of 'soft' or undangerous primitivism, noble in his resistance, but as yet not perceived to be immediately threatening by the other characters. It will become increasingly evident that this trait is a dramaturgical strategy that permits the tension of the play to simmer without boiling over. Alboury's naïveté serves as a kind of compensatory and mollifying counterpoint of character to the deep resistance he will continue to demonstrate in the face of Horn's inability to produce a body.

In addition to providing the impression of being long-suffering and vaguely fanatic in his inflexibility, Alboury shows a curious lack of concern for the actual individual 'brother'

[16] This of course does not preclude what I hope to demonstrate to be the significant challenge of playing the text as a counternarrative to the reigning primitivizing stereotypes.

he has lost. This has the effect of further restricting the individual importance of the brother in question, permitting the individual to be subsumed into a homogenized faceless mass:

> Malheureuse oui, malheureuse non. S'il n'avait pas été ouvrier, monsieur, la famille aurait enterré la calebasse dans la terre et dit: une bouche de moins à nourrir, puisque le chantier va fermer et que, dans peu de temps, il n'aurait plus été ouvrier, monsieur; donc ç'aurait été bientôt une bouche de plus à nourrir, donc c'est un malheur pour peu de temps, monsieur. (1989, 10)
>
> [It is both sad and not sad. If he had not been a worker, sir, the family would have buried the gourd in the ground and said:one less mouth to feed. It's still one less mouth to feed, the site will soon close, and he would then no longer be a worker, sir. Then it would have been another mouth to feed. So it's only sad for a little while, sir.] (1997a, 5)

While Alboury is stubborn about retrieving the body, his social Darwinist reduction of the importance of his brother would seem to temper to a certain extent the significance of the murder of that individual. Horn confirms the impression of this type of mass solidarity which effaces individual subjectivity and confirms the superiority of European culture as a result of its emphasis on the individual: "Triste histoire pour votre frère; vous vous appelez tous 'frère'" [Sad about your brother: you call everybody brother here] (1989, 11;1997a, 6). Horn will finally venture to tell Alboury that "Finalement, vous êtes trop compliqué pour moi, Alboury. Vos pensées sont entremêlées, obscures, indéchiffrables, comme votre brousse, comme votre Afrique toute entière" [You're just too deep for me... Your thoughts are all mixed up, dark and impenetrable, like the bush round here, like the whole of Africa] (1989, 89-90; 1997a, 59). Alboury does not refute Horn but simply demands a gun so that he can go kill the murderer.

The sense of the inevitability of suffering and death in the unfolding African 'worldview' is generated by the unchecked conflation of blackness with Horn's (suppressed) terrified white perspective on the surroundings. Horn has initially not been able to see Alboury where the black man is hiding at the edge of the compound.[17] Horn's terror is amplified by the monolithic and animalistic quality of the solidarity which binds the black community together. Indeed, the major reason Alboury provides Horn for not coming to the center of the compound is that his other 'brothers', the guards, might not trust him if he did:

> Ils surveillent autant dans le camp que dehors, ils me regardent, Monsieur. S'ils me voient m'asseoir avec vous, ils se méfieront de moi ; ils disent qu'il faut se méfier d'une chèvre vivante dans le repaire du lion. (1989, 12)

[17] Mary Louise Pratt notes that in post-colonial circumstances, "the seeing-man's dominion now comes accompanied by persistent fears of annihilation and violence. It is in this fear that the contemporary seeing-man records what has always been there: the returning gaze of others, now demanding recognition as subjects of history" (Pratt 1992, 220). Since *Combat* features a *colonial* encounter, the reader notices, by means of a kind of dramatic irony, how naive Horn is being in the face of the clearly terrible Alboury.

> [They are watching the camp inside out, sir. If they see me sit down with you, they will be suspicious; they will say never trust a live goat in the lion's den] (1997a, 7).

His colleagues are faceless, invisible, communicate with strange sounds, and are liable to butcher him for any transgression of their mythopoetic code of solidarity.

Koltès' African 'worldview' continues to unfold according to the grounding principles he has established in the first scene. In addition to being conflated with tribe and landscape, Alboury is recurrently repatriated to evocations of a 'mysterious' and 'magical' Africa. When explaining the urgency for the return of the body, Alboury explains that without it, all his people will freeze because of the cloud, a metaphor for the arrival of the whites, which has come between his people and the sun:

> Le petit nuage était monté, monté vers le soleil, privant de chaleur une famille de plus en plus grande, de plus en plus habituée chacun à chacun, une famille innombrable faite de corps morts, vivants et à venir, indispensables chacun à chacun à mesure que nous voyions reculer les limites des terres encore chaudes sous le soleil. (1989, 33)
>
> [The little cloud had risen closer and closer towards the sun, depriving the whole family of warmth as we grew ever larger and ever more used to each other, an innumerable family made up of the dead, the living and the unborn, each one ever more indispensable to the other, as we saw the edge of the sun-warmed lands moving away from us] (1997a, 21).

Alboury seems almost to speak with the voice of his ancestors when he explains the advent of colonialism with the cloud metaphor: "Il y a très longtemps, je dis à mon frère : je sens que j'ai froid ; il me dit : c'est qu'il y a un petit nuage entre le soleil et toi" [A long time ago I said to my brother: I feel cold; he said to me: that's because there is a little cloud in between you and the sun] (1989, 32;1997a, 20). The 'long time ago' in question pertains to events before Alboury's birth, yet he speaks with transgenerational shamanic *gravitas* of the growth of the cloud in the metaphor to include "les femmes" [our women] who also "se mirent à geler" [began to freeze] (ibid). Alboury finally reveals the quasi-mystical reasons for his search for the corpse:

> parce que son absence a brisé cette proximité qui nous permet de nous tenir chaud, parce que, même mort, nous avons besoin de sa chaleur pour nous réchauffer, et il a besoin de la nôtre pour lui garder la sienne. (1989, 33)
>
> [because his absence has disturbed that closeness which allowed us all to keep warm, because, even though he is dead, we still have need of his heat to warm us and he needs ours if he is to remain warm.] (1997a, 21)

If one compares Alboury to Alexis at this point, one begins to notice the manifestation of an 'expanding' threat which might entail a retaliation in the form of a growth and emergence of his or their own.

Koltès' use of existing stereotypical representations of Africa in *Combat* are amplified by his own actively fictional constructions of 'Africanness'. Indeed, when speaking of what

he described as "la présence obsédante des Noirs, de l'Afrique et des légendes africaines dans ses pièces" [the obsessive presence of black people, Africa and African legends in his plays], Chéreau explains that "il a inventé de faux proverbes africains" [he made up some false African proverbs] (Chéreau 1995, 63). Chéreau specifies an invented legend in *Combat de nègre et de chiens* when Leonie asks Alboury why his hair is curly:

> On dit que nos cheveux sont entortillés et noirs parce que l'ancêtre des nègres, abandonné par Dieu et puis par tous les hommes, se retrouva seul avec le diable, abandonné lui aussi de tous, qui alors lui caressa la tête en signe d'amitié, et c'est comme cela que nos cheveux ont brulés. (1989, 69)
>
> [They say our hair is wiry and black because the father of all blacks, abandoned by God and then by humanity, found himself alone with the devil, who had also been abandoned, so the devil caressed his head as a sign of friendship, and that is how our hair was burnt.] (1997a, 45)

Other strange ethnic qualifiers find their way into the text as well. At one stage Horn wonders if Alboury was "un as du karaté" [karate champion] (1989, 81;1997a, 54). This initially suggests a confusion on Horn's behalf as to what the prevalent form of indigenous combat happens to be, and possibly shows him up to be making foolish conflations between different ethnicities. Horn demonstrates himself to be quite perceptive, however, and it may strike the reader as odd that he should assume that a character as patently unsophisticated as Alboury (who is constantly referring to Cal as "l'autre Blanc" [the other white man] (1989, 81;1997a, 54) would have had extended professional exposure to something as exotic as karate. References to Asian fighting forms also find their way into the text through Cal who later says, when considering killing another black man to replace the first: Je n'aime pas me battre et ils sont trop forts, ces salauds, avec leur karaté" [I don't like close combat and they're too strong, those bastards, with their karate] (1989, 99;1997a, 65). It is interesting to note that Koltès himself was quite taken by karate films, those of Bruce Lee in particular. The ambiguous and recurring references to karate leave a reader aware of Koltès' interests wondering if the association of Alboury with the ethnic qualifier of karate is conscious or unconscious.

2.6 Whites exposed through Alboury's authenticity: the anti-imperialist critique

It becomes increasingly evident that the mythologizing and primitivizing of Alboury provides Koltès with an authentic counterpoint with which he can compare the whites. Within Horn's encounters with Alboury, Koltès' technique of reversing the Manichean allegory bears results described by Fanon: "On the logical plane, the Manicheism of the settler, produces a Manicheism of the native. To the theory of the 'absolute evil of the native,' the theory of the 'absolute evil of the settler' replies" (Fanon 1966, 93). Although Horn may be shown to be idiotic in comparison to Alboury, the latter invariably comes off as primitive and/or simple.

Within the first page of the text, the bifurcation between black and white has been

established through the way Alboury and Horn use language. According to Koltès, if Alboury is the only character in *Combat* who uses language with directness and metaphoricity recalling a kind of ancestral poetry, it is in part because the filtering from one language to another prevents him from being indirect: "parce qu'il parle une langue étrangère, pour lui un chat est un chat" [because he speaks a foreign language, a cat is a cat for him] (1999a, 21).

Alboury may demonstrate an honesty with regard to his righteous demand for the body, although he is certainly not "direct", however, in the sense that he does not use language for its denotative value only, which is what Koltès' use of the word 'direct' seems to suggest. Alboury's rhetorical quality of phrasing is poetic, and if anything, a cat is a tiger for him. On the other hand, Koltès explains that the 'whites' in *Combat* use language "comme tout homme français se sert de sa langue maternelle, comme d'un véhicule conventionnel qui trimbale des choses qui ne le sont pas" [in the same fashion that any French man uses his maternal language: as a conventional vehicle which trails along with it all kinds of things that aren't conventional] (ibid.).

In addition to an obfuscatory tone, one of Horn's first overtures is to enact the colonialist trope of the unequal gift exchange by excessively complementing Alboury with the intention of having him simply forget about the dead body he has come to reclaim:

> En tous les cas, vous vous exprimez admirablement en français ; en plus de l'anglais et d'autres langues, sans doute ; vous avez tous un don admirable pour les langues, ici. Etes-vous fonctionnaire? Vous avez la classe d'un fonctionnaire. Et puis, vous savez plus de choses que vous ne le dites. Et puis à la fin, tout cela fait beaucoup de compliments. (1989, 11)
>
> [Well, your command of French is to be admired; and no doubt you're equally at ease in English and in other languages too; you have a real talent for languages. Are you a civil servant? You have something of that air. And you know more than you let on. Well now, that's turned into quite a string of compliments.] (1997a, 6)

Horn continues to engage in evasive and voluble behavior during the next scenes, filling the language, as Koltès explained, 'with all manner of things which aren't there'. Horn mendaciously attempts to divert attention from the disappeared man and suggests that the villagers' real concern is the lack of funds to complete the bridge project. Horn has just tried to ply Alboury with money and he has refused:

> Il faut avouer que vous êtes particulièrement difficile ; c'est impossible de négocier, avec vous. ... (Bas:) Je sais bien que les gens du ministère sont furieux. Mais moi, comprenez-vous, je n'ai aucune part dans ces décisions de haut niveau ; un petit chef de chantier ne décide rien ; je n'ai aucune responsabilité. D'ailleurs, il faut qu'ils comprennent : le gouvernement commande, commande, et il ne paie pas ; cela fait maintenant des mois qu'ils ne paient pas. L'entreprise ne peut pas maintenir des chantiers ouverts quand le gouvernement ne paie pas ; est-ce que vous comprenez ? Je sais qu'il y a de quoi ne pas être satisfait : des ponts inachevés, des routes qui ne conduisent nulle part. Mais qu'y puis-je, moi, hein ? L'argent, l'argent, où passe-t-il donc ? Le pays est riche, pourquoi les caisses de l'Etat sont-elles vides? Je ne dis pas cela pour vous froisser,

mais expliquez-moi cela, Monsieur. (1989, 29)

> You must admit you're being downright difficult; you leave no room for negotiation. I know how angry people on the council must be, but you have to understand, I have no say in the decisions that come down from on high; a site manager doesn't make decisions; I'm not responsible. Besides, it's time they understood: the government issues orders, orders, but never coughs up; its been months since they paid us. The firm can't keep sites going if the government doesn't pay up, d'you understand? I know it's not good enough: half-finished bridges, roads that go nowhere. But what can I do, eh? Money, money, money, where does it all go? The country's rich, so why's the treasury empty? I'm not saying all this to annoy you, but how can you explain it? (1997a, 18)

By expanding outwards from the issue of the corpse to the wider issue of the neo-colonial presence, Horn tries to avoid any responsibility in the affair by subsuming himself into the bureaucratic infrastructure on which he relies.[18] This is one manifestation of the 'universal' qualities of Horn and Cal who, with their generic American B-movie names, embody the invasive role of the neo-colonialist in this restaging of the original colonial encounter.

Horn's smugness with regard to the viability of a bureaucratic solution to the troubling questions of colonialism reaches its illogical conclusion as to a *reductio ad absurdum* during Scene Four. Horn presents a striking caricature of the historical rationality and cultural cohesion he is continuously peddling. Alboury has suggested, in a simple fashion bearing witness to his 'oral culture', that Africa should be legislated like segregationist America: "On m'a dit qu'en Amérique les nègres sortent le matin et les Blancs sortent l'après-midi. ... Si c'est vrai monsieur, c'est une binne idée" [I have been told that, in America, the black people go out in the morning and the white people go out in the evening. ... If it's true, sir, it's a very good idea.] (1989, 33;1997a, 21) Horn counters with the oxymoronic statement that "il faut forcer les gens à être coopératifs" [we have to force people to cooperate] (1989, 34;1997a, 21), establishing the tenor of what will come after, and then proceeds over forty lines to unveil a plan whereby the entire world's population would live in France in a series of well-organized appartment blocks resulting in "Plus de conflits, plus de pays riches, plus de pays pauvres, tout le monde à la même enseigne, et les réserves pour tout le monde" [No more wars, no more rich countries and poor countries, everyone in the same boat and plenty for all] (1989, 34-35;1997a, 22). Horn notes that "Vous voyez, Alboury, je suis un peu communiste, moi aussi, à ma manière" [You see, Alboury, I'm something of a Communist, in my own way] (ibid.) before outlining the benefits of his 'final solution':

> Le dernier conflit de cette humanité-là serait un débat théorique entre les charmes de l'hiver alsacien et ceux du printemps de la Côte d'Azur. Quant au reste du monde, monsieur, ce serait la réserve. Libre l'Afrique, monsieur; on exploiterait ses richesses, son sous-sol, la terre, l'énergie solaire, sans gêner personne... sans qu'aucun Africain souffre de l'invasion étrangère, puisqu'ils ne seront plus là! (1989, 35-36)

[18] In a text entitled "Mon entreprise, par Horn" [My Corporation, By Horn] in the 'Carnets' [Notes] featured at the end of the published French verions of the text, Horn explains that: "Ma vraie famille, s'il en faut une, c'est elle" [My real family, if I had to have one, is [my corporation]. (1989, 113)

> [The last conflict facing humanity would be a theoretical debate between the charms of an Alsatian winter or of spring on the Côte d'Azur. As for the rest of the world, it would all be kept in reserve. Africa could be free, think of it; we could exploit her riches, her minerals, her land, solar energy, without treading on anyone's toes... [the] Africans [won't suffer] foreign invasion, because they won't be there anymore!] (1997a, 22)

This naive utopian vision, bristling with irony and packed with internal contradictions, serves to lampoon what Mary Louise Pratt defines as an 'anti-conquest' or "utopian, innocent vision of European global authority" (1992, 7), a vision present in French thought since the birth of cultural nationalism with Montesquieu, through de Tocqueville and Michelet, who described how France was destined to be "the pilot ship of humanity"(Todorov 1993: 210). Although Horn has a pretence of being helpful, rational and logical, his plan is still highly invasive. Indeed, despite the conciliatory attitude embedded within Horn's scheme, he continues to demonstrate far from 'cooperative' behaviour which fuels Alboury's growing hatred for the whites.[19]

In one of the most damning comparisons of blacks with whites, Alboury confronts Horn late in the play about his lack of solidarity with his people. Horn is attempting to explain to Alboury about Cal, and suggesting that "Qu'on me débarasse de lui et je serai content" [I'd be happy if someone just got him off my back] (84; 55). Alboury accuses Horn of betrayal:

> Horn — Trahison? Trahir quoi? De quoi parlez-vous donc?
> Alboury — Votre frère.
> Horn — Ah, non, s'il vous plaît, pas de ces mots africains? Ce que fait cet homme n'est pas mon affaire, sa vie ne me touche pas le moins du monde.
> Alboury — Pourtant, vous êtes de la même race, non? de la même langue, de la même tribu, non?
> Horn — De la même tribu, si vous voulez, oui. (1989, 84)

> [Horn. — Betrayal? Betrayal of what? What are you saying?
> Alboury. — Of your brother.
> Horn. — Ah no, please, spare me the African jargon. What that man does is not my business, his life means nothing to me.
> Alboury.— But you are of the same race, are you not? Speak the same language, belong to the same tribe?
> Horn. — The same tribe, I suppose so, yes.] (1997a, 56)

[19] Horn's sunny description of everyone living in France is the *reductio ad absurdum* conclusion and caricature of historical rationality and cultural cohesion. Bhabha describes how "The civil state is the ultimate expression of the innate ethical and rational bent of the human mind; the social instinct is the progressive destiny of human nature, the necessary transition from Nature to Culture. The direct access from individual interests to social authority is objectified in the representative structure of a General Will — Law or Culture — where psyche and society mirror each other, transparently translating their difference, without loss, into a historical totality. Forms of social and psychic alienation and aggression — madness, self-hate, treason, violence — can never be acknowledged as determinate and constitutive conditions of civil authority, or as the ambivalent effects of the social instinct istself. They are always explained away as alien presences, occlusions of historical progress, the ultimate misrecognitions of Man." (Bhabha 1994, 42)

By affiliating Alboury with such terms as 'brother', 'race' and 'tribe' it becomes particularly evident in this passage how Koltès consolidated Alboury's function to be the naive set of eyes through which the audience becomes witness to what one could perceive to be the absurdities of the European presence in Africa. Alboury continues with:

> Tous les deux êtes des maîtres, ici, non? maîtres d'ouvrir et de fermer les chantiers sans être punis pour cela? maîtres de prendre et de renvoyer les ouvriers? maîtres d'arrêter et de faire partir les machines? propriétaires tous les deux des camions et des machines? des cases de brique et de l'electricité, de tout ici, tous les deux, non? (1989, 84)

> [You are both bosses here, are you not? You both decide if the construction site opens or closes, and face no accountability. You hire and fire. You stop and start the machines. You both own the trucks and the machinery, the brick huts and the electricity, everything here, both of you, don't you?] (1997a, 56)

Alboury's simplistic presentation of the situation serves as an effort to draw lines of responsibility and to collapse Horn's attempts to blame the larger organization of which he is a part. This easy representation of a complex situation also has the side effect of trapping Alboury into a trope of primitive idiocy, one in which he is unable to make the paradigm shift out of an atavistic understanding of the world in which every building is a 'hut.'

It becomes evident from the first scene onwards that Koltès has staged an encounter between blacks and whites which can be qualified as colonial rather than post-colonial in nature. The reader or viewer is treated to a meeting, ostensibly taking place sometime in the 1970s or 1980s, between Horn, the white man bearing the language and structures of France, and the black character who speaks as if he has never met a white man before. Evacuated from the encounter is any suggestion of hybrid cultures or identities that may have resulted from individuals and/or cultures co-existing in one location for an extended period of time previous to the initial colonial encounter. Horn is pure European, and Alboury is pure native. Koltès brings the reader back through time or rather, put more correctly, brings aspects of what he perceives to be the history of colonialism *forward* through time. This serves to create increased contrasts of identity which fuel the fantastical re-enactment of an initial encounter between the colonizing and colonized individuals.

2.7 Some initial comparisons between 'Combat' and 'Les Amertumes'

These indications of the schema of ethnicity can be understood to fit snugly within an expanded version of the configuration of characters visible in *Les Amertumes*. The

characters in *Combat* have been filtered through the 'realist hypothesis' and have been lent increased psychological coherence from the resultant emphasis on more realistic characterization, setting and narrative. The introduction of the 'realist hypothesis' results in more interaction between the more and less 'authentic' characters, depending on their ethnicity and accompanying ethical profile. The more 'authentic' Alboury is clearly the descendent of the essentialized Alexis figure who galvanizes the action of *Les Amertumes*. In the allegory of the colonial encounter, Alboury is the primary 'fragile substance' whom we glimpse before he is subject to the 'effecting element' of the white colonists. He has increased authenticity, for he is, like Alexis before him, related to the more 'authentic' unconscious. Indeed, in the history of colonialism the already complex relationship between generic colonizing and colonized populations was also compounded in the late nineteenth century by the emergence of the concept of the unconscious. Rebecca Schneider notes how the 'black' colonized population was schematically patriated to the unconscious:

> From his work on hysteria ["Aetiology of Hysteria"] Freud would eventually postulate the existence of a dynamic unconscious and eventually interiorize primitivity into the modern personality as the theoretical id from which we *differentiate* our egos. By the close of the nineteenth century, concern with the primitive, indivisible from its roots in colonialist expansion and racism, was rapidly being assimilated, or incorporated, even consumed, into the foundational undertsanding of the modern self as its (repressed) driving force. (Schneider 1997, 140)

With the advent of the 'realist hypothesis' Alboury now plays an active role in generating the narrative. This is a marked progression for the role of Alexis who permitted the action of *Les Amertumes* to happen as a result of his presence, but who was in attendance, Koltès indicated, 'without the facts being changed' (1998a 15; app. A,3).

Despite this involvement, however, Alboury still also observes, with ethical intent, the obsessive and neurotic white 'humours', those characters whom Koltès initially did not like. Horn, the white character, is the first of three white embodiments (to be explored and to be followed by Cal and Leonie) of the neuroses and contradictions of their neo-colonial presence in Africa as Koltès sees it. The structural similarities between *Les Amertumes* and *Combat* will become increasingly apparent over the course of the investigation, especially with the eventual 'grandissement' or growth of Alboury that results in a final deadly encounter between the blacks and the whites.

2.8 Koltès answers questions about his politics

Interviewers from the press attempted to encourage Koltès to discuss how the subject material of the play related to his experiences in Africa. In an interview Koltès gave to Alain Prique in 1983, and published in its entirety in 1998, Koltès would explain of *Combat* that:

> J'ai écrit la pièce après un séjour de quatre, cinq semaines en Afrique; sur une impression première, une impression violente, très, très rapide. J'y suis retourné souvent après avoir écrit la pièce. Non, ça part d'une impression complètement fugitive et pas du tout d'une connaissance approfondie. (Prique 1998, 240)
>
> [I wrote the play after a four or five week visit to Africa, based on a first impression, a first, rapid and powerful impression. I returned frequently after having written the play. No, the play is based on an entirely fugitive encounter and not at all on any deeper knowledge.]

Koltès was also concerned to stress in another interview, when pressed to discuss questions of colonialism and race, that "je ne suis pas un auteur africain" [I'm not an African author] (1983b, 35). It seems however that, despite his dislike of whites, Koltès was quite prepared to write a play about Africa and 'Africans' based on first impressions, and let it be staged.

> j'ai cru -- et je crois encore -- que raconter le cri de ces gardes entendu au fond de l'Afrique, le territoire d'inquiétude et de solitude qu'il délimite, c'était un sujet qui avait son importance. (ibid.)
>
> [I believed, and still do believe, that to relate the call of those guards heard from the depths of Africa, and the territory of anxiety and solitude that they mark, was a subject that had its importance.]

During the interview reprinted on the back cover of the published edition of the text, Koltès revealed a pivotal stance which sheds important light on the implications of his subjectivity as a white European for the representation of non-Europeans in *Combat* :

> Ma pièce parle peut-être, un peu, de la France et des blancs ... . Elle parle surtout de trois êtres humains, isolés dans un certain lieu du monde qui leur est étranger, entourés de gardiens énigmatiques (ibid.)
>
> [I guess my play might deal with the French and the whites a little ... . It's mostly about three human beings, isolated in a part of the world which is strange to them, surrounded by enigmatic guards]

Koltès had previously admitted, perhaps out of modesty and perhaps out of self-defence, that he was 'not an African author'. The implication seemed to be that he did not attempt to speak for the indigenous Nigerians. Perhaps in an attempt to justify his thoughts about the subject of the play, Koltès noted elsewhere that the white characters were having a desperate time communicating with one another, and that "Le fossé est le même entre les deux Blancs qu'entre un Blanc et un Noir" [the chasm between the two white characters is identical to the one between blacks and whites] (1999a, 19). What is clear, however, is that by stating that the text is about 'the French and the whites', who are simply 'three' of the four 'human beings' featured in the play, Alboury is patently excluded. The African character is, by implication, reduced to being a barely differentiated extension of the "enigmatic guards" who surround the Europeans. He becomes an excrescence of the night serving to amplify the "anxiety" and "solitude" of the European characters

unfamiliar with the specifics of their strange African situation. In a useful reference to colonial literatures in which European characters engage in self-discovery in terrifying exotic places, Pratt notes that while "terror constructs the authoritative standpoint from which the whole panorama makes sense," the readers "are spared any effort to imagine or comprehend its workings" (Pratt 1992, 226).

Despite Koltès' assertions, however, Alboury does figure very heavily in the play, featuring in eight of twenty scenes and speaking over a hundred lines. Koltès *does* tell the story of the black character, and his admission that the play is 'mostly about' the play's 'three' *other* 'human beings', is part of the wider story of the representation of non-European ethnicity in *Combat*. Alboury's progression from object of exotic interest to a somewhat invisible, occluded figure enacts the contradiction of exoticism as Todorov perceives the phenomenon to operate:

> Now it is not easy to equate unfamiliarity with others, the refusal to see them as they are, with the valorization of these others. It is a decidedly ambiguous compliment to praise others simply because they are different than myself. Knowledge is incompatible with exoticism, but lack of knowledge is in turn irreconcilable with praise of others; yet praise without knowledge is precisely what exoticism aspires to be. This is its constitutive paradox. (1993 265)

Simply from reading the interview extract on the play's back cover, a reader can be made aware of how, as a result of this paradox, Alboury risks becoming, for the characters, for Koltès and for eventual readers and spectators, a 'dark' *unknown* screen onto which can be projected a host of already circulating stereotypes about blackness, stereotypes emerging from the neo-colonial discourse in which Koltès is always already implicated.

Ultimately, Koltès remained uncertain about *Combat* : "De quoi parle *Combat de nègre et de chiens*?" [What is *Combat de nègre et de chiens* about?], Koltès wondered in 1983. He continued:

> Je ne sais plus vraiment, car j'ai du mal à mesurer aujourd'hui la distance entre ce que je voulais écrire et ce qui est écrit — et je le saurai peut-être à nouveau lorsque les représentations commenceront. (1983b, 30)
>
> [I don't know anymore really, because I have a hard time measuring the distance between what I wanted to write and what is written. I might know again when the staging begins.]

It would be too speculative, perhaps, to venture an articulation of even part of Koltès' intentionality and thereby attempt to determine the specificity of what he *wanted* to write about. What seems to have found its way into the distance between 'what I wanted to write about and what is written', with specific regard to the representation of ethnicity, are the host of ethnic qualifiers of primitivity which emerge from the discourse surrounding the colonial situation which Koltès so vehemently opposed.

The application of the Manichean allegory to Alboury's encounters with Horn has provided the framework within which to discuss how an author like Koltès, despite a concurrent anti-imperialist critique in his writing, gets irremediably involved, in JanMohammed's terms, in the 'vortex' of colonialist representation. The reader interested in the representation of ethnicity and its implications may remain unsatisfied by decoding the way in which the discourse of ethnicity has been inscribed into the text. Given that "Discourses shape how we operate in the world as human agents, construct our (un)consciousness and what we consider true" (Kinchelo 1997, 62), the observer may also be drawn by curiosity to explain what factors emerging from Koltès' experience, his specific positionality in the web of reality, motivate his insistence on ahistoricism.

Such curiosity can only be further piqued by Koltès' recurring and adamant opinion that people from the so-called 'first' world were essentially despicable when viewed in comparison with their counterparts from the 'third' world. This statement is paradoxical because of its broadly *political* nature, in contradistinction to the assertions of ahistoricism regarding the reception of the text. Even late in his life Koltès would compare his fellow French citizens with the very broad category of 'the African' by stating characteristically that: "[Les Africains] ne sont pas arrogants. Ils ne sont pas cons comme les Français. C'est pas des tueurs en puissance" [(Africans) are not arrogant. They're not fucks like the French. They're not all potential killers] (Attoun 1997, 31). Indeed, Koltès felt that "les Européens en général, les Occidentaux, sont de vrais monstres" [Europeans in general — people from the 'West' — are real monsters] (1999a, 140).

What experiences had led him to feel this way? What qualities in his aesthetic vision as outlined with respect to Alexis in Chapter One worked in tandem with the way in which he internalized what he felt was the neo-colonial encounter and led to his re-inscription of the Manichean allegory?

The ways in which Koltès internalized the neo-colonial encounter deserve scrutiny, not simply because of biographical curiosity. It will be possible to demonstrate how the process of internalization specific to Koltès impacted heavily on the specificity of his representation of ethnicity in *Combat*. Understanding Koltès' experiences leading to his representation of Alboury will then permit further investigation into the representational schema of ethnicity that have been explored with the discussion of Alboury and Horn.

2.9 Nigeria's political situation during Koltès' visit in the late 1970s

The discussion of the colonial traces whose manifestations are evident in *Combat* is

most usefully situated within the specific historical circumstances of the Nigeria of the late 1970s. These are the circumstances in which Koltès was inspired to write the play. Although Koltès did travel during the same period to a number of other West African countries, each with different and specific colonial/postcolonial qualifiers, the visit to Nigeria is the one which seems to have marked him most.[20] At this stage, grounding the discussion of *Combat* in some of the verifiable historical and political specificities of the Nigerian situation of the period can serve as a form of relatively objective comparative evidence. This historical evidence can then be used to examine what could be called the *drift* evident in the re-staging of the colonial encounter of *Combat*. The articulation of this *drift* will involve a continued mapping of the manner in which the colonial/neo-colonial discourse is consciously and/or unconsciously inscribed into the representation of ethnicity in *Combat*, between 'what he wanted to write about and what was written'.

The most useful broad parameter for describing the Nigerian circumstances of the time is that the country, in terms of its political reality, was both post-colonial and neo-colonial at the same time. It was formally independent but had a degree of dependency on European economic and cultural structures (including the presence of multinationals, governmental structure, etc.). The neo-colonial aspect of the Nigerian situation was, and currently is, amplified by the fact that the unequal economic relations of colonial rule are re-inscribed in contemporary imbalances between so-called 'first' and 'third' world countries (Loomba 1998, 7).

The Nigeria that informed Koltès' *Combat de nègre et de chiens* was situated in, to borrow terminology from JanMohammed, the later 'hegemonic' rather than the earlier 'dominant' phase of colonialism. The early dominant phase comprised the long period of colonization leading up to the 'independence' of the colonized country. This phase was generally characterized by direct bureaucratic and military control of the indigenous population, whose consent is "primarily passive and indirect" (JanMohamed 1985, 61). During the later hegemonic or post-"independence" phase of neocolonialism, "the natives accept a version of the colonizer's entire system of values, attitudes, morality, institutions, and, more important, mode of production" (ibid, 62).[21]

A number of Koltès' experiences preceding his Nigerian sojourn can usefully inform his reactions to Africa.

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[20] Nigeria was the first African country he visited, he explained in his letter to Hubert Gignoux in 1978. This long letter, to be examined in depth over the course of this chapter, is the only existing piece of correspondence that deals with his African experience in any depth.(See 1997c)

[21] The fact that both the core as well as the residue of colonial activity endured following the metastasization into the hegemonic phase has resulted in intense debates regarding the relevance and applicability of the hyphenated term 'post-colonialism'. See McClintock (1994).

2.10 Experiences leading up to Koltès' trip to Nigeria

During the 1970s Koltès had been radicalized following an exposure to socialist thought through membership in the French Marxist party.[22] In a letter written in the spring of 1976 (see appendix B,3) Koltès told of a couple of difficult days in Paris, after having had the impression that "pour la première fois depuis que je suis au parti" [for the first time since I've been a member of the [Communist] party] (1999b, 95; app. B,3) that he felt he was "du mauvais coté" [on the wrong side], after having met "avec ce qui doit constituer le plus bas niveau de la classe exploitée" [with those who have to be in the lowest ranks of the exploited classes] (ibid.). It was a particularly "violent" encounter for Koltès, "sans doute parce qu'ils avaient moins de vingt ans, qu'ils me ressemblaient sur le plan des aspirations, et qu'enfin ils portaient la marque horrible d'une vie détruite déjà,

[22] Indeed, Koltès' interest in the dynamics of social and economic power as well as progressive social change had been developing for almost twenty years before the trip to Africa in 1978. He had been affected by the events of the war in Algeria and their ramifications in his home town of Metz, experiences about which he would speak a number of times over the course of his life. We even hear in the last sentence of the following quotation, a hint of the links between this early exposure to political conflict and his interest in having the audience of *Les Amertumes* be returned to the receptive state of children:

"J'étais à Metz en 1960. Mon père était officier, c'est à cette époque-là qu'il est rentré d'Algérie. ... J'ai vécu l'arrivée du général Massu, les explosions des cafés arabes, tout cela loin, sans opinion, et il ne m'en est resté que des impressions — les opinions, je les ai eues plus tard. ... En province, tout cela se passait quand même d'une manière étrange: l'Algérie semblait ne pas exister et pourtant les cafés explosaient et on jetait les Arabes dans les fleuves. Il y avait cette violence-là, à laquelle un enfant est sensible et à laquelle il ne comprend rien." [I was in Metz in 1960. My father was an officer, and it was at that stage that he came home from Algeria. ... I had lived through the arrival of General Massu, the explosions in Arab cafés, but had lived it all at a certain remove, without opinion — only impressions remained. I formed opinions later. ... Out in the country, everything seemed to be happening strangely: Algeria didn't really seem to exist, but still, cafés were blowing up and they were throwing Arabs in the river. There was violence, violence to which a child is sensitive even though he doesn't understand it.] (1999a, 115).

There was an immense amount of tension along ethnic lines in Metz as a result of unsettling events occuring at the steel mills at which many immigrants worked. "When we went to school during the period the cafés were blowing up", Koltès explained, "We were protected by the cops". (Klausner and Salino,1989)

Later, while in Strasbourg studying journalism in 1968, Koltès witnessed the events of the month of May as somewhat of a spectator. This was "not from lack of courage on his part", suggests theatre historian David Bradby, "but rather from a kind of natural reserve: he had no desire to serve as a rallying cry or to get caught up in fashionable causes" (1997a, 69). Koltès described the strange environment of May 1968 in Strasbourg in a letter to his mother:

"Ici à Strasbourg, nous vivons dans une ambiance toujours aussi survoltée. Le drapeau noir flotte sur le palais universitaire, mais malgré tout, il semble qu'il commence à y naître une certaine organisation. ... A part cela, la Fac de Lettres ressemble à une place de kermesse: des orchestres "soutinennent le moral" toute la nuit à l'intérieur de la Fac, et ça danse, et ça boit ... etc. On vend des Mikos, on distribue des tracts, bref, j'imagine mal la manière dont ça va tourner" [Things here in Strasbourg are still overcharged. The black flag is flying on the university building, and despite everything, it seems that a certain degree of organisation is emerging. ... Besides that, the Faculty of Letters has a certain village fair feeling to it: bands are 'keeping up the morale' all night inside, and people are drinking, dancing, etc. People are selling ice-cream, handing out pamphlets. In short, I have a hard time picturing how it will all turn out.] (1999b, 28)

sur leurs visages" [no doubt because they were less than twenty years old, that their aspirations resembled mine, and that they carried on their faces the scars of lives already destroyed] (ibid.). Koltès "fled" from the scene "comme un voleur" [like a robber] and "avec une honte dont je n'arrive pas encore bien à voir quelles sont les causes" [with a guilt whose source I still don't quite understand] (ibid.).

The experience of being 'on the other side' was "La sensation la plus angoissante que j'ai jamais ressentie" [the most anguishing feeling I have ever had] (1999b, 95; app. B,3) and served to galvanize and fortify Koltès' political convictions:

> Tout, pour moi, s'était mystérieusement clarifié, sur tous les plans: il n'y a pas d'issue possible hors d'une adhésion complète à la cause et au mouvement de la classe ouvrière, de tous les exploités en général (ibid.).
>
> [Everything was mysteriously clarified for me, on every level: there is no way forward besides a complete adhesion to the cause of the worker and of all exploited peoples in general.]

Koltès felt that "cela seul peut donner un sens à mon travail" [only this approach can give meaning to my work]. He explained that the writing was "*l'unique* raison de vivre" [the *sole* reason for living] (ibid.).

However, not even fortified convictions could evacuate the feelings of irresponsibility brought upon by "le poids énorme de mon individualité" [the incredible weight of my individuality] (1999b, 95; app. B,3). "Pourquoi [la culpabilité]? me suis-je demandé" [Why (the guilt)? I asked myself?] he wondered anxiously, especially when "qu'ouvertement je veux me mettre de leur coté" [I've openly declared myself on their side] and "alors que, sincèrement, je veux me mettre à leur service?" [when I sincerely want to put myself at their service?] (ibid.). Koltès continued to understand things in terms of 'sides', and asked himself whose 'side' he was on:

> Mais si, de l'autre coté, Rothschild, de Wendel, l'argent, et tous les profiteurs, sont le mal incontestable, *nous*, où sommes nous? (ibid.)
>
> [But if, on the other side, you've got Rothschild and Wendell, money and all those who profit from it, those who are incontestably evil, where are *we* ?]

Koltès wondered if his own commitment was rooted in bravado and would crumble as a result of factors beyond his own control:

> Je me dis: je suis au parti communiste, j'ai choisi mon camp; mais quand la situation me catapulte à la figure les vrais exploités, je vois sur moi, comme des verrues, come une marque indélébile, l'énormité du luxe de mon existence. J'ai choisi mon camp, me dis-je? Mais en cas de catastrophe, sur quelle solidarité compterai-je, sinon sur celle de l'argent, et pourquoi pourrai-je y compter, sinon à cause de mes origines? Sur quelle solidarité, eux, peuvent-ils compter? (1999b, 96; app. B,3)

> [I tell myself that I'm in the Communist party, that I've chosen my camp; but when the situation catapults me into the face of those who are really exploited, I feel the enormity of the luxury of my own existence like warts on my skin, an indelible mark. So I think I've chosen sides, do I? But in a moment of crisis, which solidarity will I depend on, if not on that of money, and then again only because of my background? Whose solidarity can they count on?]

He was certain that the real crisis and conflict would not arise simply between the Rothschilds and the proletariat "mais aussi entre les vrais exploités et la frange intermédiaire dont je suis" [but also between the truly exploited and the intermediate group of which I'm a part] (ibid., 97).

Despite his recognition of the possibility of a third group, caught somewhere in the middle between the rich and the poor, Koltès concluded the letter by conceiving of the question of wealth and poverty in a bifurcated fashion. "Non," Koltès stated, "je ne serai jamais comparable à ces exploités-là" [I'll never be comparable to those exploited people], those who he knew would never enjoy "tous ces refuges de l'esthétisme, dans l'art, dans toutes ces nourritures pour ceux qui ont le temps" [all those aesthetic refuges, artistic ones, in all those nourishments for those who have the time] (ibid., 96).

Koltès' tendency to think in terms of clear and categorical distinctions was perhaps influenced by the difference and distance he felt from the dispossessed. Indeed, the difference he felt from the economically marginalized in France led to essentialist distinctions articulated in religious rhetoric. His unescapable wealth was part of what in "metaphysical" terms he described as the path "du Mal" [of Darkness]. The "Dark" path was that amorphous and "imprecise" quality of existence which, in contradistinction to the "Good" path ("celle du Bien") which was "claire, sûre, bien délimitée" [clear, certain, well delineated], and "se déplace à tout instant, elle vous englobe sans qu'on s'en rende compte" [is in continuous movement and surrounds you without you even realizing it] (ibid.).

It would appear that Koltès' thoughts were marked by strong doses of guilt from perceived complicity, working in tandem with tendencies to categorize as well as his feelings of distance from the realities experienced by those he felt were condemned. It is this kind of thinking which later informed Koltès' experience of Nigeria and his fictionalization of it in *Combat*.

2.11 Koltès in Nigeria.

Koltès was shocked, felt guilty, and made categorical distinctions and decisions as a result of his encounter with impoverished Parisians. This occured at the same time as when he initially immersed himself in radical socialist thought as a member of the Marxist Party in the mid 1970s. Koltès experienced another significant awakening the following

year during his trip to Nigeria where the severe poverty and violence was quite different than anything he had experienced in the West. At the time of the staging of *Combat* he recalled how, shortly after getting off the plane, he witnessed a black police officer beat a black man:

> J'ai avancé dans la foule, et me suis heurté immédiatement à cette barrière invisible, mais omniprésente, qui mettait symboliquement les Blancs d'un coté, et les Noirs de l'autre. J'ai regardé vers les Noirs. J'avais honte des miens; mais une telle haine brillait dans leurs regards que j'ai pris peur, et j'ai couru du coté des Blancs. (Simon 1983a)
>
> [I moved through the crowd and immediately ran into that invisible but omnipresent barrier which symbolically sets the whites to one side and the blacks to the other. I looked toward the blacks. I was ashamed of my own people; but there was so much hate in their eyes that I got scared and ran back towards the whites.]

This encounter is one in which he experienced, once again, what he felt was a barrier similar to that between himself and the down-and-out he had met in Paris. The alienation he felt as a result of economic barriers was amplified in Nigeria by the differences of ethnicity.

Koltès explained that the most blatant manifestation of the corruption and lack of respect for human life, which he felt resulted largely from colonialism, was that Nigeria appeared to be the scene of conspicuous death:

> Les bords de route sont jonchés de carcasses de voitures jamais ramassées. Lorsque le conducteur et les passagers sont morts — ce qui est souvent le cas, étant donné la vitesse à laquelle on roule ici —, si l'accident se passe à proximité d'une ville, la police déverse sur les cadavres un acide qui réduit les corps à un tas de cendres, et le tout reste comme cela ; si l'accident a eu lieu plus loin dans la brousse, tantôt une bonne âme de passage met le feu à la voiture et aux corps, tantôt recouvre les corps d'une feuille de bananier ; tantôt les cadavres restent au soleil et l'on roule au milieu d'apparitions régulières de corps gonflés exposés depuis des semaines au soleil et aux oiseaux carnassiers. (1997c, 18)
>
> [The sides of the roads are packed with the carcasses of dead cars which are never removed. When the driver and passengers are killed — which is often the case, considering how fast people drive here — and if the accident has occured near a town, the police will pour an acid over the bodies that reduces them to a pile of ashes, and then simply leave it all right there, as is. If the accident has happened a little further out in the bush, sometimes a good Samaritan will burn the car and the bodies, or sometimes just cover them with a banana leaf. Sometimes the bodies stay in the sun and you often drive by the sight of bloated bodies, exposed for weeks to the sun and carnivorous birds.]

Witnessing these and other similar events would cause Koltès to begin to conceive of Africa as a place which bore the entire burden of the colonial project, relegating it to the status of the irrevocably 'condemned'. Indeed, in a passionate and hyperbolic discussion of his African experience that risked casting the entire African continent as victims, Koltès would later look back and state that:

> J'avais besoin d'aller en Afrique pour écrire tout. N'importe quoi . ... Pour moi, l'Afrique c'est

> une découverte essentielle! Essentielle pour TOUT! Pour tout. Parce que c'est un continent perdu. Absolument condamné. ... Et puis il y a un degré de souffrance! Quand on pense qu'il y a des mômes qui passent TOUTE leur journée à faire l'aller jusqu'au puits et le retour du puits, on se dit mais comment on peut encore s'intéresser à des problèmes sentimentaux ... Ils passent leurs journées à ça ... et ils meurent à la fin ... en ayant passé leur vie entière à chercher de l'eau. Je vous jure que ça vous remet à votre place. (Attoun 1997, 30)
>
> [I had to go to Africa to write everything I've written, no matter what... Because for me, Africa is ... an essential discovery, essential for everything. Because it is a lost continent, one which is absolutely condemned. And there is so much suffering. When you think that there are kids who spend their whole day walking back and forth from the well, and you say to yourself: how can I still be interested in feelings and fine sentiments ...? They spend their day doing only that and then they die having spent ... their whole lives getting water: I swear to you that it puts you back in your place.]

Koltès' writing about Africa began in Africa. Sitting and writing to Gignoux from behind a window, Koltès became the "monarch of all I see", a stance very popular in nineteenth century travel writing. Pratt describes this grand synoptic gaze in the context of other literatures as a heroic act of seeing which appropriates the landscape seen, and becomes part of the colonial discourse when represented back at home (1992, 203-04). Koltès' vision of the disgusting state of affairs in Nigeria fits very much within what can be described as the current official metropolitan code of the third world, which Pratt describes as a "rhetoric of triviality, dehumanization, and rejection colliding with the end of colonial rule in much of Africa and Asia." While no longer "cornucopias of resources inviting the artful, perfecting intervention of the west," the "newly assertive, de-exoticized" Nigeria became in the eyes of Koltès (the "seeing-man") a "repugnant conglomeration[...] of incongruities, asymmetries, perversions, absence and emptiness." (220)

Koltès continued to attempt to make sense of what he was witnessing in the terms afforded him by the discourse of his Marxist involvements. In the 1978 letter from Africa, Koltès addressed Gignoux as 'Comrade', and was apprehensive about possibilities for individual 'freedom': "Il m'arrive de craindre une vraie fatalité de l'histoire sur les destins individuels" [Sometimes I fear that history acts as an agent of fate on individual lives] (1997c, 13). He wondered wherein lay liberation from constricting historical and social circumstances: "suffit-il d'une option intellectuelle (même doublée de militantisme) pour que son propre destin soit changé?" [Is it by means of the intellect (perhaps doubled up with radical politics) that the course of one's own history can be changed?], or, he continued "suffit-il d'être communiste pour être dans le camp révolutionnaire?" [is it enough to be a Communist to be amongst the revolutionaries?] (ibid.). As a member of the French Communist Party Koltès was unconvinced of any eventual redress of global inequalities of power that even Communism might bring:[23]

[23] Koltès was a member of the Communist party from 1974 to 1978.

> Quelle cohérence, quelle solidarité, quelle absence d'antagonisme espérer entre l'économie d'un pays riche même socialiste, et les intérêts des "pays prolétaires"? La classe ouvrière française est-elle révolutionnaire dans la lutte des classes mondiale? (1997c, 13)
>
> [What kind of coherence, solidarity or absence of antagonism can you expect between the economy of a rich nation, even a socialist one, and the interests of the 'proletariat nations'? Is the French working class revolutionary with regards to the global class struggle?]

He wrote at the time on how "la corruption est à la base de tous les commerces" [Corruption is at the root of all forms of exchange] (ibid, 17) and traced the effects of a downward spiral of various forms of oppressive circumstances on the collective memory of the Nigerians he had met:

> Les coups répétés, portés par le colonialisme d'abord, par sa digne fille la dictature ensuite, aux cultures locales permettent maintenant à tout un chacun d'affirmer qu'aucune culture n'a jamais existé, et que la seule morale fut toujours ici celle du profit et de la corruption. (ibid.)
>
> [Sucessive blows, dealt first by colonialism, then by her noble daughter dictatorship, have permitted a climate in which all the local peoples can assert that no culture actually existed here, and that the only moral code that was ever in place here was that of profit and corruption.]

He recounted the story of a white employer assigned to mediate a dispute between two black employees. The employer asked one of the plaintiffs to swear before God and on the head of his children that he was telling the truth. The other plaintiff approached his car of the first, opened the hood and defied him to swear "Not before God, and not on the heads of his children, but on the motor of this car." This, the man refused to do before finally confessing his wrongdoing (ibid.).

In his 1978 letter, Koltès demonstrated himself to be very frustrated with this general state of affairs. He noted, for example, that he felt the Nigerian government to be complicit with the external interventions of the American oil companies, and excessively authoritarian: "Le général Olusegun Obasanjo, chef de l'Etat, envisage de placer des militaires comme surveillants dans les établissements d'enseignement secondaire "pour y rétablir l'ordre." [The men in power are valets of American imperialism" he notes and complained of how "General Olusegun Obasanjo, the chief of state, is planning on stationing military staff in secondary schools to 'bring back order'"] (1997c, 16).

It is telling that Koltès employed, in a letter home from Africa in 1978, the term 'neo-colonialism' (ibid., 22) to describe the situation in the country at the time. He employed 'neo-colonialism' rather than any other term which might suggest that, despite Nigeria's status as an independent state, the country had not moved beyond a colonial state of affairs.[24] He asserted in the letter to Hubert Gignoux that the visibly intrusive and oppressive presence of multinational companies was perpetuating imbalances of power and resources: "Les puits de pétrole font de gigantesques ciels rouges dans le ciel. Les

[24] There is a resonance here with a variety of debates within academic circles suggesting that the term 'postcolonial' tends to whitewash practices more aptly described by more sharply defined political terms such as 'imperialism' or 'geopolitics'. See McClintock (1994).

multinationales ont leurs immenses buildings qui écrasent Lagos et Port Harcourt." [The oil wells cast huge red glows on the horizon. The multinationals have huge buildings which crush Lagos and Port-Harcourt.] (16). He summarized that "Les dollars du pétrole ont achevé ici l'œuvre du colonialisme anglais" [Oil money has fulfilled the English colonial project] (17).

Koltès wondered if there was any possibility for intervening or even understanding problems of this magnitude. He remarked that the possibility of resistance to corporate power and government corruption in Nigeria was palpable, with the formation of unions and, in characteristics which became apparent in Alboury, of the "immense impression de force qui se dégage des groupes d'ouvriers, à l'heure de la pause, assis en rond sur les machines" [immense impression of strength exuded by workers on break sitting around their machines] (1997c, 16). He felt that each work-site he visited was clearly mapped in terms of the "la lutte des classes" [the class struggle], and that "on ne traverse pas un chantier sans la profonde impression de l'imminence de la révolution, violente, sans doute, sous les ciels rouges des puits de pétrole" [one doesn't cross any single compound without the deep feeling of imminent and undoubtedly violent revolution under the red skies of the oil wells] (ibid., 16-17). "Quand et comment se réveillera le prolétariat africain?" [When and how will the African proletariat awake?] (ibid., 17), he wondered with frustration. Koltès' call for a broad political response was even more frustrated when he witnessed manifestations of accepted servitude. Koltès noted to Gignoux that there was a black person sitting outside in the courtyard within view of the table on which he was writing his letter. Koltès appeared to be frustrated when explaining that all he would have to do is simply tap on the window for the black person, lazily shooing away flies under a tree, to get up "brusquement, pousse la porte virée, et dise : "Yes, master?" [get up suddenly, push open the glass door and say 'Yes, master?] (ibid.).

Koltès lamented the impossibility of revolt: "Comment croire une révolution possible dans les marais de l'incohérence, de la corruption, de la morale (apparente) du profit et de la servitude acceptée" [How can you hope for revolution in this swamp of incoherence, corruption and the policy of (apparent) profit and of accepted servitude?] (ibid., 18). He could not understand the relationship between macro and micro-structures of power in any way which provided emancipatory potential. "Il m'arrive de craindre de ne plus comprendre grand-chose dans la marche de l'histoire..." [I am afraid I do not understand much anymore as far as the march of history is concerned] (ibid., 13); later in the letter he affirmed that "Les lois des antagonisme sociaux sont si mécaniques que ...on finit par douter de leur existence" [The laws of social antagonism are so unmechanical ... that you begin to doubt their very existence] (ibid., 18).

Five years after his initial journey Koltès felt that the political perspectives he had initially

tried to apply to make sense of the Nigerian situation were ultimately unhelpful. He encountered similar circumstances when he was caught in war-torn Guatemala during a trip the following year. However, the difficult conditions became a boon for his writing:

> J'ai été troublé d'écrire[*Combat*] en Amerique latine, à un moment très fort de bouillonnement politique. Auparavent, si de Paris je pensais à l'Afrique, je croyais avoir des idées claires sur la lutte des classes, je me disais qu'il suffisait de se ramener avec sa bonne volonté pour en parler. Mais, quand on est au Guatamala pendant la guerre civile, ou au Nicaragua pendant le coup d'Etat, on se trouve devant une telle confusion, devant une telle complication des choses, qu'il n'est plus possible d'écrire la pièce sous une angle politique. Tout devient irrationnel. (1999a, 19-20)
>
> [I had to write [*Combat*] in Latin America at a time of severe political turmoil. Before, if I was in Paris thinking about Africa, I thought I had pretty clear ideas about the class struggle, and I thought it was enough to just bring your good will to the table and talk it all over. But when you're in Guatemala during a civil war, or in Nicaragua during a coup, you find yourself in the midst of so much confusion, so much complexity that it becomes impossible to write a play in political terms. Everything becomes irrational.]

Koltès concluded that by discovering political violence "from the inside" he was no longer able "to talk in political terms, but in emotional ones, but at the same time this fact revolted me." (1999a, 20).[25]

These later memories of the situation, similar to his retrospective and hyperbolic painting of Africa as the 'condemned' bearer of the burden of the European colonial project, are very 'political' in that they deal with what he perceived to be historical imbalances of power. They evidence little concern, however, for conceiving of the situation in any kind of sophisticated or informed political fashion. It seems as if the nebulous 'laws of social antagonism' have been reduced to a paradigm similar to the binarist Good and Dark path he evoked in the letter from the mid-1970s to discuss political engagement and responsibility. He had explained in the same letter that:

> Je fais là, à l'intérieur d'un cadre "politique", exactement un trajet qui ressemble, chapitre après chapitre, à la "nuit obscure" de Jean de la Croix, avec la monstruosité du mal qui augmente sans limite au fur et à mesure où l'on veut s'engager dans le sens inverse. (1999b, 97)
>
> [I am making a trajectory within the framework of [conventional] politics that resembles, chapter for chapter, Jean de la Croix's 'night of obscurity', with the monstruous quality of evil augmenting limitlessly as you work harder and harder to move in the other direction.]

Koltès' tendency towards categorization as a response to uncertainty unfolds hand in

[25] Koltès' use of the word 'political', in the context of both 'political violence' and the 'political terms' in which he felt he could not discuss his experience, is a revealing one. Indeed his statements about this word can shed light on his comment, which I quoted earlier in the chapter, about *Combat* not being about anything explicitly 'political'. It would appear that in the quotation above he takes 'political terms' to be based on what he perhaps interpreted to be the formulaic ideological discourse or paradigms he encountered as a member of the French Marxist party. Therefore, the vigor of his assertions about the absence of politics in his work, which emerged in part from the experience of 'political violence,' may be understood to have been significantly fueled by a desire not to be formulaic, as opposed to a desire to deny completely the political 'content' or import of his work.

hand with a complex imbrication of feelings of guilt regarding his own whiteness and his continued desire to divide those who are suffering from those who are not. He would state in 1983 that "De plus en plus, de façon à la fois vague et décisive, je divise les gens en deux catégories: ceux qui sont condamnés et ceux qui ne le sont pas" [more and more, in a vague yet decisive fashion, I divide people into two categories: those who are condemned, and those who aren't] (1999a: 20-21). In a posthumously broadcast interview with Lucien Attoun of the Théâtre Ouvert, recorded shortly before his death from AIDS related illness in 1989, Koltès reiterated how his experience of Africa in particular had become a yardstick for contextualizing his own relative privilege:

> l'Afrique c'est un truc décisif pout TOUT, pour tout, pour tout ... J'écrirais pas s'il y avait pas ça. S'il n'y avait pas cette espèce de souvenir derrière la tête qu'on est d'incroyables privilégiés, qu'on est pas intéressants, qu'on est rien. (Attoun 1997, 30)
>
> [Africa was a decisive experience for everything, everything, everything. I wouldn't have written if it weren't for that experience, if it wasn't always in the back of my mind that we are remarkably privileged, that we're not interesting, that we're nothing.]

The 'we' to which he refers is presumably the great European 'we', a form of generalizing that Attoun would question him about during the course of that same interview. Koltès had affirmed earlier in the interview "Mais c'est très clair: je hais les Français, je hais les Occidentaux. C'est pas un truc philosophique. Je les hais profondément" [It's a straightforward thing: I hate French people, I hate Westerners. It's not a philosophical thing. I hate them] (ibid., 28). Koltès clearly displays the symptoms of the exoticist who feels, unlike the nationalist, that the country with superior values is not necessarily my own, confirming Todorov's assertion that "what is at issue [with exoticism] is less a valorization of the other than an act of self-criticism" (1993, 264).

2.12 Cal

Koltès' avowed dislike for the white characters in *Combat* was brought about in part by his encounters with people resembling the character of Cal when he was in Nigeria. An examination of Cal can provide an understanding of a character embodying a neo-colonial stance complementary to Horn's. With Cal, Koltès presented a portrait of the violent *hunter* of indigenous people, a satirized embodiment of neo-colonial neurosis and racism.

Cal seems to have lived and travelled everywhere on the planet. As a result, he gives the impression of being a certain *type* of person, a circulating non-entity in a large network of anonymous and seemingly undifferentiated towns and corporations. He explains to Leonie that:

> Moi, jeune comme vous me voyez, j'ai voyagé, croyez-moi, croyez- moi. Bangkok j'ai fait; j'ai

> fait Ispahan, la mer Noire ; Marrakech, j'ai fait, Tanger, la Réunion, les Caraïbes, Honolulu, Vancouver, moi; Chicoutimi ; le Brésil, la Colombie, la Patagonie, les Baléares, le Guatémala, moi ; et finalement cette saloperie d'Afrique-là, tiens, Dakar, Abidjan, Lomé, Léopoldville, Johannesburg, Lagos ; pire que tout, l'Afrique, moi je peux vous le dire. Eh bien, partout le whisky ou le lait de soja; et pas de surprise, non. Je suis jeune, pourtant ; eh bien, je peux vous dire qu'un whisky ressemble à un whisky, un chantier à un chantier, une entreprise française à une autre entreprise française; toute la même saloperie. (1989, 39)
>
> [I may look young but I've done some travelling, believe me, believe me. Bangkok, been there, Isfahan, the Black Sea; Marrakesh, been there, Tangiers, La Réunion, the Carribbean, Honolulu, Vancouver too; Chicoutimi; Brazil, Columbia, Patagonia, Majorca, Minorca, Guatemala, yes; and finally this shit pit Africa, now, Dakar, Adidjan, Lomé, Léopoldville, Johannesburg, Lagos. Well everywhere, I found whisky and soya milk; no problem. I'm still young, you know; well, let me tell you, one whisky tastes like any other, one site's like any other, one French firm just like any other; all the same old shit.] (1997a, 25)

Even though he has provided a sense of ubiquity, Cal never actually meets or speaks with Alboury during the entire text. Horn, and as we shall see, Leonie have contact and varying degrees of closeness with Alboury. However, Koltès has Cal remain conspicuously at a complete distance from the black man while being obsessed with killing him and all the other 'niggers' throughout the entire play. With Cal's removed position *vis-à-vis* the blacks, Koltès staged an embodiment of racist views completely detached from the reality of black identity, even the reduced primitivist identity that Koltès had envisaged.

Cal's explicitly racist diatribes are more manifestly cruel than Horn's manipulativeness and yet both appear to be complementary sides of the same colonial coin. They are dependent on one another in their tendencies towards discussion, in Horn's case, and Cal's hyperactivity on the other. The schism between them comes when their differences are no longer mutually beneficial. Cal becomes angry when Horn would have him delay stalking Alboury until more discussion among the various parties has taken place:

> Je suis un homme d'action, moi; toi, tu parles, tu parles, tu ne sais que parler ; et qu'est-ce que tu feras, toi, hein, s'il ne t'écoute pas, hein, si tes petits moyens secrets ne marchent pas, hein? ... Pour l'action, les foutus cons ne servent à rien. Moi, je flingue un boubou s'il me crache dessus, et j'ai raison, moi, bordel; et c'est bien grâce à moi qu'ils ne te crachent pas dessus, pas à cause de ce que tu parles, tu parles, et que tu sois un con. (1989, 77-78)
>
> [Me, I'm a man of action; you, you're a talker, you talk, all you can do is talk; and what will you do if he won't listen, eh? If all your little secret ways and means don't work, eh?... Fucking jerks can't take action. If a nig-nog spits at me, I gun him down and I'm bloody well right to; and it's thanks to me that they don't spit on you, not because of all your talk, your jerk-talk.] (1997a, 51-52).

By uttering such statements Cal is immediately evocative of the repulsive individuals Koltès reports having met during his first trip to a Nigerian industrial compound in 1978. The evening 'club' was the site of the conspiracy to which Koltès was temporarily

patriated every night on that voyage. He was abducted as a reluctant witness[26] into a place where, as he explained in the letter to Gignoux, white men gather weeknights to talk about "bouffe, cul, nègres, et rêves européens" [food, sex, niggers and European dreams] before they go back to their "épouses soumises et la cuisine familiale" [submissive wives and the family kitchen] (1997c, 19) on Saturday nights. The club is a location of ecstatic communion amongst members of a supposed community whose members are desperate to portray a sense of unanimity, and reify the status of that community through the exercise of the stereotype. They rehearse what Slavoj Zizek describes as the 'enjoyment' of belonging to a national identity, that concept predicated "on the fear of being robbed of something no-one can adequately pinpoint except as what is in danger of being lost." (Zizek 1993, 230-37; quoted in Rosello, 175).

Indeed, Koltès discovered that his novelty as a traveller positioned him to be a catalyst for a whole host of different types of advice and warnings. These included a "discours raciste ... totale méconnaissance en politique, certitudes sommaires, convictions aussi violentes et définitives qu'infantiles" [racist discourse . . . total lack of political awareness, summary certitudes, convictions which were as violent and definitive as they were infantile] (1997c, 19). "Il ... suffirait d'une semaine ici pour devenir raciste" [It only takes ... one week before you become racist in this place], he is informed and, on the assumption that he is heterosexual, the 'gentlemen' of the club let him know that black women are

> toutes putes sans exception, pas désagréables, mais que je ne manque pas de me désinfecter après, et que je ne sois pas effrayé la première fois, car elles ont toutes le clitoris coupé et les lèvres du vagin tailladées. (ibid., 19)
>
> [are all whores, but not necessarily disgusting, but that I should disinfect myself after, and that I shouldn't be frightened the first time, seeing as they all have their clitoris cut off and their vaginas clipped.]

Koltès was being recruited as an understanding listener and accomplice to a stereotyping ritual which, surely for a variety of reasons, clearly repulses him.

A reductive masculinism that Koltès despised was frequently in evidence among the

[26] Koltès can be understood to be a 'reluctant witness', a term used by Mireille Rosello. She employs these productive and useful "emblematic figure[s]" in *Declining the Stereotype: Ethnicity and Representation in French Cultures* as sites for investigating "contemporary documents of French expression where the stereotype of the ethnic other is confronted and reappropriated from different angles and positionings" (1998, 1). The reluctant witness, as she defines it, is either an individual or a fictional character who observes or is invited to participate in dubious cultural rituals, frequently racist, of which they do not approve. In view of the unusual popularity Koltès enjoys among French readers and theatre-goers, he fits quite clearly in the category Rosello establishes for the 'reluctant witnesses' whose 'witnessing' (in this case in the form of his plays) justifies an extended discussion of their artistic creations. Koltès was one of those "people whose participation in the cultural, social and political life of the nation is both undeniable and rendered problematic by their own history and the country they live in" (ibid., 2).

'neo-colonials' he encountered. He found himself subjected to right-wing diatribes against "les gauchistes qui prétendaient à l'égalité des nègres sans en avoir jamais vu" [leftists who want blacks to have equality without ever having met any] and "ces femmelettes de métropolitains qui ne savent pas ce que c'est que la castagne" [wimpy metropolitan types who don't know what a good fight is] (20). In an incident which would serve as an inspiration for *Combat de nègre et de chiens*, Koltès wrote of the way the white managers reacted when a black man was killed by a truck on the worksite:

> On m'en mit plein la vue pour me montrer à quel point le fait était banal, presque quotidien, risible, sain, et prouvait à quel degré cette petite société, réunie au club autour d'un verre, parlant si gaiement entre blancs, était faite d'hommes, durs, expérimentés, souverains, des vrais, quoi. (ibid.)
>
> [They put the body in plain view to show to what extent the death was banal, almost quotidian, laughable, healthy and proved to what extent this little society, gathered around drinks, talking so happily amongst whites, was made of men — tough, experienced, sovereign, the real thing.]

Koltès was disgusted by an individual he met who claimed to be the representative of 'French Culture' overseas and who stated that "L'Afrique me connaît, l'Afrique m'aime, je suis la preuve vivante que l'Empire français n'est pas mort" [Africa knows me, Africa loves me, I'm living proof that the French Empire is not dead] (1997c, 20). Koltès noted dryly that "la culture française a trente-deux ans et en paraît cinquante, elle est grosse, suante, myope, ne dit pas de gros mots, et a une étoile de rides tout autour des yeux" [French Culture is thirty two years old and looks fifty, it is fat, sweaty, myopic, doesn't curse and has a star of wrinkles around its eyes] (ibid., 21). Indeed he felt that the reverberations of colonial politics manifested themselves most evidently on the faces of the white people around him:

> Le neo-colonialisme donne à tous ces hommes et à toutes ces femmes un certain nombre de rides particulières, que je n'ai jamais vues ailleurs, et qui se dessinent à la vertical, du bord extérieur des yeux jusqu'au milieu de la joue, comme une traînée de larmes écartée par le vent. (21)
>
> [Neo-colonialism has blessed all these men and women with a certain type of wrinkle I've never seen anywhere else, vertical ones that go from the outside of the eye to the middle of the cheek, like the tracks from tears blown by the wind.]

He was shocked to meet individuals who had no conception of political reality as he understood it, such as the French man who had once lived in Algeria who "n'a rien compris à ce qui s'était passé tout le temps de la guerre d'Algérie et de la décolonisation" [understood *nothing* that had happened in the Algerian war and with decolonisation] (italics mine) but simply asserted that "le bougnoule avait voulu sa peau, et qui lui prendrait un jour sa revanche, et qu'il la reprenait déjà par Nigériens interposés" [the nigger had tried to do him in, and that he would get back at him someday, and that he was already taking it out on the Nigerians] (19).

Despite his dislike for the whites he encountered in Nigeria, Koltès was torn by his perception of himself as naturally belonging to the dominant group of the 'whites', with whiteness being an indelible sign of his complicity with racial oppression. He noted in his letter from Africa how he had a mutism enforced upon him: "non pas l'obstacle de la langue, qui est un des plaisirs de l'étranger auquel je suis le plus attaché, mais plutôt celui de parler la même langue (grammaire et vocabulaire) que les néo-colonialistes avec lesquels je suis mêlé" [not by the barrier of the language, which is one of the pleasures of being abroad to which I'm most attached, but rather that of speaking the same language (grammar and vocabulary) as the neo-colonialists with whom I'm mixed] (13). Since grammar and vocabulary were "le seul terrain qui nous soit commun" [the only terrain we have in common] he felt he could not "ouvrir la bouche" [even open my mouth] (13). He decried the "abominable complicité blanche" [abominable white complicity] (1997c, 20) he had to endure while travelling from one industrial compound to another to reach his friends in Ahoada, suffering invitations to participate in cultural rituals he clearly found offensive.

It would appear that the manifest evidence of a matrix of oppressive circumstances, linked to macro-structures of power, has rendered insignificant or undetectable to Koltès his own inevitable status as what Rosello would describe as a "less consciously creolized subject" (Rosello 1998, 10). Rather than being 'one single shade of white', as it were, Koltès' own ancestors almost certainly had a variety of ethnic roots. A more developed articulation of the complexity of his own roots might have lead to a less totalizing counternarrative, but the intensity of Koltès' experiences and his perceptive stance steeped in outrage combine to conflate himself in his own mind to the whites around him. Paul Gilroy calls for a move away from such a stance of 'ethnic absolutism', suggesting that the perception of oneself as inevitably hybrid is necessary for "critically distanced participation in civil societies of the West."(Gilroy 1993, 1). Yet for Koltès critical distance remained difficult and perhaps unwanted.

The white community built on false grounding corresponds to Koltès' fascination with the 'walls' that exist between people and the desperate things they will do to have contact and solidarity. [27] The white solidarity, dependent on false grounds and anxious talk, comes across as pathetic in the context of the 'authentic' solidarity of the blacks that Koltès proposed. This schema of ethnic authenticity can be productively compared with the different levels of being that Koltès presented in the mid 1970s. As discussed in the first chapter, this schema of authenticity complements the varying levels of authenticity of character that Koltès offered through *Les Amertumes*. Cal has an anxious chatter that simultaneously attempts to solidify his connection with other racists like him and at the same time exposes his own wound of irremediable isolation. With this 'talk,' Cal

[27] Remember, for example, Koltès' assertion, quoted earlier, that the chasm between whites was as broad as the chasm that existed between blacks and whites.

demonstrates himself to be in the lineage of the desperate characters in *Les Amertumes* whose effects of cruelty affect the observing character Alexis, or in Cal's case, Alboury.

2.13 Vicarious nativism

The attempts Koltès makes to elevate Alboury's authenticity in comparison to the demonized white characters can be understood to be the result of what may be, because Koltès is himself not black, best termed a *vicarious* nativist representational strategy. This strategy began to take shape in Koltès' 1978 letter to Gignoux. In this letter he compared the horrific present he was witnessing with a prelapsarian vision of the highly evolved civilization of the Mok. Koltès had read that the Mok were a "civilization" that existed in Nigeria for eight hundred years from 500Bc to 300 AD, a people whose technical advances and sophisticated government Koltès felt rivalled those of ancient Greece. "Ne faut-il pas qu'elle ait été soumise à un rude choc et à une perversion de grande échelle pour qu'une communauté abandonne ses morts aux fossés et à la dissolution chimique?" [Hasn't a community had to suffer a terrible shock and a large-scale perversion of its systems if it is now dumping its dead into ditches and melting the bodies with chemicals?] (1997c, 17). With this suggestion, Koltès had, at the time of his trip, already begun to understand blackness as something potentially purer than whiteness best served by being conceived to be independent from the whiteness which he believed had destroyed the indigenous black Nigerian population. Koltès had already grounded his conceptualization of blackness in something originary and quasi-mythological, as well as blaming the colonizer for all the current ills.

Koltès' writing on the subject of the authenticity of black civilization, and the denigration of European imperial activity echoes the thoughts evident in the works of a black writer such as Aimé Césaire. Césaire was a pivotal voice in the Négritude movement which helped galvanize the political will for the anti-imperial independence movements in Africa:

> The Indians massacred, the Moslem world drained of itself, the Chinese world defiled and perverted for a good century; the Negro world disqualified; mighty voices stilled forever; all this wreckage, all this waste, humanity reduced to a monologue, and you think that all this does not have its price? The truth is that this policy *cannot but bring about the ruin of Europe itself*, and Europe, if it is not careful, will perish from the void it has created around itself [...] what else has bourgeois Europe done? It has undermined civilizations, destroyed countries, ruined nationalities, extirpated 'the root of diversity' (Césaire 1972, 57-59).

The nostalgia for better times that Alboury demonstrates appears to be a lament for the loss of a grounding cultural identity which he felt European colonization had destroyed, a desire which Stuart Hall, when discussing similar recollections in other literatures, identified as "a search for a sort of collective 'one true self'... which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common, or in Fanon's words a search for 'some very

beautiful splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves, and in regard to others" (Hall 1994, 395).

Included in Alboury's rehabilitative function in Koltès' vision in *Combat* is his connection with the landscape. A French critic, evidently unaware of the risks of mythologization inherent in Koltès' African worldview, complemented Koltès for the manner in which Alboury "evokes the ancestral energy released by the ancient fables" that could "mobilize strength." The critic was amazed by how Alboury's "knowledge of Africa and of its secrets allows him to be in total cohesion with the territory, unite the visible and the invisible, to be present in the absence" (Saada, 89). Indeed, in contradistinction to Horn's suggestions in the play, discussed earlier, that Alboury's mind is as muddled and dark as the landscape that surrounds it, the black man is frequently accorded a special status within the narrative for having a remarkable closeness to the land. In his second conversation with Leonie, Alboury provides her with explanations of the strange sounds she hears coming from beyond the compound. These statements fit so snugly within the noble savage-inspired stereotype of the 'primal-African-connected-to-the-earth' that the reader may be left incredulous, even smirking. "Cela qu'est-ce que c'est?" [Listen, what's that?] she asks. "Le chant des crapauds-buffles: ils appellent la pluie" [The song of the buffalo toads: they are calling for rain], he answers. "Et cela" [And that?] she asks again: "Le cri des éperviers" [The cry of the hawks] (1989, 69;1997a, 45-46). In fashioning a black subjectivity by means of what he felt to be a more 'direct' and authentic use of language, Koltès envisioned, as Sartre described when he spoke of the black poets of the Négritude movement an "Africa beyond reach", an "imaginary continent".[28]

Conversely, this 'knowledge of self'[29] that Alboury demonstrates in his articulation of deep personal wisdom, as well as in his connection with his 'tribe' and the landscape arguably serves to deride a performance of self, scripted entirely by the colonizer. Frantz Fanon posits this type of externally created identity to be one which could produce the internally divided condition of 'absolute depersonalization' (Fanon 1967b, 53). Absolute depersonalization, a notion elaborated and contested by subsequent theorists psychoanalyzing the colonized subject, involves a number of specific dynamics. Primary among these is the denigration of the cultural identity of the colonized by the colonizer in order that the colonizer may justify the subjugation of the colonized. In addition, the colonized are fundamentally unable to emulate the social model presented by the

[28] This lingusitic project, which will be discussed in more detail further on in the chapter, had a revolutionary grounding in that it set about to 'degallicise' the oppressor's language and thereby "[shatter] its customary associations" (Parry 1994, 189) .

[29] The expression 'knowledge of self', suggesting individual groundedness and connection to one's people or 'peeps,' emerged from the largely black and American hip-hop movement of the1980s and 1990s, and features heavily in the philosophy of rap artists such as Guru and the jazz-fusion of Ronny Jordan.

colonizer. The colonized cannot, even if they so desire, 'become' the colonizer (due to differences in ethnicity, history, language). They are left split between an old identity which has been degraded and a new one which they cannot attain. "Colonialist ideology", JanMohammed explains, "is designed to confine the native in a confused and subservient position" (1983, 5).

Alboury's seemingly grounded identity, and the fact that Koltès has made him tough, would initially appear to extract him from the dependency and confusion engendered by the colonial situation and its discourse. JanMohamed suggests that as a result of such confusion the attraction and hatred on the part of the colonizer for the colonized is echoed by an attraction and hatred by the colonized for the colonizer. Colonized persons have both "genuine admiration for European technology" and "hatred for the system that subjugates and insults [them]" (ibid., 4). JanMohammed suggests that the indigenous person may try to emulate the colonizer in an attempt to overcome the sense of inferiority inflicted by the colonizer. Koltès puts a significant emphasis on Alboury's hatred for the colonizer and diminished the power of the attraction of anything imported by the European. Koltès noted in the 1978 letter to mentor Gignoux from Nigeria that technology "a troublé les esprits" [has troubled people's souls] (1997c, 17). It comes as no suprise that, in his staging of a 'first encounter' between a relatively 'primal' black man and a colonizer, Koltès has shown Alboury finding European technology, such as the light which hurt his eyes or the automobiles which bring only death, to be undesirable to him. In addition, Alboury's use of folksy maxims which resonate with the 'wisdom of his people', as well as his repeated assertions of Horn's mendacity suggest that he would have no use or interest in "education, assimilation or equality" with the European that JanMohamed suggests is part of the attraction of the colonized to the colonizer (1983, 4-5).

A number of other contextual characteristics related to the historical drift of the circumstances surrounding the action of the play in the industrial compound help fortify Alboury's position of strength in the face of the 'absolutely evil' white neo-colonists. It would seem, for example, that even though Koltès has attempted to restage a colonial encounter as a means of helping foreground differences, certain essential practices characteristic of the early dominant phase of colonialism (as characterized by JanMohamed [1985, 62]) are elided. Horn and Cal are not backed up by an army. The brutal and systematic interventionist practices such as widespread military presence of colonialism's early phase are skipped over in favour of forms of discursive intervention that qualify the later hegemonic or post-independence phase of colonialism. An actual colonial military presence is replaced by 'bands of roving pillagers', black not white, to quote Koltès' description of his own Nigerian experience as explained on the text's back cover. Indeed, Alboury has more to fear from the primitive form of 'army' of his own people, in the form of the guards around the compound, than he does from any forces of

order imposed by Cal and Horn's European backers. Unlike the situation in Nigeria about which Koltès wrote home in 1978, there is no solidarity in *Combat* between the forces of order of the indigenous population (guards) and the emissaries of Euro-American neo-colonialist economic imperialism. For his part, Alboury also remains unsullied by, or uninvolved in, a variety of imported discursive activities which he has heard have affected some of his own contemporaries. Alboury is immune to (corrupt) forms of European governement which lead to the acquisition of rapaciously murderous automobiles, as well as to drink and debaucherous activity.

The absence of such an important qualifier for the colonial encounter as a military presence results in the weakening of the position of the whites and a strengthening of the position of the blacks. As a result of the way in which Alboury's originary qualities are situated in this restaging of the colonial encounter, Horn's and Cal's racism, and later Leonie's, can have no effect on him. In the early, or dominant phase of colonial practice, JanMohammed explains, colonialist *discursive* practices are not very potent means of controlling the indigenous population: "the native is not subjugated, nor does his culture disintegrate, simply because a European characterizes both as savage" (JanMohammed 1985, 62).

2.14 The implications of the vicarious nativist strategy

A number of important critiques have been written about nativist strategies of representation, vicarious or otherwise. Parry refers to investigations of the theoretical groundings of the Négritude which have critiqued the movement's generative "obscurantist ethnological notions" which posit increased authenticity of blackness for either biologically or culturally determined reasons (Arnold 172; quoted in Parry 1994, 183).

The use of the term 'nègre' in the title embodies the complexity of Koltès' own subject position as 'namer' of the blacks. I remind the reader at this stage of Koltès' assertion that the use of the term 'nègre' emerged out of sympathy with the blacks. Within the French literary milieu, the term bears the memory of its reclaiming by the Négritude movement as articulated by writers such as Césaire. In the terms established by Parry and quoted above, this movement fell clearly into the category of the renewal or reactivation of memories rather than a reactionnary conservation of tradition:

> We adopted the word 'nègre' as a term of defiance... .We found a violent affirmation in the words 'nègre' and 'négritude'... it is a concrete rather than an abstract coming to consciousness ... . We lived in an atmosphere of rejection, and then developed an inferiority complex... . I have always thought that the black man was searching for his identity. And ... if what we want is to establish this identity, then we must have a concrete consciousness of what we are — that is the first fact of our lives: that we are black; that we are black and have a history ... [that] there have been beautiful

> and important black civilizations... that its values were values that could still make an important contribution to the world. (Césaire 1972, pp 74, 76).

Although the use of the term by Koltès, recalls an archive of strength to lend weight to Albouy's criticism of the whites, it is severed from its own roots by Koltès' subject position of white European. The term 'nègre' comes to serve the constellation of prejudices which continually haunt Koltès' subject position. As Rosello suggests had become the case in the 1990s, "most of the time, calling someone 'le nègre' is an extremely violent racialization, a doubly racist condemnation of the individual and the race itself" (1998, 140).

More recently, Murray Bookchin has provided a sustained critique of what he terms 'the myth of the primitive' which he argues has unproductively infiltrated Western post-colonial consciousness. In a text entitled *Re—Enchanting Humanity: A Defense of the Human Spirit Against Anti-Humanism, Misanthropy, Mysticism and Primitivism*[30] Bookchin critiques how Euro-American 'primitivists' have made it difficult to understand the lives and cultures of indigenous populations "by attributing to them suprahuman, paradisiacal dimensions" (1995, 120). He notes that these projections are not simply naive, but downplay the real difficulties such populations face and pressure the individuals who comprise these populations to be somehow 'better' as a result of their increased 'authenticity':

> There is a perverse irony in the fact that, after virtual consensus has been reached about the abuses that European colonialists inflicted on [indigenous and aboriginal] peoples, the possibility of attaining a realistic and sympathetic view of the 'primitive' is being gutted by assorted ecomystics, anticivilizationists, and more generically, self-avowed primitivists who have made 'the primitive' into a postmodern parody of the noble savage. (ibid.)

It becomes evident that any nativist strategy of the celebration of the indigenous must be carefully examined with a view to context. Discussions of nativist strategies of representation pursued by indigenous postcolonial writers have usefully demonstrated that such strategies are far too easy to deride with a theoreticist prejudice which would persecute an author for not upholding the most up-to-date rules of discursive radicalism (Parry 1994, 179). Benita Parry wonders, in an article subtitled "Two Cheers for Nativism", if "revisiting the repositories of memory and cultural survivals in the cause of postcolonial refashionings [has] a fixed retrograde valency?" (ibid., 173). She concludes that each case of nativist representational strategies must be examined separately, as the legitimacy of nativist representation would seem to depend on "who is doing the remembering and why" (ibid). In defense of nativist representational strategies, Parry notes the difference between reactionary and potentially progressive representational use

[30] Bookchin explains the use of the rather New Age term 're-enchanting' in the title: "This word, after all, suggests a mystical bewitchment consistent with views held by many anti-humanists, not humanists. My reasons for employing the word are simple: I am using it partly as a spoof, and partly as a metaphorical expression of my respect for what the human species could be and what it could achieve if it applied its intellectual faculties to the creation of a rational society." (1995, 5)

of ethnic stereotypes when writing that "a need to renew or activate memories is distinct from the uncritical attempt to conserve tradition" (174). For his part, Stuart Hall argues that the search for the collective one true self "continues to be a very powerful and creative force in emergent forms of representation amongst hitherto marginalized peoples.. We should not ... underestimate or neglect the importance of the act of imaginative rediscovery which this conception of a rediscovered, essential identity entails" (1994, 393). We are left wondering who supplied the cultural memory Koltès inscribed in the text through Alboury.

Before discussing the question of the manifestation of reigning racist discourse in the text, it must be made clear that Alboury is not creating his own identity by playing into reigning stereotypes as a means of achieving his desired ends. This already very slim possibility is finally dashed by a short text Koltès included in the "Carnets de *Combat de nègre et de chiens*" [*Black Battles with Dogs* Notebooks]. The twenty-three texts in the notebooks appear at the end of the 1989 Editions de Minuit version of the text and are thoughts on a variety of issues Koltès attributed to the four characters. Of the twenty-three short texts, Alboury has one two page long rumination entitled "Comment Alboury affronta le premier chien" [How Alboury confronted the first dog] (1989, 111). In this text he describes how he killed Cal's dog. The short text does not indicate when this event occured, but the evidence serves nonetheless to add depth to the fiction by providing the reader extra knowledge about events occurring throughout the main body of the play.

Alboury's description of the death of the dog fits within the lexical and stylistic paradigms of his speech in the main body of the play. The dog is described as "aboyant comme tous les diables" [barking like the devil] (ibid.) and "si petit qu'un coup de pied l'enverra tout de suite rejoindre ses ancêtres" [so small that one good kick would send him right off to join his ancestors] (ibid.). Alboury continues describing the event along these lines. He explains how by killing the dog he has brought "ce premier cadavre" [the first corpse] to his murdered brother, whom he describes as "mon âme, père, frère et fils de ma race" [my soul, father, brother, and the son of my race] (ibid., 112). By murdering the dog, whose name 'Toubab' Koltès described on the title page to mean 'white man', Alboury notes how he has begun the long process of killing many times over because, as he explains, "car aux morts de ma race appartient la mort du toubab et de tout ce qui est à lui, ses femmes, ses larbins, ses propriétés et ses chiens" [the dead of my race own the death of the *toubab* and everything that belongs to him: his women, his brats, his property and his dogs] (ibid.).

The almost incantatory phrasing of this promise, generated by a series of lists supported by a prophetic tone, is unleavened by any sense of irony. Such self-awareness could at least allow a reader to surmise that Alboury was consciously chosing, in a kind of

'strategic essentialism' à la Gariyatri Spivak (1989, 124-26), to speak in primitive tropes as a means of grounding himself in the strength of his ancestors. This self-awareness could point towards the black character's own recognition of the constructedness of the primitivizing tendencies he is uttering. However, Albouy's speech seems *authentic* in the sense that its naturalness is unquestioned by its speaker. Even the moments of hyperbole within this cumulative caricature of primitivizing tendencies seem to be adornments which point towards Koltès' comical tendencies rather than indicate any humorous self-awareness in Albouy. For example, before the little dog "s'est jeté jusqu'à ma tête" [jumped with one leap to my head], Albouy takes pity on the creature for its small size, and explains how for a moment he loses "l'envie ... de l'envoyer valser avec mon pied dans le domaine minuscule de ses minuscules ancêtres" [the desire to send him waltzing with a kick into the miniscule world of his miniscule ancestors] (1989, 112).

As it can be conclusively said that Albouy's identity is at no place ironized in the play, the discussion can return to Koltès. Essential to this discussion is that the tropes of indigenous authenticity are passing through the authorship of Koltès, a white man. Although he initially demonstrated compassionate interest in the plight of 'the African', he provided little to indicate that he had much experience with the actual people of Nigeria. Koltès' correspondence to Gignoux made no note of any *discussion* with the black Africans he met while in Nigeria.[31] Any examples provided in the letter simply reify the initial feeling of the distance Koltès explained he felt from the blacks from whom he fled after having got off the airplane. It would seem safe, therefore, to conclude that not only were these cultural memories 'borrowed' through Albouy, but Koltès' portrayal of the essential identity of blackness is based on his own projections of tropes consciously

[31] It is interesting to note that in his long 1978 letter from Africa, Koltès makes no mention of having ever had any discussions with the indigenous black Nigerians he encountered. This notable absence of direct communication with the individuals with whom he sympathizes may have facilitated Koltès' mythologization of the authenticity of the indigenous subject.

or unconsciously gleaned from the reigning discourse of his time.[32]

No matter whether the source be conscious or unconscious (and most likely a mix of the two) Alboury's complex representation as a primitive (and all the pathologies that that labelling entails) does have an implication in the post-colonial moment during which *Combat* was written and, as it continues to unfold so do its implications. The ideological function of primitive representations of otherness within the dominant phase of the colonial project best serve the domestic (*ie* European) colonial discourse by justifying continued subjugation and economic extraction. The stereotypical representation of the indigenous people results in their inclusion in the systematic circulation of images and symbols which mirrors the process of commodification at the heart of the project of resource extraction which motivates the colonial apparatus in the first place.

By eradicating the individuality of the natives and rendering them less than human through representations, their subjectivity is excised and the remaining husk is commodified, rendered generic and interchangeable. The animalizing and/or primitivizing of the native provides additional justification for this evacuation of individuality (JanMohammed 1985, 64). Such dynamics permit for the colonizer what Said describes as a "flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand" (Said 1978, 7). The flexible superiority allows the currency of the image to feed into the Manichean allegory "which functions as the currency, the medium of exchange, for the entire colonialist discursive system" (JanMohammed 1985, 64). Within the European

[32] The ease with which Koltès takes on a vicarious nativist stance is related to his simplistic understanding of the identities of others. Koltès felt that the oppositional and generative energy of his own marginalization, what he described as a feeling of 'déracinement' or uprootedness, was linked to his particular experience as a homosexual. He explained that this important locus of 'uprootedness' served as a complex link with the marginalization and oppression of peoples from the developing world, a link which, as I have demonstrated with the discussion of Nigeria, was not an uncomplicated one. As for writing of his own 'uprootedness' he would assert that: "le pédé m'intéresserait le jour où je comprendrais exactement de quel déracinement il s'agit — il y en a un et je ne l'ai pas encore bien saisi. Ce jour-là j'en parlerai. Mais tant que je n'ai pas bien saisi encore, je commence par les déracinements les plus simple, comme l'Arabe émigré, le ... Bon, des gens comme ça" [the homo will interest me the day when I understand exactly what kind of uprootedness it involves — it exists and I simply haven't figured it out yet. ... . Until that day I'll begin with the simpler uprootings such as the case of the emigrant Arab ... . These are more radical forms of uprootedness — and much simpler — so I can talk about them because I understand them.] (Prique 1998, 7)

Koltès makes the potentially erroneous assumption that because certain manifestations of uprootedness are very visible (such as the first-generation immigrant Arab in France), that these forms of uprootedness are 'simpler'. Recalling Koltès' anti-analytical tendencies, as explored in the first chapter, which informed his desire for an audience's unfettered experience of a theatrical production, can be useful at this juncture. These immediatist impulses help shed light on why Koltès felt that an exploration of uprootedness in all its various forms, if offered in political or conceptual terms, might be reductive of both the complexity and urgency of the phenomenon. Contrary to Koltès' assertion of the 'simplicity' of 'uprootedness', the discussion of the Manichean allegory demonstrated the extreme complexity of certain forms of 'uprootedness' resulting from invasive colonial practice can, in fact, be.

post-colonial or neo-colonialist states, this circulation of images is always very closely tied to reigning stereotypes and frequently evacuates the native's subjectivity in order to promote a vision of the 'other' suitable for the political necessities of the capitalist state (84).

The reduction of Alboury to a primitive stereotype also contributes to a discourse which can have real political and legal implications for natives living as immigrants within the post-colonial former 'mother country.' Koltès' text, geared towards presentation for European audiences,[33] in a way justifies the continued subjugation of the 'indigenous' people, even those who, unlike Alboury, have internalized all the Western economic and socio-cultural operating systems down to the "obligatory, ritualized acceptance of Western forms of parliamentary government" (JanMohamed 1985, 62). Rosello specifies how the reification of stereotypes emerging from colonialist and neo-colonialist discursive matrices can result in manifest physical oppression of those same peoples:

> Racist stereotyping is one of the favourite rhetorical games of the French National Front, whose leaders shamelessly exploit any incident involving people of ... African descent to fuel the smouldering fires of xenophobia and racism (1998: 4)

Indeed, Sidiki Bakaba, the actor from the Ivory Coast who played the role of Alboury, explained the difficult economic implications of being a black professional actor in France in the 1980s:

> When you're like me: black and from Africa, you can't expect the task [of getting roles] to be made easy for you. The road is long and hard. The 'whiteys' have often wanted me to play the image that they have of me: monkey, dopey, good for nothing. (Simon,1983)

2.15 Koltès is somewhat troubled by exoticism

It is interesting to note Koltès' initial awareness of the stereotypical European construction of African identity, and the reductive simplicity of these stereotypes, when he first arrived in Nigeria in 1978. Take for example the famous Banania chocolate flavoured breakfast powder that Koltès refers to in one of his letters from Africa. During the first few days of his trip to Nigeria, he is being canoed down a river and stereotypical images of Africa experienced within his time in Europe wash over him:

> un voyage en pirogue sur le Niger donne seulement cet amusement superficiel qu'est l'impression de se balader dans un dépliant d'agence aérienne sur les dernières coutumes nègres : ne manquez pas d'admirer les bronzes du Bénin, savez-vous qu'il existe encore quelques marchés de viande humains? —Cases, cocotiers et petits noirs ; Banania, pensai-je sur la pirogue. (1997c, 14)
>
> [A canoe trip down the Niger gives only that superficial amusement similar as if you were journeying through a airline travel brochure on current African customs: 'don't forget to see the

[33] It is important to specify that the circulation of this text has been restricted largely to within what can be termed for methodological purposes post-imperial or postcolonial Europe.

Benin bronzes', 'did you know there are still human meat markets left'? huts, coconut trees, and little black sambos: Banania, I thought to myself in the canoe.])[34]

Mireille Rosello describes Banania as a product "anyone in France would be familiar with", a hundred year-old product with the signatory yellow box. She explains that "the smiling Senegalese Rifleman enjoying a spoonful of Banania is an unforgettable cultural icon branded with the same intensity into the minds of white and black French and Francophone people". Although the images on the box have evolved to replace the black face with a more ideologically acceptable smile, possibly in response to various forms of protest, "the memory of previous representations lingers in the collective unconscious" (Rosello 1998, 5).

Yet the spirit of the "huts, coconut trees and little black sambos" to which Koltès derisively refers in his 1978 letter all make their way into *Combat* five years later. These images, sedimented into the reigning discourse, seem to have a potency which Koltès cannot reject, recalling JanMohamed's caution that "even a writer who is reluctant to acknowledge [the Manichean model] and who may indeed be highly critical of imperialist exploitation is drawn into its vortex" (1985, 62).

In an interview ten years later, Lucien Attoun of the Théatre Ouvert brings Koltès' attention to questions of cultural production and these very same questions of 'authentic' African qualifiers inscribed into the broader discourse of the culture. Attoun stated that "Il me dit qu'il aime beaucoup l'Afrique ... mais pas la musique africaine authentique, ancienne" [He has told me that he does like Africa, but not ancient, authentic African music] (Attoun 1997, 31). The ensuing discussion of Koltès' views on African music and art is revealing in that Koltès demonstrated a number of conflicting perceptions of the nature of authenticity with respect to cultures and to cultural production. "Mais il n'y en a pas" [But (ancient, authentic African music) does not exist], Koltès replied, suggesting that he had a sensibility to the non-originative and always evolving quality of forms of expression as well as to the mythologization and naturalization to which these forms of expression are susceptible. Then, however, Koltès moved towards contradiction, suggesting on the other hand that he does love "l'art authentique nègre" [authentic negro art] (ibid.), thereby implicitly confirming its existence. Koltès especially liked "les statuettes de Bénin" [statuettes from Benin] which are "tellement dur [à] voir" [very hard [to] find].

[34] Mary Louise Pratt, discussing the "glossy disembodied fantasies of tourist propaganda" in an extended examination of tourist writing entitled *Imperial Eyes*, notes that generally, in the West, "In the 1960s and 1970s, exoticist visions of plenitude and paradise were appropriated and commodified on an unprecendented scale by the tourist industry." She notes as well that "The white man's lament is also the lament of the intellectual and the writer. It may be thought of in part as an attempt to drown out the chatter of another monolithic voice emerging in the same decades: the voice of mass tourism. The depth-creating powers of the travel writer must compete with the ten-day nine-night air hotel package, tips included, and the glossy disembodied fantasies of tourist propaganda ... "Real" writers took up the task of providing "realist" (degraded, counter-commodified) versions of postcolonial reality." (1992, 221)

These statues are, of course, the very form of expression which he explained, in the letter to Hubert Gignoux ten years earlier, that he felt was the kind of folkloristic kitsch that adorned European airline tourist brochures. And so although authentic 'African' music does not exist for Koltès, authentic "negro" art does. In the process of affirming this, Koltès ironically contradicted himself by removing Benin statues from his earlier categorization of kitsch to another category of the authentic and beautiful.

What were the grounds on which Koltès was basing his aesthetic pronouncements? He provided some clarification with regard to the category of folklore which he found so annoying, explaining in the interview with Attoun that

> Quand je dis que j'aime pas le folklore africain, c'est bien sûr du "folklore" que je parle ... C'est-à-dire tout ce qui se fait depuis un siècle ... C'est la dégénérescence ... A cause de l'occident. La dégénérescence de l'art africain. (Attoun 1997, 31)
>
> [When I say I don't like folklore, it is of course 'folklore' I'm talking about... That is to say everything that has been made over the last century— it's all degeneration. Because of the West. The degeneration of African art.]

Attoun wondered in response to Koltès' assertions: "Vous ne pensez pas que la musique est un peu déformée par l'apport de l'occident?" [Don't you think that [African] music has been a little deformed by the influence of the West?]. "Pas déformée" [Not deformed], Koltès answered, "Ça a donné un nouveau son!" [It's been given a new sound!] (ibid.). Attoun continued by chiding Koltès about his somewhat capricious and judgemental categorizations, suggesting that Koltès' appreciation for African music, for example, might result from the influence of African music on popular music in France in the 1980s. Koltès answered with "les modes, on s'en fout. La musique est belle ou elle est pas belle" [I don't give a damn about trends. Music is either beautiful or it's not]. Attoun pushed further, suggesting that "C'est facile à dire ça, non? La pièce est bonne ou pas bonne, le comédien est bon ou pas bon. C'est un critère tellement subjectif qu'on ne peut pas communiquer avec ça" [That's easy to say though isn't it? The play is good or it's not, the actor is good or he is not. Those criteria are so entirely subjective that you can't expect to communicate with them]. Koltès sidestepped his own contradictions by being adamant regarding the primacy of personal taste over considerations of context: "Je ne parle que de mon opinion. Je ne suis pas sociologue. J'ai pas envie d'analyser les modes. Il y a les musiques que j'aime." [I'm simply providing my opinion. I'm not a sociologist, I don't want to examine trends. I simply like some kinds of music" (ibid.).

It is clear that Koltès remained aware of the possibilities of mythologization through his understanding of the 'folklorization' of so-called authentic artefacts and music. It was, however, an almost flippant assertion of mercurial personal taste that dictated which broad model of cultural evolution (*ie* that the Western influence is entirely good or

entirely bad) is deployed to justify Koltès' particular taste to date.

The precociousness that Koltès showed in his attitude towards cultural artifacts was also evident in his discussion of ethnicity. Attoun wondered if Koltès did not "jouer un peu au cynique" [play at being cynical] (Attoun 1997, 29) about this hatred of Westerners for some kind of effect. The interview, from which I quoted a brief section earlier in the chapter, continued as follows:

> Koltès — Non, je ne crois pas que ce soit du cynisme. Non, mais j'ai peur de dire que... Enfin, je sais pas, je vois pas pourquoi je ménagerai... je ménagerais la susceptibilité des Français ou des... Je vois pas pourquoi... Je les hais vraiment. Je les hais...
> Attoun — Dites moi... un Français que vous avez rencontré dans la rue ou dans votre ville, et qui vous a bouleversé au point que vous les haïssez tous... Je ne comprends pas...
> Koltès — C'est pas UN, c'est tous! Je descends dans la rue, je vois un embouteillage avec les gens prêts à tuer! Litéralement à tuer...
> Attoun — Et vous croyez que c'est propre aux Français , ca?
> Koltès — C'est propre à l"Occident, certainement. Je parle de l'Europe, évidemment... Je parle pas de l"Amérique. Les Etats-Unis, c'est encore pire. Mais tous les jours, tous les jours, je deviens fou, moi... Dans le métro, dans le bus, tout ça... C'est des tueurs, c'est des tueurs en puissance, tous, tous, tous. Et ils tuent d'ailleurs, hein... C'est pas simplement en puissance, c'est qu'il y a plein qui tuent. Les voisins qui tirent sur les gens qui cassent une voiture... Non, non, c'est vraiment des tueurs, les Occidentaux...
> (Attoun 1997, 29-30)

> [Koltès — No, I don't think it's playing at being cynical... But I'm not afraid to say that... In short, I don't see why I should have to humour the French or the... I don't see why... I hate them, I really do..
> Attoun — Tell me. Did you meet a French person in a street or in your town who affected you to the point where you hate them all, I don't understand...
> Koltès — It's not simply ONE of them, it's all of them! I go down into the street and I see a traffic jam full of people ready to kill each other! Literally...
> Attoun — And you think that's peculiar to France?
> Koltès — It's certainly peculiar to the West. I'm talking about Europe, obviously... I'm not talking about the United States. It's worse in the United States. It's driving me crazy, every day, I'm getting crazier and crazier... In the metro, in the bus, all that.. They're killers, potential killers, all of them, all of them! And it's not just potential, because a lot of them do kill. Neighbours shooting at somebody who damages a car. No, Westerners are really killers.]

Attoun gradually coaxed Koltès to admit:

> je dis je hais les Français, bien sûr, mais je les hais pas globalement. On a pas le droit de haïr comme ça. Je déteste l'ESPRIT français. Je hais le Français moyen. Ca, je supporte pas... Ni les bourgeois français, d'ailleurs. (ibid., 30).

> [I say I hate the French, but of course I don't hate them globally. No one has the right to hate like that. I hate the French SPIRIT. I hate the 'Français moyen'. I can't stand them. Nor the French bourgeoisie for that matter]

Koltès explained that this dislike was only kindled in 1989, before Attoun reminded him that his earliest professionally produced piece, *La Nuit juste avant les forêts*, involved

feelings of violence and antipathy towards the French. Koltès laughingly conceded that this anti-French, anti-Western feeling "est une vieille obsession apparemment, vous voyez! (rire.) Elle a au moins dix ans!" [is an old obsession, it seems! (*Laughter.*) It's been around for ten years, at least!] (ibid.).

Further on Attoun continued to pursue his investigation of Koltès' perceptions of Africa, inflected once again with attempts to upset Koltès' seemingly inevitable binarist categorizing imperative. Attoun wondered if Koltès found any similarities between the blacks he had met in Africa and those he had met in North and South America. Koltès responded with:

> Koltès — Non, non. C'est une autre race. Non, ça n'a rien à voir. Les Noirs américains sont Américains, d'abord! ... Et les Noirs jamaïcains sont encore tout à fait une autre race. Plus proche de l'Afrique, beaucoup plus. Mais vous savez, même en Afrique, c'est pas les mêmes... Entre les Zaïrois et les Ivoiriens... "Les Africains", ça veut pas dire grand chose.
> Attoun — On pourrait en dire autant des Français, ou des Occidentaux. Ce sont des généralités. (ibid., 31-32)

> [Koltès — No, no, they're an entirely different race. American blacks are Americans first! ... And the Jamaican blacks are an entirely different race. Closer to Africa though, much closer. But you know, even in Africa, they're not the same, even between the Zairens and people from the Ivory Coast. "Africans" doesn't mean that much.
> Attoun — You could say the same of the French, or of Westerners. Those terms are generalizations.]

Despite what seemed to be an implicit agreement with Attoun's caution about generalizations, Koltès concluded by then re-establishing firm and ultimately restrictive categories of identity by stating that "comme les Français et les Américains, c'est deux races différentes, Dieu merci"[like the French and the Americans, they're two different races. Thank God] (32). Such a temperamental means of conceptualizing the distinction between these national groups (themselves internally diverse), in tandem with the fallacious assumption that there is more than one human 'race', recalls the quality of Koltès' binarizing precepts regarding audience reception of *Les Amertumes* and the corollary question of the gradations of authenticity as discussed in Chapter One.[35]

2.16 Collapse of the double helix of stereotyping: Leonie

The harshness with which Koltès names Alboury as 'nègre' in the title points towards the root connectedness of the two visions of blackness, both the explicitly colonialist and Koltès' implicitly colonialist vicarious nativism, explored so far. The term 'nègre' has an important historical significance as a locus of resistance in the Négritude movement, but

[35] "This production occurs in the immediacy of the moment, in immediate experience, and this fact should, I believe, justify the interdiction of any kind of studied appreciation. The experience will simply have taken place or will not have taken place." (Koltès 1995a, 14; app. B,2)

was (and is) a powerful racial epithet in France when Koltès used it. I will now set out to demonstrate, with a discussion of Alboury's relationship with Leonie, what occurs when these two visions of blackness, the authenticating and the pathologizing, begin to collapse irresistibly into one another.

It is the relationship between the African character Alboury and the German ex-patriate from France named Leonie which fascinated Koltès the most (Koltès 1999a, 35). Koltès described in an interview how the connection between them is "antique fatidique" [ancient and fateful] and characterized by an "insurmontable singularité" [insurmountable singularity] (36). I will first describe how, with the momentary closeness that is established between these two characters, Koltès has provided a dramaturgical mechanism which briefly serves to unsettle and challenge the alienation that irrevocably separates Alboury from the whites.

Koltès described "la grande Histoire" (1999a, 36) (a term perhaps best translated as "History with a Capital H"), what can be understood as his perception of the traditional discourse of France's past as portrayed through various media, to be 'most likely Manichean' (1999a, 26) in nature. He believed that within this discursive environment the relationships between ethnic groups are characterized as being plagued by irrevocable differences. However, "Les histoires individuelles" [Personal histories], he explained in relation to Alboury and Leonie, "ne sont jamais simplement dualistes" [aren't simply dualist] (ibid.,26). In so doing he appeared to be suggesting that there may be room for these two characters to move beyond his own hyperbolizing view of the Manichean colonial circumstance and the corollary discourse of ethnicity which has calcified relations between Alboury and the other characters. He had even initially written the Leonie and Alboury scenes to include a love affair, but this utopic situation had been discouraged by Chéreau.[36]

Leonie first appears in Scene Two, having recently arrived at Horn's invitation from Paris on the understanding that they will be married. She and Horn have met only once previous to her trip. Leonie is unpacking in one of the houses in the compound and does not yet feel comfortable coming outside. Her arrival in Africa is marked by confusion and anxiety about what shoes to put on, and indeed she is angry for being overcharged at the St. Laurent Africa store in Paris for the flimsy footwear she is wearing. Her confusion appears to be remarkably naive and her preparations for coming to Africa involved exposing herself to Jamaican music: "je me suis préparée, préparée comme une folle: j'écoutais du reggae toute la sainte journée, les gens de mon immeuble sont devenus cinglés" [I prepared myself like crazy; I listened to reggae all bloody day, the other

[36] Koltès explained that "I rewrote a scene. I'd wanted to do it for a long time. Besides that the text hasn't changed much." (Héliot 1983, 47)

people in the house were going bonkers] (1989, 15;1997a, 9).[37]

The juxtaposition of Paris and Africa demonstrates how her dissatisfaction with Europeans is foregrounded by her encounter with Africa. She envisages the continent as a potential site for emancipation from the oppressive city from which she has just arrived:

> Savez-vous ce que je viens de découvrir, en ouvrant ma valise? Les Parisiens sentent fort, je le savais; leur odeur, je l'avais sentie déjà dans le métro, dans la rue, avec tous ces gens qu'il faut frôler, je la sentais traîner et pourrir dans les coins... . Il me faudra le temps d'aérer tout ce linge. Que je suis contente d'être ici. L'Afrique, enfin! (1989, 16)

> [Do you know what I discovered when I opened my suitcase? Parisians really smell; I knew it, this stench, I've smelt it in the metro, on the streets, on people you brush against, I've smelt it hanging and rotting in corners... . It'll take ages to air out my clothes. Oh, I'm so glad to be here. Africa, at last!] (1997a, 9)

Before Leonie's first encounter with Alboury, Koltès demonstrates Horn and Cal to have stereotypical and gender-restrictive views about her. Horn treats her like an object and Cal treats her as an object of desire. Leonie is not privy to Horn and Cal's discussions about Alboury and the murder, and so she remains unaware of the subject of the 'men's talk.' Her relationship with Alboury is different, however. She simply becomes intrigued by him and they meet and speak on a number of occasions.

Leonie's linguistic formulations seem to predispose her to understanding Africa in a way that is a parallel to the mythologized African identity which Koltès constructed for Alboury. Indeed, the reader witnesses how, for Leonie, Africa may be more than simply a location of anxiety but also one of potential revelation and of a quasi-mystical 'coming home.' When she first meets Alboury in Scene 6 she explains, speaking of the bourgainvillaea flower, that:

> C'est quand j'ai vu les fleurs que j'ai tout reconnu; j'ai reconnu ces fleurs dont je ne sais pas le nom ; mais elles pendaient comme cela aux branches dans ma tête. (1989, 42)

> [When I saw the flowers I recognized everything; I recognized these flowers though I don't know their name; but they were hanging from the branches like that in my mind.] (1997a, 27)

It seems that these bougainvillaea have been associated with, as she explains, "un lac au bord duquel j'ai passé une vie, déjà, et cela me revient souvent, dans la tête" [a lake I know, I've spent a whole lifetime on its banks, and it comes to me all of a sudden in my mind] (1989, 42;1997a, 27). She seems to be retrieving memories of an almost archetypal quality which, as a result of their highly nature-oriented character, demonstrate her potential for resonance with Alboury's worldview.

[37] Once again, Koltès himself was a dedicated reggae fan, and so as in the discussion of karate earlier in the chapter, the informed reader is left wondering if by conflating the ethnic qualifier of reggae to Africa, a strategy which clearly demonstrates Leonie to be uninformed and naive, Koltès is not somehow 'hoist by his own petard'.

Indeed, Alboury's 'magical' presence does have a powerful effect on her. He has been hiding under the flowers at the periphery of the compound and the stage directions reveal that "elle reconnaît son nom" [she recognizes her name] in "des chuchotements et des souffles, dans des claquements d'ailes qui la contournent" [the whispers and flurries, in the beating of wings which surround her] and "puis elle sent la douleur d'une marque tribale gravée dans ses joues" [then she feels the pain of tribal scarification marks on her cheeks] (ibid.). Alboury's presence seems to amplify her poetic tendencies, perhaps even invoking her memories of flowers as a result of his close proximity to the bougainvillaea. She feels summoned, almost invoked, by him.

The landscape itself conspires in their communicative moment by becoming animate. The stage directions continue to describe how "L'harmattan, vent de sable, la porte au pied de l'arbre" [the harmattan, a sandy wind, carries her to the foot of the tree] (ibid.). It is within these heightened and unnatural circumstances in the orbit of the magical Alboury that Leonie first reveals characteristics of her identity which have not been evident during her previous interactions with Cal and Horn: "Vous croyez aux vies antérieures, vous?" [Do you believe in reincarnation?] (ibid) she asks him. Alboury will remain in a state of potent silence for the entire scene, and Leonie continues by answering her own questions:

> J'y crois, moi, j'y crois. Des moments si heureux, très heureux, qui me reviennent de si loin; très doux. ... Je connais un lac au bord duquel j'ai passé une vie, déjà, et cela me revient souvent, dans la tête. (1989, 42)
>
> [I believe in it, I do. Happy times, blissful times which come back to me from far away, so gentle .... There's a lake I know, I've spent a whole lifetime on its banks, and it comes to me all of a sudden, in my mind] (1997a, 27).

She fears that by discussing such things she will be taken for "une conne" [an airhead] by the European men in her life and explains to Alboury how very glad she is that he is not "Francais ni rien comme cela" [French or anything like that] (1989, 43;1997a, 27). Indeed, access to Alboury's 'Africanness' continues for Leone to be a route to deeper, as yet unarticulated truths which she has yet to fully apprehend: "J'apprendrai votre langue africaine, oui, et quand je la parlerai bien, en réfléchissant bien pour chaque mot que je dirai, je vous dirai... les choses... importantes... qui... je ne sais pas." [I'll learn your African language, and when I can speak it well, really choosing my words, then I'll tell you ... things ... important things ... which ... I don't yet know.] (1989, 43;1997a, 27-28)

Leonie's emancipation is underway, but is already troubled for a number of reasons. Foremost among these is that during her initial encounters with Alboury the reader is able to discern the first few steps of Leonie's eventual pathologization of the very blackness to

which she finds herself attracted. Leonie feels that she and Alboury share a certain impurity: "D'ailleurs" [Besides], she explains to him "moi non plus je ne suis pas vraiment française. A moitié allemande, à moitié alsacienne. Tiens, on est faits pour..." [I'm not really French either. Half German, half Alsatian. You see, we're made for ...] (1989, 43;1997a, 27). While she stops short of completing the sentence with 'each other', it begins to become very clear that Leonie wishes to align herself with Alboury. She does this by equating Alboury with what she feels to be her own state of unhappiness and marginalization.

Leonie's insulting behaviour towards Alboury would appear to be part of Koltès' drive to demonstrate the impossibility of a relationship between the two characters because of the ignorance of the whites. Koltès has, however, paradoxically performed the same inscription of primitivism upon Alboury, and also upon Leonie. Take, for example, the scenes discussed earlier in the chapter in which Alboury patriates himself with less complex life forms. Alboury, as explored earlier in a different context, provides Leonie, during their second conversation, with explanations of the strange sounds she hears in the distance. "Cela, qu'est-ce que c'est?" [Listen, what's that?] she asks. "Le chant des crapauds-buffles: ils appellent la pluie" [The song of the buffalo toads: they are calling for rain] he answers. "Et cela" [And that?] she asks again: "Le cri des éperviers" [The cry of the hawks] (1989, 69;1997a, 45-46)

Despite his ability to connect with the earth he is still afraid, however, of the dog that he hears barking in the distance. "Vous avez peur?" [Are you frightened?] Leonie asks. "Oui, oui" [Yes] he answers. "Pour un roquet de rien qu'on entend même plus!" [Of a silly little puppy which you can't even hear anymore!] she continues. With the following riposte that Koltès provides for Alboury, the black man reinscribes himself into the discourse of primality that Cal has previously used to denigrate him in his absence. Alboury explains to Leonie that "Nous, on fait bien peur aux poules; c'est normal que les chiens nous fassent peur" [We frighten chickens; dogs frighten us, that's normal]. He specifies by saying that dogs "sont des bêtes mauvaises; moi, elles me sentent de loin, elles courent après pour me mordre' [They're evil beasts; me, they can smell me from miles away, they hunt me down and bite me] (1989, 70;1997a, 46).

Leonie's emancipation is also troubled by the fact that Koltès appears to 'liberate' her into a paradigm of the female in which the woman is dissociated from reason and associated with nature. This representational ploy, presumably designed to foreground Horn's casuistic and Cal's violent uses of language, can be as restrictive as that of the primitivism which Koltès ascribes to Alboury. Although clear lines between the genders maintain a metaphorical simplicity which permits the quick perception of irrevocable difference between them, through his critique of certain qualities associated with masculinity Koltès has reinscribed Leonie into a potentially regressive paradigm of

feminine identity.

The momentary closeness that Leonie and Alboury experience is spent swapping primitivizing clichés. This exchange of regressivity results in the reduction of both their identities to something less than human. Leonie compliments Alboury on his hair and he responds with the proverb, introduced earlier, that Chéreau explained Koltès had actually invented:

> On dit que nos cheveux sont entortillés et noirs parce que l'ancêtre des nègres, abandonné par Dieu et puis par tous les hommes, se retrouva seul avec le diable, abandonné lui aussi de tous, qui alors lui caressa la tête en signe d'amitié, et c'est comme cela que nos cheveux ont brûlés. (1989, 69)
>
> They say our hair is wiry and black because the father of all blacks, abandoned by God and then by humanity, found himself alone with the devil, who had also been abandoned, so the devil caressed his head as a sign of friendship, and that is how our hair was burnt. (1997a, 45)

Leonie then tells Alboury that she loves "les histoires avec le diable" [stories about the devil]. She especially loves the way Alboury tells them because, she compliments him, "vous avez les lèvres super" [your lips are wonderful]. She concludes by stating that "d'ailleurs le noir, c'est ma couleur" [besides, black is my best colour] (ibid.).

This rapid change of registers, from concern, to the supernatural, then to the flirtatious (with comments about his stereotypable *big* negro lips), then to fashion, is indicative of the palimpsest of impressions that Leonie projects onto Alboury. This series of juxtapositions acts as a subtle critique of the white European's narcissistic association of vanity and of the suffering of others. Leonie's accessorizing of Alboury's misfortune comes off as fundamentally reductive of Alboury's experience. The critique is, however, once again neutered by the recurrent simplistic and unchallenged auto-stereotyping of the black man. Indeed, Alboury sums things up quite nicely by stating that black "est une bonne couleur pour se cacher" [is a good colour to hide in] (ibid.), perpetuating a myth of victimization.

In an interview, Koltès explained with regard to Leonie that she

> voit chez le nègre une manière de porter sa condamnation. ... Du point de vue de Léone, les Noirs sont des gens qui portent une condamnation sur leur visage, mais qui ne leur appartient pas en propre: c'est davantage une malédiction globale à laquelle ils sont assimilés. (1999a, 20-21)
>
> [sees in the negro a means of bearing her condemnation. ... From Leonie's perspective, black people bear their condemnation on their faces, in a literal sense, but that condemnation does not belong to them individually. It's more of a global malediction into which they have been assimilated.]

This can be usefully contextualized by Rebecca Schneider's study of primitivism and feminist art practice, in which she provides a historical contextualization of the emergence

of the associating discursive mechanism which permits Koltès' easy conflation of Leonie and Alboury: "The 'dark continent' of female sexuality, as Freud put it in an unmistakable allusion to Africa (1953-74, 212), was indelibly linked [in the nineteenth century] to the inferiority, indeed the feminization, of colonial subjects in relation to their civilized "superiors." She concludes by stating that within Western imperialist rhetoric both the 'feminine' and the 'primitive' are:

> emblematic of the vanishing point of knowledge and provoke[...] a related terror and fascination that tangle race and gender in significant ways. 'Primitivity' is an attribute historically ascribed to 'lower' races just as 'femininity' is ascribed to the 'second' sex. (Schneider 1997, 127)

Deep within the descending vortex of regressive stereotypes, Leonie and Alboury experience a mystical closeness and manage to understand one another while speaking their respective native tongues of German and Woloff. In a moment of magic which recalls the fantastic quality of Koltès' earliest texts, Alboury speaks coaxingly in Woloff while Leonie continues in French and German: "Oui, oui, c'est comme cela qu'il faut parler, vous verrez, je finirai par le saisir" [Yes, go on speaking like that, you'll see, I'll get it eventually] (1989, 38;1997a, 58). She notes that "j'ai toujours pensé que, si on regarde longtemps et soigneusement les gens quand ils parlent, on comprend tout. Il faut prendre le temps et voilà tout" [I've always thought that if you look at people very carefully, for a long time, while they're talking, you can understand them. You just need to take your time]. In this world of possibility it is simply as easy as being careful to "parler étranger" [speak foreign] and she continues to explain, "et vous aussi, alors, on sera vite sur la même longueur d'onde" [and you too, so we'll soon be on the same wavelength] (ibid.). Leonie breaks back into French so the audience can follow the narrative flow of the scene and she gradually begins to understand Alboury although he continues to speak Woloff. The last lines of the scene (with only the French text translated into English) are as follows:

> ALBOURY. — Lan nga ñäw ut si fii ?
> LEONE. — Je crois que je commence à vous comprendre.
> ALBOURY. — Lan nga ñäw ut si fii ?
> LEONE. — Oui, oh je savais bien que cela viendrait !
> ALBOURY. — (Avec un sourire) Tu as peur ?
> LEONE. — Non. (1989, 60)

> [ALBOURY — Lan nga ñäw ut si fii?
> LEONIE — I think I'm beginning to understand you.
> ALBOURY — Lan nga ñäw ut si fii?
> LEONIE — Oh, I knew it would come!
> ALBOURY (*with a smile*) — Are you frightened?
> LENONIE— No.] (1997a, 39)

With Alboury suddenly comprehensible in the same language in which Leonie has been addressing him, the reader is left with a number of interpretive options. Has the reader

witnessed a fulfillment of Leonie's plan of listening to Alboury's 'speak[ing] foreign' long enough until she has understood him? If this is the case, then Alboury's last line, although comprehensible to the audience and Leone, is ostensibly still in Woloff. This strategy would have interesting implications with regard to the translation of languages, for if Alboury speaks his last line in the language of the production, it demonstrates the always already domesticating necessity of having the foreign understood in the dominant and domesticating language for the benefit of the Western audience.

Perhaps, however, Leone is indulging in wish fulfillment, and does not actually come to understand Alboury, which would indicate that Alboury has made a conscious decision to speak in the same language as her in order to allow her to understand him. The translated endnotes provide some clues on this issue, for they indicate that Alboury repeatedly asks her throughout the scene if she has heard the "screaming" (1997a, 71)[38] nearby (presumably the mourning of the woman whose son Cal has murdered). He twice asks her "What did you come here to do?" Is she answering him or not? Koltès leaves the situation shrouded in ambiguity, for Leonie's penultimate statement "Oh, I knew it would come!" sheds no light on what she has or has not actually understood of what Alboury has already said. The indication that Alboury is smiling when he asks her if she is frightened suggests a successful conclusion to Leonie's attempt at a miracle, but the smile is ultimately inconclusive evidence as it could be taken up many ways in production by a team of actors and a director. At any rate, the stage directions immediately following the scene are replete with images of death and blocked light. Together they suggest a rapid closure to the brief reprieve from mistrust in the relations between black and whites in the text:

> Tout à coup un tourbillon de sable rouge portant des cris de chien couche les herbes et plie les branches, tandis que monte du sol, comme une pluie à l'envers, une nuée d'éphémères suicidaires et affolés qui voile toute clarté. (1989, 60)
>
> [Suddenly a whirlwind of red sand, bringing with it the cries of a dog, flattens the grass and bends the branches, while from the ground there rise, like an upwards rain, clouds of maddened, suicidal mayflies, veiling the light.] (1997a, 39)

In her final encounter with Alboury, despite what she clearly believes are her own good intentions, it becomes even more evident that Leonie's speech and attitudes are inflected with different manifestations of the same prejudices towards blacks that burden the French men in the industrial compound. She attempts to convince Alboury to take the money that Horn is offering him in lieu of the corpse and also tries to placate him by offering to live with him in her conception of his primal nirvana:

> A quoi ça sert de vouloir se battre pour quelque chose qui n'a plus aucun sens quand on vient gentiment proposer d'arranger tout, et de l'argent en plus? ... Car ce n'est pas la guerre que je veux vivre ... . Moi, c'est vivre tout court que je veux, tranquillement, dans une petite maison, où vous

[38] These translations do not appear in the French text published by Minuit.

> voudrez, tranquilles. Oh, je veux bien être pauvre, cela m'est bien égal, et chercher l'eau très loin et cueillir aux arbres et tout le saint-frusquin. (1989, 91-92)
>
> [Why go on fighting for something that no longer has any meaning, when someone's kindly offering to sort it out, with money as well? ... I don't want to go to war or fight. ... I just want to live quietly, in a nice little house, wherever you say, in peace. I don't mind being poor, that doesn't bother me, I'll fetch water and chop branches and do whatever's needed] (1997a, 60-61)

She then manages out of ignorance to insult him quite explicitly by trying to deny her own ethnicity and embrace his, but derides his ethnicity in the process. He does not answer and so she anxiously wonders aloud if he is interested in being with her:

> Pourtant, vous ne pouvez pas vous tromper sur moi, Alboury. Je ne suis pas vraiment une Blanche, non. Oh moi, je suis déjà tant habituée à être ce qu'il ne faut pas être, il ne me coûte rien d'être nègre par-dessus tout cela. Si c'est pour cela, Alboury, ma blancheur, j'ai déjà craché dessus depuis longtemps, je l'ai jetée, je n'en veux pas. (1989,92)
>
> [But don't get me wrong, Alboury. I'm not really white. I'm so used to being something I shouldn't be that there's no problem being a nigger on top of everything else. If that's all it is, Alboury, my whiteness I spit on it, have done for ages, I don't want it.] (1997a, 61)

Alboury continues to remain silent. After denying her own ethnicity, she attempts once again to fully embrace his, but in so doing reenacts the entire trajectory of the colonial project: from the process of exotification of the ethnic 'other', to the occupation of land and property, the appropriation of discourse and voice, all the way to conquering the unconscious:

> O noir, couleur de tous mes rêves, couleur de mon amour ! Je le jure : lorsque tu rentreras chez toi, j'irai avec toi ; quand je te verrai dire: ma maison, je dirai: ma maison. A tes frères je dirai: frères, à ta mère: mère ! Ton village sera le mien, ta langue sera la mienne, ta terre sera ma terre, et jusque dans ton sommeil, je le jure, jusque dans ta mort, je te suivrai encore. (ibid.)
>
> [Oh black, colour of my dreams, colour of my love! I swear it: when you go back home I'll go with you; when you say: my house, I too will say: my house. Your brothers will be my brothers, your mother will be my mother! Your village will be mine, your language will be mine, your earth will be my earth and I'll follow you even into your dreams and beyond death, I swear, I'll still be with you.] (ibid.)

He answers in Woloff with "I wouldn't bother with you; I won't give up" (1997a, 72), before spitting in her face, indeed spitting on her own whiteness *for* her, and leaving.

Just as Alboury has blocked the deal proposed by Horn, in which the black man would receive whiskey, compliments and money from the white man in return for forgetting about the body, so has he blocked the possibility of "the ideal of cultural harmony through romance" (Hulme 1987, 49). Alboury has effectively denied a union which in this case would, despite Leonie's lack of ethnic self-confidence brought about by her mongrel whiteness, once again guarantee European supremacy.

Alboury's last line provides an important clue to an essential question: why does he spit in her face and leave? A reader, shocked by Leonie's apparent stupidity and desperation, might assume that Alboury's action is most evidently an indictment of her inability to understand the culturally and ethnically determined aspects of Alboury's identity in anything but derogatory terms. It would seem, however, that Alboury's motivations for his actions towards Leonie have less to do with her denigration of his ethnicity than with her suggestion that he accept Horn's offer of money. His assertion that "I won't give up" in his quest for the body, suggests that her seemingly unconscious insults of his ethnicity are less insulting than her attempt to deride his quest for his brother's body. After all, it would seem illogical for Alboury to be upset by her racism if, previous to her insults, Koltès has had Alboury quite consistently animalizing and primitivizing his own ethnicity.

Leonie also desires to inscribe herself in the seemingly more authentic discourse of primality embodied by Alboury. Shortly after Alboury "a disparu" [has vanished], Horn scolds Leonie for being an emotional turncoat and trying to win Alboury's attentions right in front of him: "Quelle image vous donnez des Blancs" [What a picture you give of the white man] (95, 62) he says, producing, in the English translation, a hilarious conflation of gender, before himself changing tune and asking her to marry him. Leonie has been marked by her encounter with Alboury, however, and turns away from Horn. The stage directions describe the following action:

> Léone s'est redressée. Contre une pierre, elle brise la bouteille de whisky et rapidement, sans un cri, en regardant l'ombre où a disparu Alboury, avec un éclat de verre, elle grave sur ses joues, profondément, les marques scarifiées, semblables au signe tribal sur le visage d'Alboury. (1989, 95-96)
>
> [Leonie has stood up. She breaks the whiskey bottle on a stone and quickly, without a cry, looking at the shadows into which Alboury has vanished, she takes a shard of glass, and cuts deeply into her cheeks, making scarification marks similar to the tribal markings on Alboury's face.] (1997a, 63)

The momentary closeness between Alboury and Leonie has imploded under the pressure of irremediable difference[39] grounded in Koltès' convictions about differences between people and then fortified and extended by the Manichean paradigm. This implosion is then followed, through Leone's act of self-mutilation, by the externalization of the white

[39] Consider for purposes of general comparison Pratt's discussion of a short story by Albert Camus: "*The Adulterous Woman* culminates with a climatic nocturnal scene at the ... fort when, alone in the dead of night, the woman experiences an orgasmic momentary fusion with the "desert kingdom" that "can never be hers," then returns weeping to her joyless matrimonial bed. This momentary permeation of the colonialist boundaries between Euro-African and Africa constitutes the adultery referred to in the story's title, a kind of cultural adultery... The fluid boundaries of female subjectivity provide a means for imagining what a decolonization of self might mean. Camus constructs a glimpse, no more, of an agonized relinquishing that is also an emancipatory release, and then pulls back. His colonial exploratress returns from the interior not in triumph like the Nile heroes, but in hopelessness and loss." (Camus 1957, 224)

woman's interior wound of socially inscribed shame and guilt. It would seem then that Leonie's relationship with Alboury has come full circle. She exposes her guilt and shame by attempting to patriate herself with the blacks, by bringing to bear upon herself the initial pain she felt in her cheeks as described in the stage directions upon their first encounter.[40] In so doing she has accelerated and folded back upon itself the representational dynamic present throughout the colonial period by which women have "symbolised the conquered land" (Loomba 1998, 152). As part of the colonial mechanism, Leonie has carved into her face a symbol of that which her 'people' have conquered, blackness, but also that of which she would have herself be a part. As a woman, she is doubly, perhaps triply, conquered: the intitial misogynist behaviour which she suffers at the hand of Cal and Horn, the perhaps unwilling complicity in the apparently masculinist neo-colonial conquering act which underpins her entire presence in Africa, and finally, her being left bearing the brunt of both these conquerings in the form of self-exile and self-mutilation.

Leonie's ultimate failure to understand Alboury suggests that the emulation of the African by the European can lead nowhere because the European is too flawed to understand the African. In addition, as a result of Alboury's deeper *authentic* presence, the African is presented as being too mysterious to be understood, no matter what the perceptive abilities of the European may be. The chasm between the blacks and whites remains unbridgeable and the momentary, almost magical closeness between Leonie and Alboury serves to heighten the tragic inevitability of divisions along ethnic lines.

2.17 Exotopics and sex

We have seen how, in Leonie's relationship with Alboury, the stereotypes about blackness from the two versions of the Manichean allegory, both reversed and unreversed, merge. In Leonie's view, blackness is both more authentic and more pathological at the same time. The fact that this merging of stereotypes occurs at a moment of desire for intimacy and prohibited sexual attraction comes as no surprise. It was when Koltès was attracted to African men that he experienced the power of 'blackness' most profoundly.[41] It was also at these moments, as I will now explore, that Koltès demonstrated himself to be most inexorably marked, like Alboury, by both the authenticating and pathologizing stereotypes about blackness that emerge from the Manichean allegory.

The multivalent and frequently sexual attraction Koltès felt towards African men served to problematize his initial hope for objectivity regarding the dynamics of power and

[40] "In the whispers and flurries, in the beating of wings which surround her, she recognizes her name, and then feels the pain of tribal scarification marks on her cheeks." (1997a, 27)

[41] One might wonder if staging a heterosexual rather than homosexual rapprochement between black and white was necessitated by Koltès' 'realist hypothesis' strategy.

identity which manifested themselves in the diverse European ex-colonies he visited in Africa. He discussed the quality of his attraction to black men in poetically encoded personal terms in an enigmatic passage from a text entitled "Un Hangar à l'ouest" ('A Warehouse in the West'). This text is a commentary on *Quai ouest* published in *Théâtre en Europe* shortly after the staging of the play by Chéreau (Koltès, 1986b). In a passage, entitled simply 'Blacks', Koltès obliquely discussed his attraction to African people and black characters in terms of "dans le système solaire, un caillou, en chute permanente vers le soleil" [a pebble, in the solar system, in a perpetual fall towards the sun] (1986b, 63) :

> On peut être agi, je le suppose, selon les mêmes lois que celles de la mécanique ou de l'astrophysique. Or une pierre ne tombe pas sur le sol par sympathie, par solidarité ou par attrait sexuel; elle tombe, dépourvue de tout sens moral. A posteriori, et tout en tombant, elle peut se trouver de jolies raisons de tomber. (ibid.)
>
> I suppose we [humans] can be animated by laws similar to those governing mechanics or astrophysics. And yet a stone does not fall to the ground in sympathy, in solidarity or by sexual attraction; it falls without any moral or emotional reason at all. *A posteriori*, however, and during its descent, it can find itself some pretty good reasons to fall.

Koltès explained how, unless the fall was modulated and tempered by what he called the "secondaire" [secondary] and presumably non-sexual attractions (sympathy and solidarity), the inexorable nature of this primary attraction could result only in "crashing" on the sun's surface and perhaps merging with the subjectivity of the object of desire.

By poeticizing his attractions in this fashion, Koltès performed a joining of his sexual attraction with his feelings of sympathy and solidarity with black men. This prevented the objectification of these feelings or the mapping of their differentiation from one another. The letter written in 1978 from an industrial compound in Nigeria to Gignoux in France demonstrated the complex imbrications of sexual attraction and hints of ethnic superiority that Koltès experienced when in the presence of African men to whom he was drawn. In a passage featuring a setting oddly reminiscent of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Koltès recounted his exchange of glances with the black man who was paddling a canoe during a trip he took on the Niger river:

> Je savais bien que tant de beauté réunie me ferait perdre pied, et ... je sens la fermeté de mon jugement être ébranlée : je sens bien que, à l'envers, je risque de reconnaître la supériorité de la race noire sur la race blanche! Alors, je me contiens, j'affirme ma lucidité, je ne sanctionne pas par une opinion mes impressions esthétiques, je refoule toutes ces choses le plus bas possible, je les emballe hermétiquement et mets le pied dessus en disant : "Tout cela, c'est des histoires de cul." (1997c, 15-16)
>
> [I knew that so much beauty gathered on one face would make me lose my footing [...] and I feel the firmness of my judgement slipping; I feel obscure and dubious things gathering in the depths of myself, indeed I feel tempted to recognize the superiority of the black race over the white! Then I contain myself and assert my lucidity. I do not penalize my aesthetic appreciations with an

opinion. I force all those things as far down as possible, I seal them, hermetically, and stomp my foot on them saying : "This is all just about sex, that's all."]

Such gazes were what provided Koltès with anchors within the "futilité et l'inutilité des voyages" [futility and uselessness of travel]. A trip in a canoe down the Niger afforded only a certain "griserie — mais de celles que l'on peut provoquer un soir quelconque d'automne sur les bords de la Seine" [exhilaration — but one that can be experienced any autumn evening along the quays of the Seine], a feeling of excitement which was not sufficiently powerful to leaven that "amusement superficiel qu'est l'impression de se balader dans un dépliant d'agence aérienne sur les dernières coutumes nègres : ne manquez pas d'admirer les bronzes du Bénin, savez-vous qu'il existe encore quelques marchés de viande humains?" [superficial amusement which is the impression of flipping through an airline's brochure on black customs: 'don't miss the bronzes of Benin, did you know they still have markets selling human meat?] (1997c, 14). Were it not for the gaze of the paddler in the back of the canoe, Koltès felt that his perceptual field would consist of nothing more than vague recollections of various French products using stereotypical images of France for advertising purposes discussed earlier in the chapter (The breakfast food Banania,[42] books such as "'Tintin goes to Congo',[43] or reminiscences of visits by virile missionaries with slideshows to my childhood school"). Such fragmented and remembered images of Africa are anchored only by the weight of the temperature and "le fourmillement indiscutablement réaliste de tous les poux du continent africain qui se sont donnés rendez-vous sur mes jambes pour faire du tam-tam" [the undeniably real hustle and bustle of every louse from the entire African continent who have gathered on my legs to play bongos] (ibid., 15).

The effects of these encounters were also inevitably compounded by the material excretions and reifications of power dynamics such as Homi Bhabha describes when discussing Nadine Gordimer's South Africa: "the violence of a racialized society falls most enduringly on the details of life: where you can sit, or not; how you can live, or not [...] who you can love, or not" (Bhabha 1994, 15). Colonialist discourse found frustrating form in the sanctioned use of spaces and left Koltès fuming. He mentioned seeing another black man out the window of the room in which he was writing the letter:

[42] As discussed earlier in the chapter. Rosello recounts the history of the famous Banania chocolate-flavoured breakfast powder to which Koltès refer. This hundred year-old product is one which "anyone in France would be familiar with". Banania's signatory yellow box with "The smiling Senegalese rifleman enjoying a spoonful of Banania is an unforgettable cultural icon branded with the same intensity into the minds of white and black French and Francophone people." Although the images on the box have evolved to replace the black face with a more ideologically transparent smile, possibly in response to various forms of protest, "the memory of previous representations lingers in the collective unconscious"(Rosello 1998, 5).

[43] Rosello also describes the enduring stereotypical resonances which inhabit Hergé's very popular *Les aventures de Tintin au Congo*. Despite the various re-editions of this popular *bande dessinée* or hard-covered comic book, the Africans are still "endearing, childish, harmless, yet potentially rabble-rousing"(ibid., 4).

> Pourquoi moi, dois-je, aujourd'hui, payer le prix d'un siècle d'histoire imbécile ? ... Si l'interdit n'était pas si profond que ni le nègre, ni le blanc, assis l'un à côté de l'autre, un matin, sur le pas de la porte, et qui se sourient, n'y peuvent rien et le savent ... Mais : la table sur laquelle j'écris est placée devant une baie vitrée donnant sur une terrasse ombragée. Là, dans l'ombre, comme barrant l'entrée, — ses genoux sont repliés sur son ventre, un bras soutient sa tête, tandis que l'autre, de minute en minute, chasse mollement quelques moustiques — dort la future révolution. (1997c, 16)
>
> [Why do I have to pay the price today for a century of ridiculous history? [...] If only the forbidden were not so deeply ingrained so as to prevent a black man and a white man from even just sitting side by side on the doorstep, smiling at each other and not being able to do anything about it, [...] But the table I'm writing on is placed in a glass-enclosed alcove facing out over a shaded terasse. And there in the dark, as if he was blocking the door, with knees up to his chest, one hand holding his head and the other chasing away flies — there sleeps the future revolution.]

Taboos related to homosexuality, combined with the prohibitive proxemics of the racialized situation at hand, leave Koltès twice removed from the object of his desire: "Perception ô combien douce et cruelle, dont la cruauté est doublée ici de l'interdit" [oh, sweet and cruel sensation, whose cruelty is doubled with this interdiction] (ibid.).

Koltès asserted that conceptual clarity was not easily attained, or even desirable in the heightened state invoked by the gaze of the black paddler. He continued by remarking that

> tant de choses sont des histoires de cul. Je crains d'avoir emballé la politique dans le même paquet, et me voilâ obligé de tout redéfaire pour y voir clair. Oh si tu voyais comme je vois... (ibid.)
>
> [so many things are 'all just about sex.' I fear that I've mixed politics in with all this, and here I have to pull it all apart to try and see things clearly. But, oh, if you could just see what I see ...]

His feelings of sexual frustration mounted and, in almost the same sentence that he was tempted to consider black people superior to white, he pathologized his attractions:

> Ainsi donc, la seule perception qui empêche que le voyage ne me vide totalement de ma substance et me réduise à l'état d'image sur diapositive, c'est cela même qui me renvoie à cette *perversion* qui, sous d'autres cieux, me pousse à *rôder* dans les profondeurs du Drugstore Saint-Germain (ibid.) (my emphasis)
>
> [And so the only thing that might save me from being emptied by this voyage [to Nigeria...] is the same thing that brings me right back to that *perversion* which, at other times, pushes me to *prowl* the *recesses* of the Drugstore St. Germain.] (my emphasis)

With the association of blackness and perversion, he echoes nineteenth-century popular and medical discourses which progressively intensified the linkages between blackness and sexuality and the black man and deviant sexuality in general (Loomba 1998, 160).

2.18 The escalating pathologization of blackness

The evidence presented so far suggests that Koltès' particular internalization of the post-

colonial encounter, one complicated by sexual difference, also fused with his aesthetic interests. With the collapse of the distance between the authenticating and pathologizing stereotypes of blackness, both stereotyping tendencies demonstrate themselves to be different sides of the same representational coin. This bears itself out in the case of Leonie because her pathologization of Albourey goes uncontested by the text. It appears that Albourey is even more upset that she urges him to accept money from Horn rather than because of her racism. The study of Koltès' own thoughts about sexuality and blackness reveal that he himself confused the authenticating and pathologizing stereotypes of blackness.

In a narrative strategy corollary to the collapse of authenticating and pathologizing stereotypes in Leonie's talk with Albourey (stereotypes which demonstrate themselves to be different sides of the same representational coin), Horn and Cal begin to slide unwittingly towards the blackness they fear. This occurs almost unconsciously, and during their personal devolution towards increasingly explicit corruption and dissolution, they both adopt some of Albourey's linguistic tendencies, even actual lines. Towards the end of the text the desperate and now explicitly murderous Horn adopts Albourey's enigmatic and folksy use of proverbs. He justifies his own suggestion that Cal should hurry up and kill another black man to replace the body of the first murdered man by stating: "Il vaut mieux exterminer le renard que de faire des sermons à la poule" [Better to shoot the fox than lecture the hen] (1989, 100;1997a, 66).

This narrative strategy signals the ultimate collapse of the distinction between the pathologizing and authenticating visions of blackness in the play. Despite earlier hints of this collapse, such as the use of the term 'nègre' in the title, the anti-imperialist critique in the play depends largely on the authentic qualities that Koltès ascribes to Albourey viewed as distinct from the unfortunate qualities of the white neo-colonials. But now, the 'territory of anxiety and solitude,' that dangerous primitive unconscious, begins to make itself evident in the white characters. This is not simply a question of showing the white characters to be the actual primitives, while Albourey remains the bona fide cultural sophisticate, rather, the white characters begin to take on 'primitive' qualities and are further pathologized by them. Many of these qualities are ones already demonstrated by Albourey, with Cal's dissolution into the blackness which he fears is the most pronounced devolution experienced by the blacks. His decline is marked by a binary subordination of whiteness into blackness and it is terrifying for him because it depends on the collapse of stereotypes. Dyer argues that the most important function of stereotypes is "to maintain sharp boundary definitions, to define clearly where the pale ends and thus who is clearly within and who is clearly beyond it" (Dyer 1993,16).

The relationship that Cal entertains with his pet dog is one of the early indications of his evolution towards a state of 'primitivity.' Bearing the personality inscriptions, if not the

wrinkles of the individuals Koltès once met at various neo-colonial gentlemen's clubs, Cal first appears in scene three. He is playing dice with Horn on the veranda and lamenting the disappearance of his dog, whose name, Toubab, is described in the fronstispiece as being an "appelation commune du Blanc dans certaines régions d'Afrique" [common name for whites in certain regions of Africa] (1989, 7;1997a, 3). The rhetorical energy unleashed by this first speech, replete as it is with hatred for the Africans, reveals an intensely paranoid mentality:

> (à la table, la tête entre les mains). — Toubab, pauvre bête, pourquoi es-tu parti? (Il pleure) Quel mal est-ce que je lui ai fait ? Horn, tu me connais, tu connais mes nerfs. S'il ne revient pas ce soir, je les tuerai tous; bouffeurs de chiens. Ils me l'ont pris. Je ne peux pas dormir sans lui, Horn. Ils sont en train de me le manger. Je ne l'entends même pas aboyer. Toubab! (1989, 18)
>
> [(at the table, his head in his hands) Toubab, you poor animal, why did you have to go? (He cries.) What did I do to him? Horn, you know me, you know my temper. If he doesn't come back tonight, I'll kill them all; dog-eating swine! They've taken him from me. I can't sleep without him, Horn. They're probably eating him right now. I don't even hear him barking any more. Toubab!] (1997a, 11)

It quickly becomes evident that Cal's paranoia is fueled by guilt, for it would seem he has killed Alboury's 'brother.' Without directly confessing his crime, Cal entreats Horn to stand firm together with him in the face of the threatening "niggers" and suggests that Horn should use all the administrative power at his disposal to clear him from any responsibility for the incident: "C'est simple: tu fais un rapport pour la police, un rapport à la direction, tu le signes, et hop; et je me tiens tranquille" [It's simple: you do one report for the police, and one for the directors, you sign it, and bingo; I'll keep calm] (1989, 19;1997a, 12). Horn diverts the conversation back to the game they are playing and to the recently arrived Leonie before Cal provides a fantastic and obfuscatory description of the death of the black man, suggesting that an act of God was responsible:

> Un gars traversait le chantier; je le vois. A cet instant, un violent orage éclate. je crie: viens Toubab, viens! Le chien dresse le museau, dresse ses poils; il sent l'odeur de la mort; ça l'exite, pauvre bête. Puis je le vois courir vers le nègre, là-bas, sous les trombes d'eau.... Alors, au milieu du vacarme, des éclairs déchainés, je vois un grand trait de foudre. Toubab s'est arrêté; tous on regarde. Et on voit le nègre tomber, au milieu des bruits de tonnerre; touché, sous les tonnes de pluie; il se couche dans la boue. (1989, 20)
>
> [A lad was crossing the site; I saw him. At that moment, the storm breaks. I shout, 'Here, Toubab, here!' The dog raises his nose and his fur stands on end; he can smell death and it exites him, poor bugger. Then I see him running after the nigger, through all the heavy rain. ... Then in the middle of all this racket, through the lightning, there's a huge thunderbolt. Toubab froze; we all saw it. We saw the nigger fall, through the thunder; hit, under tons of rain; lying in the mud.] (1997a, 12)

Following forty or fifty lines of continuous denial from Cal, Horn finally intervenes with "Tout le monde t'a vu tirer. Imbécile, tu ne supportes même pas ta foutue colère" [Everybody saw you shoot him. Idiot, you can't control your bloody temper] (1989, 24;1997a, 15). In his torrent of rage Cal explains that the black worker deserved to die

because he had spat within two centimetres of Cal's shoes after Cal refused to allow him to leave the worksite an hour early. Following Horn's intervention, Cal explains that even after the worker was dead, he was unable to leave the body lying in peace in the compound: "mais l'instinct, c'est comme ça que cela marche" [that's the way instinct works] (1989, 25;1997a, 16), he explains. Cal explains how he took the body to the dump but then returned, removed the body once again, and finally disposed of it in the lake. Cal then continues to report that "ça me travaillait, Horn, de le laisser en paix dans l'eau du lac" [it really bothered me, leaving him there in peace in the lake] (1989, 25;1997a, 16). He returned to the lake to get the body before finally throwing it into the sewer where he was able to "lui foutre la paix, malgré moi, une bonne fois" [leave (the body) in peace, in spite of myself, for once and for all] and eventually even "me calmer" [calm down] (1989, 26;1997a, 16).

Initially, Cal's hyperactive and seemingly neurotic qualities would appear to feed into his continuous violence-inflected celebration of the importance of instinct, a kind of feral counterpoint to Horn's more upscale bureaucratic slipperiness. This quality of instinct is, as was discussed in the sections on the reversal of the Manichean allegory and vicarious nativism, a major building block of Alboury's identity. Cal's instinctual qualities manifest themselves quite clearly when he forces himself on Leonie. "J'ai l'instinct, pour les femmes" [I have an instinct, as far as women are concerned] (1989, 51;1997a, 33), he explains as he tries to hold her in his arms. She pulls away and he calls her "pudique" [a 'cock teaser'] (ibid.) before reminding her that "J'ai l'instinct, moi, pour certaines choses" [I've got a good instinct when it comes to certain things] (ibid.). Horn then arrives into the compound and she wriggles free but not before Cal accuses her home city of Paris of being "le plus grand bordel du monde" [the biggest brothel on earth!] (1989, 52; 1997a, 33). Cal feels let down: "Quand on ne voit pas de femmes pendant si longtemps, après, on attend ... comme si ça allait être ... l'explosion. Et puis, rien, rien du tout. Un soir de plus, perdu." [When you haven't seen a woman for ages, you expect ... you imagine some sort of ... explosion. And then there's nothing, nothing at all. Another wasted evening] (1989, 52;1997a, 33-34).

Earlier, Cal explains to the recently arrived Leonie that she should not worry about sweating from the heat. He describes how layers and layers of dried sweat form "une carapace, ça protège" [a sort of protective shell] to ward off predators and also that "ça développe l'instinct" [it develops your instincts] (1989, 37;1997a, 24)which allows you to get to know people by their smell and discern what belongs to who. He idolizes his missing dog for its pure "instinct" and ability to "aboi[yer] quand il voit un boubou" [(bark) when he sees a nig-nog] (1989, 45;1997a, 28) Cal's self-contradiction is energetic and revealing, however, because he wants to let the blacks battle together with his dog as a result of their shared animalness: Laisse les bêtes régler leurs comptes entre elles" [Let the animals fight it out amongst themselves] (1989, 28;1997a, 45), he

explains to Leonie, seemingly forgetting that he has recently celebrated his own animal qualities.

Cal's desire to be animalistic, and yet categorize others as animals is one example of the generative contradictions of the colonialist pathologization of the native. In this sense, the portrayal of Cal is counternarrative to the history of colonialism. Cal, as part of the colonial mechanism, has to justify the violence of his own intrusion yet also pursue that intrusion by relying on tropes of baseness applied to the native to justify that same intrusion. Koltès ably exposes this contradiction by having Cal both celebrate and denigrate animality over the course of two sentences: the initial idolization of the dog for its "pure animality", followed by the association of his dog with the Africans in the category of "animals," a category from which he implicitly excludes himself. However, Alboury never extracts himself from the sticky qualities of determining instinct ascribed to him, and the counternarrative critique of Cal through instinct is weakened if not annulled.

Indeed, Cal seems somewhat numbly aware that it is simply the taxonomic act which prevents his own conflation into the category of 'animals' which he has derided. Africa for Cal is nothing but "l'envers du monde" [the arsehole of the world] (1989, 50;1997a, 32) from which he distinguishes himself by his education. "J'ai plus de diplômes, plus de qualifications" [I've studied, I've got degrees] (ibid.) he explains to Leonie, qualifications which prevent him from being entirely associated with the primitive qualities that overcome Europeans when they move to Africa. "Ici, on devient presque des sauvages" [Here we're all practically savages] (ibid.), he asserts.

One of the short texts in the notes for at the end of the play, entitled "Cal, songeries d'un ingénieur insomniaque" [Dreams of an insomniac engineer], finds Cal very articulate about his dislike of anything associated with blackness:

> Il y a trop de nuits, une par vingt-quatre heures, quoi qu'on fasse; et trop longues, bien trop longues, avec tout ce qui y bouge et qui n'a pas de nom, qui y vit à l'aise comme nous le jour, dans notre élément naturel, eux c'est la nuit, cachés derrière les arbres, le long des murs, cachés couchés dans l'herbe, tout en haut des palmiers, et, les nuits la lune, cachés derrière le long, en haut de dedans, rien du tout, la nuit suffit. Or qui sait le nombre et la taille, l'intention et le but de ce qui, dans la nuit, bouge ou est immobile, mais vit dans son élément naturel? C'est donc de jour qu'il faut guetter, poursuivre, attraper, tuer, massacrer, exterminer, réduire en poudre tout ce qu'on peut reconnaître comme étant une menace possible.
> Attrape en plein midi un boubou et coupe-le en quattre avec une bonne machette ... Pourrais-je alors songer à dormir enfin? (1989, 117-118)
>
> [There are too many nights. One every twenty four hours, no matter what you try to do about it. They're too long, way too long. And full of everything that moves and doesn't have a name. Things that live out their lives, just like we do during the day, in our natural element. Their element is the night, they hide behind trees, against walls, they hide in the grass or up palm trees. When there's no moon, they hide anywhere they please, the night hides them all by itself. And

> who knows the number, the size or the intention of those things that move around in the night like it's their natural element? It's during the day that you have to keep a look out, chase after, catch, kill, massacre, exterminate and pulverize anything that might be a threat.
> Catch a nigger at high noon and cut him in four pieces.... Maybe then I could finally get myself some sleep.] (my trans. — these notes do not appear in the Methuen edition)

Cal's fear of the dark and his conflation of 'night' with 'nigger' reveal his true paranoid racist colours. He is drawn inexorably towards that which he hates, however, for at the end of Scene 18 Cal echoes Alboury's earlier complaint about the brightness of the electric illumination around the compound as the engineer looks up towards the surveillance towers and cries: "Il y a trop de lumière, beaucoup trop de lumière" [there's too much light, much too much light] (1989, 102; 1997a, 67).[44]

Koltès shows Leonie, Cal and Horn, in their increasingly accelerated downward ethical spiral, to affect qualities of the blackness that has qualified Alboury. And so, in an intriguing extension of this dynamic, the corruption of the whites in *Combat* leads to an increased dependency on the very projections of baseness which they impose on the blacks. While Koltès begins to conflate the whites with what they fear, at no point does he actively dissociate the black character from the racist projections in which the whites engage. Koltès' depiction of the black may perhaps be motivated by a desire to demonstrate black resistance, and to serve as an effective counterpoint to the completely corrupt Europeans. It is, however, essentially regressive in that it does not permit any more complex subjectivity of the black character, characterized by an articulate and cognizant counternarrative, to emerge. In an interesting development of the type of binary subordination witnessed so far in Koltès' work,[45] one term in the binary does not have to be induced to collapse, but does so entirely of its own accord. All of the nativist tropes that Koltès has used to bolster Alboury's authenticity are soon buried under the derogatory associations with blackness that Koltès borrows from the white character's anxiety about the blacks and ascribes to the whites' devolution.

2.19 The fragile substance

[44] It is useful to note at this juncture that the pathologizing relationship between colonizer and colonized emerging from the Manichean allegory proposed by JanMohamed and other scholars is marked by a degree of dependency of the colonizer on the colonized for his/her identity. On one hand the colonizer avoids the colonized in view of the fact that the colonized subject has been created and envisioned as the embodiment of everything that is unholy, unhealthy and evil. On the other hand, however, the colonizer "is at the same time absolutely dependent upon the colonized people not only for his privileged social and material status, but also for his sense of moral superiority and, therefore, ultimately for his very identity." Such dynamics result in the colonizer being caught between his civilizing imperative (the 'white man's burden' which is used to justify his very presence in the colony) and the recognition that a too effective civilizing drive will result in the eventual eradication of difference between colonizer and colonized, and thus the eventual eradication of the grounds of the colonizer's privilege.

[45] This was discussed for the most part the first chapter with explorations of the subordinations of exteriority by interiority, of inauthenticity by authenticity, of character by actor.

Recalling some of the investigation of Chapter One can provide a sense of how the concept of character that Koltès outlines early in his career contributes to the Manichean dynamics discussed above.[46] I discussed in Chapter One how the 'fragile' and originary 'substance' that Koltès posited as being at the core of all dramatic characters (and people) served as a kind of *logos* for each character's and individual's identity. This type of conceptualization permitted Koltès to understand identity to be undifferentiated and having, as Derrida would describe it, unmediated self-presence. This system of identity with its essentialist characteristics resonates on a structural level with essentialist assumptions which ground the Manichean allegory that produces and maintains the white/non-white, civilized/uncivilized, rational/irrational, colonizer/colonized binaries at the core of the colonial/neo-colonial discourse. It would seem that Koltès' own tendencies towards essentialist understandings of identity made him more susceptible (a risk for any anti-colonialist writer, as JanMohamed noted), to falling into the colonial discourse characterized by the restrictive system of binaries which are direct manifestations of the process of exclusion of difference evident on a metaphysical level throughout the history of Western thought.[47]

From the colonialist's perspective, the terms 'white', 'civilized', 'rational' and 'colonizer' are the grounding *logos* by which the colonizer justifies colonial activity to him/herself. As has been explored, Koltès stated to the press that the text is about whites and the civilized, rational, colonizing world; thereby strangely annulling Alboury. The insights gathered to date, in tandem with the fact that Alboury is integral to the plot and action of the play, makes it inevitable, however, that Alboury will be an important point of signification in *Combat*. In the terms Koltès uses to discuss *Les Amertumes*, Alboury is the originary 'fragile substance' to which all the white characters — not to mention Koltès himself — are drawn, burdened with the shame of what would appear to be the always already internally conflicted state of their whiteness (and therefore differentiated and without self-presence). Alboury, in terms of his actantial position, is more a more generalized and potent force than the whites, serving the function of an allegorical figure. The whites, severed from landscape and people, and by extension from the kind of authenticity that marks the blacks, are less potent on Pavis's scale of the degree of reality of Koltès' characters (see Chapter One).

In that the text contains elements of an anti-colonialist critique, the binaries in *Combat*

[46] Although Koltès did not speak in interviews about this early understanding of character at the time of the staging of *Combat*, neither did he refute it. I am therefore proceeding on the assumption of a certain amount of consistency in his understanding of notions of character as well, particularly with regard to the essentialism which informed *Les Amertumes*. It can be useful to note that the poetic rather than literal quality of the model he conceived in his early letters to Gignoux permits a relatively open-ended yet productive application of the model to the characters in *Combat* .

[47] This was the case at least until the challenges brought to bear on the question by the post-structuralists.

(white/black, etc) are reversed in the sense that the positive term in the binary within the hegemonic colonial discursive matrix (eg, white) is flipped over to become the negative. 'Blackness' becomes the new *logos* for Koltès, and although he makes Alboury, his representative of that *logos*, very strong, Alboury and the 'fragile sustance' at his core remain significantly haunted by the irrational and uncivilized qualities previously attached to the term 'blackness' within the hegemonic colonial discourse.

This devolution, echoing the allegory of sacrifice, choice, and punishment in *Les Amertumes*, will result in the white characters paying a heavy price. Leonie has already been punished for her attempt to block Alboury's quest for the body, for encouraging the black man to take Horn's money and for accompanying suggestion that blackness is weakness. Since she has punished herself, Alboury's heightened ethical quality, undoubtedly a result of Koltès' vicarious nativism, remains intact. On a narrative level, Cal and Horn must be punished by the ethically intact Alboury for the murder of his brother. Yet, like Leonie, they must also be punished, not for the primitivizing of blackness, or even for their incursion into the territory of 'anxiety and solitude', but for sullying the *logos* of blackness with their white weakness. By taking on black characteristics, they have trespassed on the source of of Alboury's primitive power, and will pay dearly for their transgression.

2.20 The final explosion

The both conscious and unconscious movement of the whites towards the more *authentic* yet somehow *pathological* primal 'blackness' at the core of the text also leads to results beyond the level of the representation of ethnicity. It is also tied into the increasing dramatic tension in the plot. The movement of the 'whites' towards the 'blacks' (or 'colonizer' towards the 'colonized', of the 'rational' towards the 'irrational', etc.) cannot, as we have seen through the example of Leonie and Alboury, lead to any sustainable connections because of the differences between them. Instead, this slide towards the pathological qualities of blackness builds towards the violence at the play's closure.

The final scene of *Combat*, entitled '*Last visions of a distant enclosure*', serves as the point of emergence for the violent primitivism of the black *logos* that has served as the motivating strength behind Alboury's resistance throughout the play. The scene is set at night and comprised largely of stage directions. Koltès indicates that the following actions occur: Horn sets off the fireworks, Alboury converses with the guards on the compound walls who then shoot Cal, and in the only dialogue, heard after "Le jour se lève, doucement" [Day breaks gradually] (1989, 107;1997a, 70). Leonie speaks in German to the chauffeur waiting to drive her to the airport: "Do you have a safety pin?

My dress is coming apart. My God if you don't have one I shall have to go stark naked back to Paris." (1989, 107-108 ;1997a 70).

Alboury figures heavily in the final sequence with his primal shamanic powers in full force, invoking the power of the elements. Shortly after the fireworks go off we read that:

> Soudain, la voix d'Alboury: du noir jaillit un appel, guerrier et secret, qui tourne, porté par le vent, et s'élève du massif d'arbres jusqu'aux barbelés et des barbelés aux miradors. (1989, 106)
>
> [Suddenly, Alboury's voice is heard: out of the darkness arises a call, a secret warrior call, which is carried away by the wind, rising up from the clump of trees to the barbed wire and from the bardbed wire to the watchtowers.] (1997a, 69-70)

This call would appear to be similar in function to the growth, or 'grandissement', that Alexis experiences at the end of *Les Amertumes*. The call is then followed by an exchange between Alboury and the guards in which language becomes magical, evocative, devoid of rational sense, and finally in tandem with the cosmic description of the 'exploding suns' of the fireworks:

> Alors s'établit, au coeur des périodes noires entre les explosions, un dialogue inintelligible entre Alboury et les hauteurs de tous cotés. Conversation tranquille, indifférente; questions et réponses brèves; rires; langage indéchiffrable qui résonne et s'amplifie, tourbillone le long des barbelés et de haut en bas, emplit l'espace tout entier, règne sur l'obscurité et résonne encore sur toute la cité pétrifiée, dans une ultime serie d'étincelles et de soleils qui explosent. (1989, 107)
>
> [Then a conversation starts up, in the heart of the dark period between explosions, an unintelligible dialogue between Alboury and the heights all around. The conversation is tranquil, impassive; brief questions and answers; laughs, an indecipherable language resonating, swelling, eddying along the barbed wire from top to bottom, filling the whole space, governing the darkness and vibrating over the petrified camp, as a final sucession of glittering sparks and suns explode.] (1997a, 70)

The Europeans' fantastic firework illumination, which brings a final blast of light to the territory of 'solitude and anxiety' as Koltès described it, serves only to shed, to quote Horn and Cal from other contexts, 'too much light' on the site of the European's violent intervention. The light also serves to evacuate momentarily the night, which, as Cal has complained, arrives every twenty four hours no matter what one does about it.

The 'indecipherable' language spoken by Alboury and the guards takes on a dilating and animistic quality which permeates the differences between the black individuals participating in the strange conversation, reducing and solidifying them into one mysterious black '*logos*'. The dark 'conversation' they entertain filters upwards and mixes in a yin yang fashion with the celestial occurrence of Horn's fireworks. No quietist Taoist calm emerges from this dialectic, as both black and white, both obscure and light are forces of strength. Cal dies at the hands of the African guards who emerge from the night, which up until this stage has entirely hidden them, save their 'strange

calls', to perform a retributory murder. The death of Cal evidences an important structural parallel with Alexis' emergence at the end of *Les Amertumes* which occurs at the same time that the other characters are frozen in white flashing light while Alexis is bathed, in the foreground, in violent red light.

The violent manifestation of the black *logos*, similar to the "final and irrational revolt" of Alexis which is "the fulfillment of all the activity exterior to him which has preceded him" (from Koltès' introduction to *Les Amertumes*), does substantiate further scrutiny of the type of primitivism with which Koltès imbues the blacks in *Combat*. Up until this stage, we have largely witnessed Alboury to be represented as a resistant but essentially naive manifestation of a kind of soft primitive, or noble savage. With his emergence, catalyzed by the white's incursion on the *logos* of blackness, Alboury takes on another role. He becomes a manifestation of the dark flip side of his earlier soft primitive: the noble savage's "confrontative barbarous twin." (Schneider, 134-141)

Rebecca Schneider provides a very useful history of the distinction between 'soft' and 'hard' primitivism in twentieth century pictorial art in a text entitled *The Explicit Body in Performance*. She notes how the non-aestheticism of primitive decorative arts previous to the twentieth century, with "its connection to life versus art, underscored its early application as a means of confrontation to the tenets of high art" (ibid., 138). Before Picasso, stylistic instigations "incited the long migration of African fetish objects out of museums of ethnography and into art museums" (ibid.). Schneider explains how, previous to Picasso,

> 'savage' primitivism was practically synonymous with physical affront — the punch of base necessities of everyday life in the face of higher transcendent ideals — the punch of the artifact in the face of art — the punch of the lowly literal or the real in the face of the lofty symbol or dream. (ibid.)

The 'punch' of Picasso's use of the primitive, as it were, had already been appropriated, however, as primitive artifacts had already become "exotic insignias of colonialist dreamscapes" through exposure and circulation through the marketplace of colonialist exhibitions. The punch was subverted by the aesthetic distance provided to the fetish, a distance "which the market had already affected through commodified display" (ibid., 139).

To apply the notion of 'hard' primitivism to *Combat* is to understand how Alboury's initial figuration as 'noble' savage, a firm, insistant and naive 'soft' primitive, gives way to his repatriation with the night full of undifferentiated murderous guards which birthed

him.[48] This movement permits a fuller actualization to the anti-civilizational critique, similar to Picasso's anti-art critique in the pictorial arts, which in the case of *Combat* has been increasing in intensity over the duration of the text. The reader may have wondered early in the text if the whites will subsume Alboury in their mendacious and racist utterances, a possibility which is finally negated by the act of "primal vandalism" (Krauss 1988, 54). It is entirely possible, as explored at length in the section on vicarious nativism, that by staging such an emergence, Koltès felt he was providing a degraded and counter-commodified version of the reigning neo-colonial reality. Despite what can be understood as an attempt to demythologize the heritage of the 'noble savage', the replacement he has offered does not displace any of the bases of the racist representational and commodificatory dynamics which have constructed the 'noble savage', but rather, in view of the violence of the emergence of the black *logos*, has, if anything, simply displayed and perhaps in so doing, has solidified those bases.

Indeed, Alboury's 'hard primitivism' also fits quite snugly within what has been criticized as the hegemonic phallocratic tendencies embedded within the discourse of postcoloniality itself. Alboury's resistance is predicated on violence and in this way, he is the embodiment of Koltès' conception of Nigeria which he voiced in 1983 during the text's production: "je suis content que le lieu d'origine de la pièce ne soit pas un pays faible, ni colonisé "[I'm glad that the location of the play's origin is neither a weak, nor a colonized country] (1999a, 19). Gone from Koltès' understanding of the Nigerian political situation are the discussions of neo-colonialism which characterized his long letter to Gignoux of five years earlier. It would appear that Nigeria, like the Alboury who emerges from it, has had part of its history erased, is unconditionally strong and ready to fight. This conflation of gender and nationhood in Koltès' writing confirms Anne McLintock's assertion that "Not only have the needs of 'post-colonial' nations' been largely identified with male conflicts, male aspirations and male interests, but the very representation of 'national' power rests on prior constructions of gender power" (McClintock 1994, 260).

Cal's murder would seem to be the beginning of the killing that Alboury prophesies in the thoughts Koltès provides for him in the 'Notes' following the text: j'en apporterai .. [d'autres corps] encore" [I'll bring you many more bodies] he says to his dead brother, "car aux morts de ma race appartient la mort du toubab et de tout ce qui est à lui, ses femmes, ses larbins, ses propriétés et ses chiens" [because the dead of my race own the death of the whites, and the death of everything that belongs to them: their women, their brats, their property and their dogs] (1989, 112). Both this murder and the fact that it is set at a simplified and nebulous remove from the verifiable historical situation from

[48] The reader may hear an echo in Césaire's words at this stage: "We found a violent affirmation in the words 'nègre' and 'négritude'.. it is a concrete rather than an abstract coming to consciousness." (Césaire 1972, 74,76).

which *Combat* was inspired would seem to indicate that that a projection Homi Bhabha has made about similar circumstances has been fulfilled. He writes in *The Location of Culture* that

> The hideous extremity of Serbian nationalism proves that the very idea of a pure 'ethnically cleansed' national identity can only be achieved through the death, literal and figurative, of the complex interweavings of history, and the culturally contingent borderlines of modern nationhood" (Bhabha 1994, 5).

As a result of Koltès' strategy of vicarious nativism in *Combat* and, despite his perhaps laudable attempt to portray the possibility of an autonomous decolonized culture, the final violent emergence consolidates the text-long trend of a mythologizing ethnic essentialism. This mythologizing takes the form of a reverse ethnocentrism which reproduces, without challenging them, existing categories emerging from Western binarist metaphysical assumptions. As Benita Parry describes with regard to similar dynamics in other forms of representation, Koltès vision is founded on "an undifferentiated and retrograde discourse [which] instill[s] notions of a foundational and fixed native self and demagogically assert[s] the recovery of an immutable past" (Parry 1994, 180). The primal and 'hard' strength of the Africans, although rooting them in Koltès' vision of a unified and transnational resistant past, leads them to finish the text mired in a vision of a magical, incoherent, irrational and very violent future.

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Myriam Boyer, Philippe Léotard,
Combat de nègre et de chiens,
mise en scène de Patrice Chéreau,
Nanterre-Amandiers, février-avril 1983.

Figure 4

Figure 5

CHAPTER TWO PART TWO

2.1.1 Chéreau and Koltès

> Mais en vérité, puisque j'écris en français, la seule mise en scène à laquelle je m'intéresse vraiment, que je considère comme une réalisation finale de mon travail, c'est celle de Chéreau. (Koltès 1986b, 63)
>
> [If the truth be known, since I'm writing in French, the only staging that really interests me and that I consider to be a final carrying out of my work, is that of Patrice Chéreau.]

How did Chéreau's[1] work enact the realities in *Combat* discussed in the first half of the chapter? In what way did Chéreau, as he put it, "cheminer d'abord avec l'auteur" [first travel alongside the author]? (Chéreau 1990b, 107)

The switch from a study of texts to a study of productions is motivated by a desire to supplement the textual analysis with that of an investigation of the space of production. This shift requires new theoretical paradigms that can yield a different set of insights. Slippages, augmentations, amplifications and erasures can be traced in this process during the shift on the phenomenal level between text 'object' and staging 'object'. Taken in the context of the current investigation, it can be understood that it is unavoidable that these changes transform the representation of ethnicity as it appears in the text. The quality of these shifts or 'translations' of meaning can be traced by examining their actual manifestation in the performance text. In addition, and in a fashion similar to the examination of the dramatic text, a careful scrutiny of any direct contextual evidence (in the forms of letters and interviews) or indirect contextual evidence (by situating creative choices in wider theatrical or cultural discourses), can help explain the motivations and desires generating what can, for methodological purposes, be referred to as the performance text of the production.[2]

[1] It is relevant to recall at this stage that this discussion proceeds on the basic understanding that the term 'Chéreau', although obviously a proper name, can also be understood to be what John Rouse describes as the 'director function', with the application of the term 'function' from Foucault seeming: "particularly well suited to describing the contradictory elaboration of discourse within the performance text. We all know, and usually murmur in passing, that this text is "written" through a collaboration between those who control its various signifying systems (actors, designers, composers, etc.), but we "legitimize" the text's authority by attributing it to the director" (Rouse 1992, 147). In following with this reasoning, the specific work of other contributing artists, such as actors and a variety of designers, will be discussed when relevant.

[2] Rouse explains that in semiotics, the notion of 'performance text' is widely accepted and that there is, by "methodological consent", an initial separation between performance and dramatic texts so that underlying systems of meaning can be elaborated analytically. (Rouse 1992, 146)

As I did not see the productions under discussion, I have to subject them to a reconstitution analysis.[3] This involves recreating, to the extent possible with the the materials available,[4] portions of the 'performance text' of the production. Such a 'text' does not presume to stand in for the production, or rather more precisely, the experience of the production, but does provide a sufficient number of semiotic indicators or systems of *signs* from the production to be transcribed into writing. These signs can serve as a basis for analysis. Portions of the performance text will be described when it is relevant

[3] Pavis has noted that "it is difficult to choose an approach, much less idenitify shared elements" (1998, 254) amongst the various types of analysis which formulate the epistemological field of performance analysis. He suggests, however, that two main trends can be distinguished among the existing approaches, namely those of *reportage*, which is based on the actual viewing of a production, and *reconstitution* analysis (ibid.). As I did not see the productions, I must pursue the latter.

The evidence I have collected falls under the categories of statements of intent and traces left after the event, such as brief audio recordings, reviews, critical investigations, interviews and so forth. With this type of archival material I will construct, when necessary, what Pavis terms as the 'performance text', the "theoretical model that opportunely replaces the illusory whole of the empirical object that was the performance" (ibid., 255). This reconstituted skeleton of the production does not, like an epistemological creature of the undead, attempt to stand in as a 'reconstruction' of the original 'living' event. Nor does it depend on the pseudo-scientific pretense of a complete taxonomy of the signs in the production, as if a listed series of micro-units could somehow provide a sense of a coherent whole. Pavis addresses this question when he quotes Bert States' discussion of the dissection of impressions from a perspective informed by phenomenology, echoing the flavour of Koltès' concerns about the relevance of the search for significance in a performance event:

"The problem with semiotics is that in addressing theater as a system of codes it necessarily dissects the perceptual impression theatre makes upon the spectator. And, as Merlau-Ponty has said, 'it is impossible... to decompose a perception, to make it into a collection of sensations, because in it the whole is prior to the parts'" (ibid.)

My general approach when discussing the production will be to blend a semiotic analysis with enough qualitative statements of a phenomenological and subjective nature to provide a sense of what spectators may have been experiencing at the productions. The semiotic aspect will situate the signs discussed within the greater context of the performance text which, over the course of the chapter, I will gradually elaborate to the extent necessary for a cogent analysis. Once again, I will avoid "taxonomic and positivistic" (Pavis 1998, 258) tendencies that reject the never neutral gaze of the spectator. Due respect will be given to Koltès' warnings discussed in the first chapter regarding excessive attempts to 'make sense' of phenomena, and an athletic semioticism will be avoided at all costs. As has been the case with my examination of Koltès' texts to date, I will also avoid an attempted articulation of Chéreau's full intentions or a final statement about the meaning or message of the work. To lend an extra measure of caution to the reductive dangers of these types of analysis that Pavis calls "obsessive" (ibid., 256), I need only quote Chéreau's own sense of ambiguity about the texts: "I didn't really understand [*Combat*] at first..." (Chéreau 1990b, 107).

[4] Much of the material I have collected about the productions takes the form of journalistic accounts. In view of Chéreau's fame, his opening of a new arts centre in Nanterre was an event of magnitude in cultural milieus. Consequently, I was able to collect forty-seven reviews for *Combat*, many of which were detailed, some of which were written by trained academic critics such as Bernard Dort. I will undertake to use the most articulate of the descriptions of the performance from these reviews as a basis for a discussion of the production. These descriptions fall into categories of description of the design and of the performance. Since the critics for the most part are not trained, I will be particularly careful to qualify any descriptive statements or opinions which might contain value judgments about the production. Such value judgments will, in some cases, be used to spark a deeper discussion, or to reveal important assumptions on the reviewers' part that can feed into the discussion.

to the discussion at hand.[5]

A useful approach to the narrative of the investigation will be to follow the same pattern of analysis established in the examination of the production of *Les Amertumes*. This will involve identifying the assumptions and actualities of Chéreau's conception of theatrical reality manifest in the production of *Combat*. Constituent parts, or contributing elements, of the theatrical reality in question will be examined. These include such factors as: 1) the way in which the design was conceived; 2) the way in which the design functioned in relation to the actor, text and audience; 3) the way in which Chéreau worked with the actor (including body work and proxemics; identification/distanciation; delivery of the text), and, finally, 4) the complex and simultaneous interaction of all the above elements. Some similarities with the production of *Quai ouest* will be discussed when I examine the production of *Combat*. The steps of the above investigation, however, will be repeated in the third chapter when I focus on *Quai ouest*. The repetition will be

[5] On an important methodological note. Carlson has usefully traced a variety of assumptions about the relationship between text and performance, suggesting that the performance of a text has, historically, been envisaged as either an illustration, a translation, a fulfillment or, more recently, as a supplement (1985, 5-11). If, as a variety of theorists, playwrights and critics, from Castlevetro to Charles Lamb to Strindberg, have suggested, plays have a mysterious organic inner unity all to themselves, the most important role a production could actually serve would be as an illustration, an ornament of something already complete (ibid., 5-6). The twentieth century avant-garde, following the path of Craig who suggested that plays were already complete when written, has used this notion of illustration to reject texts entirely and to base productions on non text-based material (ibid.6). The 'translation' school, championed first in the twentieth century by critics such as Stark Young, suggests the necessity for the recreation of texts in theatrical terms when staged, an approach adopted, as suggested above, by semioticians: "since many of its critical tools, derived from linguistics, seem highly appropriate to a view of performance and script as two different communication systems between which certain messages might be 'translated.'" (ibid.,8)

As we have seen with the work of Chéreau and Koltès, Chéreau's stagings of his work actually influenced Koltès' writing of his next piece, which troubles the implicit assumption in the translation model, namely, that the "translation" is unidirectional and moves from original (text) to copy (staging). As well, Koltès' own assertions that his plays were meant to be read as well as staged challenges the 'fulfillment' model, which would have it that a text is only fulfilled in production.

Carlson calls on Derrida's notion of the supplement to discuss some of the problems of both the illustration and the fulfillment models, theories which undermine either the text or the performance, in view of the fact that in such models one must be ascendant over the other:

"a play on stage will inevitably display material lacking in the written text, quite likely not apparent as lacking until the performance takes place, but then revealed as significant and necessary. At the same time, the performance, by revealing this lack, reveals also a potentially infinite series of future performances providing future supplementation." (ibid., 10)

The theoretical model of the supplement, on which the following investigation is based, serves then to question the contradictory assumption of plenitude or completeness of both 'texts' (the play and the production) that is inherent in the semiotic model. This assumption does indeed seem to jar with the texts under investigation in that questions of absence play such a role in both the thematics and concerns of representation. The concept of the supplement can, as well, help negotiate conceptual space in the face of Koltès' assertions that only Chéreau's productions can do his texts justice: other productions by other directors have, inevitably, followed those of Chéreau. Indeed, a more protracted study might compare later productions of the texts under discussion with Chéreau's inaugural one. In the interest of restricted and focussed scope, I will simply be referring to a number of other productions in passing.

undertaken largely so as to be able to mark progressions which occurred in Chéreau's dramaturgy between the productions.

These manifestations of theatrical reality will be elaborated in order that they may be productively discussed in relation to the earlier model Koltès established with *Les Amertumes*. Such comparisons will permit an investigation of the progression of the function of the characters of Albourg and Abad in the theatrical reality established by Chéreau in contradistinction to the fashion in which Alexis functioned in *Les Amertumes*. Questions of Koltès' textual representation of blackness in particular, and of ethnicity in general, will be supplemented by discussions of the same in the context of Chéreau's production.

2.1.2 Aestheticization of space

"The stage stuck to the actors, guiding them, building a space around them, a mirror in which they reflect back to the other actors their interior impulses and manifest physical movements." (Godard, 1983)

Chéreau was interested in *Combat*, Bernard Dort suggests, in part because the text permitted him to continue his search for the "théâtre allégorique" in which "the ideas within the text would finally release some emotion, as a result of the beauty of the production"(Dort 1988, 12). Dort's evocation is evidently in the tradition of an argument discussed in section 2.1 of this chapter. At that stage I introduced Chéreau's 1973 assertions regarding the alliance of the allegorical and the concrete in his work, as well as Patrice's Pavis' (1983) and Anne-Françoise Benhamou's discussions on the subject.

At that stage I also proposed the complementary notion of the 'allegorical real' to help explain Chéreau's influence on Koltès. Conversely, Koltès had also articulated a similar interest in the heightened and aesthetic space of the theatre in terms that Chéreau found

compelling:[6]

> Koltès, se plaît-il à rappeler, formule d'une phrase magnifique ce que j'avais l'impression de penser depuis longtemps: 'le théâtre au moins est le seul endroit où l'on dise que ce n'est pas la vie'. (Dort 1988, 12)
>
> [Koltès often says a magnificent phrase which I myself feel that I've been thinking for a long time: 'at least the theatre is somewhere that we accept not to be real life.']

What happens to the situation of enunciation of *Combat*, one informed by Koltès' realist hypothesis, when it is actualized by Chéreau's design team? How did Koltès' balance between the allegorical and the real emerge in the design for the production? Put differently, how did this reciprocally generative interest of the two men manifest itself in the set for *Combat*? And as a corollary question, what occurred when Koltès' text was staged by a director with similar aesthetic concerns? Finally, in what way did the staging of the 'hypothèse réaliste' (coherent narrative, anchoring location, more complex characters) mark an evolution in the type of communication between stage and audience which Koltès hoped for with the staging of *Les Amertumes*?

On the evening of February 1st 1983, a capacity crowd gathered at the government subsidized Théâtre Nanterre-Amandiers in the Parisian suburbs. They made their way into the theatre's cavernous, transformable and ironically named 'petite salle.' Flanked by spectators on two sides sitting on uncomfortable benches, a large open workyard covered in soil and bathed in fog was overarched by an immense concrete viaduct supported by three huge pillars. The reviewer for *Libération* described the bridge as "huge. It is the only thing you can see. Held up by enormous columns of concrete that seem like weapons, it remains fixed, unfinished and terribly rigid..."(Créssolé 1983, 25). Notions of interior and exterior were blurred as cars drove about the 'stage' through mist while the four actors peered at one another through the bougainvillea and the occasional downpour of rain.

[6] These reciprocal interests of the two artists, quickly mythologized by a number of reviewing media, provided the grounding for a solid collaboration. Indeed, Chéreau would end his programme notes for the staging of *Quai ouest* in 1985 with, as discussed in the introduction, a public attestation of fidelity to Koltès' work as a writer:

"Que l'on comprenne qu'il y a ici un écrivain auquel je veux demeurer fidèle. Une autre pièce viendra dans un an, dans deux ans une autre encore, et ensemble, avec Bernard, nous essaierons à quelques-uns de comprendre ce monde, le nôtre, et le raconter" [Let it be known that there's an author here to whom I want to remain faithful. Another play will come in a year, and in two years another one. Together, with Bernard [Koltès], a few of us will gather to try to understand this world, our world, and to tell it]. (Chéreau 1990b, 21) .

The long-term working relationship between the two men ensuing from the first production resulted in stagings of other major texts in addition to *Combat* (1983) and *Quai ouest* (1985), including *Dans la solitude des champs de coton* (1986) and *Le Retour au désert* (1988). The much discussed confluence of the two artists' sensibilities, combined with the lavish means at Chéreau's disposal as director of a major state-funded theatre, resulted in widely discussed productions of which Koltès would occasionally provide criticism and appraisal.

A first major design trend becomes apparent when one compares the set with the playwright's stage directions. Koltès' text proposes a multiplicity of locations within the one allegorized location inspired from the industrial compound he visited in Nigeria. The text calls for a variety of locations within the compound, including a veranda as well as an area in the compound where the buildings attached to the veranda are not visible. In Chéreau's production, the size of the stage area reduced the multilocationality of the textually created compound by proposing enough distinct stage locations to match all those called for in the text.

In a work entitled *The Practice of Everyday Life,* Michel de Certeau (1984) offers a useful framework for describing, in physical and spatial terms, some of the resonances activated by Chéreau's compression of allegorical and real aesthetic modes. He distinguishes between 'place', which depends on a semiotically, and thus theoretically determined, order of phenomena — a series of signs waiting to be read — and 'space', which is 'practiced place':

> Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into space by walkers. In the same way, an act of reading is the space produced by the practice of a particular place: a written text, i.e.: a place constituted by a system of signs." (de Certeau 1984, 117)

In that the 'place' cannot actually be apprehended except through a theoretical *post-festum* discussion, instead the place can be considered to be the performance text of the space (in the sense that I have defined 'performance text' above using Pavis' terminology as a way of creating a context in which to discuss the production). The 'place' of the set design can then be described as objectively as possible, without the imported experience of the spectator as 'space.' Indeed the 'space' has none of the (arguably illusory) concreteness of 'place.' It is defined by its ambiguity, in that "a single 'place' will be realized in successive, multiple and even irreconcilable spaces" (Kaye 2000, 5).

In de Certeau's terms, then, the size of the location in Chéreau's design reduced the ambiguity of the textually created 'space.' The set proposed enough stage area that none of the actual (somewhat) objectively describable 'place' had to be used to generate more than one 'space.' That is to say, the multi-locationality suggested in Koltès' text was not, as might be the case in a design that employed a more suggestive use of space, staged in one of the locations within the compound evoked by the stage directions.

This realistic approach was complemented by the use of very 'real' stage effects such as

cars and rain storms which soaked some spectators.[7] Like other realistic art practice, the stage design, with all its 'real' effects, presented the iconic signs of the reality that inspired it by collapsing, on many levels, distance between signifier (the stage material used) and that which is signified.

However, the realism invoked by Chéreau was not a literal-minded one that tried to remove all suggestive or transportative effects (which, in critical terms, expand the distance between signifier and signified). A variety of the realistic effects also served to emphasize the allegorical aspect of the text by means of a transportative or poetic quality. These transportative effects persuaded the audience to suspend their disbelief *vis-à-vis* the theatrical illusion being constructed by these same effects. For example, in answer to Koltès' suggestion that it was the sound of the guards calling in the night that had inspired him to write the play (1983b, 35)[8], Chéreau called for a sound design which underlined the ambiant or 'total' nature of the three hundred and sixty degree set. The sound design evoked an imaginary landscape beyond the confines of the onstage compound, a landscape full of the indecipherable calls of guards and the calls of animals. In addition, the perpetual darkness and fog which bathed the set rendered the comings and goings of the actors quite mysterious:

> Just like Koltès' play Chéreau's production begins, as does any theatrical performance, with darkness. With each production, Chéreau grounds himself increasingly in this darkness. The crepuscular aura is the supreme trick of illusion which Koltès knows how to play better than anyone in France. (Créssolé 1983, 24)

These sound and lighting effects served to underscore the existence of a 'territory of anxiety and solitude' surrounding the compound, an important factor in the actualization of the allegory of colonialism.

It would appear then that the realistic qualities of the set entertained a close symbiotic relationship with the suggestive effects (and thus the ones feeding the allegorical understanding of the play) that the set's elements (fog, full-scale viaduct, darkness, rain) contributed to generating. Chéreau discussed this collusion between the real and the allegorical when he noted that his interest in cinema had permitted him to explore the

[7] Indeed. doctor/journalists from the *Quotidien du Médecin* (Doctor's Daily) had attended *Combat* to investigate reports that the production was harmful to people's health:

"... the fog, dust, cars spinning in circles and sweeping past the first rows are very real. So real in fact that a few suffocating spectators asked themselves if this excessive neo-realism did not in fact threaten to harm the skin, mucous membranes and bronchioli which found themselves under needless attack." (Casteret, 1983)

Despite a large quantity of noise and movement on stage, the investigative team found the security and health arrangements satisfactory and determined, in a final pronouncement that would have no doubt satisfied Artaud, that "The only effect of exhaustion generated by the production is on the spectators' nerves."(ibid.)

[8] As in the previous chapters, material that has already been presented in both languages earlier in the thesis will, when reappearing, only be written in English.

boundaries of reality and illusion in the production of *Combat*. Chéreau found himself particularly influenced by observing the work of artists who had worked for both the stage and screen, such as Welles, Visconti and Kazan:

> On ne peut pas tout dire sur les gens au théâtre. On ne les voit ni dans la rue, ni en gros plan. Pourtant la caméra sous un réalisme apparent les manipule bien davantage. Elle peut, par exemple les exclure du champ, quand sur une scène, un personnage qui est entré doit obligatoirement sortir au su et au vu du public. Je suis fasciné par le jeu de cache-cache avec la réalité. (Pascaud, 1983)
>
> [You can't say everything there is to say about people with the theatre. You never see them as they might appear in the street, nor do you ever see them in a close-up. The camera, however, with what appears to be a realistic approach, tells a lot more. The camera can crop the field of vision and exclude things, while on stage, a character must enter and exit the stage under the scrutiny of the audience. I'm fascinated with the hide-and-seek games we play with reality.]

In an observation resonant with Chéreau's interest in the cinema, Anne-Françoise Benhamou applauds Chéreau's vision of pursuing a design which was "impossible to take in with one glance" (2001, 50). She indicates that this design decision, that made spectators feel as if they were on a film set, was consonant with the fractured spaces within the one initial location that originally inspired Koltès (ibid.).

2.1.3 The collapse of theatrical illusion

What were some of the implications for what can be described as a compression of the real and the allegorical in the design? According to the de Certeau model discussed above, the aestheticization of the textual 'place' into the 'space' of performance led, in very real terms, to the text's being crushed by the stage design. Many spectators who saw *Combat* complained that the text became inaudible within the space. Many complained that the actors were reduced to silhouettes by Richard Peduzzi's stunning, yet restrictive, monolithic design. A reviewer for *Les Echos* felt that "It's simply too bad really that the dialogue often evaporates behind pillars, in the immensity of this stage which consumes the sight and the sound of the actors" (Copperman, 1983).[9]

One could interpret the overbearing presence of the set to be the result of Chéreau's technical incompetence as a director.[10] However, in view of his lengthy career in film, theatre and opera, and the accessibility of amplifying technology which could have dealt with at least the question of audibility, the notion that such difficulties were entirely an

[9] The *Figaro* critic wondered, in a review entitled "Fatal Giganticism", if "a frontal model in all its modesty would perhaps have permitted a better understanding of Koltès' incontestable originality" (Macabru, 1983).

[10] It would appear that Chéreau had arrived at similar results before. A contemporary of Chéreau, Bernard Sobel, stated during a round table discussion with him: "Sometimes I'm completely transported by the splendour of your stagings, and then all of a sudden, after they're over, I realize after that the splendour eclipses essential points of analysis in the text that you have in fact scrutinized with a great concern for precision" (Chéreau 1991, 36).

oversight on Chéreau's part is unlikely. Indeed, the general scrupulousness with which he approached his direction led him to pursue staging strategies that he felt very much answered the needs of the text. One theatre specialist describes Chéreau's attitude towards texts as having the objective of "Understanding, knowing, making clear. That is the quasi-pathological passionate desire that fuels Chéreau. Not one single word of text can escape him" (Aslan, 35). Francois Regnault, Chéreau's longtime dramaturg, concurs:

> The work that we're doing together is not concerned with a general understanding of things, but rather consists of discovering exactly what the characters mean when they say something to one another, why someone, at one particular moment, says a particular line. He will not leave any mystery hide in the shadows. Nothing can remain unclear. Our work has to tell, with the greatest amount of precision possible, just as in the screenplay for a film, the history of a scene, of a character, of the play in its ensemble. (ibid 35)

Chéreau himself spoke of how he enjoyed the demanding quality of Koltès' texts. During the staging of *Quai ouest* he explained that

> J'ai été frappé par la virtuosité du style, unique dans tout le théâtre actuel, et puis, peu à peu, au cours des répétitions, on découvre la nécéssité de la moindre réplique, la précision de la ponctuation, jusqu'aux points-virgules. (Dumur, 62)
>
> [I was struck by the virtuosity of (Koltès') style, which is entirely unique in all of contemporary theatre, and then, bit by bit, over the course of the rehearsals, uncovered the motivation for every single line, the details of the punctuation, every single semi-colon.]

In addition to this desire for textual clarity, Chéreau felt, during the period in which he was staging Koltès' work, that despite being recognized for departures in the interpretation of texts, he did not necessarily want stagings of texts to be immediately recognizeable as his. This type of immediate recognition of a particular style of directing "renvoie à une perception un peu superficielle du travail théâtral" [suggests a somewhat superficial understanding of theatre work], he explained (1988, 20). He insisted that the text itself has to be "recognized" by the audience, in the sense that his interventions, both on a macro and a micro-scale, were destined to reveal something within the text (ibid). Such an understanding of the symbolic relationship between the director and the text manifested itself, he felt, in the increasing sophistication of staging work in general:

> Je crois que l'importance qu'a prise la mise en scène au théâtre est un phénomène irréversible. C'est le même phénomène qu' en musique: aucun chef d'orchestre ne fait plus l'économie d'une analyse de la partition, du texte musical (ibid).
>
> [I think that the importance of the director in the theatre is an irreversible phenomenon. It's the same phenomenon as in music: no conductor can avoid a precise analysis of the score, of the musical text.]

It seems quite safe, in view of the preceding evidence, to assume therefore, that Chéreau was aware of the problems of audibility and visibility. It follows that it is not entirely

speculative to suggest that he intended them to occur.[11]

What were the implications of the close collusion, even collision, of elements of the allegorical and the real on the effects generated by the design of *Combat*? First, it would appear that by creating this type of relationship of dominance with the text, Chéreau paradoxically defamiliarized and foregrounded the fictional status of the text. The text was one of the important elements permitting the perpetuation of the theatrical illusion by means of a sustained fiction, but it is foregrounded in such a fashion that the fiction of the text and the illusion which it in part generates are both at perpetual risk of extinction.

In the first instance, the extinction of the text and its delivery under the looming weight of the design served to actualize a sort of continual implosion of theatricality. The qualities of fictional illusion brought about by the embodied delivery of the text by the actors were exposed to be part of the illusion through their recurring annihilation at the hands of the staging and design. Such an annihilation, however momentary, brought about by simple inaudibility and invisibility, served to thwart the rhythmical and proxemic tensions and relationships necessary to sustain theatrical illusion.

In a complex double-play, Chéreau's staging stole many things from the world around it to display its power of illusion:[12] smoke, expensive highways, cars, dirt, rain. Chéreau then allowed this illusion, by means of its own sheer size and hyperbolic valency, to erode the potency of its own major function as the locus of enunciation for the text. Chéreau established the grounds for a struggle of titanic proportions, as each order of experience, each order of 'reality', competed for precedence by its incursion on the other's presentational and representational territory.

Such an ostension of the order of illusion can be conceived, in a remarkable reversal of *verfremdung* techniques, to be operating in a direction opposite to the defamiliarization drive popularized by Brecht. The latter had built on the work of the Russian formalists[13], as well as practitioners such as Meyerhold and Piscator, to compile a series of theatrical 'alienating' devices which, by means of encouraging theatrical self-reflexivity, draw the spectator's attention to the status of theatrical illusion. Explorations of this kind have now

[11] A final prognosis on Chéreau's degree of intentionality is not necessary. This must be noted before we embark on an analysis of the implications of his staging choices for the production, although to a certain extent the notion that it is a creative choice validates the study of the implications that will follow. A similar collapse of theatrical illusion in *Quai ouest* resulted, as I will argue, as much from neglect as choice, and so it would be unwise (not to mention impossible) to rule out the possibility of neglect in the staging of *Combat*.

[12] Bert States observes, when discussing the effect of a dog on stage, that "The illusion has introduced something into itself to demonstrate its tolerance of things. It is not the world that has invaded the illusion; the illusion has stolen something from the world in order to display its own power." (States 1985, 34).

[13] A good collection of essays by the Russian formalists, including Victor Shklovsky, Boris Tomashevsky and Boris Eichenbaum can be found in *Russian...*, (1965).

become a traditional fashion in which illusion's fundamental 'naturalness' can be displayed and questioned by the dramatist and the audience.

Chéreau had repeatedly employed such devices in a variety of stagings, inspired in all likelihood by his observations of the Berliner Ensemble and as the French 'Brechtian' Roger Planchon. Notable examples include an early production of *Dom Juan* in which stage hands manipulated the stage machinery that animated the character of the avenging statue which kills Dom Juan; or indeed the onstage observers and commentators that comprised an essential part of the staging of *La Dispute* which Koltès had found so engaging.

The devices elaborated by Brecht to generate effects of 'estrangement' upon the spectator were the result of a politically progressivist impulse that was intended to allow the spectator to reflect upon the sociohistorical implications of the fable at hand. The result of Chéreau's defamiliarization of illusion in the staging of *Combat* was to let illusion collapse under its own weight. Indeed, Chéreau's production upped the representational ante by constantly denying the possibility for sustained illusion at all, not only interrupting illusion, but questioning its epistemological grounding altogether.

The seemingly fatal nature of the 'combat' that Chéreau staged, in that theatrical illusion was constantly threatened with extinction, would seem to be a specific manifestation of a general conviction that both Chéreau and Koltès maintained *vis-à-vis* the theatre. Koltès had affirmed in 1986 that:

> Je crois très sincèrement, que le théâtre est un art qui finit, tranquillement. Et c'est pour cela que ça devient intéressant. C'est un art qui ne peut pas prendre en compte les autres arts, un art qui doute de lui-même, donc, qui reconnaît mieux ce qui lui est propre. Or, c'est peut-être dans ces moments-là qu'on produit les choses les plus belles. (1999a, 66)
>
> [I believe very sincerely that the theatre is an art form which is quietly dying. And that's why it's becoming interesting. It's an art form that can't take other art forms into account, one which is doubting itself, one which recognizes that which is proper to it. And it's in those moments that perhaps the most beautiful things are created]

For his part, Chéreau had suggested that he shared the same doubts as Koltès about the theatre, its uses, and the type of stories it can tell (Chéreau 1997, 1). These are doubts which had manifested themselves, before his collaboration with Koltès, in a desire to deal with crises of representation and of the theatre in his productions. Bernard Dort has discussed one of Chéreau's first productions, *The Price of Revolt on the Black Market* by Dimitri Dimitriadis, which featured a band of downtrodden actors playing in a dilapitated church. Dort described it to be "the ruins, the pathetic and shiny ruins of the Theatre" (Dort 1988, 8). With the staging of *Combat*, the study of the crisis of representation would seem to have moved to a rarified new level, with the implicit

socially radical critique which characterized earlier productions being subsumed into an exploration of epistemological radicalism.

It is possible that the absence of historical 'space' between the writing of *Combat* and its mise en scène served as an axis of compression which restricted the meta-theatricality that characterized much of Chéreau's earlier work. Indeed, it would seem that a significant contributing factor to the difference of Chéreau's directorial 'intervention' in the text, in comparison to the handling of previous texts, was Koltès' contemporaneity.[14] It was the first time Chéreau had staged the work of a contemporary author since Jean-Paul Wenzel's *Loin d'Hagondange* in 1977. Chéreau would state in 1987 that "Travailler sur une oeuvre classique et travailler sur une pièce contemporaine, ça n'est pas la même chose" [Working on a classic text and working on a contemporary piece of writing are two different things] (1990b, 107). He felt that with classic texts, one had reference points, such as previous stagings against which "on peut se battre secrètement contre" [one secretly battles against] (107). And even if one makes faulty suggestions by means of a staging, Chéreau suggested that, "ça ne tire pas vraiment à conséquence" [it really has little consequence] considering that numerous other interpretations have preceded and will follow his own. Chéreau felt differently with respect to contemporary authors, however, suggesting that staging the work of living authors such as Genet or Koltès put him on "un terrain beaucoup plus délicat" [a much more delicate terrain], for "il y a pas de mode d'emploi" [there are no instruction manual(s)]" (ibid.) accompanying these texts:

> On se retouve en présence d'un objet non-identifié, totalement neuf — qu'il ait déjà été joué ou non—, qui ne répond à aucune norme habituelle. (ibid.)
>
> [One finds oneself in the presence of an unidentified object, one which is entirely new — whether it has been staged already or not — that doesn't live up to any habitual norms.]

[14] As a result of Koltès' being alive and on many occasions very much around, Chéreau asserted that the creative faithfulness that Koltès inspired in him was not particularly easy to sustain, affirming on at least one occasion that the long-term fidelity to the author was in fact "douloureuse" [painful] and "difficile" [difficult] for reasons pertaining to the creative process (Chéreau 1987, 2). Generally speaking, Chéreau thought with *Combat* that he had remained sufficiently 'critical' of the text to be able to remain objective, but became too admiring of the text of *Quai ouest*, suggesting that "Je me suis laissé étouffer par le respect envers l'auteur Koltès et je n'ai pas vu les pièges" [I let myself be smothered by my respect for Koltès the author and lost sight of the traps in the text] (Chéreau 1990b, 107). He would resume his characteristic 'infidelity' in the face of the following text, *Dans la solitude des champs de coton*, the same way he felt he had approached *Combat*, or Marivaux or Shakespeare:

"I tried to be at once admiring and skeptical, and most of all to remain critical, to enjoy Koltès for what he is, and to treat him like any other author."(ibid.)

Chéreau's infamous 'infidelities' to the texts he worked on did not, however, extend to the manipulation of actual text. "Absolument jamais" [Absolutely never] (Chéreau 1987, 8) would he intervene in the process of writing either, but rather felt he could never honestly intuit Koltès' intentions:

"Ce serait d'ailleurs très compliqué puisque, s'il l'a écrit d'une certaine façon, c'est que, pour lui, c'était la seule possible et que je sais qu'il n'écrirait pas autrement" [It would be very complicated (to intervene) because if he wrote it a certain way, that's because, for him, it was the only way possible and I know he wouldn't write it any other way.] (1990b, 108)

It seems that Chéreau's traditionally textual interventionist practices were restricted by Koltès' contemporaneity. Previous stagings of the work of other authors were based frequently on the type of hindsight afforded by a difference in historical period and the emotional freedom permitted by the absence of the author. Chéreau's constraint would appear to have been compounded by the reciprocal aesthetic interests of the two artists. The compression of historical distance as well as the closeness between the two men most likely contributed significantly to the type of very rarified theatrical self-reflexivity investigated in the preceding section. One commentator from the daily *Libération* noted that

> The play, which is overwritten, too clearly destined for Chéreau ... ends up resembling Chéreau. A compliment certainly, but a very crafty one: word for word, *Combat de nègre et de chiens* resembles a Chéreau production. The only thing onstage at Nanterre, stripped down and looking at

itself, is Chéreau's own approach." (Thibaudat, 1983)[15]

2.1.4. Some initial implications of the design on the representation of blackness and ethnicity

Earlier I stressed the notion of the 'rarified' quality of the aesthetic explorations undertaken by Chéreau in response to the text. Chéreau did not appear to attempt to question the relation of the text to the historical circumstances of its creation. Although Chéreau and his designer Peduzzi made a trip to Nigeria to collect impressions, the creative team did not make any in-depth attempts to problematize, but rather in fact extended, a variety of Koltès' associations with blackness.

As a general premise, Chéreau explicitly avoided dealing with the way in which Koltès

[15] This question of 'collapse' in Chéreau's staging resonates powerfully with Koltès' concern with collapses and subordinations of various kinds as explored in the first chapter. In metaphorical terms, using language borrowed from contemporary physics, it is as if Koltès and Chéreau created a dark and compressed 'singularity' which sucked all significance that might have resonated outwards from this staging back towards the voracious 'black' hole at its core. Such echoes of orifice emerging from the discussion of cosmic phenomena quickly invoke the seductive nihilism of a writer such as Georges Bataille

At any rate, further study could lead to a further articulation of what could be termed this 'aesthetic of implosion.' For the moment, however, I will simply include one of the possible starting points for such a discussion in this footnote, that of binary terror.

Very significantly, this form of shimmering and perpetual quasi-collapse of theatrical illusion entertained a complex relationship with the form of 'binary' terror discussed in Chapter One and the first half of the second. This concept was also applied earlier in the chapter with respect to the staged collapse between categories of (mythologized) blacks and whites. In a discussion of Artaud, Rebecca Schneider provides some statements useful for understanding the link between the thematic questions of the 'binary collapse' and the means employed in Chéreau's staging of the play. She reminds us that "moments of danger were sought by Antonin Artaud as well, and similarly provoked by binary explosion, specifically the collapse of socially coded distinctions between mind and matter." (Schneider 1997, 14)

Can Chéreau's perpetual quasi-collapse of illusion be understood to function as an Artaudian collapse between 'mind and matter'? If so, in what way does this extend Koltès' concern for binary collapse, both regarding the conflation of stereotypes of blackness and the possibilities for increased contact with his audiences? It would appear that Artaud, the "poet of the possibilities of theatre" as Grotowski described him, had proposed a method for pursuing the collapse of such distinctions between mind and matter. Artaud's thinking on the matter is useful for specifying the implications of Chéreau's experiments:

"The best way I can think to carry out this idea of danger on stage is the ... unexpected transition from a mental image to a real image." (Artaud 1988, 235-36)

The transition of which Artaud spoke is very similar in nature to the recurring transitions a spectator may have encountered while observing the struggle Chéreau established between the real and the allegorical in the design for the production. Spectators may have found themselves oscillating back and forth between two experiences of the stage images. On one hand they may have felt that they were experiencing 'real' images, ie. images which in some sense were perceived to be unmediated or unaestheticized because of their reliance on a close association between signifier and signified. On the other hand, they may have experienced those same images as having an aesthetic grounding related to the fear and elation of discovery projected onto the location by the white characters (the 'territory of anxiety and solitude'). These projections are an important part of the allegory of colonialism and were transferred over to the audience as a guide for their own meaning-making activity.

was situated *vis-à-vis* the material he was writing about. A critic for *Le Matin* quoted Chéreau as saying that he was setting out to avoid "psychological pitfalls" because the play was about "'une Afrique vue par un blanc et c'est l'oeuvre d'un jeune auteur. Deux choses avec lesquelles nous entretenons des rapports compliqués et qu'il faudra mettre de coté'" [Africa seen by a white person and it's also the work of a young author. These are issues that entertain complex relationships with the play and are best put aside] (Costaz 1983b).

Before I proceed to the more specific question of the representation of ethnicity of each of the characters, it is possible and important at this stage to make some remarks on the general implications of the design for the representation of ethnicity. This sense of the major representational context offered by the concrete situation of enunciation of the set can act as a base for more in-depth scrutiny.

In Chapter Two I described the 'tribal' qualities which bind the monolithic black 'community' together in *Combat*. Alboury's faceless, invisible guard friends communicate with strange sounds and are liable to murder him like an animal for any transgression of their mythopoetic code of solidarity. Koltès presented an African 'worldview' in which Alboury, a seemingly momentary excrescence of the wider darkness surrounding the white 'folk,' is recurrently patriated to evocations of a mysterious and magical Africa. The sustained mythologization and primitivization of Alboury provides Koltès with an 'authentic' counterpoint with which he can compare the white characters. Alboury's hyperbolized 'tribal' naiveté and archaic sets of references establish a pair of 'unspoiled' virgin eyes through which the audience can see the excesses and contradictions of the white European colonial project.

Unlike the 1982 English language production of the text mounted a year earlier in New York by Françoise Kourilsky at the Ubu Theatre, Chéreau's staging had next to no visible stereotypical African visual referents. Kourilsky's production employed a variety of devices such as an accompanying African rhythm ensemble, broad-leafed shrubbery and neo-colonial style khaki outfits (Lamont, 1982) to emphasize the 'Africanness' of the text and to illustrate in an archaic fashion some of the strangely pre-contact types of encounter established by the text as discussed in the first half of the chapter.[16]

Besides the simple materiality of the objects in the space, very little sense of a 'real' world beyond the stage world, and to which the stage world was referring, actually remained. As a result, the mediating fiction provided by the text in production had very few referents anchored in recognizably 'real' social or geographical contexts. This effect occurred despite the understanding that at least Piccoli, playing the role of Horn, had of

[16] Considering Alboury's caricaturesque discussion of tribes and proverbs, it would almost seem evident to have him dressed in a grass skirt and rattling beads at his white stage-mates!

his character being anchored in some kind of sociohistorical specificity. Piccoli described Horn's motivations:

> It's the same old liberal dream of cooperation, the same fear of being surrounded.... The same myth of the impenetrable and mysterious Africa which pushes tourists to go wall themselves up in a Club Med in Senegal (Ollé, 1983)

Despite such an articulation, the convergence of Chéreau's imposing design and Koltès' broadly drawn characters led spectators to feel transported into an entirely imaginary universe, which one critic likened to a fantasy or science fiction cartoon:

> Refugees from a collapsing civilization. On the threshold of Apocalypse they attempt, if not to save their skins, at least rationalize their convictions and the lives they have led. Their efforts, however are vain: their voices are overwhelmed by a deep and alarming groaning, they get lost in the dark, even the light becomes agonizing for them. (Georges, 1983)

Another critic writing for *Le Monde* noted the eventual irrelevance of the sociohistorical context of the production for the real issues and tensions of the play: "The conflicts of class and race which could arise between [the characters] are in fact simply surface pretexts, rapidly cleared away, surfaces which cannot hide a profound heritage of deeper wounds, wounds that will not heal." (Godard, 1983)

This very review demonstrates elements of the colonial discourse to be inscribed within it. A significant amount of the discussion of the first section of this chapter revolved around the frequently unavoidable representational implications of disregarding questions of sociohistorical context. As I have discussed, the contradictions that can result from such an approach are especially visible in the case of Koltès, in that the brute realities of the sociohistorical context were a major motivating factor in his writing. Such a contradiction becomes evident even in this review in *Le Monde*, when we read Collette Godard discussing Alboury in the terms in which he has been created by the colonial discourse. Despite Godard's assertion earlier in her article that issues of class and race are quickly "cleared away" to expose the "deeper" titanic struggle among decontextualized souls, she herself later immediately recognizes Alboury to be the one who, of all the characters, represents the "unknown" and the "dark". Even though the context has been "cleared away", elements of the colonial discourse remain indelibly inscribed in the new fantasy world and its spectators.[17]

One must wonder, despite the absence of pronounced and mythologized referents as were evident in Kourilsky's design, whether Chéreau's design supported the underpinnings of Koltès' representational project? What is certain is that the aestheticization of the space involved significantly the use of darkness and of confusing fog which created a theatrical environment that Koltès' called for in the text with recurring stage descriptions which tell of events occurring at the "crépuscule" [twilight]

[17] I refer to the writing of newspaper critics.

(1989, 9; 1997a, 5) and in the "demi-obscurité" [half-dark] (1989, 68;1997a, 45).

What becomes evident is that the placement of the audience in a liminal zone between the stage area in front of them and the sounds of the guards coming from behind them positions the spectator in a no man's land between the world of the white neocolonialists and the blacks beyond the compound walls. The darkness within which the audience found itself could on one hand serve as a recreation or embodiment of the metaphorical zone of discovery. This zone is one in which the whites move painfully yet inexorably towards their more 'authentic' opposites, the blacks, whose essential quality is that they are terrifying 'hard primitives.' Indeed, the ambiant staging environment that surrounded the spectators could have suggested that they were placed in general sympathy with the white characters who are discovering the power and terror of the blacks for the first time. With this interpretation of the audience's spatialization in Chéreau's staging, Alboury becomes a character who is set to remain a manifestation of the curious yet dangerous 'unknown'.

Alternately, the location could be understood to situate the audience in the same penumbra from which Alboury emerges, a penumbra whose inhabitants are unknown to the whites. This possibility dovetails nicely with the fourth wall convention followed by the white *actor*s who ignored the audience, as well as Alboury's desire not to be seen by the observing guards/audience. However, as discussed earlier in the chapter, the inscriptions of the colonial discourse are frequently indelible. They also proved to be so in the case under discussion. Even if members of the audience considered the seating to be proxemically resonant with the black guards behind them, this subject position is one amply marked by primitivism and mythologization.

Perhaps the set of *Combat* places the audience in a situation of having to choose the camp with which they would have to affiliate themselves. This would be consistent with Koltès' early desire to place the audience in a position of 'choosing' some form of heightened authenticity while observing *Les Amertumes*. Beyond the broad question of proxemics is the more specific question of how each character was created and how the actors performed their text. This can lead to a more sophisticated appraisal of which 'camp' the audience were encouraged, by the production's signifying networks, to join.

2.1.5 The Text Fights Back

In what way, we must now ask, did the text, at least when it was heard, manage to 'fight back' the onslaught of the design from within the situation of enunciation? In other words: if the major representational process of the design was to engage an oscillatory dynamic between, in general terms, the 'real' and the 'illusion'; and if this same oscillation was performed by compressing/reducing the effectiveness of the design's

illusory qualities by means of a paradoxical dilation of these same qualities, what qualities within the text and its delivery arrested the collapse of signifier and signified, the 'illusion' into the 'real'? If we first answer these questions in general terms, the investigation will be well-positioned to examine further the relationship between the specific ethnicity of the characters and the specific delivery of the actors.

Pavis proposes a theoretical model that can be useful to help articulate the nature of the confrontation under discussion, that of the metaphorical and the real. He suggests that, as has been discussed above with regard to the aestheticization of space, the performance has a complex relationship with the text. First of all, the performance "encompasses and integrates the fictional world of the text spoken on stage" by supplying the situation of enunciation for it. Secondly, and also of particular relevance to this part of the discussion, the performance "may be at any time contradicted and deconstructed from within through the intervention of the text spoken within the performance" (1998, 386).

Pavis' description suggests that we must not restrict ourselves solely to assuming that the design, which though many felt to have an oppressive relationship with the text, simply played an overbearing role without a specific aesthetic purpose. The apparently oppressive relationship may in fact have provided room for a different type of negotiation in which the text's allegorical qualities were in some way ostended. Indeed, Koltès himself had asserted that his texts had both 'concrete' and 'allegorical/metaphorical' qualities.

Finally, Pavis reminds us of the figure who complicates the prospect of discussing such ephemeral and evanescent phenomena with any degree of accuracy or conviction. This figure is the central mediator between the text and its enunciation: the actor. As I suggested at the beginning of this section, more analysis of Chéreau's work with the actor will be required. This will become particularly important when discussing the differences between the way in which the black character and the white characters were created. However, I must first explore what effects were generated onstage in the actors' performances with respect to the relationship between the spoken text and the location of the set.

Generally speaking, a dynamic similar to the one between the allegorical and the real established in the design appears to have been the effect generated in the text's delivery. What one reviewer described as the 'hypperrealism' of the production (Diatta, 1983), which worked in combination with the intense combative quality of the performances (ibid.) resulted in the ostension and foregrounding of the syntactically complex and thus 'written' quality of the text. One commentator discussed the effect of the presentation onstage of a "collage of speeches" (Georges, 1983). Commenting on the occasionally twisted syntax of the text, the critic for *Le Monde* felt that "The words themselves may

be banal, but they speak in very complex sentences which multiply the possibilities of interpretation and express an infinite number of nuances by variations of rhythm" (Godard, 1983).

This approach would appear to have allowed the poetic qualities of the rhythmically and syntactically 'heightened' text to resonate. Godard found that the multitude of interpretive possibilities opened up by the variance of the rhythm of delivery allowed the text to be spoken "directly". This, she thought, could be pursued without what she understood to be heightened inflection, but in such a fashion that the text's ambiguities were not evacuated by a 'realist' delivery (ibid.). Indeed, Bernard Desportes describes the general poetic quality of Koltès' work to be one which "provoke vertigo" in a listener:

> the poetic enunciation of myths and symbols which follow one upon the other with a kind of disorder that can be compared to brutal flashes of light onto the incoherent night of the situation, images which, in wave after wave, serve to mask, disrupt and overturn any dazzling or desperate attempts at logic or reason. (Desportes 1993, 9)

The realistic aspects of the design, those referents liberally borrowed from the 'real world' in such as fashion as to establish a representational process that questions the status of illusion, were contradicted and deconstructed from within the performance. This internal contradiction was carried out by the utterance of the manifestly poetic text and enunciated through bodies demonstrating manifestly theatrical gestural qualities. Conversely, yet in structural parallel with the emphasis of the metaphorical by means of the poetry in the text, the realist delivery of the text served to anchor the fiction in the realistic qualities brought by the design. This double process is best theoretically contextualized according to the following process described by Pavis, whereby the

> dramatic text is a semiological system whose semantic precision and immediately perceptible verbal nature throws a certain light on the other signifying systems and provides them with the possibility of anchoring themselves to the signifieds uttered by the linguistic text (Pavis 1998, 386)

In short, then, it is useful to come to some working conclusions about how the text 'fought back' which can then be challenged or developed when we reach the specific case of the individual actor/characters. The poetic qualities of the text, enunciated through expressive bodies, resonated with the allegorical aspects of the design, while the trend of realistic vocal delivery resonated with the crushing aspects of the design's overbearing realism. This last statement verges on self-contradictory, largely as a result of a lack of specific and nuanced evidence from the actual performance. However, there would appear to have been, in the staging of *Combat*, a kind of reciprocating presence of the allegorical and the real in the text and its enunciation (including design and actors). The most that can be said conclusively is that when the text was audible, the theatrical illusion was bolstered, and when it was not audible the theatrical illusion was weakened.

The reviews quoted above serve to set the stage and prepare the way for a more differentiated discussion of the performance. The discussion must now proceed further by investigating the way in which each character depends on his or her ethnicity for the delivery and creation of character. In this fashion, both questions of ethnicity and the specificity of the delivery of the text according to each actor and role can be explored. This will also permit more reflection on the 'realistic' quality of the actor's performance as a function of their ethnicity.

2.1.6 Chéreau's work with the actor

> At early stages of rehearsal, Chéreau's work relies on setting up constraints within which he explores the deep forces and conflicts that emerge from a first contact with the text. The work often unsettles people so that those deep forces emerge. It can be difficult for people. (Jocelyn, 2000)

This assertion, made by a director who worked on Chéreau's production of *Hamlet* for the Avignon festival in 1988, indicates what would appear to be some parallels with Koltès' statements, discussed in Chapter One, with regard to the 'deeper' and conflicting 'forces' the author felt animated the 'fragile substance' of human beings and their fictionalized counterparts, dramatic characters.

How did Chéreau's rehearsal work and staging imperatives result in a particular representation of blackness and ethnicity on stage, and what was that particular representation? Discussing rehearsals is difficult, however, for Chéreau's way of working is influenced by his feeling that (because of what he feels is the increased sophistication in the work of the director) the actual work being done in rehearsals depends significantly on the actor's relationship and rapport with the director. Anything visible to an observer is less than important[18] :

> On ne peut pas expliquer les mécanismes du travail. Au fond, tant mieux. On peut filmer des heures de répétitions, et ne jamais parvenir à rien révéler du travail qui progresse. L'image que donne un reportage ne peut rien expliquer de l'alchimie d'une répétition. Il existe trop de facteurs incontrôlables, des éléments de hasard, de fuite. (Chéreau 1988, 20)

> [You can't explain the mechanisms at work in rehearsal. In fact: all the better. You could film hours of rehearsal and never get a sense of how the work progresses. The presentation of rehearsal in a reportage can never explain the alchemy at work in a rehearsal. There are too many factors, too many elements of chance that are beyond an observer's control.]

Despite the subtleties of such types of exchange, documentary evidence from the actors and from reviews of the production supplies enough information to allow the investigation to focus upon a number of important areas.

[18] François Regnault, Chéreau's dramaturg, described how, in a similar fashion, it is within the context of the subtle interactions of the stage work that the majority of the script analysis is completed: "In fact, Patrice does his dramaturgy on the stage. He never talks about it beforehand, we discover his ideas at the same time he does, when he's trying them out on stage. I couldn't tell you a thing about what occurs between the script analysis and his ideas of staging" (Aslan 1986, 35)

Although rehearsals began with table work[19], Michel Piccoli, the actor playing the role of Horn, suggested that their reading of the text in rehearsal was misleading:

> From the first readings around the table, we had the feeling that the text was like a kind of peaceful and easy river: the characters seemed secretive, but straightforward. It all unfolded quite nicely.... When we started to get the play moving, to bring it up on its feet, we experienced a kind of panic: when we had just read the play, it was like an adagio, but when it entered the space, things became significantly more difficult. (Philippon, 1983)

The rehearsal work began with an immediate engagement with the text that was facilitated by Chéreau's noted ability to get actors to begin to work out relations of power[20] with their proxemic arrangements in the space. Piccoli described how it became evident that a "total tension" was to become necessary for, in the first rehearsal, Chéreau had discovered "violence he had previously been unaware of" (ibid.).

According to Roger Planchon (Aslan 1986, 74),[21] Chéreau's success with the corporeal expression of his actors depends both on his ability to find "immediate physical rapports" and also his capacity to create an environment in which actors can take interesting physical risks. However, Chéreau proposes no physical training nor warm-ups. This distinguishes him quite clearly from the Italian-influenced traditions of teachers like Jacques LeCoq or the theatre practice of some of his well-known contemporaries, such as director Arianne Mnouchkine. Chéreau asks his actors to externalize psychological impulses according to their own training, with the resulting work usually fitting into a schema in which characters on stage either "observe each other, face each other down, or flee" (Aslan 1986, 74).

Chéreau enjoyed getting the actors to externalize impulses on the set of *Combat*. He explained that within the open-plan 'site' of the staging, new types of physical

[19] Chéreau's table work, suggests Odette Alsan, is not interpretive in nature, but permits the actors to understand the full script in its context. She describes the situation thus: "[Chéreau's] table work does not necessarily have a specifically dramaturgical orientation. Rather than analyzing the text, he sets it up in a first encounter with the live theatre." (Aslan 1986, 70)

[20] Chéreau has, over the course of his career, moved away from being a director who saw actors as inconveniences to his ideas about a staging. He is now recognized at being a master at evoking good performances from the performers in his productions (Aslan 1986, 67). Chéreau noted how his approach has changed: "Dans mes premiers spectacles, il y avait peut-être une mécanique où tout était pensé par l'oeuil, où les acteurs ne véhiculaient pas vraiment le sens de l'oeuvre dans leur chair ... et ce n'est plus du tout le cas." [In my first performances, there was perhaps a dynamic going on whereby everything was visually oriented, and the actors didn't carry the meaning of the work in their bodies, and that's no longer the case] (ibid., 67). Chéreau described in 1978 how, for a number of years, he had been ensuring that "toute l'émotion, toute la signification d'un spectacle passe par le comédien plutôt que par la mise en scène ou le décor" [every emotion in a production passes through the actor rather than the staging or the design] (ibid., 35).

[21] Colete Godard, the critic for *Le Monde*, thought that Koltès' characters staged by Chéreau were "solid and simple in construction, with a vital complexity, one which is beyond psychology. It is the complexity of primitive forces." (Godard, 1983)

relationships became possible:

> Dans la mise en scène, j'ai voulu qu'ils soient le plus souvent, séparés de trente mêtres. Il faut sortir de l'intimisme qui ronge le théâtre et provoquer de nouvelles images. (Pascaud, 1983)
>
> [In this staging, most often I wanted the characters to be thirty meters from one another. We have to get away from the kind of obsession with intimacy which is eating away at the theatre, and create new images.]

The tensions that became evident in the new images Chéreau was pursuing began with each body being a site in and upon which conflict was occurring. For example, Philipe Léotard, the actor playing Cal, had by the end of the rehearsal period developed a particular kind of walk. He walked leaning forwards, generating a kind of perpetual disequilibrium proper to the character's own imbalance and volatility (Le Roux, 1983).

The types of tension and imbalance sought in the actors' physicality were repeated in Chéreau's pursuit of psychic tension in his performers. I discussed in the first part of the chapter how Koltès' characters are, to a significant extent, in a state of psychic dissonance. For example, major internal contradictions motivate a character such as Cal, and his vehement racism operates in tandem with an equally evident fear and vulnerability. This dynamic creates a void which, as discussed at the end of Chapter Two, results in the psychic aporia which must be filled by the abject 'blackness' which he professes to hate.

In view of the complexity of the characters in this text, creating character identification can be understood to be a necessarily challenging affair. It is a procedure which involves the prospect of emotional risks and challenges to the actor. As Shomit Mitter explains:

> The principal problems in the art of characterization occur, however, when features in roles are not as easy to locate within the usually more limited world of the actor. The task of the director is then to generate those experiences in workshop so that they may subsequently be used in performance. (Mitter 1992, 21)

The risk-taking in the rehearsals for *Combat* was of course led and promoted by Chéreau, who has much-discussed abilities as a 'seducer' of actors: "Un metteur en scène n'est ni un leader, ni un chef" [A director is not a leader, nor a chief] Chéreau explains, "Il est celui avec lequel on a un rapport" [He is the one with which you have a

rapport] (Chéreau 1991, 39). [22]

It is in the context of this rapport with the director that the character, and the actor's relationship with that character, begin to emerge. While the work of identification begins early in Chéreau's rehearsal process, the objective is not for the actor to be sublimated into the role in the Stanislavskian sense.[23] Chéreau is motivated by a desire for certain of the individual actor's qualities to become evident on stage. He is particularly interested in exploring what he feels to be the neuroses of the actors he is working with. Chéreau works to uncover such neurosis and to find some relation between the actor's neurosis and that of the character. This follows the general directorial necessity, according to Ryngeart, to push actors "off balance", put in a situation where they are "placed at ease and made uneasy" (Pavis 1998, 103).

Chéreau's casting choices reflect his desire to make the most of an actor's uneasiness. Rather than using actors who are simply proficient, he prefers to find performers who have a 'strange' quality to them, individuals in whom he has perceived "an interior universe that he wishes to make sense of" (Aslan 1986, 68). Pavis explains that

> A director... discovers within the actor a complex individual with many tasks and unsuspected powers with an individual view of the character but also an understanding of the play as a whole, an individual contribution of relevant traits subordinate to the overall staging. (Pavis 1998, 103)

An actor who worked with Chéreau explained that the only things the director finds interesting when working with the actor are "the soul, the blood, the skin, the wounds". As long as Chéreau has not "drawn blood", he is not happy (Laurent 1988, 62). For his part, Michel Piccolo, who played the role of Horn, described rehearsal going on every day from two in the afternoon until midnight for a month and a half: "we suffered"

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[22] He is quick to explain that seduction is not necessarily gratuitous or invasive, but part of the work with the actor:

"Les rencontres de travail qui fonctionnent à la séduction sont rarissimes, pas plus fréquentes que dans la vie. On ne séduit pas physiquement, on a envie d'être accepté, d'être reçu, d'être aimé. La séduction est la seule chose dont il n'est probablement pas très intéressant de parler, parce qu'elle n'est pas spécifique au théâtre, elle vaut pour tout le monde. Au théâtre, on a juste la très grande chance de pouvoir l'exercer impunément." [Working encounters that depend entirely on seduction are quite rare, they occur no more frequently than in real life. One doesn't simply seduce people physically: you want to be accepted, taken in, liked. Seduction is probably not particularly interesting to talk about, because it's not specific to the theatre, it happens everywhere. But one is faced with the opportunity of exercising it with impunity in the theatre]. (Chéreau 1991, 39)

[23] Claude Stratz, one of Chéreau's assistants, explained that from the table reading onwards, the actor must see the play "from their character's point of view" (Aslan 1986, 71). The question of the actors distance from the character is a complicated one, and is perhaps best understood in terms of a continuum in a state of perpetual flux, a continuum in which the actor oscillates to varying degrees between the two theoretical poles of zero distance or total identification as described by Pavis (1998, 109). François Regnault, Chéreau's dramaturg describes it by suggesting that "there is no distanciation without identification" (Aslan 1986, 71). Regnault notes that even Brecht's *The Little Organon* recognizes that without an actor's identification with his/her character, the theatre would collapse.

(ibid.).[24] It would seem that Chéreau felt that digging deep and 'drawing blood' through emotional and psychological destabilization was necessary for the actors to be able to identify with Koltès' characters. Indeed, Chéreau's digging into the actor was consonant with the actor's digging into the character in order to create a fusion of character and actor. Chéreau explained how when staging Koltès' plays, digging was essential because his characters keep their secrets[25]

> il n'est pas suffisant, comme le dit Koltès, de se fier à ce que disent les personnages. Ils parlent pour cacher l'essentiel. Leurs paroles sont comme des trompettes de Jéricho qui, à la fin, font tomber les murailles. (Dumur, 1986)

> [you cannot simply, as Koltès would have it, trust what the characters are saying. They speak to hide what is essential. Their speech is like the trumpets of Jericho which, at the end, make the walls come down.]

The initial destabilization Chéreau provokes in the actor in order to generate a pathway between the secrets of the actors and the secrets of the text often continues throughout the production. Jean-Philippe Ecoffey, who played the role of Charles in *Quai ouest*, explained how he was given only two weeks to prepare for his role after finishing his actor training at the school Chéreau was running at Nanterre at the time: "and so I didn't have the time to make use of my training, which is what [Chéreau] wanted: for me to be on some kind of virgin territory" (Laurent 1988, 63). It would seem that, at least in the case of *Combat*, the rehearsal phase created the unstable ground from which a final level of 'exposing' of the actor's 'self' could occur within the performance:

> After having discovered that fantastic chaos, we had to discover the fragility of the characters. And we only found that at the last moment, in front of the audience:[26] it was completely unavoidable. (Philippon, 1983)

It would appear that the characters in *Combat* are particularly well-suited to Chéreau's

[24] Piccoli continued to explain that Chéreau had not yet developed a sense of humour about his work: "He's an important artist, but my experience tells me that all the important artists are also big jokers: Brook, Ferreri, Bunuel... Chéreau's not a big joker yet." (Costaz,1983)

[25] Chéreau notes elsewhere that this search for the secret is central to his work: "Les choses visibles à l'oeuil nu masquent le reste, la partie du travail qui est souterraine, celle qui compte. Souvent les gens ne parlent que des choses visibles. Or, la façon que j'ai d'organiser le secret, c'est quand même la partie la plus importante de mon travail, même si c'est la moins spectaculaire." [The things visible at first glance -- superficial things -- hide everything else -- the part of the work which is hidden, unseen, is what counts. Often people talk to me about that which can be seen. But the way in which I organize the secret, it's the most important part of my work, even if it is the least spectacular]. (1988, 20)

This tendency towards the secret resonates with Koltès' fascination with the surprise emergences of Albouy and Abad.

[26] Specific results of the rehearsal work were, it seems, visible to the audience. In *Les Echos*, Annie Coppermann described Myriam Boyer as "skinned alive", Phillipe Léotard as "brutal" yet "wasted", Michel Piccoli as "falsely calm" and animated by "anxiety". The critic for France-Soir described the actors as "suffering", for "Patrice Chéreau has made them discover the kind of cries that we generally hide, but which are our real nature." (Chalais, 1983).

major abilities and interests as a director. His skill in recognizing physical relations of force between characters answers Koltès' system of textual gestus which is generally combative and physical. Chéreau's interest in the idea of pushing actors to the brink, combined with an interest in states of near madness,[27] gives him the sensitivity to allow actors to create pathways of identification with the psychologically simple, unbalanced, secretive and wounded characters. These characters are ones which Koltès described as being in a "territory of anxiety and solitude"[28] (Chéreau 1990a, 19).

In simultaneously mining the 'essence' of the characters and the 'essence' of the actors in order to create linkages and fusions between the the two selves represented, Chéreau displays the same metaphysical assumptions as Koltès regarding identity (as discussed in the first chapter). Scrutiny of Koltès' model of theatrical reality supported one of Auslander's assertion's vis-à-vis Stanislavski, Brecht and (the early) Grotowski, namely, that viewed through the lens of deconstruction "the self is not an autonomous foundation for acting" but in the work of these thinkers/practitioners the self "is produced by the performance it supposedly grounds" (Auslander 1995, 60). Chéreau and Koltès both lent major significance to the essential qualities of the identities of characters as well as the actors with whom he was working.[29]

What occurred when Chéreau approached the character of Alboury and the actor Sidiki Bakaba in this fashion of attempting to merge the inner essences of the two?

2.1.7 Alboury

> (Alboury arrive pour) semer le désordre dans le cours infaillible des convictions toutes faites. (Chéreau in Programme Notes, 1990a, 20)
>
> [(Alboury arrives)] wreaking havoc in the inexorable progress of ready made convictions]
>
> The actors bring with them the weight of their bodies, and the punches they have received. They bring their starving and melancholy gazes and their weak gestures. Sidiki Bakaba is the barely real image of the unknown. (Godard, 1983)

We have yet to explore what kind of results Chéreau expected to achieve, and what was

[27] One of the actors who was performing in Genet's *The Screens* which ran concurrently with *Combat*, explained that the work brought them to the brink of emotional collapse as well: "Patrice is never satisfied. He puts actors in a state of constant vigilance, in a state of perpetual observation. It creates splendor but it is very exhausting, it even makes you anxious for a long time. You come out enriched, especially after some time has gone by, but it involves a kind of acceptance called passion." (Laurent 1988, 60)

[28] When one considers the various testimonials of actors working with Chéreau, an observer gets the impression of a certain consonance between life at Nanterre and this description Koltès provides of the play!

[29] Indeed, Chéreau informed the press that he cast well-known actors not because they were famous, but because he felt that "une humanité entière passe par eux" [an entire humanity passes through them"] (Aslan 1986, 68).

actually achieved, with the creation of the role of Alboury in the design environment he generated. Is there a resonance between the 'hard primitivist' function of Alboury's 'blackness' vis-a-vis the white characters in *Combat* and the effect of the darkness of the design on the spectators? Answering this question depends on our situating Alboury in the context of his important predecessor Alexis, investigated in Chapter One.[30]

Casting Alboury, and later Abad, "contrairement à ce que pensait Koltès" [despite what Koltès thought] Chéreau explained, was very difficult because he found some of Koltès' characters to be "plus compliqués à cause de leur grande abstraction" [are quite complex as a result of their significant level of abstraction] (1996, 45). Claude Stratz, one of Chéreau's major assistants during the Nanterre era, agreed, suggesting that "Patrice [Chéreau] had a difficult time with the black roles in that they were not particularly concrete, especially Abad in *Quai ouest*" (Stratz, 1999). Stratz felt that

[30] Situating Alboury in a specific and documented lineage, rather than intuiting Koltès' intentions regarding the character when there is no evidence, appears to be the most logical way of discussing Alboury. Generally speaking, Chéreau and Koltès had very little interaction during rehearsal times. It is difficult to trace the degree to which Koltès approved or disapproved of the work occurring in rehearsals. For his part, Chéreau would later state that "Je crois que, profondément, il n'était pas très d'accord avec ce que je faisais de ses pièces. Peut-être que j'étais le meilleur des pires" [deep down, I think that he wasn't very happy with what I did with his texts. Perhaps I wasn't the worst in his eyes, simply the least bad." (Chéreau 1991, 36) Koltès, however, explained with reference to Chéreau's staging of *Combat* that "Le résultat me surprend tout en correspondant à ce que j'attendais" [The results are a surprise to me, but at the same time correspond to what I expected] (Costaz, 1983).

Claude Stratz, Chéreau's assistant for both *Combat* and *Quai ouest*, explained that during the rehearsals of *Combat*, he served as a go-between for Chéreau and Koltès. It seems that Koltès did not feel comfortable attending the rehearsals of his own productions because of the differences between the trades of the author and the director. Koltès would later write that:

"La manière dont un metteur en scène conçoit un spectacle et la manière dont un auteur conçoit une pièce sont des choses si différentes qu'il vaut peut-être mieux qu'elles s'ignorent autant que possible, et qu'elles ne se rencontrent qu'au résultat. En ce qui me concerne, j'ai toujours écrit seul, et je ne me suis jamais mêlé de mise en scène. L'accord avec un metteur-en-scène se fait ailleurs, une fois le texte écrit, et avant les répétitions." (1986b, 62)

[The way in which a director conceives a production and the way in which a playwright conceives a play are such different matters that it may be best that they remain unknown to one another as much as is possible, and that they meet only at the outcome. As far as I'm concerned, I've always written alone, and I've never involved myself with directing. The agreement with a director is made elsewhere, once the text is written, and before the rehearsals.]

This statement demonstrates Koltès to have moved much beyond his early work with texts where he was indeed involved in directing his own work.

"I remember how during the first rehearsals of *Combat de nègre et de chiens'*, Stratz recalled during a roundtable on Koltès in Metz, France, in 1999, "we were doing script study, and Koltès was very uncomfortable to be solicited for this or that piece of information, and he quickly realized he had nothing to add at this stage of the process" (Stratz 2001,107). Koltès chose not to attend many more rehearsals, although "it was always painful for him to think that the show was being rehearsed and he was not there for it" (ibid.,107). Stratz and Koltès discovered that they were neighbours and began meeting on a regular basis before and after Stratz went to rehearsals, "and it was in this fashion", explained Stratz, "that Bernard [Koltès] and I became accomplices." (ibid.)

Koltès had been a "spokesperson" for the blacks.[31] He also suggested that Chéreau understood Alboury and Abad to play the kind of function within the production that resonates with the kind of increased 'authenticity' that Koltès ascribed to black individuals:

> I think in many ways [Chéreau] saw [Alboury and Abad] to be connected in a visual sense to the design, in that they had a kind of natural presence and quality of resistance that was closely tied to the major events in the play. (Stratz, 1999)[32]

It would appear then that Chéreau already had, or came to have through working with Koltès, similar assumptions about the natural authenticity and strength of black people that motivated Koltès. Chéreau had, of course, suggested, as I pointed out earlier, how in order to avoid psychological pitfalls he had distanced himself from any considerations of context.[33] Chéreau's connection of the characters with the design serves as a concrete articulation of the dynamic operating in both *Combat* and *Quai ouest* whereby the black characters are to a significant extent, and in a variety of fashions, linked to their surroundings.

In what way were the qualities of 'presence' and 'resistance' Chéreau attributed to Alboury (and later Abad) given room to resonate within his staging of *Combat*? Since the question of the role of the space has been discussed, I can now focus specifically on questions of the character and the actors for whom this theatrical space was their situation of enunciation. Indeed, an answer to this question can serve as an extension of the exploration of how the aestheticization of the 'place' of the text into the 'space' of the

[31] I asked Stratz if he still felt that "Koltès didn't try to defend the blacks, he didn't speak in favour of blacks, he made blacks speak." (Stratz 1990, 22) He answered "I do, particularly in the sense that very few black roles were being played on the stage at the time. We were doing our part at Nanterre with *Les Paravents* and *Combat* being played back to back. Of course Bernard was white, but he did understand marginalization, and had a close rapport with many black people. At the time he was a spokesperson for the blacks, in a way." (Stratz 1999)

[32] In addition, consider as well a very specific example of how Chéreau pursued, in the same fashion as Koltès, the same type of conflation of all black ethnicities under the blanket of 'blackness.' Chéreau described in an interview how he was careful not to recreate the sounds of the guards around the perimeter: "Je n'arrivais pas, en revanche, à me figurer les cris off des gardes invisibles, d'autant que, dans les cités dortoirs des techniciens français au Nigeria, je ne les avais pas entendus." [I could not figure out, on the other hand, how to create the calls of the invisible guards because I didn't hear them in the compounds of the French technicians in Nigeria] (1996, 44). Rather than have some 'inauthetic' sounds, Chéreau had the guards appear on stage in a van from whose tape player emerged the sound of the reggae band, Burning Spear, and their song *Cry Blood Africa*. This use of reggae, in the name of some kind of authenticity to the specificity of the African location, is revelatory of the same dynamic that made Koltès, as will be discussed in Chapter Three, initially want to call Abad by the name of Marley, after Bob Marley. As I will indicate in the analysis of this desire in that chapter, it speaks of a conflation of the specificities of ethnicities into one pan-black karate-chopping, reggae-listening collection of 'sambos.'

[33] Chéreau felt that *Combat* was "Africa seen by a white person and it's also the work of a young author. These are issues that entertain complex relationships with the play and are best put aside." (Costaz, 1983)

design, translated or 'supplemented'[34] Koltès' practice of relating blackness to a specific location.

It is useful at this stage to retrace some of the insights gained from previous sections in the discussion of the texts so that I can then explore more fully the implications of Chéreau's staging of Albouy. I discussed in the first chapter how the 'fragile' and originary 'substance' that Koltès posited as being at the core of all dramatic characters (and people) served as a kind of grounding for each character's and individual's identity. In *Les Amertumes* it is Alexis in particular who has a *logos* of identity which, when being forged by the experience of living, emerges in a state of 'revolt'. Koltès conceived of living as a crushing of powerful 'forces' coming from above and below. This conception of character was embedded for Koltès in a model for the creation and reception of theatrical meaning. Alexis played a pivotal role in this model as a type of conduit of significance between the audience and the stage. This role was amplified in the final scene of the text as Alexis emerged, in his state of revolt, to channel a final blast of significance towards the audience.

Similarly, the character of Albouy was very much in the lineage of Alexis in view of his function as revealer. In an interesting series of extensions of the function of Alexis in the character of Albouy, it became clear early in the chapter that the naturalized assumptions about blackness emerging from the colonial/neocolonial discourse had been grafted on to the grounding identity of Albouy. The 'fragile substance' at the root of this black character's identity is a source of quasi-mystical authenticity, as well as a locus of violent resistance, revolt and the abject. Albouy's initial figuration as 'noble savage,' a firm, insistant but naive 'soft' primitive, gives way to his revelation of a deeper self and a repatriation with the night full of the undifferentiated murderous guards who birthed him. He and his kin finish the play as primitive vandals, the noble savage's confrontational barbarous twin.

Chapter One discussed Koltès' particular understanding of theatrical reality as he envisaged it while creating *Les Amertumes*. An essential 'rule' of the theatrical 'game', as Koltès played it, was the prevalence of the phenomenological drive in his aspirations for the audience's reception of the theatre event. This was evident in his desire for his audience to "regain [...] the faculty of first impressions" which are "all the deeper in that they are first impressions" (1998a, 10; app. A,1). A number of Koltès' creative strategies were motivated by a desire to encourage this form of reception by the audience. The major one of these was the presence of Alexis, who served as an interpretive intensifier and a model for the experience of the entire audience. Alexis is a "hyphen" between the production and the spectators, "and, though him," is engendered the presence of

[34] The notion of the supplement is the Derridean terminology employed by Marvin Carlson. See note 5.

"spectator-witnesses" (1998a 13; app. A,2). Having Alexis occasionally be a member of the audience serves also to equate the audience in function to an observing character, thereby inducing an extra level of connection and reducing the exteriority of the audience to the phenomenon occurring onstage. Koltès explained in a letter to his mentor Gignoux that Alexis is "really another spectator, but one who, in exteriorizing his receptivity, stimulates the rest of the audience" through a "free and profoundly personal" performance (1995a, 14; app. B,2). Alexis, and the character playing him, would appear to engage in what could be productively described as an act of self-sacrifice in demonstrating to the audience his acceptance of the painful stimulus of the inexorable forces to which he is subjected.[35]

A number of interesting issues are raised at this juncture. The first of these is that the acceptance of the painful stimulus by Alexis can provide some means of understanding, on a broad level, the types of motivations that encouraged Koltès to allow the character Alboury to accept the abuse brought to bear on him by the other characters. There is of course, the 'final revolt' when the other black characters with whom Alboury is associated murder Cal. Before this 'primitive vandal' phase, however, Alboury lives the 'soft primitive' side of his 'noble savage' nature. He withstands the abuses he is subject to, purifying himself with his reasonable approach to the white intruders before finally the whites go too far and Cal gets killed. The nobility of Alboury, in comparison to that of Alexis before him, is enhanced by his representational recovery into colonialist tropes of the 'noble savage' as discussed in the first part of this chapter.[36]

A second important issue arises when one compares Alboury on stage in Chéreau's *Combat* with Koltès' discussion of Alexis as 'really another spectator, but one who, in exteriorizing his receptivity, stimulates the rest of the audience' through a 'free and profoundly personal' performance (1995a, 14; app. B,2). Another distinct progression can be traced between Alexis and Alboury, for a 'free and profoundly personal' performance of the role was difficult for Sidiki Bakaba, the actor playing the character.

[35] Although the performance demanded of the actor playing Alexis is described as 'profoundly personal', there is nothing in Koltès' descriptions which would explicitly suggest that the "personal" aspect of the performance involves a Grotowskian act of self-exposure. The prospect that Koltès may have been suggesting that this type of exposition of personal self through the character is, however, an exiting one.

[36] Indeed one review suggests that the actor playing Alboury, Sidiki Bakaba, was "an incarnation of dignity" (Copperman, 1983). Another critic describes Alboury as both a source of "humility" and yet "the master" (Lerrant, 1983), marking his progression from soft to hard primitivism. The appraisal of a third critic demonstrates how the noble savage can still always be seen as a largely negative phenomenon, with Alboury's would-be 'humility' and 'mastery' instead became "pathetic and menacing" (Jamet,1983).

According to Sidiki Bakaba, he was very happy to get the role and to play it.[37] An optimistic review of *Combat* in France's *Bwana Magazine*, which revolved to a significant extent around the celebration of Bakaba actually getting such a big part, reported that the actor said that "This play is amazing. All of Albouy's words could be words from everyday. Bernard-Marie Koltès has put his finger on the problem" (Koltès, 1983b). Bakaba is quoted as suggesting otherwise in a more extensive interview with the *Cahiers du Cinéma* in which he explained how "Albouy is a mystery for everybody, me included". Even though Bakaba knew "those three whites and what they represent" since he had "had to meet or argue with them in many different forms", he felt that Albouy remained "something quite foreign to me" (ibid). Although the role was not explicitly that of a monkey, a flunky or an idiot, Bakaba had no models even upon which to base the character. Albouy's strangeness, Bakaba felt, was that "he comes from deepest Africa, which doesn't know governments or borders" (ibid.). Considering this 'strangeness,' it comes as no surprise that Bakaba had a difficult time connecting on a personal, intuitive level with the character in the fashion that Chéreau was expecting with the other actors.

For his part, Phillipe Léotard, the actor playing Cal, described how his personal life helped him create his character:

> If I figured out the character, it's only because I approached things instinctively, by thinking about anything but the character. For example, the things that I wore to rehearsal every day — old t-shirts, crappy shoes — these became my costume one day. And I had a feeling of victory about this, because I think only that which is involuntary is important." (ibid.)

Sidiki Bakaba had to stretch much further to project himself into and identify with his character. He explained how the approach being taken by the other actors did not bear fruit: "Approaching the character, as I did at one point, by using my own age, didn't work" (ibid.). Under Chéreau's direction, Bakaba created a character who

> is encountering white people for the first time in his life... he's someone young, completing an initiation. It's the text of the twentieth century: we're not going to send him to the sacred forest to meet the lions, but into a white man's industrial site. Will he say what he has to say? (ibid.)

Although the sacred forest has changed form, the nature of the encounter has not. The young black character is still just as naive, for the parable of the encounter depends to a significant extent on this naiveté to demonstrate a rite of passage. The parable, however, has fit snugly into the colonial discourse by fashioning the rite of passage in question to

[37] A number of articles about him appearing at the time of the production discussed the difficulty experienced by African actors in finding work in a Parisian theatre environment which, at the time, already had a ninety percent unemployment rate: "an African actor has to work five times harder than any other actor" (Simon, 1983b). It seems that the part was significantly better than other roles given to him: "The road is long and hard. The 'whiteys' frequently want me to take on the image that they have of me: that of a monkey, a flunky or an idiot.." (ibid.). Indeed, his was the first role of this significance to be played by a black person since Doura Man had played the title role in George Wilson's *Othello* in 1976 (Cerquant, 1983).

be one from the 'soft' to 'hard' primitive side of the 'noble savage.' That the role was played by an actor older than the part serves only to emphasize in concrete terms the infantalizing qualities of the role.

The reviews for *Combat* suggest that a number of qualities in the way Alboury's character was played contributed to his appearance as the soft, then hard, primitive that the text suggests he is. Alboury is described as speaking quite slowly. The reviewer for the *Cahiers du Cinéma* felt that Sidiki Bakaba's characterization was particularly strong "in the way in which the language is delivered in a deliberate fashion". Each word, he felt, "seemed weighted and calmly offered" in comparison to the other actors who were sometimes inaudible (ibid.).

Here we have the more subtle differentiation, based on a character/actor's ethnicity, of how the text 'fought back' to sustain the theatrical illusion. Alboury's gradual delivery exists in a relationship of counterpoint with the white characters who behave, as Chéreau describes it in the programme notes, like "de vieux enfants" [old children], whose "mots précèdent les pensées" [words precede their thoughts] (1990a, 19). The results in the staging are well encapsulated by the reviewer from *Les Petites Affiches* who described Alboury's character as having "lyrical incantations" in comparison to the others who were cut from a realist cloth (Ménager, 1983). It could be argued that Alboury's increased 'authenticity,' inscribed in the text and perpetuated in the staging in such a fashion that he was the only consistently audible character, suggests that Alboury is the character who sustained the theatrical illusion. He is certainly the character whose poetry (be it 'ancestral' or not) helps bridge the space between exteriority and interiority, between representation and the represented. This bridging occurred by means of the dynamic described by Pavis who suggests that heightened poetic speech provides the spectator with an "awareness of being seized by an enigma that speaks to him personally" (1998, 275).

Chéreau's appraisal of Alboury's more deliberate use of language fits quite snugly with Koltès' thoughts about the inherently meddlesome and prevaricatory nature of speech as explored in Chapter One. Earlier I explored how Koltès' discussion of an audience's total reception of *Les Amertumes* was closely related to an avowal made later in 1976. Koltès wrote that deep, irreversible and seemingly inexorable connections between people, between characters, and between audiences and characters emerged naturally and could best do so in complete silence. The increasing level of authenticity of identity that he posited was marked by a decreasing level of activity. First, there was the "interminable ... chitchat" of "psychological activity"; this was followed by the "powerful forces" like ocean waves, which although exterior to individual identity, "confront and combine to create both the equilibrium of an individual and the relations between people"; next were

the slow growths "like excrescences from the self which occur at a level "static and indifferent to the vagaries of existence"; finally there was the primal "fragile substance" (1999b, 99).

Although there was nothing to indicate that Chéreau was aware of Koltès' early writings, it is fascinating to note how the director created a sound environment which supported Alboury's 'emergence'. This environment was established quite gradually over the course of the evening. Chéreau created a development of sound whereby the comparatively inauthentic and anxious chatter of the white characters became foregrounded by ambiant qualities of silence resonant with what Chéreau indicated in the programme notes was Alboury's more enduring linguistic presence:

> A partir de l'épisode de la panne du générateur, j'ai commencé à fabriquer le silence sur un plateau: avec des fréquences de groupe électrogène ou de simples grésillements indécalables à l'oreille, j'installe des plages de silence apparentes; lorsque ces bruits indiscernables s'arrêtent brutalement, le public entend un silence, devenu total, dans toute sa profondeur. (Chéreau 1996, 44)
>
> [Shortly after the sequence where the generator gives out, I started to construct silence on the stage: with a couple of low frequency generator sounds or some barely audible insect chirpings, I created an illusory silence. When these undetectable sounds stop suddenly, the audience becomes aware of a total and very deep silence.]

While Alboury's character, with his slow walk and relative stasis in the shadows, would appear to embody the more 'authentic' end of the authenticity spectrum,[38] the white characters appear to be on the chitchatty and silly end of the continuum. Phillipe Léotard, who played the role of Cal and who describes himself as a very instinctive actor, suggested that in view of the fact that the play is a tragedy "How else can you play it but by sheer force of nerves?" He continued to describe how he finally found his sense of the character on opening night: "I had to bang my head against a wall. So the first thing was to go was my voice. Any actor can understand why without having read Freud." Léotard commented that "I wouldn't have lost my voice if I hadn't wanted to lose my voice. And it's a good thing too, because that's how I found the character. That was the 'click', in the real sense of the term, *because it really hurt"* (my emphasis) (Philippon, 1983).

Bakaba's acting was not psychologically based, and was at first very contained, before the narrative dictated that 'darkness' reared its head and murdered Cal. Phillipe Léotard's presence was psychologically grounded, and was very anxious. It comes as little surprise that the fusion of Phillipe Léotard's anxiety with that of his characters should result in his character's extinction at the hands of the more 'authentic' presence at the end of the

[38] Most reviews spoke of the "quiet dignity" of Alboury, although one lone critical voice reacted with a skeptical irony to Alboury's so-called "ancestral poetry" when he wrote "Ah, isn't it wonderful, the soul of the old tales beating strong to the bongo beats of the heart." (Créssolé, 1983)

production.[39]

2.1.8 Casting of the other characters; casting and ethnicity[40]

All the actors in the play, each well known, played roles that resembled them. Reviewer Monique Leroux finished a discussion of how the "photogenic" qualities of the staging restrict the 'jeu théâtral' (the theatrical exchange) in the production, with an account of how the casting practice led to a further restriction of the same 'jeu':

> Patrice Chéreau has used an approach to casting generally reserved for film... Every single actor was picked for their close resemblance to their character. Their performances remain contained within the first image of the character that is presented to us. This prevents the spectator from performing the necessary work of the imagination that is part of the theatre. (Le Roux, 1983)

She continued to describe how Piccoli was "magisterial" in a role "which you would think was written for him as a function of his filmic performances"; similarly, she thought the roles played by Myriam Boyer and Phillipe Léotard were so realistic that the effect was "reductive" (ibid.)

In an interesting slip, she did not mention the role of Alboury at all in her review. By extending her discussion and contextualizing the black character in her discussion of the whites, some trends discussed earlier in the chapter, as well as in other chapters, reappear. There is an initial resonance with the question of the collapse of theatricality which was evident in Chéreau's hyperbolization of the set and the dynamic that was established between the text and the set. In addition it has become apparent that a tension is established between the way in which the black actor and the white actors each relate to their characters.

I have described a divergence between the intuitive, immediatist, and vaguely Strasbergian 'method' inflected approach of the white actors, quite different than the Bakaba's more constructed means of creating his role. This divergence would seem to be an embodied logical extension of the continuum of increased authenticity that Koltès proposed in the 1976 letter (1999b, 94-97; app. B,3). The chatty frantic surface chit chat

[39] This mix of acting styles is common in Chéreau's productions. Generally speaking, according to Odette Aslan, Chéreau would not impose any particular style of performing on the actor. Aslan explains that "It's the overall coherence of the production which interests him, as well as the richness of each actor's performance" (1986, 68).

[40] I want to be careful not to engage in retrospective criticism that does not take into account the difficult realities of racism of the period. A statement made by a white actor in *Combat* opens up a huge chasm of potential racism within the acting profession and suggests another important area of study.

Phillipe Léotard, the actor who played Cal, is quoted as saying "Since I won a César for best actor of the year, I can do a play with blacks in it, that is to say blacks playing major roles, without closing any doors on a professional level" (Simon, 1983a).

I will therefore be careful to continue to set out to demonstrate the relationships between phenomena and to discuss the conditions of their emergence rather than to judge them.

which prevents real contact between people is lived out by the white characters, and quite remarkably, by the method in which the roles were rehearsed in the Chéreau production. Alboury, the locus of authenticity, demanded a different type of creation.

That Sidiki Bakaba could not reach the 'fragile substance' of his own character with the intuitive readiness with which the white actors reach the core of their characters is important evidence that points to the difficulties with Koltès' and (to a lesser extent) Chéreau's expectations of black authenticity. A space was opened between the fictional reality of the character and sociohistorical reality as experienced by the actor. This space is made evident by comparison of the means and methods of approaching characterization as performed by the white actors. What could be called a rift between the actualities of the character and of the actor is the space that must be covered by Bakaba's enactment of the myth of the primitive black African. Despite Chéreau's discussion of his efforts to cast an 'authentic African actor,'[41] it takes a different type of work to make the character 'authentic' enough to play his function of the 'universal colonized' in the allegory of the colonialism encounter at the core of the play.

2.1.9 Looking ahead

Koltès' expectation about black authentication arising from his desire to have black actors play the roles served in effect to demonstrate his projections of Manichean distinctions emergent from the colonial discourse onto the blacks. In what can be understood as a search for the embodiment of the 'fragile substance' as evoked in the model associated with *Les Amertumes*, Koltès ended up supporting the colonial discourse he so evidently despised during his early trip to Nigeria. Chéreau supported this dynamic by 'leaving aside' the contextual considerations of Koltès' identity as a white author. He also extended what is occurring in the text by staging largely realistic performances from the whites, and a more stylized and 'theatrical' performance from the black actor. Despite his assertion that staging the black character was difficult because he is an abstraction, there is no evidence to suggest that Chéreau found Alboury's status as abstraction fundamentally problematic. Indeed, with his pushing aside of questions of context, it may be that he simply chose not to consider it.

One thing which is clear, however, is that the staging encouraged the audience to understand Alboury to be a mythologized abstraction. The staging which, in view of the insight that the character served to sustain fictional and theatrical illusion through his measured delivery, also encouraged audiences to see him as more 'authentic'. This set of

[41] The importance of Alboury being played by an authentic African was pointed out by a number of the reviews (Thibaudaut and Gauville, 1983) and hailed by the French African press as being a "real role" (Diatta , 1983).

factors heightened Alboury's difference from the other characters by foregrounding the mythologized 'primitive' qualities attributed to him in the text. By bringing the myth of the 'primitive' embodied by Alboury into evidence, Chéreau's staging served simply, as he suggested in 1973, was within the range of theatre's possibilities, to 'make ideology concrete' and confirming the virulent iterativity of the restrictive stereotypes.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 The 'jump sideways'?

> Each time [Koltès wrote a new play], there was a 'jump sideways' with reference to the one previous to it, as if the author was turning his back on the immediate past, rejecting what is known, to do other things or do them differently, to surprise himself.
> Michel Vinaver, playwright, contemporary of B.M. Koltès (1990, 11).[1]

Koltès expressed his general dissatisfaction with the positive reception of *Combat* when it was first staged in France. "Au fond" [At the end of the day], Koltès noted following the large-scale production of the text staged by Chéreau at Nanterre and complete with a car and a half-constructed bridge on stage, "le succès de *Combat de nègre et de chiens* se fondait sur un malentendu: exotisme, romantisme" [the success of *Combat* was grounded in a misunderstanding: exoticism, romanticism]. Koltès had decided that this kind of mythologizing is "tout ce que je refuse" [everything that I am against] (1999a, 69). This surprising statement suggests that all the mythologizing and pathologizing of blackness in the text of *Combat*, as explored in the previous chapter, was perhaps largely unconscious in origin. Finally seeing the text in production might have foregrounded aspects of the text of which Koltès had been unaware. The unveiled aspects could have been that which found its way in between 'what I intended to write and what was written.'

Had Koltès become more aware with regard to his own position as an individual who might be prone to using the stereotypes generated by, and circulating within, the discourse in which he lived? Was Koltès aware that the vicarious nativism deployed in *Combat* through the figure of Alboury played a significant role in generating the exoticism and romanticism of which he later became critical? A journalist questioning Koltès inquired if the exoticism and romanticism in the production were a result of infidelity to the text by Chéreau. "Au contraire" [On the contrary], Koltès answered, "il a été trop respectueux" [he was too respectful] (1999a, 69), thereby suggesting that possibly, having seen the production and reflected upon it, he felt the exoticism and romanticism were of his own making.

As it is impossible to answer the question of Koltès' level of discursive self-awareness with any accuracy, the investigation can most usefully turn towards the text. Indeed such

[1] As in the previous chapter, for reasons of brevity I have restricted French text to statements or texts by Koltès and Chéreau.

biographical questions are only contributory to the understanding of how Koltès' plays themselves represent blackness and ethnicity. If Koltès was unhappy with *Combat*, specifically with the aspects of romanticism and exoticism that became apparent within it during the production, what changed and what stayed the same with regard to the representation of blackness and ethnicity in his following play? This play is entitled *Quai ouest* (1985), and was staged by Chéreau in 1986, three years after *Combat*.

The question above can best be pursued by first quickly outlining the action of the play. The plot concerns a group of first and second generation South American illegal aliens who are living as squatters in an abandoned warehouse in a derelict docklands neighbourhood situated in an unnamed "grande ville portuaire occidentale" [port city somewhere in the West[ern world] (1985).[2] The immigrants act as vampiric hosts to a corrupt white business executive named Koch and his assistant Monique who arrive at the beginning of the play, lost and confused, looking for the river. The executive is fleeing his own white collar crime and would rather drown himself than live to see his reputation destroyed. The Hispanic family, including the mother Cécile, the father Rodolphe, the son Charles, the daughter Claire and their Asian friend Fak, all target Koch and Monique. One of the former aims to relieve Koch of his Rolex, another, his Jaguar, while Cécile attempts to secure help in getting visas for the entire group.

Also living in the margins of the warehouse is a silent black man named Abad, the controlling partner in collaboration with Charles and Fak in the dubious 'bizness' they all pursue in order to feed themselves and the family. During the course of the numerous encounters between family members, their entourage and the new arrivals, deals are struck, histories and prejudices are revealed, and accusations are levelled until finally the family implodes. Abad, who experiences verbal abuse from both the immigrants and the white executives, remains largely mute for the duration of the play. However it is Abad who, at the suggestion of Rodolphe, the boy's impotent father, finally kills the greedy son Charles for enigmatic reasons grounded in pity and rage.

At first glance, *Quai ouest* shows some major structural similarities with *Combat*, which in turn, as I discussed at length in the previous chapter, shares some major characteristics with *Les Amertumes*. A number of non-black characters in a removed location gravitate around a mysterious black man named Abad. He remains largely mute over the course of the play and observes much of the action unbeknownst to the other characters. We learn that Abad has suffered extensively before the action of the play begins. Eventually, after

[2] I will provide only the references for the Editions de Minuit publication of *Quai ouest*. The English language version was written by Alex Johnston, Joseph Long and myself for a 1999 production at the Project Arts Centre, Dublin, by Bedrock Theatre Company. In addition, as in the previous chapters, I will generally not provide both the French and the English translation when quoting material for which both versions have already been presented over the course of the work, but only the English version.

suffering more abuse at the hands of the non-black characters, he kills one of the most insulting of them. In this fashion Abad repeats Alboury's structural similarities to the seminal figure of Alexis, as he: 1) has a distanced relationship with the action although he exercises a controlling function over the action; 2) has an authenticity of identity unmatched by the more dubious non-black characters; and finally 3) plays an ethical function vis-a-vis the other characters which culminates in a violent emergence.

Although Koltès rarely expanded publicly on his dissatisfaction with *Combat* he did note elsewhere that he believed that a change in the 'subject' of *Quai ouest* would lead to a different form of narrative focus on the black character.[3] Koltès discussed the issue in the section entitled 'Sujet' of 'Un Hangar à l'ouest' [A Warehouse in the West] a text published in a major European theatre magazine around the time of Chéreau's production (1986b).[4] He began by noting that in *Combat* "il s'agissait déjà de deux mondes" [the play dealt with two worlds] which "se parlaient comme au-dessus d'un précipice" [spoke to one another across a chasm]. Koltès felt that "le point de vue narratif"[the narrative point of view] stayed "tout le temps du même coté, celui des Blancs, avec, seule, Léonie qui tentait de jeter une corde de l'autre coté" [on one side the whole way through, that of the whites. Only Léonie tried to throw a rope to the other side] (ibid., 60).

One wonders exactly how this question of 'narrative point of view' manifested itself in the text, and what a switch in narrative point of view to the other side of the 'chasm' might entail? In what way would he, or one of his characters, 'throw a rope to the other side'? He suggested that in his new play he would move across the chasm evoked specifically to deal with the subject of the blacks:

> Je me suis beaucoup posé la question, en écrivant *Quai ouest*, de savoir si une pièce pouvait commencer sur un 'sujet' et terminer sur un autre. Il m'a paru que oui, pour la bonne raison que, dans la vie, on peut changer de point de vue sur une même question, donc changer la question.

[3] Koltès' other type of dissatisfaction with the play had to do with more specific technical questions concerning his writing: "Le travail de la scène, tel qu'il est fait en tous cas par Chéreau, met en lumière un certain nombre de défauts techniques du texte dont il faut bien finir par se soucier. C'est ainsi que des questions que je me posais déja, mais confusément, au moment de *Combat de nègres et de chiens*, je me suis efforcé de les résoudre pour *Quai ouest*. Ce qui est difficile, ce qu'on met du temps à apprendre, et qu'on rate et qu'on recommence et qu'on ne réussit jamais tout à fait et qui empêche de dormir, ce sont des choses comme: faire entrer quelqu'un sur un plateau, lui donner une raison de sortir et voir à quel point cette raison modifie la scène qu'on imaginait d'abord." [The staging of a play, at least in the way in which Chéreau undertakes it, reveals a number of technical faults in texts that I really must pay attention to. I was forced to resolve a number of questions I was asking myself, although somewhat confusedly, during *Combat*, for the creation of *Quai ouest*. These are the things that are difficult to learn, that you fail at and that you try again, and which keep you awake at night, are things such as: getting someone onstage, giving them a reason to leave and seeing in which way this reason modifies the scene you started out with." (Nores, 1986)

[4] This piece first took the form of an interview with Alain Prique, but was reworked by Koltès and released as a text in *Théâtre en Europe* .

> C'est ainsi que le début de la pièce tourne autour de: Koch, parviendra-t-il à se jeter dans le fleuve? Alors qu'à la fin, lorsqu'il meurt, on ne s'en soucie qu'à travers le destin d'Abad, et c'est Charles et Abad qui terminent la pièce. (1986b, 60)
>
> [I frequently asked myself the question, when I was writing *Quai ouest*, if a play could begin with one 'subject' and finish with another. It seemed to me that it could, for the good reason that, in life, one can change points of view on the same question, and therefore change the question. It is in this way that the beginning of the play revolves around this question of — will Koch manage to throw himself in the river? Whereas at the end, when he dies, we are concerned only as it relates to Abad's fate, and it is Charles and Abad who finish the play.]

This extract suggests that Koltès' understanding of the term 'subject' is restricted to that of the subject of the play. This is opposed to an awareness of how his authorial stance might affect his writing or the way in which aspects of the colonial/neo-colonial discourse might be inscribed in the identities of his characters. It would seem from this initial indication that although Koltès' new modus operandi would switch narrative emphasis onto the black character, a general reconsideration of black subjectivity — the black 'point of view' as it were — does not seem to be included in his progression from *Combat*. Indeed, it could be argued that the shift in narrative focus which Koltès proposes to be a new strategy for *Quai ouest* has already occurred in *Combat*. The latter text began as an exploration of whites lost in 'the depths' of Africa and finished as the triumph of Alboury's tribe's violent invasion of the white enclave and the discourse that supported and generated it.[5] Indeed, it will be my contention that although Koltès did make some interesting structural and representational changes in *Quai ouest*, a number of tendencies evident in *Combat*, particularly the representation of blackness as something monstrous or even abject, are extended and consolidated in *Quai ouest*.

Determining the nature of the progressions and continuities between *Combat* and *Quai ouest* will depend on being able to articulate the way in which Koltès presented the subjectivity of Abad, his central black character. This will involve the discussion of the implications of Koltès' change in dramaturgical emphasis on the important areas which were the crux of the investigations of the second chapter, namely: 1) the arrangement of the colonial and neo-colonial contact zones; 2) the double helix of stereotyping which both displaced and displayed nativist stereotypes emerging from the colonial discourse and sustained by the Manichean allegory; and 3) the specific stereotype of the black 'monster' who wavers in representational terms between a form of noble savage and the primitive vandal.[6]

[5] This emergence, as was discussed in the last chapter, can be productively compared, and thus more deeply understood, with the emergence of Alexis in *Les Amertumes*.

[6] Since the two previous chapters have introduced the majority of theory necessary to undertake this investigation of *Quai ouest*, this chapter can now more easily structurally integrate the discussion of the text and the production.

3.2 The warehouse: Koltès' fictionalization of the New York location; the white characters' experience of the darkness of the warehouse

> Europe, which was the beacon of civilization, has seen the far ends of the earth come establish themselves at the center. I have the impression that his plays take everything from the margins and plant it right in the centre. Indeed, the center is mummified and the circumference is coming alive, entering the center, bringing the center alive and becoming the center itself.
>
> Actor Maria Casarès discussing Koltès and *Quai ouest*. (1990, 27)

The first major similarity evident on a structural level between *Combat* and *Quai ouest* is the extent to which both depend significantly on a specific location which inspired Koltès to write the play. I will begin by exploring the extent to which the the aestheticization of this location and its function as a post-colonial 'contact zone' led to the type of extension of the function of blackness that was evident in *Combat*.

Koltès noted in 1982 in an interview with Jean-Pierre Han that was reprinted as a text entitled "Lieux privilégiés" [Special Places] (Koltès 1983b) that the starting point for *Quai ouest* was actually a docklands in Manhattan:

> Il y a en particulier un dock désaffecté, un grand hangar vide, dans lequel j'ai passé quelques nuits, caché. C'est un endroit extrêmement bizarre - un abri pour les clodos, les pédés, les trafics et les règlements de comptes, un endroit pourtant où les flics ne vont jamais pour des raisons obscures. Dès que l'on y pénètre, on se rend compte que l'on se trouve dans un coin privilégié du monde, comme un carré mystérieusement laissé à l'abandon au milieu d'un jardin, où les plantes se seraient développées différemment; un lieu où l'ordre normal n'existe pas, mais où un autre ordre, très curieux, s'est créé. (1983b, 36)
>
> [There's one disused dock in particular, an enormous empty warehouse in which I spent a few nights, hidden. It's a very strange location — a hiding place for bums, fags, dealers, a place where you go to settle scores, but also a place where the cops never go for some reason. As soon as you get inside, you realize that you're in a special little corner of the world, like a plot in the middle of a garden that has been mysteriously let go, one where plants grow differently, a place where the normal order of things doesn't exist, but where a strange new order has taken its place.]

The 'strange' quality of the location is immediately reminiscent of qualities characterizing the industrial compound which was the genesis of *Combat*. This location recreated the defamiliarizing effect of how "une chose vue de loin, déplacée, devient parfois plus symbolique, parfois plus déchiffrable" [things seen from afar become displaced, and more symbolic sometimes, more decipherable] (1983b, 35). Indeed, Koltès explained with regard to the warehouse: "J'ai eu envie de parler de ce petit endroit du monde, exceptionnel et, pourtant, qui ne nous est pas étrange" [I wanted to talk about that little corner of the world, a strange place, yet one that is not unfamiliar to us.] (ibid., 36). If in *Combat* it is the world of the French that Koltès sought to ostend by laying bare its contradictions and neuroses, what is it that can be witnessed more clearly in the warehouse? And what role does Abad play in relation to this?

The 'place' of the text was staged differently than in *Combat*. Indeed, there had been considerable speculation leading up to the second Chéreau/Koltès staging of *Quai ouest*, which would open at Nanterre on April 24th, 1986, for a run of fifty-three performances. The memory of the huge décor from *Combat*, with its concrete pillar, half-finished highway and dusty red ground had lived on in the minds of Parisian audiences and critics (Coppermann, 1986). A week before the opening, Chéreau spoke of the design: "Richard Peduzzi a fait des décors très complexes qui paraîtront très simples. Les éclairages tiendront une très grande part" [Richard Peduzzi has made a very complex set which will appear to be very simple. The lighting will play a significant role] (Dumur, 1986).

The set consisted of a back-drop of huge cargo containers moving in kaleidoscopic fashion, tracing large geometrical patterns in the darkness of the docklands devoid of workers. The moving cargo containers gave the impression of continuously floating on air while combining together, separating and recombining to create a feeling of confinement (Le Roux, 1986). Out of this visual context of arbitrariness and flux came moments when the set was in full synchronicity with the text. At the point in the production when the sound of the body dropping into the water could be heard, a black crack formed in the middle of the set, and the walls split to reveal blackness and the sound of water hitting the wall (Copperman, 1986). Light occasionally came to "lick" (Copperman) the set, however it was most often dark, enveloped in mist, with the high grey walls of the back opening onto nothingness. In this penumbra actors purposefully bumped into the set, or even used it to hide in.

The production received immediate praise for poetic density and the inventiveness of the text (Nerson,1986a); a strong cast playing "beings weighted down with solitude" (Godard, 1986); Peduzzi's gigantic deçor, this time facing the audience, which moved to the rhythm of the "superb" lighting of Daniel Dellanoy (Le Roux, 1986). One critic explained that all of these factors contributed to the creation of a "universe of sacred mystery" (Héliot, 1986b) in which "people do not meet one another, not understand one another, where love only lives in dreams, where money counts for too much and hope not enough" (Copperman, 1986). However, the production's detractors felt that it was too long, the text poorly constructed and the set once again far too much of a presence (Nerson, 1986a).

The arrangement of characters that Koltès inserted into the fictionalized version of this warehouse resemble patterns established in *Combat*. Specifically, a number of white characters cross into a territory of 'anxiety and solitude' which is inhabited by non-white characters. In *Combat*, Koltès staged an encounter between 'deepest Africa' and white neo-colonial emissaries in a revisiting of the colonial encounter. In *Quai ouest*, however,

morally bankrupt white characters encounter emissaries from the so-called 'heart of darkness' in a *post-colonial* encounter. Indeed, while the initial warehouse had been a "hiding place for bums, fags, dealers" (1983b, 36) going about their business away from the forces of order, Koltès' fictionalized warehouse is inhabited by immigrants. In a fascinating reversal, the 'heart of darkness' plumbed in *Combat* has dilated and been relocated to (or perhaps even come home to roost in) the festering, evacuated heart of the Western metropolis. This unnamed city is situated in the very same Western milieu which generated, through economic and discursive practice, the 'heart of darkness'[7] from which the immigrants have arrived. The 'heart of darkness' has now expanded to include the entire developing world, for there are representatives from Asia, Africa and South America preying upon the whites in the warehouse.

The move 'home' for Koltès' location could be understood as an indication of at least two motivating factors: a) a recognition on some level for Koltès that even *situating* his texts in non-Western contexts increases the potential for the type of exoticism and romanticism he so ardently rejected following the staging of *Combat;* and/or b) that the appearance of the warehouse 'heart of darkness' with Abad as its anchoring figure within the metropolis can serve on an allegorical level as a hard primitivist intervention of 'darkness' into the core of the West, a binary collapse of locations (or at least subordination of one location by another) in which the white West is terrified by a sudden proximity with the dark 'rest' of the world.

The first potential motivating factor most likely must remain speculative because of its dependence on a clear understanding of Koltès' clearly unknowable intentions. However, an appraisal of the 'hard primitivist' allegorical function of the presence of the alienating locale and its foreign inhabitants (Abad central among them) within the core of the Western metropolis can be undertaken by an examination of 1) Koltès' fictionalization of his encounter with the warehouse; and, in the following section 2) Abad's role within, and relationship to, the warehouse.

Koltès made a decision to foreground the location in which the play takes place early on in the writing process. In the text entitled "A Warehouse in the West" published concurrently with the production, Koltès explained that "Les motivations qui me poussaient à écrire cette pièce étaient si nombreuses qu'elles ont fini par constituer la principale difficulté à l'écrire" [the motivations that were pushing me to write this play were so numerous as to end up constituting the principal difficulty in writing it], inviting

[7] In addition to the qualifications of this expression provided in the last chapter, it may be informative to supplement them with a reference to the considerable amount of postcolonial criticism of Conrad's novel of the same name. Very significant to the ongoing criticism was the opinion expressed by Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe in 1977 that Conrad was "a bloody racist" for using images derived from the colonialist trope of the so-called 'dark continent' to provide a backdrop for white exploration and self-discovery. See Tredell (1998).

the reader to imagine that

> un matin, dans ce hangar, vous assistiez à deux événements simultanés; d'une part, le jour qui se lève, d'une manière si étrange, si anti-naturelle, se glissant dans chaque trou de la tôle, laissant des parties dans l'ombre et modifiant cette ombre, comme un rapport amoureux entre la lumière et un objet qui résiste, et vous dites: je veux raconter cela. Et puis, en même temps, vous écoutez le dialogue entre un homme d'âge mûr, inquiet, nerveux, venu là pour chercher de la came ou autre chose, et un grand type qui s'amuse à le terroriser et qui, peut-être, finira par frapper pour de bon, et vous dites: c'est cette rencontre-là que je veux raconter. (1986b, 59-60)
>
> [one morning, in this warehouse, you are witness to two simultaneous events: on one hand, the day that is breaking in a fashion so strange, so unnatural, itself through each hole in the sheet metal, leaving parts in the darkness and modifying that darkness, in short, like a lover's connection between the light and an object that resists it, and you say to yourself: that's what I want to tell. And then, at the same time, you listen to the dialogue between an old man who is anxious and nervous, he's come here to find drugs or perhaps something else, and a big guy who plays at terrorising him and who may end up hitting him for good, and you say: it's that encounter that I want to tell.]

Koltès felt that "les deux événements sont indissociables" [the two events are indissociable] and that "ils sont un seul évènement selon deux points de vue" [that they are one event from two points of view] (ibid., 60). The challenge for Koltès then became how to integrate the two events in the telling of them. He wondered "quelle est l'histoire qu'on va mettre sur le devant du plateau et quelle autre deviendra le décor" [which is the story that's going to be at the front of the stage and which one will become the set] (ibid.). He concluded his thoughts on the matter by affirming the importance of the location (the structure) relative to the characters (that which is housed within the structure) by stating that "ce n'est pas obligatoirement l'aube qui deviendra décor" [it's not necessarily the breaking of dawn that will become the set] (ibid.). In order to include both these types of encounters in the play, Koltès was curious to see if he could build the work in the same fashion in which one would build a warehouse. This could be undertaken, he felt, by first creating a structure which could contain all other structures within it (ibid., 59). This structural exploration was the crux of his move away from the 'realist hypothesis' for it resulted in an increased emphasis on the role that the location plays in the text, and progresses hand in hand with a lesser emphasis being placed on the plot of the play.

Whatever Koltès' intentions may have been with regard to changing the 'subject' of the play, the warehouse is indelibly marked by the subject position both of the white characters who stumbled across it and Abad who is at its core. Indeed Koltès' suggestion that both encounters he witnessed at the warehouse (between individuals and between light and darkness) can be understood from 'the same point of view' and are therefore indissociable, is a revealing one. His assertion suggests that in their fictionalized form each event will be inflected with identifying characteristics of the other. Since Koltès witnessed the encounters and was responsible for their fictionalization, they will necessarily be marked by his subjectivity. When speaking specifically of the warehouse

he would explain his intentions in this manner:

> J'ai eu envie de parler de ce petit endroit du monde, exceptionnel et, pourtant, qui ne nous est pas étranger; j'aimerais rendre compte de cette impression étrange que l'on ressent en traversant ce lieu immense, apparemment désert, avec, au long de la nuit, le changement de la lumière à travers les trous du toit, des bruits de pas et de voix qui résonnent, des frôlements, quelqu'un à côté de vous, une main qui tout à coup vous agrippe. (1983b, 36)
>
> [I'd like to re-create the strange impression you get when you cross that seemingly deserted and immense location, including the changing light through the holes in the roof through the night, the echoing sound of footsteps and voices, things brushing against you, someone beside you, a hand which suddenly grips you.]

We discover the warehouse and its terrifying inhabitants in the same fashion in which Koltès does: darkness and fright first. The fictionalized locale is evoked for the reader by a cumulative description of the surroundings in the stage directions and through the speech of the characters. We read in the stage directions that the first scene begins "Devant un mur d'obscurité" [In front of a wall of darkness] (1985, 11) before the executive assistant Monique's opening description of the location which provides more indications:

> Et maintenant : où? par où? comment? Seigneur! Par ici? c`est un mur, on ne peut plus avancer; ce n`est même pas un mur, non, ce n`est rien du tout; c`est peut-être une rue, peut-être une maison, peut-être bien le fleuve ou bien un terrain vague, un grand trou dégoûtant. Je ne vois plus rien. (1985, 11)
>
> [Now where? Which way? How? Jesus! That's a wall, we can't go any further. It's not even a wall, it's nothing. Maybe it's a road, maybe it's a house, maybe its the river or some bit of waste ground. Some huge disgusting hole. I can't see a thing.]

Monique fears the presence of aggressive men in the warehouse and is made more anxious by the sounds of dogs barking in the distance. There are slippery things on the ground which she cannot see and she claims to have never been this frightened, even as a child.

The fact that Monique is in the warehouse because of her job as Koch's assistant makes her reasons for being present there somewhat reminiscent of the purpose of Horn and Cal's presence in Africa. Monique, Horn and Cal have all had to displace themselves for their work and find themselves in situations for which they are not entirely equipped or prepared. Indeed, a variety of Monique's assertions serve to ostend the difference between her previous experience and the world offered by the warehouse. For example, she is obsessed in a somewhat futile fashion with personal appearances: she begs for a piece of comb from Charles to fix her hair and worries about Koch destroying his shoes.

The anxiety invoked by Monique's intitial encounter with the warehouse is contrasted by Koch's openness to the terrors that the location might present. "Je sais, moi, très

exactement où je suis" [I know exactly where I am], he explains to Monique when she tries to entreat him to leave. For his part, Koch has chosen to come to the warehouse to commit suicide in order not to face humiliation and punishment because of an embezzlement scam in which he has been involved. He explains to Charles and Abad the reason for his decision:

> Pour une histoire à moi, une histoire d'argent. Je dois rendre des comptes pour de l'argent qu'on m'a confié et voilà, cet argent n'existe plus. Pour vous en dire un peu, il s'agit d'argent sacré. Je ne peux pas me présenter au conseil d'administration. Une histoire de réputation est à l'eau. Je me fous bien qu'elle soit à l'eau, cela ne me gêne pas, mais je ne veux pas voir le plongeon. (1985, 21)

> [This thing I'm involved in, a money thing. I have to account for some money I was minding and, well, the money's not there anymore. I'll tell you this much, it's church money. I can't go to the board of directors. It's about my reputation, you see. My reputation's in the water. I don't give a damn about it, it doesn't bother me, I just don't want to be around to see it go under.]

The darkness of the locale provides a direct threat to the subjectivity of the whites, a threat which Monique fears and one which Koch at first embraces. Although Koch admits he is scared, there is an element of personal development in his adventure. Indeed, qualities of fascination and fortitude manifest themselves in Koch's behaviour in his initital contact with potential annihilation. "Ne risquez rien du tout, Monique, rentrez" [Don't risk anything at all, Monique, go home], he tells his assistant, and explains that "Je rentrerai par mes propores moyens" [I'll get home by my own means] (1985, 12).

Charles, the young Hispanic immigrant, informs Koch that Abad, the silent black man, asks Koch why he has chosen to "régler tes sales affaires ici" [settle your shit here] (ibid., 22) in the warehouse. Koch answers that he has embraced the warehouse because "J'ai connu ce quartier, autrefois. Je cherchais un endroit qui me ressemble" [I used to know this area, years ago. I was looking for a place that reminds me of myself] (22), suggesting that the darkened and deteriorated milieu is a metaphorical parallel for his own descent into immoral patterns of behaviour. Like Léonie in *Combat*, he is attracted to the location by a *desire* for its terrifying and defamiliarizing effects, for its capacity to induce self-revelation. Just as Leonie in *Combat* wishes to embrace Alboury and Africa in order to patriate herself with something or someone whose curse was visible, so Koch seeks a 'darkness' into which he can both foreground and subsume his own guilt and shame with one swift action.

Koch's desire for the salve of this darkness may be usefully compared with the rather different reactions to darkness experienced by heroes of nineteenth century colonial fiction on their voyages through the 'dark' nights of the colonies. In reference to a variety of colonial travel accounts and literatures, Pratt describes moments when "In the night an empowered subject is called forth for whom uncertainty, vulnerability, and the invisible

bring joy, plenitude and an expansion of self" (Pratt 1992, 222).

The joy Koch and Leonie experience is brief, and their plenitude is a fullness of shame. It became evident in the discussion of *Combat* that, when Leonie was spat upon by Alboury after wanting an experience of darkness, Alboury's actions did not appear to be motivated by a desire to punish her for her colonialist views. I discussed how the 'darkness' did not punish her because it disagreed with the way in which it had been qualified. She was not punished because her perversely utopic vision of a community of collective guilt and sorrow was seen as untenable by those she sought to recruit into it. She was punished because she encouraged Alboury to take the money after all, to become as inauthentic and weak as the whites. In other words, she threatened to sully the 'pure' blackness underpinning the identity of the blacks.

In the case of *Quai ouest*, the warehouse is a place in which Koch's own degeneracy can shine darkly, briefly and in secret before being extinguished on its inexorable descent on the vertical axis: "Je n'ai plus rien à donner" [I have nothing left to give] he asserts when bargaining his way across the warehouse towards the river. "I'm too old and too worn out to try and start a new life", he declares and then continues:

> Je veux seulement qu'on me laisse approcher du fleuve, qu'on me laisse ramasser deux pierres. Je ne ferai aucun bruit. Je ne veux pas qu'on me frappe, qu'on me fasse mal. (1985, 22)
>
> [I just want to be allowed to get to the river, collect a couple of rocks. I won't make a sound. I don't want anyone to hurt me.]

As I will explore, the narrative of the play would appear to critique this desire for white self-revelation. Koch is fished out of the water by Abad after his first attempt at suicide, then he becomes terrified and realizes he wants to go home after all. But Koch does indeed die when the game becomes unexpectedly lethal.

3.3 Alboury, the source of the darkness in the warehouse

According to Monique, it would appear as if the location has only recently become degraded:

> Autrefois il y avait des lampadaires, ici ; c'était un quartier bourgeois, ordinaire, animé, je m'en souviens très bien. Il y avait des parcs avec des arbres ; il y avait des voitures ; il y avait des cafés et des commerces, il y avait des vieux qui traversaient la rue, des enfants dans des poussettes ; les anciens entrepôts du port servaient de parkings et certains, de marchés couverts. C'était un quartier d'artisans et de retraités, un monde ordinaire, innocent. Il n'y a pas si longtemps. (1985, 13)
>
> [There used to be streetlamps here, and this was a bourgeois neighbourhood, ordinary and very busy, I can remember. There were parks with trees, cars, shops and bars, old people crossing the street, kids in prams. They used the warehouses as car parks and covered markets. There were

craftspeople, people living out their retirement, normal, harmless people. Not long ago, either.]

For his part, Charles cannot imagine why else anyone would come to the warehouse. He asks Koch what are his motives for coming:

> Vous voulez qu'on vide les lieux, n'est-ce pas? Il faudrait être plus rat qu'un rat pour se plaire ici. Il n'y a plus de café, plus de boîte, plus une femme ; il n'y a plus de route en service, plus d'électricité, plus de bateau, plus d'eau. (1985, 18)
>
> [You want us to split, dont you? You'd have to be lower than a rat to have fun 'round here. There's no bars, no clubs, no women; no roads anymore, no power, no more boats, no more water.]

The slide from bourgeois normality has transformed the location, now cut off from the other side of the port with the cancellation of passenger ferries, into a lugubrious setting for Grand Guignol or perhaps a *film noir*: "Mais aujourd' hui, Seigneur!" [But today, Jesus!] Monique exclaims, "N'importe quel individu, le plus innocent, qui se perdrait là même en plein jour pourrait se faire massacrer en plein soleil et son cadavre jeté dans le fleuve sans que personne ne songe à le chercher ici" [Any fool wandering in here could get hacked to bits in broad daylight and dumped in the river and nobody would dream of looking for them] (1985, 13). Indeed, the only thing remaining of the location's previous splendour is the view of the new port which one can only access by crossing the dark central space of the warehouse and arriving at the exact point on the pier from which we discover Koch wishes to throw himself into the river.

A variety of explanations are proposed for the degeneration of the location. Monique suggests with assurance an argument based on the supply and demand model. Koltès seems to be exposing this formula by reversing and extending it to its perverse logical conclusion:

> Tout cela, c'est de la faute aux loyers trop bas. Il fallait encourager les propriétaires à relever leurs loyers, il aurait fallu les forcer à les relever, même s'ils n'avaient pas voulu. Les cafards ont pénétré ici comme des soldats vainqueurs ; les propriétaires ont laissé les murs se lézarder, les vitres brisées n'ont pas été remplacées, les vieux sont morts ; alors les commerçants ont fini par déserter ces quartiers et aujourd'hui tous ces immeubles, des kilomètres de rues bordées d' immeubles ne rapportent plus un sou, pas un centime à personne, rien du tout, rien, c'est dégoûtant. (1985, 13-14)
>
> [Of course it's all because of the low rents. The landlords should have been made to raise the rents even if they didn't want to. The rats and the cockroaches have blitzkrieged the place, the landlords let the walls crumble, the broken windows stay broken, the old people are all dead. So the shop owners have moved out, and now all these buildings, these miles of streets and buildings don't bring in a single cent to anybody, nothing at all, nothing, it's disgusting.]

A first indication of the generative source of the darkness at the core of the warehouse is made manifest in an introductory text appearing before the opening scene. Indeed, the destabilization of the location seems to have begun two years earlier when Charles, the

son of the Hispanic immigrants, discovers the arrival of a black man in this location:

> Une aube de tempête de neige, deux ans auparavant, Charles, qui rentrait par le ferry, fut averti par les ouvriers qu'il croisait chaque matin et qui embarquaient pour travailler au port, d'une présence anormale et inquiétante, le long du mur extérieur du hangar. Il s'y rendit et aperçut une sorte de tas, sombre et immobile, à demi recouvert par la neige, qui ressemblait vaguement à un sanglier mort ou assoupi. Il s'en approcha; lorsqu'il en fut à deux mètres, la forme se dressa brusquement, grande, épaisse, agitée de tremblements, les yeux brillants et avec une calotte de neige sur la tête; elle prononça quelques mots inintelligibles, à ce point inintelligibles qu'ils firent rire Charles qui en retint les dernières consonances, probablement anglaises ou, peut-être, arabes, dont il baptisa provisoirement l'animal. Puis, car il était d'excellente humeur, il le prit par le bras, l'entraîna dans le hangar, lui découvrit un coin où l'étranger fut à l'abri de la neige. Il y disposa quelques cartons pour lui tenir chaud, et, après l'avoir vu s'y terrer, dégageant une intense fumée de tout le corps, Charles s'éloigna en sifflotant et rentra chez lui. (1985, 9)

> [One snowy morning, two years previously, Charles was returning home on the ferry when he was told by the workers whom he met, each morning, setting out in the opposite direction to go to work in the port, of a strange disturbing presence by the outside wall of the warehouse. He made his way there and saw a kind of dark, motionless heap, half covered with snow, which vaguely resembled a dead or sleeping boar. He came closer, and when he was two paces away, the form suddenly stood up; large, thick and shivering, with shining eyes and a snow cap on its head; it spoke several unintelligible words, probably English or perhaps Arabic, of which Charles caught the last sounds, and which were so unintelligible that they made him laugh, and he used them to name the creature. Then, as he was in a good mood, he took the creature by the arm, brought it into the warehouse and found it a corner where it was sheltered form the snow. He arranged a couple of boxes to keep it warm and when he saw that it had settled down, with a heavy smoke rising from its body, Charles left, whistling, and went home.]

The "strange, disturbing presence" of the black man is once again, like Alboury before him, an inscrutable, "unintelligible" entity which, in this reincarnation, is a "dark, motionless heap" resembling a "dead or sleeping" animal. Despite its immobility, the creature does evidently have an important internal energy of some kind, for it has the capacity for exuding "heavy smoke" from "its" body.

The stage directions describe Abad as a man approximately thirty years old, "sans nom, que Charles, au début, appela deux ou trois fois 'Abad'" [without a name, who Charles, at the beginning, will call 'Abad' a number of times] (1985, 7). Koltès was initially going to call Abad 'Marley' after Bob Marley. His use of the name of this left-wing Jamaican reggae singer with whom he was fascinated is similar to how his love of karate manifested itself in the prevalence of the martial art amongst the Africans of *Combat*. A reader may once again be left wondering how conscious such creative decisions were. At any rate, Koltès' tendency to blur ethnic differences such as those between an African and a Jamaican (with the first of these already being far too vast a category from which to glean any specific determinants), is additional evidence that the socio-historical determinants resulting from differences in geographical or ethnic origin were, as in the case of *Combat*, not particularly relevant or of interest to Koltès for the creation of his characters.

Koltès noted at an early stage of the writing of the text that he intended to use a name based on the three letters 'Abd'. In some working notes, he explained that: "L'abréviation: Abd, dont je me sers pour désigner un personnage est provisoire; j'ai l'intention de composer son nom à partir de ce préfixe arabe qui signifie: "qui appartient à." [The abbreviation Abd, which I'm using to name a character, is a temporary one. My intention is to create his name based on this Arabic prefix, which means 'that which belongs to'] (Stratz 1990, 22-23). The name serves the function of qualifying Abad as being from somewhere foreign to the metropolis in which he finds himself. It also serves to anchor him semantically to slavery. Viewed in perspective with Koltès' tendency towards universalization and generalization with respect to questions of identity, it may not be entirely speculative to suggest that Abad's state of bondage is metaphorical of what Koltès feels to be the wider state of blackness (be it a Jamaican or an African blackness). Such a view would certainly be consonant with his understanding, articulated around the time of the creation of *Combat*, that people in the world are divided into two categories, namely those who are condemned and those who are not.

The relationship between Abad and slavery is thrown into question by Koltès' remarks in the endnotes to the play when he explains that Abad is the play's central character: "Abad n'est pas un personnage en négatif au milieu de la pièce" [Abad is not the negative of the play] he wrote, on the contrary "c'est la pièce qui est le négatif d'Abad" [it is the play which is the negative of Abad] (1985, 107). This indication, in tandem with the stage directions to the effect that he exudes energy, suggests that the initial association of Abad with an imprisoning darkness may also contain, as with Alexis and Abad before him, the seeds of his eventual 'emergence.'

Indeed, like Alboury before him, Abad's eventual emergence begins with his resistance. Abad's characteristics are gradually revealed, and the reasons why he has embraced his own blackness "as a good colour to hide in" — as Alboury suggests in a different context in *Combat* — become more evident. Twenty pages into the play the reader encounters a text attributed to the character Abad. This is one of three parenthesized texts not intended for either the production or even programme notes, but solely for the reader.[8] The text appears to be Abad's attempt to answer a question about his identity, prompted by a question from an unspecified interlocutor: "Qui es-tu ? celui qui a vu le diable, qui es-tu ?" [Who are you? You who have seen the devil, who are you?] the person asks. "J'essaie de le dire" [I'm trying to say] (1985, 19) replies Abad, who like Alboury in *Combat*, has now been associated with both blackness and the evil of the devil. Abad explains that his current state of identity is related to a frightening encounter with a white

[8] Koltès specified in the endnotes for the play that "The passages in quotation marks in parentheses which are written in the form of novelesque monologues are not to be performed. Neither are they destined for programmes. They each have their place between two scenes for the reading of the play, and that's where they must stay. The play was meant to be both read and staged." (1985, 105)

person:

> je rentrais une nuit par le grand jardin avec le sac d'école sur le dos, je vis un homme sous le réverbère le dos tourné, je m'approchais de lui, il tourna la tête, seulement la tête, il avait la peau rose et pelée et des yeux bleus, j'ai lâché mon sac et je me suis sauvé en courant jusqu'à la maison, j'essayais de le dire : qui es-tu ? (1985, 19)
>
> [I was coming home one night through the park with my schoolbag on my back, I saw a man under the street lamp with his back turned, I went closer to him, he turned his head, only his head, his skin was pink and mangy, his eyes were blue, I dropped my bag and ran all the way home, I tried to say it: 'Who are you'?]

He continues with the kind of folksy proverbial talk that qualified Alboury's speech when he explains that "une idée met le temps que met une fourmi à marcher des pieds jusqu'aux cheveux pour me venir jusqu'à l'esprit mais j'essaie de le dire" [An idea takes as long to make its way into my mind as it takes an ant to crawl from your feet to your scalp, but still I'm trying to explain it] (ibid., 19). He continues by explaining how he has been doubly displaced from his home. His first displacement comes from being mysteriously ostracized from his family and having his name "torn" from him by his father for simply not being ill one night with a cough while his siblings were all ill: "le matin il demanda aux femmes qu'elles ne me coiffent plus comme elles coiffent mes frères ni qu'elles ne me nourissent plus et que je n'habite plus sous le même toit que mes frères" [in the morning he told the women not to comb my hair the way they combed my brothers' hair and to feed me no more and that I no longer lived under the same roof as my brothers] (ibid., 19). The elliptical play of disease and health, black and white that would appear to have somehow contributed to Abad's banishment takes another turn as we read of what seems to be a discussion of an albino:

> des enfants naissent sans couleur, nés pour l'ombre et les cachettes avec les cheveux blancs et la peau blanche et les yeux sans couleur, condamnés à courir de l'ombre d'un arbre à l'ombre d'un autre arbre et à midi lorsque le soleil n'épargne aucune partie de la terre à s'enfouir dans le sable ; à eux leur destinée bat le tambour comme la lèpre fait sonner les clochettes et le monde s'en accommode. (1985, 19)
>
> [some children are born without colour, born for shadows and secret places with white hair and white skin and eyes without colour, condemned to run from the shadow of one tree to the shadow of the next and at noon when the sun spares no part of the earth they must bury themselves in the sand; for them, their destiny beats a drum like the leper rings his bell and the world goes along with it]

In this portion of text 'whiteness' is recast from Abad's perspective as a sickness, and the reader is left wondering if the blue-eyed individual evoked previously is an albino black person or a white person simply understood by Abad to be an albino black person. This pathologization of whiteness, and Abad's recognition of whiteness as contributory to his state of alienation, is similar in function to Alboury's discussion in *Combat* of the arrival of the whites acting as a kind of cloud coming between his people and the sun.

This reverse pathologization combines with the centering of blackness ('Abad is not the negative of the play, the play is the negative of Abad') to serve as a locus of resistance to his denigration at the hands of the whites. Abad's resistance lies hidden deep within the text, in a portion not to be staged. Indeed, Abad continues by communicating without speaking (since the text is not intended for delivery on stage) of blacks who are the antithesis of those "born without colour" and who have something dangerous within them waiting to emerge:

> à d'autres, une bête, logée en leur coeur, reste secrète et ne parle que lorsque règne le silence autour d'eux; c'est la bête paresseuse qui s'étire lorsque tout le monde dort, et se met à mordiller l'oreille de l'homme pour qu'il se souvienne d'elle. (1985, 19-20)
>
> [for others, a beast, lodged in their hearts, lies hidden and does not speak until silence reigns about them; it's the slothful beast that stretches when the world is sleeping, and sets itself to gnawing at man's ear to remind him of its existence.]

At this early stage of the text Abad retreats back into the silence which qualifies him. He states that "plus je le dis plus je le cache, c'est pourquoi je n'essaierai plus, ne me demande plus qui je suis" [the more I say it, the more I hide it, that's why I won't try anymore, don't ask me anymore who I am] (ibid., 20). Abad's assertion demonstrates a marked similarity with Koltès' thoughts from the time of *Les Amertumes,* that the attempt to formulate and clarify truths by means of paradoxical language can only conceal a more profound reality best experienced through a form of non-linguistic presencing.[9] The promise of an emergence of a more profound reality, Koltès indicated in 1976, could lead out from the deeper (as opposed to superficial) level of the self which is "completely inexpressible, always unspoken, frequently forgotten" as well as "static and indifferent to the vagaries of existence" (1999b,app. B,4).

Abad manifests a remarkable similarity to the qualities of the deeper reality or self which Koltès discusses earlier in his career. He is largely silent, relegated to the margins of the space which is already a marginalized location, firm in his resolve and control of the goings-on in the warehouse, and emanating a powerful energy. His centrality to the text recalls that of both Alexis in *Les Amertumes* and Alboury in *Combat*, who served as witnesses to the action of the play as well as eventually demonstrating some form of resistance to that action in the form of a surprise manifestation of presence of strength. Abad's early reference to "the beast within" suggests the possibility of a similar emergence in him: the apparition of the disruptive and emancipatory *logos* of a conflation of blackness and 'authentic' identity. Indeed, Abad's secret text which lapses back into potent silence serves as the beginning of what will eventually become, specifically on the level of the plot, Abad's progression from the position of having been derogatorily named by Charles, to the reversed status position of being Charles' murderer. The

[9] Koltès stresssed that the use of language in addressing important issues of relationships between people, or between the audience and the stage, might lead us to "drown in this interminable interior twisting and turning chit chat that ends up invading our entire mind" (1999b, 99;app B,4)

further implications of the establishment of what seems to be the *logos* of darkness in *Quai ouest* will continue to be of vital concern in the rest of this chapter.

Koltès' further thoughts on Abad reveal a fundamental contradiction embedded within his representation of the character. In a second series of assertions about Abad, Koltès attempts to extract him from the discourse of darkness in which the character has been firmly embedded as a result of his metaphoric relationship with the warehouse. "Il y a deux manières de parler d'Abad" [There are two ways of speaking of Abad], Koltès noted (1986b, 60). He suggested that, although the description of Abad as not being the negative image of the play provides a useful paradigm for a synoptic understanding of the text, he felt that such an approach was "un peu littéraire" [a little literary] (ibid.). Koltès stated that "peut-être vaut-il mieux en parler comme d'un personnage à part entière, parce qu'il en est un" [perhaps it's better to speak of (Abad) as a character entirely on his own, because he is one] (ibid.). Perhaps in a bid to avoid the exoticism and romanticism which he felt had been the basis of the success of *Combat*, Koltès set about systematically denying Abad the elements of his subjectivity which root him in the discourse from which he emerges and in which he, as representation, must be critically appraised. Koltès began by noting that Abad is "Finalement, ... ni plus ni moins secret que Koch; il est seulement moins familier" [In the end, ... neither more or less secret than Koch; he is only less familiar.] (1986b, 60). This absence of familiarity, Koltès noted, should not lead a reader or spectator to romanticize Abad. That which sets him apart is not some form of "mystérieux sauvage" [savage mystery] (ibid). Indeed, Koltès explained, Abad "n'est pas, morphologiquement, différent des autres; sa couleur est un élément important, mais sans motif; tout ce qui fait sa différence est volontaire de sa part" [is not, morphologically speaking, different from the others; his colour is an important element, but without a motive; everything which sets him apart is a result of his choice] (ibid.).

The above statement foregrounds the major difficulties in Koltès' tendency towards neglecting the significance of socio-political context in the construction of identity. Koltès emphasizes the role he plays in creating what he would evidently prefer to be power-neutral configurations of place and identity. First, when Koltès asserts that Abad's blackness is 'without a motive', I am assuming that he is referring to 'motives' in reference to his own intentions as an author. Considering the evidence presented to date concerning his strategic use of blackness, (although perhaps to a significant extent used unconsciously) Koltès' statement sounds somewhat disingenuous. Consider, for example, Koltès' assertions, discussed in the second chapter, that despite his attempts to be clear about his motives with regard to black men in Nigeria, he feared that his fascination was all "just about sex". Even if there were investigative means to verify the veracity of Koltès statement reagrding 'motive', his assertion that Abad's blackness is *without* a motive suggests that he assumes that the very representation of blackness does not bring with it associations, histories and layers of sedimented meaning from the world

beyond the fictional spaces he is creating.

Secondly, Koltès' statement that Abad 'choses' to set himself apart appears to be an attempt to give Abad a kind of agency or volition which would remove the character from the kinds of characterization of exoticism which the viewing public imposed on *Combat*. By disavowing a motive for Abad's blackness and by suggesting the reasons for his difference from the character's own choice, Abad's blackness and the history that that blackness bears (something about which Koltès was quite adamant in his discussion of Alboury in *Combat*) risk being erased.

However, the wider discursive associations with Abad's blackness are not as easily deleted. Primitivity and sex are what Abad seems to exude. Note, for example, how French designer Daniel Jeanneteau primitivizes Abad during an appraisal of the character made at the time of director Michel Froehly's staging of *Quai ouest* in Paris in 1994:

> A lot of desire and sensuality are circulating in this text. Abad is a magnificent hero, a fundamental character. He's a totem and resembles a god. He is both the darkest stain, the lowest of the low, and all of Africa, the animist power. A production must feed itself from his strength and his force, and the character has to be more of a magical pillar than a silent presence. We should have developed in Abad a sense of obscure forces and a kind of eroticism. (Jeanneteau 1996, 97)

Koltès himself very allusively suggested that the warehouse is a homosexual pick-up joint. He told of how the idea for the play came with an exchange that he witnessed in the docklands warehouse between "un homme d'âge mûr, inquiet, nerveux, venu là pour chercher de la came ou autre chose, et un grand type qui s'amuse à le terroriser et qui, peut-être, finira par le frapper pour de bon" [a middle-aged man, anxious, nervous, come there to look for drugs or something else, and a big fellow who amuses himself terrorizing him, and who will perhaps haul off and hit him for good] (1986b, 60). But it is within the plot of the play itself that the secret unfolding of desire is more evident. Initially, as French critic Anne-Françoise Benhamou points out, Abad and Charles' negotiations about getting to the other side of the warehouse are not sexual (on a textual level at least), even if their encounters echo Koltès' description of the encounter he witnessed (Benhamou 1996, 28-29). It is only somewhat further on, with the encounter between Fak and Claire that the warehouse becomes sexualized. As Fak hits on Claire, he repeatedly uses the euphemistic "passe là-dedans" [go in there] (1985, 25-26), referring ostensibly to the warehouse, as a way of covering his real intentions. The play's erotic mystery is also to be found in the way in which the play organises the enigma around the building that one only rarely sees from inside, and into which the characters enter for obscure reasons. Koltès also described the very sensual fashion in which light and shadow plays in the space; how the day slips "dans chaque trou de la tôle, laissant les parties dans l'ombre et modifiant cette ombre" [through each hole in the roof, leaving some areas in the shadows, and modifying those shadows] like "un rapport

amoureux entre la lumière et un objet qui résiste" [an amorous relationship between the light and an object which resists it] (Koltès 1986b, 59).

Once again, the metaphoric relationship between Abad and the warehouse signals an emphasis on Abad's sexual potency, and thus the relationship Koltès establishes between blackness and sexuality. Remembering Koltès' thoughts about blackness and the erotic from the last chapter sheds light on his understanding of blackness and sexuality and how his understanding then helps ground his conceptualization of the warehouse as a dark, sexualized and marginalized location.

The discourse of primitivization and sexualization which contextualizes Abad cannot simply be derailed by the playwright's will. Despite Koltès' attempts to extricate Abad from the discourse which determines him, Abad's presence in the warehouse is inflected with markers of the same type of primitivizing discourse which marked Alboury's relationship with the landscape of "terror and solitude" surrounding the industrial compound in *Combat*.

3.4 The "rules of the game" are refined

The preceding discussion of Koltès' fictionalization of the warehouse, the white characters' experience of the warehouse, and Abad's affiliation with the location and his identity as a primitive containing the seed of resistance characteristic of the earlier characters of Alexis and Alboury, has served to outline the representational framework of the 'container' of the warehouse that Koltès filled with the action of the play. The investigation may now further pursue the representation of Abad and ethnicity in general by detailing the way in which the central black figure interacts with those around him. This detailing is intended to establish an anatomy of the ways in which the rules of encounter Koltès' post-colonial contact zone have provided increased differentiation from previous dynamics of encounter in *Combat* and *Les Amertumes*. The discussion of Koltès' increasingly formalized and sophisticated understanding of the rules of the theatrical game will consist of an investigation of encounters between vastly different characters, the inherent violence of the encounters and the way in which these encounters are regulated and paced by rules of exchange. This discussion will allow all these factors to be demonstrated to contribute to a hierarchy of authenticity of ethnicity in the play. This hierarchy of ethnicity is one which echoes Koltès' earliest assertions about hierarchy of identity and being in *Les Amertumes* and surrounding material.

3.5 Encounters between difference

A pivotal tendency of Koltès' dramaturgy which is increasingly formalized in *Quai ouest*, one which is very closely related to his representation of ethnicity, is the tendency towards the exacerbation of difference between his characters. In *Les Amertumes* I explored the extent to which the animosity occurring among the characters (other than Alexis) was a result of 'forces' which seemingly had no source. In *Combat*, the fundamental difference between Alboury and the other characters had its source in the "chasm" between the experience of the black and white characters. This textual reality was informed by Koltès' experience of guilt in the face of the underprivileged and the black 'condemned' of the world as he described them. The 'chasm' was also brought about by sexual difference and distance. Of course, it also seems safe to assume that the difference between his characters was also brought about by the dramaturgical necessity of generating tension between them. In addition, important locational and proxemic considerations in *Les Amertumes* and *Combat*, related to the restriction of space and time, provided the dramaturgical constraints necessary to hyperbolize the tension between the characters which generated the action of the play.

Chéreau and Peduzzi emphasized elements of this compression of space and time in the staging of *Quai ouest*, all the while retreating from the ambiant design concept of *Combat* by creating a set in a proscenium arch-style setting. Although I will return to the question of the design at the end of the chapter, it is useful at this stage to have a sense of how Peduzzi set out to create a spatial and temporal environment in which the characters might actually live:[10]

> I drew vertiginous lines of escape: the characters find themselves in a kind of knot, a complex labyrinth. From this location, this place where people impose themselves on one another, I tried to build my own structure: an articulated architecture within a classical proscenium arch setting, a very rough location: blocks and streets within which you're always turning around something without finding it, but always knocking into things. (Scali, 1986)

Echoing the intent of the overwhelming design environment of *Combat*, Pedduzi concluded by stating that:

> I didn't create a theatre design, but rather a location in which people would like to finish, or begin, their lives: a place with a thousand ways of escape, but where one stays. (ibid.)

The multiplicity of spaces and their many false ways of escape offered by the revolving set emphasized the multi-spatial elements of the text, in which a variety of locations in

[10] Peduzzi was inspired by photographs from a New York docklands and his experience growing up in Le Havre after the second World War: "There was a place kind of like [the warehouse] there, a bit of waste land, kind of tortuous, in which a kind of scrabbling humanity was trying to survive after the war. They found scraps of lead and sold them." (Scali,1986)

and around the warehouse are juxtaposed. This approach was markedly different from that of *Combat*, where space and place, sign and signified, were collapsed in the layout of the location.

With the writing of *Quai ouest*, Koltès was becoming increasingly clear about his interest in how the palimpsests of difference afforded by such 'strange' locations that served as a backdrop to the coming into contact of characters. He felt that encounters whose major tension was generated by mutual feelings of estrangement between individuals were fundamentally theatrical in nature:

> Il m'arrive parfois, lorsque je suis avec une personne dont rien, je dis bien: rien — sauf le fait de manger, de dormir et de marcher — ne ressemble à telle autre, il m'arrive de me dire: et si je les présentais l'un à l'autre, qu'arriverait-il? Dans la vie, bien sûr, il n'arriverait rien; les chiens s'accommodent bien des humains sans être quotidiennement stupéfaits des différences. Il faut des circonstances, des évènements ou des lieux bien précis pour les obliger à se regarder et à se parler; la guerre, la prison en sont, je suppose; ce hangar en était un; le plateau de théâtre en est un, certainement. (1986b, 59)

> Sometimes it happens to me, when I'm with someone about whom nothing, and I mean by that: nothing — except for the fact of eating, sleeping and walking — resembles someone else I know, I say to myself: what if I introduced them to one another, what would happen? Nothing would happen in life of course; dogs get well used to human beings without being stunned by the differences on a daily basis. You need particular circumstances, events or places to make them look at and talk to one another. War and prisons are some, I suppose; this warehouse was one, the stage is one, most certainly. (59)

It would be entirely speculative to suggest that Koltès' concern with the representation of differences of ethnicity was secondary to his concern over the generation of tension by evoking absolute difference. However, it is interesting to note that the latter interest precedes the former in a statement the author made about the possibilities offered by the location:

> Peu d'endroits vous donnent, comme ce hangar disparu, le sentiment de pouvoir abriter n'importe quoi — je veux dire par là: n'importe quel événement impensable ailleurs. Alors, bien sûr, ma première idée fut de s'y faire rencontrer deux personnes qui n'avaient aucune raison de se rencontrer, nulle part et jamais. Ainsi sont nés Koch et Abad. (1986b, 59)

> [Few places give you, like this non-functioning warehouse, the feeling of being able to shelter absolutely anything — and by that I mean: any event unimaginable elsewhere. So, of course, my first idea was to have, inside, two people meet who had no reason to meet one another, there or anywhere else. Thus Koch and Abad were born.]

The greatest difference between individuals Koltès can imagine is that of a white executive and a black immigrant, and it is only after having established the primacy of the encounter of difference that this difference was qualified as having an ethnic basis.

As I have suggested above, underlying Koltès' use of simple and immediately

recognizeable ethnic qualifiers such as skin colour as a means of augmenting difference, lies an important quality of the koltesian contact zone. This aspect is the seeming inevitability of conflict that arises between particular individuals who happen to meet one another. With the writing of *Quai ouest*, this tendency has become increasingly differentiated.

Koltès provided a grounding explanation for this phenomenon in a text accompanying *Dans la solitude des champs de coton,* a play written concurrently with *Quai ouest* but produced later. In this initially unnamed text which would later be referred to as "Si un chien rencontre un chat" ("If a Cat Meets a Dog") Koltès introduced a theory of instant enmity:

> Les ennemis le sont de nature, et ils se reconnaissent comme les bêtes se reconnaissent à l'odeur. Il n'y a pas de raison à ce que le chat hérisse le poil et crache devant un chien inconnu, ni à ce que le chien montre les dents et grogne. Si c'était de la haine, il faudrait qu'il y ait eu quelque chose avant, la trahison de l'un, la perfidie de l'autre, un sale coup quelque part; mais il n'y a pas de passé commun entre les chiens et les chats, pas de sale coup, pas de souvenir, rien que le désert et du froid. On peut être irréconciliables sans qu'il y ait eu de brouille; on peut tuer sans raison; l'hostilité est déraisonnable. (1986c)

> [Real animals are enemies to begin with, and they recognize themselves in the same way that animals recognize each other's scent. There's no reason why a cat's back goes up and it starts spitting when it sees an unfamiliar dog, nor is there a reason for the dog to bare its teeth and growl. If it was hate, something would have to come before, the treachery of one or the other, a dirty move on someone's part. But there's no shared history between the cat and the dog, no treachery, only a cold emptiness. There can be irreconcilability without a quarrel, murder does not need a motive, hostility is irrational.]

Koltès transferred to human beings this gloomy vision of biology as destiny. Traces of this biologism are evident in his strategic use of the word 'species' to emphasize irreconcilability as a requisite state between human beings. In a section of the text preceding the above quotation, Koltès introduced the possibility of a cat and a dog meeting. He then transferred the notion of irremediable biological difference between these two animals to a discussion of the encounter of two human beings. By drawing such a parallel between human beings and animals, Koltès consolidated the primordialist understanding of ethnicity that became evident in his work through the study of *Combat.* Koltès affirmed that "si deux hommes, deux espèces contraires, sans histoire commune, sans langage familier, se trouvent par fatalité face à face" [if two men, two opposite species, with no shared history, no common language, find that fate has brought them face to face] in a defamiliarizing location, then "il n'existe rien d'autre entre eux que de l'hostilité" [there can be nothing between them except hostility] (1986c). He continued to build a case for the inevitability of tension by stressing once again how hostility "n'est pas un sentiment" [is not an emotion], but rather "un acte, un acte d'ennemis, un acte de guerre sans motif" [an act, an act between enemies, an act of war without a motive] (ibid.). Such a grounding mechanism, operating in tandem with Koltès' understanding at

this point in his career of the role that location plays in exposing hidden tension, provides both a source for, and justification of, the continuous animosity between his characters. This resonates with the inevitability of extreme conflict which was a determining quality of *Les Amertumes*. The evidence to date, including the insights gained from the investigation of *Combat*, would suggest that Koltès' strategy tends to display rather than displace potentially restrictive formations of identity in order to generate more evident theatrical tension.[11]

A supplemental factor, related to issues of location and the inevitability of tension, indicates that Koltès' determination to demonstrate the explosive release of this tension is related to his wider understanding of the particular state of the world at the time when he was writing the play. As I have indicated, Koltès' conceptualization of tension can be understood to be based on his conviction of the universal impossibility of non-violent encounters between individuals. He notes that the compressed and accelerated state of the world, a kind of 'über' contact zone, prevents human beings from using the one quality that differentiates them from other animals. This quality is that of reflection which would allow humans to move beyond reflex-based and biologically determined combative stances to non-violent encounters:

> Notre territoire est trop petit, les hommes trop nombreux, les incompabilités trop fréquentes, les heures et les lieux obscurs et déserts trop innombrables pour qu'il y ait encore de la place pour la raison. (Koltès, 1986c)
>
> [Our habitat is too small, full of too many people, with far too frequent incompatibilities, far too many obscure and deserted locations and times for there to be any room left for reason.]

Implicit in this statement is a broad critique of certain socio-economic conditions which would contribute to the "too many people", and possibly even the excessive number of "obscure and deserted locations" or the "far too frequent incompatibilities". The broad critique, ethical in flavour as a result of its social moorings, could be understood to serve as Koltès' justification for staging both a condensed and a dilated version of a violent world as he witnessed it. This wild world is complete with struggles and brawls based,

[11] There are many precedents for Koltès' representation of radical difference for the purposes of the release of tension, from Hegel's writings on Antigone to the writings of a thinker such as the founder of the French Collège de Sociologie, Georges Bataille. The well-investigated writing of Bataille provides some useful insight into Koltès' fascination with 'binary terror.' Stoekl, one of Bataille's translators, suggests that Bataille "did not see a transformation or resolution of the socially matrixed forcefield of dialectics" nor "was he intent on crafting political change" (Stoekl 1985, xxiii, 14), but was interested in the "combustive moment of violent interaction"(14) that occurs when "two necessary and incompatible positions impossibly meet" (Stoekl 1985, xxiii). Bataille's interest in the formal effects of encounters between radical differences resonates with Koltès' proclaimed lack of interest in politics, and also with Koltès' fascination with removed locations in which socio-politically decontexualized encounters between supposedly 'natural' essentialized identities can occur.

Schneider's critique of Bataille's habit of essentializing identity positions in order to provide the fixed poles necessary for a forceful binary combustion will inspire the continued critique of such strategies in Koltès which will be further pursued over the course of the chapter (See Schneider 1997).

in part, on the mutual fixing of positions of identity and the lack of time and space in which to build non-confrontational relationships. The powerful presence of Abad will also play an ethical function similar to that played by Alexis in *Les Amertumes*. It comes as no surprise, however, that the implicit and undifferentiated nature of Koltès' broad socio-political critique seems to be accompanied by his harbouring implicit and undifferentiated assumptions about ethnicity. This may cause a reader to wonder, once again, at what point does Koltès' universalization of identity positions, based possibly on, as is evidenced in the above statement, a counternarrative critique of conditions leading to violence, come to serve predominantly as a display or reinscription of discursively generated and fixed positions of identity?

Koltès' choice of differentiation along the lines of ethnicity also quickly reintroduces an important dynamic which became apparent during the study of *Combat*. Koltès seemed to be deploying visible differences in ethnicity (such as skin colour) and wealth (poor black man/rich white man) as a means of generating the encounters of estrangement with which he was fascinated. The reader may recall from the discussion of *Combat*, in addition to serving a dramaturgical function, Koltès' belief that the occasionally oppressive effects related to representations of whiteness and blackness were inscribed within the broad social discourse of his time as indelibly as pigmentation is embedded in the skin. Such oppressive effects take the form of prejudices and stereotypes, as well as blockages to communication and advancement. Koltès' statement that "History is Manichean", made in reference to the tragic relationship between Alboury and Leonie, can serve as a summation of his understanding of the restrictions imposed on persons as a result of their ethnicity (1999a, 26,36).

In other words, Koltès' text performs two major actions simultaneously. First, Koltès (perhaps unconsciously) uses discursively generated stereotypes for reasons of dramaturgical efficacy. The text shows that foremost among these is the appearance of ethnic and socio-economic 'polar opposites' which offer the threat of binary collapse and resultant binary terror for wealthy whites. Indeed, this immediate suggestion of the intractability of signs pertaining to ethnicity revolving around a binarist paradigm (poor black immigrant/rich white executive) — what could be described in other words as Koltès' impulsive recourse to a kind of semiotic straightjacketing or portenteous predictability — would appear to be corollary in spirit to a variety of his views and positions explored to date. These positions include, amongst others, his assertions and demonstrations that history fixes identity irrevocably, as well as his demonstrated lifelong deployment of categorical binaries as a means of understanding individuals and phenomena.

Such tendencies combine with the insights gained from the investigation of *Combat* to provide the impression that, once again, Koltès' broad dramaturgical strategy in *Quai*

ouest may be self-contradictory in its critical aims. Indeed, it would seem that the second action of the text, as demonstrated by these statements revolving around encounter and ethnicity, is to cultivate and display disjuncture and dysfunction between decontextualized characters. These characters (again, perhaps unconsciously on Koltès' part) bear the hyperbolized markings of the socio-political discourse of which Koltès is critical, hyperbolized markings that in some instances perpetuate these same hegemonic representational structures.

To summarize then, in addition to providing the grounding substrate or *logos* of tension for his dramaturgical system, Koltès' statements regarding encounter and the inevitability of violence serve to confirm, as well as to shed light on, what would appear to be the profoundly deterministic and essentialist theories of identity informing his creation of character and ethnicity at work in the contact zone.

3.6 Diplomacy and exchange as the energies within the contact zone

The inevitability of violence brought on in part by the essentializing of identity positions is only momentarily displaced by the particularities of the characters' use of language. In the brief accompanying text (1986c) to *Dans la solitude des champs de coton* (1986a), a play written concurrently with *Quai ouest* but staged later, Koltès wrote that "Le premier acte de l'hostilité, juste avant le coup, c'est la diplomatie, qui est le commerce du temps." [The first act of hostility, just before the first hit, is diplomacy, which is the commerce of time] (ibid.). He continued to explain how this diplomacy, most frequently taking the form of language, was fundamentally duplicitous, in that it "joue l'amour en "l'absence de l'amour" [plays at love in the absence of love] and also reverses "desire" and "repulsion" in order to achieve its effects. He described in metaphorical terms how those engaged in such diplomacy are fated to fulfill essential destinies related to fixed positions of identity:

> c'est comme une forêt en flammes traversée par une rivière: l'eau et le feu se lèchent, mais l'eau est condamnée à noyer le feu, et le feu forcé de volatiliser l'eau. (ibid.)
>
> [it's like a river running through a burning forest, though: the water and fire lick one another, but the water is condemned to drown the fire, and the fire is forced to burn the water.]

As a result of the destinies determined by essentialized identities, "l'échange des mots ne sert qu'à gagner du temps avant l'échange des coups, parce que personne n'aime recevoir des coups et tout le monde aime gagner du temps" [the exchange of words serves only as a reprieve before the hitting starts, because no one likes being hit and everyone likes a reprieve]. Violence as an outcome in any encounter can only be delayed, never circumvented entirely.

The action that comprises both *Combat* and *Quai ouest* can be considered to fall into this interstitial moment of diplomacy. Koltès specified about *Combat* that if Horn had not lied to Alboury, or if conversely Alboury had not blocked Horn's intentions to deal away his dead brother's body, there would have been no play. Similarly in *Quai ouest*, Abad blocks Koch's intentions of killing himself and creates a narrative space within which all the encounters that constitute the action of the play take place.

Such 'diplomacy' occurs in almost every scene. Over and over, the threat of physical violence is momentarily delayed or displaced because of a bargaining dialogue. Consider for example Scene eight when Charles' considerations regarding the possible punishment of his sister take on a repetitive and almost baroque quality:

> CHARLES. — Je la tabasserai.
> FAK. — Pourquoi tu la tabasseras ?
> CHARLES. — Parce qu'elle t'a suivi
> FAK. — Ce n'est pas elle qui m'a suivi, c'est moi qui l'ai suivi.
> CHARLES. — Je la tabasserai quand-même. Une fille n'a rien à foutre dans la rue à son âge.
> FAK.— C'est à cause de trop de café qu'elle a bu.
> CHARLES.— Elle n'a pas à boire du café à son âge.
> FAK.— Elle n'est quand même pas si petite que ça qu'elle ne pourrait pas boire du café. Tu es son frère, c'est pour ça que tu ne vois pas qu'elle n'est pas si petite que ça, pas du tout, loin de là, pour le café en tous les cas.
> CHARLES.— Justement, moi, je vois tout à fait l'âge qu'elle a, c'est pour ça que je dis qu'elle n'a pas à sortir la nuit, elle n'est plus assez petite pour cela, et je la tabasserai parce qu'elle t'a suivi.
> (1985, 34-35)

> [CHARLES.— I'm gonna beat the fuck out of her.
> FAK.— Why are you gonna beat the fuck out of her?
> CHARLES.— Cause she followed you.
> FAK.— She didn't follow me, I followed her.
> CHARLES.— I'm gonna beat the fuck out of her anyway. A girl shouldn't be on the fucking street at her age.
> FAK.— It's cause she drank too much coffee.
> CHARLES.— She shouldn't be drinking coffee at her age.
> FAK.— She's not too young to drink coffee. You're her brother, that's why you can't see that she's not really all that young, far from it, in fact, not for drinking coffee anyway.
> CHARLES.— Yeah, exactly, I see how old she is, that's why I say she's not going out at night, she's not too young for it anymore, and I'm gonna beat the fuck out of her cause she followed you.]

Charles never does beat his sister, but instead trades her for the keys to the Jaguar. He thereby engages in the other form of recurring displacement activity which serves to maintain the action of the play and keep the implosion of annihilation temporarily at bay.

Central to all the interactions among the characters, and very evident in the dialogue between Fak and Charles above, is the mechanism of the *deal*, or exchange. This mechanism serves as the communicative substratum upon which all the relationships and

diplomacy between characters are based. Koltès insisted in his notes published with *Quai ouest* that "ce sont des scènes de commerce, d'échange et de trafic, et il faut les jouer comme telles" [these are scenes of commerce, of exchange, and of trafficking, and they have to be played that way] (1985, 108).

Indeed, at the point in his life when he was writing *Quai ouest*, Koltès was beginning to articulate his understanding of a world run by relationships of exchange. He would frequently defend this position from charges of pessimism:

> La manière commerciale d'envisager les rapports humains me paraît plus proche de la réalité; c'est de cette façon-là que j'ai envie d'en parler en tout cas, où encore je me sens le plus libre. Ce n'est pas que j'ignore l'affectivité; l'affectivité existe aussi dans le commerce. Par contre, si je ne vois guère de tendresse systématique dans ces relations-là, je rencontre pourtant de l'enthousiasme, des choses comme cela. (1999a, 127-28)
>
> [Understanding human relationships as commercial ones seems closer to reality; that's the way that I want to talk about things anyway, or the way in which I feel the freest. I don't ignore emotion; there's emotion in commerce. On the other hand, if I don't see any systematic tenderness in those types of relations, I certainly encounter enthusiasm and those kinds of things.]

Koch, for one, begins the play by offering gifts to Charles and Abad so that they will escort him across the warehouse to the river where he can drown himself. He places his cufflinks, watch and lighter on the ground in a gesture that Claude Stratz, the directorial assistant to Chéreau on *Quai ouest*, explained was inspired for Koltès by Columbus' offering of trinkets to native North Americans (1990, 24). The wealthy white businessman demonstrates himself to be from a different economic environment and not used to this direct form of dealing:

> Le problème est que l'argent, je veux dire l'argent liquide, les pièces, les billets, cela fait longtemps que je n'en ai pas eu en main, cela fait longtemps, vous devez le savoir, que l'argent ne se transporte plus en pièces, en billets, comme au Moyen-Age, je suppose, je ne connais rien à l'Histoire ; à la rigueur de quoi boire un verre dans un bar ou acheter des cigarettes ; mais comme j'ai arrêté de fumer et que l'alcool, je n'en bois que très rarement, je n'ai sur moi que des cartes de crédit; je veux bien vous laisser mes cartes de crédit, si vous savez comment vous en servir, je sais que ce n'est pas facile ; mais si vous savez, alors tant mieux pour vous; moi je m'en fous. (1985, 15)
>
> [The trouble is, money, I mean hard cash, coins and bills, that's something I haven't carried in a long time. I'm sure you know, its been a very long time since money meant coins and bills, the Middle Ages, I guess, I don't know my history. I never carry more than enough for a drink or cigarettes, and since I stopped smoking and hardly drink, I only carry credit cards. I'll gladly leave you my credit cards, if you can use them, I know its not easy, but if you can, well, good for you; I don't give a shit.]

The warehouse has a levelling effect on people's ability to trade, however, for Abad controls all the deals and refuses to allow Koch to cross the warehouse to kill himself. In his first appearance he whispers directions into Charles' ear concerning what should be

done about Koch. Abad appears quite concerned that the daylight forces of order not make an appearance at the warehouse:

> Abad et Charles se parlent, longuement, à l'oreille.
>
> CHARLES (à Koch). — Il ne veut pas.
> KOCH.— Pourquoi?
> CHARLES.— Il dit qu'un mort ici attirerait la police.
> KOCH.— Foutaises. L'affaire sera étouffée. Voulez-vous que j'écrive un mot, qui vous blanchisse? Vous le porterez à cette femme.
> CHARLES.— Il ne veut pas.
> KOCH.— Dites-lui qu'avec deux pierres dans les poches, mon corps collera tout au fond, personne n'y verra rien.
> CHARLES. — Il refuse.
> KOCH. — Suppliez-le.
> CHARLES. — Non.
> (1985, 23)

> [Abad and Charles whisper together at length.
>
> CHARLES.— (*to Koch*) He doesn't like it.
> KOCH.— Why?
> CHARLES.— He says a body here will attract the police.
> KOCH.— Bullshit. It'll be hushed up. You want me to write you a note, to clear you? You can give it to the woman.
> CHARLES.— He doesn't like it.
> KOCH.— Tell him with a couple of stones in my pockets, I'll sink to the bottom, nobody'll see anything.
> CHARLES.— He says no.
> KOCH.— Beg him.
> CHARLES.— Nope. (23)]

Abad is evidently a locus of strength in this 'dark' domain. Even when Charles disobeys Abad's wishes and trades a walk with Koch to his place of suicide for the keys to Koch's car, Abad blocks the exchange and dives into the water and rescues Koch before he is drowned. This ability to block deals is an important factor in Abad's increased authenticity over the other characters. His increased authenticity, unlike Alexis' role in *Les Amertumes*, depends on an actual intervention in the plot, and unlike Albourey in *Combat*, involves not simply a refusal, but a pro-active blocking of the action. Abad's role as dealer consolidates the increasingly active role that Koltès' 'central' characters take in their manipulation of their environment.

Abad's role as dealer and deal blocker contributes significantly to the gradual erosion of all sophisticated forms of economic exchange to which characters like Koch would be accustomed. This leads to the eventual exposure of the final commerce of language, the ultimate form of frequently desperate exchange that precedes violence and death. A first sign of this erosion would appear to be that the warehouse is the site of recently evacuated commercial activity:

> Tout cela, c'est de la faute aux loyers trop bas. Il fallait encourager les propriétaires à relever leurs loyers, il aurait fallu les forcer à les relever, même s'ils n'avaient pas voulu. Les rats et les cafards ont pénétré ici comme des soldats vainqueurs; les propriétaires ont laissé les murs se lézarder, les vitres brisées n'ont pas été remplacées, les vieux sont morts; alors les commerçants ont fini par déserter ces quartiers et aujourd'hui tous ces immeubles, des kilomètres de rues bordées d' immeubles ne rapportent plus un sou, pas un centime à personne, rien du tout, rien, c'est dégoùtant. (1985, 13-14)
>
> [Of course it's all because of the low rents. The landlords should have been made to raise the rents even if they didn't want to. The rats and the cockroaches have blitzkrieged the place, the landlords let the walls crumble, the broken windows stay broken, the old people are all dead. So the shop owners have moved out, and now all these buildings, these miles of streets and buildings don't bring in a single cent to anybody, nothing at all, nothing, its disgusting.]

A more simplified form of exchange occurs within the space now that it is has been abandoned by those engaged in more sophisticated and codified forms of trade. A reader will quickly notice that every character in *Quai ouest* has something to sell. Each of their exchanges is related to one extent or another to the dealing that Abad does. Charles, the elder child of the immigrant family, is initially very protective of his sister Claire. For example, Charles tells Fak, the young male character Koltès describes as being "most likely Asian," to stay away from her. Charles suspects that Fak's intentions are sexually invasive ones. However, shortly after Charles confesses that he wishes to escape to the better side of the river, he trades Claire to Fak in return for the keys to Koch's Jaguar which the businessman has left outside the warehouse. Charles then gives the keys to Koch's assistant Monique in return for a promise of being able to accompany her to the other side of the port. Charles realizes he has been had, since the distributor cap is missing from the Jaguar. It becomes clear that Fak has removed the distributor cap and given it to Claire in return for allowing him to accompany her into the darkest part of the warehouse. In the meantime, Cécile has punctured the tires of the Jaguar, the car which the audience never sees, rendering both the keys and the distributor cap useless. Claude Stratz, Chéreau's assistant director, describes this series of exchanges which erase the value of the previous exchange:

> What's interesting is that the trading [in the play] doesn't simply refer back to a society where everything is being bought and sold, even feelings, but also shows characters in the process of running after useless objects. The keys are not of any use without the distributor cap, which is itself useless because the tires have been slashed. (1990, 22)

In a fascinating reversal of the general dynamics of the market economy, the recently decommercialized location of the warehouse serves as the site where all the objects in circulation between the characters lose their trading value. Consumerist icons such as the brandname Rolex or Jaguar are demonstrated to be utimately devoid of any real use or

value.[12] Indeed it is empty signs which drive the plot and are only provided temporary significance by the character's desires, in the same fashion that it is within the circulation of objects that are ultimately useless that the various desires within each of the characters are revealed. The fugitive evanescence of the value of each object serves only to indicate and remind each character of their failure.

When there are no objects left to exchange and the circulating objects have been shown to be devoid of any value, it is language which becomes currency. Human interaction becomes reduced to transaction, a "commerce between solitudes" as commentator Jean-Marc Lanteri describes the situation in *Quai ouest* (Lanteri, 367). A reader familiar with *Combat* may recall Horn's explication of diplomacy to the racist Cal:

> Il n'y a pas qu'à coup de flingue qu'on se défend, dans la vie, bon Dieu. Je sais me servir de ma bouche, moi; je sais parler et me servir des mots. (1989, 65)
>
> [Christ, you can't just shoot your way through life. Look at me: I've got a tongue in my head, I've learnt to speak and use words. Maybe I didn't go to school, but I can talk.] (1997a, 43)

Similarly, Cécile in *Quai ouest* is very aware of her "baratin" [talk] with which she hopes to scam Koch: "Jusqu'au soir il faut que je me cache, quand le soir commencera à venir j'irai trouver ce monsieur distingué avec mon baratin, si je commence tôt je serai cuite, mon baratin ne marche qu'aux premières heures du crépuscule." [I must hide myself till the evening, and when evening comes I'll go and find the smart gentleman and use my talk on him. If I start too early I'm fucked. My charm only works during early twilight.] (1985, 52)

Even the syntactical arrangement of certain portions of the dialogue becomes very stylized as the characters bargain with one another. Consider the exchange between Fak and Claire as Fak attempts to convince her to enter the warehouse:

> L'autoroute, dans la nuit, avec le bruit de l'eau contre les murs.
> Entre Fak, suivi de Claire.
> Ils s'arrêtent à la porte du hangar.

[12] In an early unnamed short story, Koltès uses the car as an allegory for the consumer society:

"Si j'étais capitaliste américain, j'achètrais une voiture de douze mêtres de long et de trois de largeur, blanche auz sièges de cuir rouge, de marque Chevrolet, décapotable et toujours décapotée pour qu'on puisse voir l'intérieur. J'y installerais des jets d'eau, de la musique, des projeteurs de couleurs, les plantes vertes et les femmes blondes; j'y mettrais un chauffeur noir pour la conduire et un valet (métis) en livrée a chaque porte, et je m'y coucherais dans un hamac de soie. Sur chaque coté, j'aurais fait écrire en grandes lettres dorées: "Ton châtiment, c'est de me voir" [If I was an American capitalist, I would buy a car 12 metres long and three metres wide, all white with red leather seats, a Chevrolet convertible that was always converted so that you could see inside. I'd install fountain spouts, music, colour projectors, green plants and blonde women; I'd put in a black chauffeur to drive it about and a mixed race valet waiting at each door. I would have 'Your punishment, is to look at me' written in big gold letters, on either side.] (Koltès 1991, 73)

A relationship linking poverty, servitude and ethnicity also makes itself evident in this fragment.

FAK. - Tu es venue jusqu'ici, maintenant passe là-dedans.
CLAIRE. - Il fait bien trop noir là-dedans pour que je passe.
FAK. - Il ne fait pas plus noir là-dedans qu'ici.
CLAIRE. - Eh bien justement, ici, il fait complètement noir.
FAK. - Il ne fait pas complètement noir ici puisque je te vois.
CLAIRE. - Et moi je ne te vois pas, pour moi il fait complètement noir donc.
FAK. - Si tu passes là-dedans avec moi, je te parlerai de quelque chose à propos de quelque chose dont je te parlerai si on passe tous les deux là-dedans.
CLAIRE. - Je ne peux pas passer, mon frère me tabasserait.
FAK. - Ton frère ne saura pas.
CLAIRE. - Même s'il ne saura pas, je ne veux pas passer.
FAK. - Pourquoi tu m'as suivi jusqu'ici alors ?
CLAIRE. - Je suis venue jusqu'ici seulement pour prendre l'air, parce que j'ai bu trop de café, parce qu'il faisait trop chaud chez moi, pas pour faire du tout quelque chose avec toi.
FAK. - Je ne te demande pas de faire quelque chose, tu n'as qu'à te laisser faire ; moi, je te fais passer là-dedans et je m'occupe de tout.
CLAIRE. - C'est trop noir là-dedans, je suis trop petite et j'ai peur.
FAK. - Il y a des trous dans le plafond et dans les murs, il fait moins noir dedans que dehors à cause des lumières du port qui viennent de l'autre coté.
CLAIRE. - Et comment je pourrais le savoir assez pour ne pas avoir peur, moi ?
FAK. - Tu n'as qu'à fermer les yeux, voilà comment.
CLAIRE. - C'est idiot ; si je ferme les yeux, il fait complètement noir.
FAK. - Si tu fermais les yeux, comment c'est dehors, noir ou ne pas noir, ça te serait égal, tu peux faire comme si c'est plein de lumière, que tu as simplement les yeux fermés, que je te conduis, qu'on passe tous les deux là-dedans, que tu les ouvrirais quand je le dirais, et ce n'est même plus la peine de les ouvrir jamais.
CLAIRE. - Si au moins il y avait une lumière dans la rue, je pourrais voir la porte et je pourrais dire si je passe ou je ne passe pas. Mais maintenant je ne vois même pas la porte et je ne peux pas dire si je veux ou si je ne veux pas. Je crois que je ne veux pas parce que je ne vois pas la porte, au point que si je ne savais pas qu'il y en a une parce que je la vois tous les jours quand il fait jour, je ne saurais même pas qu'il y en a une: et que si toi tu ne me parlais pas, je ne saurais même pas qu'il y a toi ou quelqu'un là, et je finis par avoir tout à fait peur. (1985, 25-26)

[The motorway at night, with the sound of water against the walls.
Fak enters, followed by Claire.
They stop at the door of the warehouse.

FAK: You've come this far, now, go on in.
CLAIRE: Me go in there? It's way too dark.
FAK: It's no darker in there than out here.
CLAIRE: Well yeah, it's completely dark right here.
FAK: It's not completely dark here cause I can see you.
CLAIRE: And I can't see you, so for me it's completely dark.
FAK: If you go in there with me, I'll tell you something about something I'll tell you about if we both go in.
CLAIRE: I don't want to go in, my brother will beat the shit out of me.
FAK: Your brother won't know.
CLAIRE: Even so, I don't want to go in.
FAK: So why did you follow me?
CLAIRE: I only came this far to get some fresh air, cause I drank too much coffee and at home it's too hot, not to get up to anything with you.
FAK: I'm not asking you to get up to anything, all you have to do is take it easy. Come in with me, and I'll take care of everything.
CLAIRE: It's too dark in there, I'm too young, plus I'm scared.

FAK: There's holes in the ceiling and the walls, it's less dark inside cause the light comes through from the other side of the port.
CLAIRE: How can I be sure enough that I don't get scared.
FAK: Close your eyes.
CLAIRE: That's nuts; if I close my eyes it'll be pitch black.
FAK: If you close your eyes, whatever it's like outside, dark or not dark, it won't matter; you can pretend there's plenty of light, you just have your eyes closed, I'm guiding you, we're going in together, you'll open them when I say, and it's not even worth opening them at all, ever.
CLAIRE: If there was a light in the street, I could see the door and I could make up my mind about the whole thing. But as it is I can't see the door and I can't say if I wanna go in or if I don't. I think I don't, cause I can't see the door, and if it wasn't for the fact that I know that there is one, cause I've seen it by day, I wouldn't even think there was one at all, and if you weren't talking to me, I wouldn't even know you were there, or anybody else, and now I'm really scared.]

The cumulative effect of this type of exchange over the course of the play in which respondant after respondant is locked into a frenzied yet frequently almost perpetually blocked exchange recalls the story told in one of the tableaux in *Les Amertumes*.[13] The increased sophistication of these blocked configurations of perennial tension is the major dramaturgical component of the move away from the 'realist hypothesis'. The fixed patterns of tension draw the emphasis away from the 'plot', an important component of the realist hypothesis because in the perpetual yet extremely indefinite circumstances in which the characters find themselves, no action is possible. As a result, language, with its dealing and trafficking, becomes a weapon[14] with which to define some personal territory and psychological coherence in the nebulous and threatening space of the warehouse. Commentator Jean-Marc Lanteri describes how in *Quai ouest* "a relationship of causality is established between a particular character's weaknesses on one hand and a repetitive and obsessional language on the other" (Lanteri, 368). Charles talks because he cannot leave, Monique talks to try to maintain some semblance of control and to cheer herself up, Koch talks because he cannot kill himself and Cécile talks because she feels that Charles is no longer hers. Their language is a sign of their weakness. Their speech does not occur, however, in a Beckettian style of framework where the orientation of the dramaturgical structure is focussed on time, waiting and the erosion of a character's sense of self. Instead language becomes a logorrheac flow which fills an absence of resolve with the appearance of resolve cobbled together with the energy of urgency and desperation (ibid.). The *contenant* of the warehouse, the form that Koltès wanted to imitate in his construction of the play, serves as the milieu, defined metaphorically by the characteristics qualifying Abad's blackness, in which all this blocked tension can occur.

[13] The tableau involves the Old Woman telling a long story which nicely captures the feeling of non-development and blocked tension that occurs throughout the text. In the tale, a warrior in the employ of an evil governor has been ordered to kill a generous monk. The monk asks the warrior to wait until after he has finished his prayers before killing him, to which the warrior agrees. The monk kneels to pray and keeps on praying until the end of time, locking the two of them into a frustrated and forever fixed and unresolvable battle. (1998a, 25-27)

[14] Chéreau would write about *Combat* that "les personnages n'ont, semble-t-il, plus qu'une arme: la parole" [it seems that the characters have only one weapon left: language]. (1990a, 19)

3.7 Ethnicity and status in the contact zone: the abjectification of Abad

Within the context of the staged encounters of difference, meetings marked by remarkable animosity blocked into fixed holding patterns of tension, a difference in status amongst ethnicities begins to make itself evident. This chapter has explored the extent to which 'blackness' has been positioned at the core of the text as a possible locus of resistance to what the text suggests are the unfortunate qualities of whiteness and Western culture. In addition, the second chapter explored the extent to which Koltès' use of discursively generated stereotypes related to blackness did not do much more than to reverse a problematic 'black-white' binary. It is now the moment to explore the extent to which the active abjectification of Abad by the play's other immigrant characters remains fundamentally unchallenged by any other mechanisms in the text.

The directed stream of language which emerges from the characters as they attempt to maintain their energies can function only when they are motivated by an urgency for another respondant, either present or absent (Benhamou 1996, 18). Whenever the characters are not bargaining or dealing with one another, a significant part of the energy of desperation is aimed at Abad. His role as the object of the frustration of the other characters seems closely related to his state of disenfranchisement. This state results in part because of his close affiliation with the warehouse from which all immigrants want to escape. Only Koch hopes to find the solace of death in the warehouse. All the other characters wish to extricate themselves from the darkness to which the feel they have been unfairly relegated.

The immigrant family's fear of annihilation through poverty in the anonymity of the warehouse has been exacerbated by the recent destabilization of the location's micro-culture. This unsettling change began when the passenger ferries from the other side of the port ceased landing near the warehouse. Within the economically and socially unstable environment of the warehouse, the representatives of various immigrant cultures meet, deal and fight. They compete for supremacy, weave myths from memories of the past, and absorb to varying degrees the qualifiers of the unnamed Western country in which the warehouse is located. Koch's arrival, marked as it is with the re-introduction of opportunities for theft and extortion by the location's inhabitants, represents the possibility of the reversal of this Hispanic family's fortunes.

The first indications of the potential for stratification of character status becomes evident when Charles articulates to Koch his understanding of how the inhabitants of the "new" side of the port wish to create scapegoats out of the less fortunate who have been left behind in the darkness:

> Aux autres, je leur ai dit: méfiez-vous, ils ont l'oeil sur vous ; ils vous regardent, maintenant, ils vous surveillent ; ils vont guetter la moindre de vos respirations, le moindre de vos mouvements, le moindre de vos rêves ; et s'ils soupçonnent, de là-bas, de l'autre côté du fleuve, la moindre illégalité dans l'une de vos respirations ou dans l'un de vos rêves, ils accourront, ils l'arracheront au silence et à l'obscurité de votre repaire, ils l'engraisseront et le feront pousser, ils en feront un crime qu'ils montreront à toute la ville et alors, ils auront leur raison et on aura été pris pour des cons avec raison.(1985, 18)
>
> [I told the others: watch out, they've got their eye on you, they have you under surveillance, they're gonna stake you out and listen for your breathing, your slightest move, your slightest dream; and down there on the other side they're looking out for the tiniest little crime in one of your breaths or in one of your dreams, and then they'll come running, and they'll rip that crime out of the silence and darkness of your little nest and they'll shit on it and make it grow, they'll make a big fucking scandal out of it they can show the whole town, and then they'll have their excuse and we'll have been taken for dumb fucks and rightly fucking so.]

Charles refuses to be categorized as one of the less fortunate ones. He explains to Koch how he has prospects on the 'other side', stating that "J'ai un travail, un vrai travail, normal, qui m'attend au port; une place de gorille dans un club; quand je le voudrai" [I've got a job waiting for me at the port, a real job-type job, bouncer in a club, whenever I want] (1985, 18).

Significantly, Koch's arrival appears to unleash in Charles an intense dislike for Abad, Charles' 'bizness' partner who has, it seems, already affirmed that he no longer wishes to do 'bizness' with him. In a moment alone shortly after Koch's arrival, Charles explains that he will leave soon anyway, compulsively calling Abad 'nigger' twenty times in fifty lines of dialogue. In this fashion, through the blatantly excessive use of the term, Koltès cleverly demonstrates the crazed iterativity of the kind of racial slur that Homi Bhabha describes when he notes how such appelations are "a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place' already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated" (Bhabha 1994, 66).

Despite the fact that Cécile is sharing the warehouse with Abad, she refuses any complicity with him and questions his reasons for emigrating. She wonders if he murdered his mother, and if he was mixed up in politics. She finally insists that "you don't even have the right to exist"(1985, 54). She then proceeds to blame him for all the ills she and her family have experienced, attempting to fuse the black immigrant character with associations of sickness and chaos:

> Vous nous portez malheur, avec l'odeur de vos crimes, de votre honte, de votre silence, de tout ce que vous cachez. Avec vous, venus ici sans père ni mère ni race ni nombril ni langue ni nom ni dieu ni visa est venu le temps des malheurs les uns après les autres; à cause de vous le malheur est entré chez nous, il a monté nos escaliers, il a défoncé nos portes et ça a été le commencement de la misère, le commencement du manque d'argent, le commencement de l'obscurité quand il faut de la lumière et des soleils qui refusent de se coucher; le commencement des bateaux qui ne s'arrêtent plus, de l'abandon des maisons par les gens honorables, le commencement du désordre, des insultes, des coups de couteau, de la peur de la nuit, de la peur du jour, de la peur collée aux

épaules, du dérèglement des jours et des nuits; le commencement des maladies pîquées dans notre sang par les mouches qui se cachent dans vos cheveux. Avant, le soleil était le soleil et il obéissait au doigt et à l'oeil, et la nuit le temps du sommeil; les portes fermaient à clé, les fenêtres fermaient avec des vitres, et des robinets coulaient de l'eau; mais vous avez bu jusqu'a la denière goutte de l'eau de nos robinets et vous n'en avez laissé pour personne. Avant, tout était bien ici ; il n`y avait ni douleur dans les jambes ni douleur dans le dos, dans le cou, dans les yeux, pas de fièvre qui empêche de dormir, pas de mal de ventre ni de mal de poitrine. Alors nos corps à nous marchaient bien dressés, les épaules an arrière et le dos souple. Mais votre honte a courbé lentement nos épaules et baissé notre tête, et ça a été le commencement de notre malheur. Je ne veux plus te voir, je ne veux plus rien voir. (1985, 54-55)

[You're bringing us bad luck, it's the stink of your crimes, your shame, your silence, everything you're hiding. You came here with no mother, no father, no race, no birth, no language, no name, no God, no visa, nothing but one misfortune after another. Bad luck has come into our home because of you, it crawled up the stairs, broke down the door, and that was the beginning of misery, the beginning of the end of money, the beginning of darkness where there should be light, of suns that refuse to set, boats that won't stop here, and houses abandoned by decent people, and chaos, and insults, and stabbings, fear of the night, fear of the day, fear hanging on our backs, night mixed up with day, the flies in our hair injecting disease into our blood. Before you came the sun was the sun and obeyed the rules and night was the time for sleeping; we had keys for our doors and glass in our windows and water in our taps, but you've drunk all the water and left nothing for anyone. Before, everything was good; there were no pains in the back or pains in the legs, in the neck, in the eyes, no fever to keep you awake, no aches in the stomach or in the breast. Our bodies stood upright, shoulders broad, backs supple. But your shame slowly bent our shoulders and forced down our heads, and that was the beginning of our misfortune. I don't want to look upon you anymore, I don't want to look upon anything.]

The rhythmically hysterical quality of Cécile's speech combines with the grandiose scope of her assertions to create an auto-satirizing dynamic. The hyperbole she employs tends towards an unconscious self-ridiculizating and the subsequent delegitimizating of her own claims. This creates a textual situation in which the reader may witness the moment of iteration during which stereotypical imagery associated with immigration is vigorously recombined and redischarged in an actively virulent fashion towards a new subject. A bitter irony permeates her entire act of naming Abad as she herself is an immigrant, living by her own admission, like a 'dog' in the 'dark.'

The actions of Rodolphe, Cécile's husband, risk putting Abad in a situation where the myths about dangerous black immigrants could be confirmed. Rodolphe uses Abad's marginalization to attempt to manipulate the black man to murder Koch for him. Rodolphe begins by threatening Abad with the prospect that his presence will eventually be discovered by the authorities on the 'other side' and he will be removed:

Mes yeux sont peut-être trop bousillés pour que je puisse voir ta gueule, mais j'ai pas besoin de la voir, négro, pour savoir tout de suite que t'es pas régulier; tu ne fais pas assez de bruit quand tu marches pour être régulier, et figure-toi qu'ici on n'aime pas ça, les types qui ne sont pas réguliers ; ils prennent sur la gueule. Le gros, là-dehors, il va retourner de l'autre côté, il va leur dire: j'ai entendu des gens qu'on n'entend pas quand ils marchent, là-bas, de l'autre côté; et tu vas prendre sur la gueule. Et si ce n'est pas lui qui te dénonce, ce sera ce chiot enragé qui veut sauver sa peau; et si ce n'est pas lui, ce sera cette chienne qui me sert de femelle; et si ce n'est pas elle, more, négro, tout vieux et tout abimé que je suis, parce qu'on est trop nombreux sur la terre pour pas

assez de place. De toute façon c'est toi qui vas tout prendre tout seul sur ta putain de gueule, et ça va te faire un sacré coup, parce que t'as rien pour amortir le choc, négro, pas de passé, pas de famille, pas de guerre, pas de vieillesse, pas d'intérêt nulle part. (1985, 73)

[My eyes may be too gummed up to see your face, but I don't need to see it, negro, to know right away, you're not one of us, you don't make enough noise when you walk to be one of us, and you know, they don't like that here, they don't like people who aren't one of us, those kind of people catch all the shit. The big man out there, he'll go back to the other side and he'll tell them I've heard guys who you can't hear when they walk, over there, on that side, and the shit'll fall on your head. And if he doesn't turn you in, it'll be that rabid pup that wants to save his own ass, and if he doesn't it'll be that bitch that serves as my female, and if it's not her, I'll turn you in myself, negro, old and broken as I am, because there's too many of us on this earth, and not enough space. Whatever happens, you're gonna take it all on your fucking head, and it'll be a damn hard knock, cause you've nothing to soften the blow, negro: no past, no family, no war, no old age, nothing going for you at all.]

In a fashion similar to Horn's sudden decision to ask Alboury to murder Cal in *Combat*, the text presents the reader with few clear motivations for Rodolphe's desire to have Koch killed. It would appear, however, that his wife Cécile has been acting 'the whore' and flirting with the new arrival and, like Horn in *Combat*, Rodolphe is feeling emasculated. Moreover, Koch's arrival has only served to further infantilize and emasculate Rodolphe. Cécile has, in pleading for help from Koch and Monique, repeatedly used Rodolphe's weakness as a justification for the family's marginalization. Rodolphe asserts, however, that his apparent state of debilitation actually masks a potent object which will allow him to reassert his virility:

(Il fouille dans ses vêtements.) Ces chiens me croient tellement abîmé par la guerre que j'arriverais à peine à marcher ; ils croient que cette guerre m'a tout gelé, les pieds, les jambes, et le cerveau ; mais, si j'ai tant de mal à marcher, cela n'a rien à voir avec la guerre ; c'est ce machin qui pèse cinq kilos et qui mesure soixante-cinq centimères et que je porte sur moi nuit et jour depuis la défaite. Aide-moi à m'en débarasser, maintenant, j'en ai marre d'être vieux. (Il sort le pistolet-mitrailleur de ses habits.)

C'est une kalashnikov, fabrication soviétique ; c'est pas vraiment moderne, mais je te jure que ça t'éclate la tête. (1985, 74)

[(He searches his clothing) These dogs think I'm so broken by war that I can hardly walk; they think the war froze everything, feet, legs, brain; but if I don't walk too well, it's nothing to do with the war, it's this thing that weighs five kilos and is sixty-five centimetres long, which I've been carrying night and day since the defeat. Help me get rid of it, now; I'm sick of being old. (He pulls the sub-machine gun from under his clothing.)

It's a Kalashnikov, Soviet made; it's not the latest model but I swear it blows your head off.]

Rodolphe's assertion of virility depends entirely on Abad's ability to carry out the job for him:

Eclate-lui sa tête, au gros, mon fils, et qu'il sente venir le coup; un coup ici, un coup là, prends ton temps, qu'il en chie; fais-le pour moi, mon fils, je te le demande, parce que moi, je ne peux pas le faire moi-même. (Il pleure) J'ai la main foutue, la cervelle bousillée, j'ai ma foutue main qui tremble, regarde ça, mon fils, regarde ; jamais je n'y arriverais, je suis sûr de le rater, et sa foutue grosse tête n'éclaterait pas. (1985, 76)

> [Blow off the big man's head, my son, and let him know what's coming to him; a shot here, a shot there, take your time, let him shit his pants; do it for me, my son, I'm asking you, cause I can't, I can't do it by myself. (He weeps) My hand is fucked, my head is broken, I've got this fucking hand that shakes, look at that, my son, look; I could never do it, I'm sure I'd miss, and his big fucking head wouldn't blow off.]

By passing the Kalashnikov over to Abad, and suggesting that Abad do his 'dirty work' for him, Rodolphe is distancing himself from the murderous act he himself will not perpetrate. By giving away the weapon, Rodolphe also qualifies himself as different from Abad, the character whom he continues to vilify and threaten until the end of his speech to him:

> Je te préviens que si tu ne te sers pas de ça pour tuer le gros, négro, j'irai moi-même à pied, de l'autre côté, puisque maintenant je marche aussi bien qu'un gamin, et je leur dirai, là-bas: j'ai vu quelqu'un, de l'autre côté, qui tient une kalashnikov là-bas, comme je vous vois; et ils aimeront pas ça; je leur dirai : allez-y à plusieurs, encerclez le quartier, parce qu'il court vite et ses pas ne font pas de bruit sur le sol. Et tu prendra sur la guele. (1985, 75)

> [I'm warning you, negro, if you don't use that to kill the big man, I'll go to the other side myself, on foot, cause now I can walk as well as a teenager, and I'll tell them: I saw someone on the other side with a Kalashnikov, just like I see you now; and they won't like that, and I'll tell them, go now, all of you, close off the neighbourhood because he runs fast and his steps don't make a sound. And you will be in the shit.]

Some notable similarities emerge between Charles', Cécile's and Rodolphe's obsessive use of terms such as 'nigger,' 'savage' and 'negro' when they are addressing Abad.[15] Mireille Rosello provides a useful description of the way in which the principle of the stereotype underlying this racist appellation plays on "the fundamental ambiguity in the distinction between proper names and common nouns", suggesting that "stereotyping reflexes turn the name of ethnic groups into undecidable units that share some of the characteristics of both proper names and common nouns" (Rosello 1998, 141). When Charles, Cécile or Rodolphe call Abad either "moricaud" ('nigger) or "nègre" ('negro'), they label him with a term that is incapable of providing any semantic differentiation between him and another black person.

What are the implications of this obsessive deployment of derogatory terms which recalls Koltès use of the term 'nègre' in the title of *Combat de nègre et de chiens*? Within the fiction itself, the fear resulting for the other characters from the unfortunate associations that burden Abad is *exacerbated* by their continuous labelling of Abad in this fashion. This serves to generate tension throughout the text. The object of the fear, namely Abad, cannot be removed from the name-callers' purview because of the restricted location which they all share. Therefore, the fear resulting from the associations of hyperbolized otherness is not erased by the name calling, but is in fact *perpetuated* in the same

[15] It is interesting to note that Abad's given name is never spoken by any of the characters.

gesture. A dynamic of compulsive amplification of anxiety occurs for the Hispanics when they de-individualize Abad and reassociate him with a larger more ominous status of universalized black intruder. In metaphorical terms, the naming sends Abad back to the night from which they believe he has come. No mechanism seems available to diffuse the growing tension, and the name callers are left with little choice but to continue the cumulative reenactment of fear emerging from the stereotypes. By constantly and compulsively differentiating themselves from Abad, the Hispanics attempt to reaffirm their position on the 'white' side of the black/white binary in order to accede to the Western way of life. This in turn heightens the possibility of their experience of binary terror as they feel they are sliding towards the darkness towards which they are so resistant.

The articulated display of the way in which derogatory naming functions, in tandem with 1) Koltès attempts (however unsuccessful) to remove Abad from the discourse of primitivity, as well as 2) the consolidation of the pro-active (rather than reactive) quality of Abad's character and thus his increased position of influence and strength within the narrative, can be seen to be the attempts that Koltès made to rid blackness of the exotic and romantic qualities which he felt had so marred *Combat*. However, two important issues still haunt Koltès' attempts to demythologize blackness. These issues are the question of Abad's silence, as well as the further implications of the differences in status among the ethnicities in the warehouse which contribute to a hierarchy of ethnicities supported by the representational networks in the text.

3.8 Abad and silence

What are the effects generated by the compulsive racist naming practice with regard to the representation of blackness and the figure of the immigrant? I have discussed how the festering quality of the warehouse is related very intimately to Abad's presence there, to the point that Abad's arrival seems to have coincided with the degeneration of the location. By allowing ethnic and individual difference between black people to be blurred without correction, Abad has become the 'strange presence' who is the positive to the play's negative. He has become a new centre in a contact zone in which, it is suggested in Abad's earlier text, whiteness may be a sickness.

The text's cycles of obsessive derogatory naming do have implications for the representation of Abad and the qualities of blackness and the state of immigration he represents. These can perhaps be best examined through a discussion of the implications of Abad's refusal to answer back. For Abad is indeed the incarnation of silence, the absorber of speech at the core of the play. Only one weapon is more powerful than language in the recently deregulated location of exchange, and that is silence. Investigating the potential sources of Abad's silence can allow for an additional appraisal

of Abad for both counternarrative or complicitous qualities vis-a-vis the hegemonic representations of blackness as generated by the colonial/postcolonial discourse and introduced in the second chapter.

I discussed earlier how Abad retreated into his silence that qualified him at the end of his only lines. To explain this behaviour, Koltès notes hearing after his final line that Abad "n'est pas plus incapable de parler que Koch; il *refuse* de parler, voilà tout" [is no less capable of speaking than Koch; he *refuses* to speak, that's all] (my emphasis) (1986b, 60). Koltès' use of the verb 'refuse' with reference to Abad suggests a certain volition or agency. As I set out to demonstrate with the case of Albourey in *Combat*, providing a character with volition may allow that character to resist certain potentially restrictive forces on a narrative level. In Abad's case, for example, his capacity for refusal will lead to his own ability to protect himself from the violence threatened by his 'bizness' partner Charles. Such a volitional quality in the character does not necessarily result, however, in counternarrative representations of the character within a wider discursive context.

Why, according to the text, does Abad 'refuse'? The endnotes to the play do not provide any clear reasons, but do specify that "Je ne l'ai pas rendu muet parce que c'était plus facile, bien qu'effectivement cela le fût, mais parce que c'était incontournable" [I did not make him mute because it was the easiest thing to do, even though it certainly was, but because it was unavoidable.] (1985, 108). Claude Stratz, assistant director to Patrice Chéreau when the text was first staged, referring to the period when Koltès was writing the play,[16] informs us that:

> Koltès spent a long time trying make [Abad] speak. In his notes he always had the following written down: 'Two monologues by Abad: one at the beginning, one at the end. He refuses to speak in between.... Absolutely refuses to speak with K[och]. — Very talkative with Charlie; mute with the others. Finishes his speeches with a period. Sentences running on to infinity." (Stratz 1990, 22)

It could be interpreted that Abad is muted by the the weight of his double disenfranchisement, that of being in exile both from family and from country. It follows that the burden of the grief resulting from such a trauma may have led to Abad's retreat into himself. What is particularly revealing is that Koltès' own summation of Abad's reasons for not speaking does not even do justice to the text in which Abad discusses his double marginalization from his family and his country. Koltès avoided the discussion of context, on a broad socio-political level and even the context internal to the play which he himself has established. He stated at the end of his description of Abad that those things which distinguish him from the other characters are simply formal elements related

[16] Stratz describes aspects of Koltès' creative process: "He began by imagining characters, by writing a few lines, a few monologues, and fragments of situations. Each time he wrote a play he re-read his notebooks in which he would often take notes: something he heard in the street, something that came to mind..." (1990, 22)

to dramaturgical mechanics: "sa seule différence notable et structurelle est sa lenteur; et c'est un des moteurs de l'histoire" [(Abad's) only notable and structural difference is his slowness; and it is one of the motors of the story] (1986b, 60).

Benita Parry notes in a discussion of silence in postcolonial novels that "The problem here is that silence can be read either as a sign of resignation to subjugation — being reduced to silence, as marking the refusal to speak or to be heard within the oppressor's system of meanings, or as a form of non-speaking subjectivity" (Parry 1994, n.193). Indeed, Koltès would appear to be confirming Abad's disenfranchisement for the majority of the play without historicizing the hegemonic representational networks which haunt this particular representation of blackness. A result is that his disenfranchisement appears to be natural and inevitable. Indeed it may be that on some level Abad's 'refusal' seems more powerful if it emerges from an unquestioned, seemingly natural, disenfranchisement — a kind of *logos* of marginalization, as it were.

Whatever the specificities of the origins of his strength, Abad's silence does serve to block the first deal of the play. Like Alboury who prevents Horn's quick cover-up of the murder of the black guard in *Combat*, Abad subverts the objectives of Koch's intervention in the warehouse.[17]

Extending the comparison of Alboury from *Combat* with Abad from *Quai ouest* can be useful here. Koltès extends Alboury's means of direct communication in his construction of Abad by withdrawing him entirely from the use of spoken language. Indeed, Koltès notes that Abad has a specific role to play in the market of language and dealing which suffuses the text: "Abad refuse de parler à qui que ce soit d'autre que Charles; et encore est-il *économe* en mots, et lui parle-t-il à l'oreille" [Abad refuses to speak to anyone except Charles; and even then he is *economical* with his words, and whispers into his ear] (my emphasis) (1985, 108).

His silence could be further understood to be a means of blocking the exchange of identities as well, specifically the stereotypes attributed to him. The locus of Abad's

[17] Please recall the quotation discussed above:
Abad and Charles whisper together at length.

CHARLES: (*to Koch*) He doesn't like it.
KOCH: Why?
CHARLES: He says a body here will attract the police.
KOCH: Bullshit. It'll be hushed up. You want me to write you a note, to clear you? You can give it to the woman.
CHARLES: He doesn't like it.
KOCH: Tell him with a couple of stones in my pockets, I'll sink to the bottom, nobody'll see anything.
CHARLES: He says no. (1985, 23)

resistance may perhaps be understood to reside in his withdrawal from the dangerous dealing with language, a form of communication which has only served to leave him stereotyped, denigrated and punished. It would appear that the 'psychological' chitchat which Koltès derided as inauthentic in his thinking in the 1970s has demonstrated itself to be dangerous as well as meddlesome in *Quai ouest*.

Mireille Rosello's discussion of the iterativity and ubiquity of the ethnic stereotype provide a basis for understanding the systems of representational mechanics which constrain Abad in such a fashion:

> [the] memorability [of ethnic stereotypes] is related to their timelessness: a vicious circle develops whereby memorability leads to timelessness; which in turn because human cultures horde the past, increases memorability. The alliance between memory and time in this case can be pinpointed as both the cause and the effect of stereotyping practices, what I will call their iterativity. Because of their strong iterative force, they travel from mouth to mouth, from text to text, from discipline to discipline without losing much of their original strength and shape, as if, parasites themselves, they need not worry about the deterioration other statements suffer from circulation and transmission processes. (Rosello, 35)

Rosello's discussion of iterativity may be usefully juxtaposed with Koltès' proto-model of his understanding of theatrical reality as discussed in Chapter One. Faithful to this model, Koltès, in various stages of his work, attempted to avoid 'psychological and intellectual pitfalls' (1995a, 13; app. B,1) in favour of a utopic 'immediate' and unmediated apprehension of experience. Similarly, his conception of relations between both individuals and their fictionalized counterparts, the dramatic character, was based on a distinction between linguistic and non-linguistic connections. He understood deep non-linguistic connections to be "static and indifferent to the vagaries of existence" as well as "completely inexpressible, always unspoken and frequently forgotten" (1999b, 99; app. B,4). These bonds were more enduring and significant than those emerging from what Koltès understood to be the "anecdotal" activity of discussion, those superficial relations based on an "interminable interior twisting and turning chitchat that ends up invading our entire mind" (ibid.).

Such a distrust of language befits Abad as well, for he plays a similar function to that played by Alexis, the pivotal character from *Les Amertumes*, and to Alboury, the pivotal character from *Combat*. Both these previous characters played an essential witnessing role. In playing this role Alexis never spoke and Alboury spoke what Koltès felt was 'straightforward' and 'authentic', therefore honest, language. Following the staging of *Combat* Koltès would note the risks of exoticism that resulted from such a depiction. That Abad's silence was simply 'unavoidable', as Koltès explains, and in a sense suggests a certain self-evidence, may perhaps mask a recognition on Koltès' behalf that the character's speech could do nothing but imprison the character. This imprisonment had occurred when audiences at *Combat* had mythologized and exoticized Africa and

Alboury.

What awaits Abad throughout the rest of the play? Does Koltès' declared emphasis on the 'subject' of the blacks in *Quai ouest* allow for different, unexoticized, and presumably more 'authentic,' identities to emerge? Early in his writing life, in a description prescient of some of his later pivotal characters' acts of violence, Koltès had described Alexis' emergence as a "final and irrational revolt" which was the "fulfillment of all the activity exterior to him which has preceded him" (1998a, 15; app. A,3). After considerable abuse, Abad fulfills the destiny ascribed to Alexis in *Les Amertumes* by taking the gun from Rodolphe and killing Charles, as well as possibly Koch. This violent, wordless act of mute aggression, although Koltès describes it as a 'gift' to the inhibited Charles (Stratz 1990, 23), is similar to the blacks' murder of Cal at the end of *Combat*. Despite Koltès' assertions that Abad is not some form of savage (Koltès 1986b, 60), the character's violent act inscribes him in a lineage of Koltès' characters, as well as reinscribes him as a violent manifestation of the 'hard primitive' tendency which emerges from the hegemonic postcolonial discourse as discussed in the second chapter. Since Koltès' other characters have emphasized Abad's status as immigrant, Koltès' representation of Abad facilitates the association of immigration with a primitivity that, despite Koltès' attempts, does not remain suppressed.

It is evident that a retreat into silence is one of the few fashions in which Abad can shelter himself from the aggressive and restrictive discourse that surrounds him. The only text attributed to the character is, as I have shown, replete with the stereotypes which suffuse the hegemonic colonial/post-colonial discourse in which Koltès was anchored. When combined with Abad's 'final irrational' and murderous 'revolt' (to borrow once again the terms Koltès used to describe Alexis' appearance in *Les Amertumes*) (1998a, 15; app. A,3) his text and his silence provide the reader with a representation of the black immigrant as primitive, bearing illness and violent. Again, this representation is left largely undisturbed by contestation or modulation throughout the rest of the text.

3.9 Hierarchies of Ethnicity

The refined 'rules' of the theatrical 'game', explored in the previous sections and which takes place in the contact zone of the warehouse, serve to establish the conditions from which the hierarchy of ethnicities emerge. Increased differentiation between individual characters (the 'pure' black Alboury, the Hispanic Rodolphe, the aboriginal Cécile, the mixed race children, the Asian Fak, the white Koch with a Germanic name, the white Monique), in a stage world where black is more authentic than white, creates the need for a hierarchy since the simple black/good white/bad binary of *Combat* has been superseded. The increased emphasis and formalization of exchange creates an

environment where power and status can be further differentiated and actualized. It can be useful to review briefly, and expand upon, some of the subtleties of the hierarchical arrangement of ethnicities which become evident in the text. This can serve as a context in which to investigate specific cases of the immigrant characters on points along various continua which have become apparent.

The hierarchy of ethnicity that emerges in *Quai ouest* is actually composed of two concurrent, superimposed, hierarchies. On the surface, each of the hierarchies has an opposite direction of flow from the other. The first direction of flow posits an undifferentiated whiteness and a 'Western' origin as a 'better' overall ethnicity and accompanying location. The second posits blackness and the foreign as a more enviable and authentic grounding for identity.

The first hierarchy is upheld by the Hispanic immigrants, all of whom desperately, as will be explored, wish to emulate in one fashion or another both the whites and the new 'Western' culture of which they hope to become a part. This first hierarchy can be termed the narrative hierarchy, in the sense that it is a manifestation of the dominant hegemonic 'narrative' which Koltès frequently spoke strongly against: the spread of 'whiteness' and its cultural affiliations around the globe.

The behaviour of the white characters demonstrates an unpleasantness which would appear to be a manifestation of the scathing views Koltès held about French people. Monique's hysterical complaints about the immigrants living in the warehouse echo Cal's anxious racist diatribes in *Combat* :

> Brutes, clochards, malades, miteux, déchets d'êtres humains ; j'en ai tellement marre de ces fous mal lavés, je préférerais vivre avec des rats et des chiens, Seigneur ! tous ces gens me dégoûtent. Je vais vivre enfermée par quatre portes de béton, je vais me faire barricader dès que je rentre chez moi, je me ferai passer la nourriture par un tunnel pour ne plus voir ni sentir l'odeur de cette raclure d'êtres humains ; je veux me faire couler du béton des cheveux jusqu'aux pieds avec juste un trou pour la bouche et le nez, Maurice, je veux rentrer. (1985, 81)

> [You're animals, tramps, you're creeps and imbeciles, human garbage; I've had it up to here with these filthy lunatics, Jesus! I'd rather live with rats and dogs. All these people disgust me. I'll live behind concrete doors, I'll barricade myself in as soon as I get home, I'll have my food passed to me through a tunnel so that I can't see or smell the stench of this human trash. I want concrete poured from my head to my feet with just a tiny hole left open for my nose and mouth, Maurice, I want to go home.]

A counternarrative begins to become apparent in *Quai ouest* with the manifestation of Koch's desire to embrace the darkness of the warehouse. The white man's flight to darkness is then complemented by Abad's pathologization of whiteness early in the play. These factors are then supplemented by Koltès' continuous recentering of blackness and 'the immigrant' throughout the remainder of the text. This last effect is achieved to a

significant degree by means of Abad's metaphoric association with the location and his pivotal function in the plot. In light of these counter-moves to legitimize a mythologized blackness and foreignness in the face of an equally mythologized whiteness and domesticity, it becomes evident that the counternarrative hierarchy of ethnicity suggests that any move towards whiteness is in fact not a move up, but down, the ladder of 'authenticity' as Koltès understands it. The first narrative hierarchy, where white is something to be achieved, revered and attained, is reversed in the counternarrative hierarchy.

Some of Koltès' remarks can provide additional and revealing contextual evidence to support the growing case this chapter has made for Koltès' centering of 'blackness' and 'the immigrant' as loci for a certain type of authenticity within this text. Indeed, the existence of the counternarrative hierarchy in *Quai ouest* comes as little surprise when one considers some of Koltès' statements articulating the necessity of the arrival of non-white immigrants to France. He explained in 1988, regarding the rise of Jean-Marie Le Pen's right wing National Front party, that "J'ai ressenti une très grande peur aux dernières élections présidentielles. Je me suis dit que j'irais vivre au Portugal, je ne voulais pas vivre dans un pays qui ressemble à la Suisse" [I experienced a deep fear in the last presidential elections. I told myself that I would move to Portugal, I didn't want to live in a country that resembled Switzerland] (1999a, 126). He noted that "La présence des immigrés est ce qui nous maintient à un niveau intellectuel à peu près correct. Pour moi, la Suisse, c'est le cauchemar absolu" [The presence of immigrants is what is helping us maintain some sense of intellectual integrity. Switzerland, for me, is the absolute nightmare] (ibid., 127). Koltès felt that the 'blood' of immigrants to France was what was keeping France alive:

> Le seul sang qui nous vienne, qui nous nourrisse un peu, c'est le sang des immigrés. On commence à le reconnaître aujourd'hui: il faut le reconnaître encore davantage. Je peux tout autant parler des Blancs, mais il est vrai que le sang de notre peuple, aujourd'hui, est noir et arabe. Je ne dis pas que cette réalité est définitive; elle est pour la génération dans laquelle nous vivons. Le sang neuf naît de cette présence des Noirs et Arabes; il ne naît pas de la France profonde qui est le désert, là, rien ne vit, et, s'il se passe quelque chose, c'est toujours à cause des immigrés. Si on parle de Marseille, par exemple, ce n'est pas aux Blancs de Marseille qu'on fera allusion. (1999a, 127).
>
> [The only blood that's coming here is the blood of immigrants. We're starting to see it these days; it has to be talked about even more. I can talk about the Whites, but it really is true that the blood of our people is black blood and Arab blood. I'm not saying that this is a definitive reality, it simply is the case for the current generation. The new blood is a result of the presence of Blacks and Arabs; this newness does not come from France which is a desert. Nothing is alive there and if anything happens at all, it's because of the immigrants. If you talk about Marseille, for example, you're not talking about the whites from Marseille.]

This statement resonates with the kind of punitive energy towards white French society that was evident throughout Koltès' career. In the light of this commentary, it becomes

clear once again that the arrival of the (exotic?) immigrants at the warehouse serves as a kind of corrective function to the whiteness/westernness of the city in which the warehouse is situated. Indeed, the 'newness' of the immigrants in the warehouse, the appearance of a revivifying otherness within the known, is similar to the emergence of the indigenous within the industrial compound in *Combat*. The authenticity of an immigrant is anchored for Koltès, it would seem, in his or her capacity to be disruptive of the 'lifelessness' Koltès felt risked overwhelming France. In view of the fact that Koltès despecified the location of the city in which *Quai ouest* is set by situating the warehouse in a city 'somewhere in the West', it can be understood that he extrapolated his experience of France outwards to any developed country.

This second, counternarrative, hierarchy, one which I will continue to argue dominates the significatory systems of the text, posits a move towards blackness as a means of increased authenticity and power within the contact zone of the warehouse. But the counternarrative hierarchy, like the narrative hierarchy, also maintains the site of blackness and of the immigrant as a locus of the abject and the pathological. These powerful associations begin to become evident with Koch's adoption of the warehouse as a place which 'resembles' his state of advanced corruption, associations which disturbed the simple model of hierarchies in reversed flow. Indeed, the flow of the hierarchies only appears to be *somewhat* reversed, in that Abad is demonstrated to be the only character with any moments of 'authenticity' throughout the entire text. Abad's authenticity is, however, based in part on a state of marginalization which is consistently derided by the text's other characters in a fashion left unquestioned, even encouraged and supported, by the text's representational networks. Blackness and the trope of the immigrant come to serve as a complex and contradictory significatory locus for resistance and capitulation, for strength and vulnerability, for authenticity and the abject.

The biologically oriented, parochial and almost fetishistic use of the word 'blood' in Koltès' statement recorded above about immigrants also foregrounds his simplistic and seemingly essentialist understanding of ethnicity. Viewed in the context of such a statement, Koltès' persistent and equally simplistic derision of whiteness and celebration of blackness in his text and commentary come as little suprise.[18] In addition, the simple cue that Koltès immediately understands the term 'immigrant' to mean 'black' or 'Arab'[19] suggests that he feels that these ethnic categories somehow produce more authentic immigrants than other ethnicities along the epidermal continuum whose skin colouring is neither manifestly black nor Arab in their skin colouring.

Indeed, the very presence of the Hispanics in the warehouse disturbs the simple binary

[18] One must only recall Koltès' statements explored in the second chapter about all Europeans being murderers, and the general pathetic quality of the whites in *Combat*.

[19] It is important to remember that Abad's name is derived from an Arabic term.

poles of the 'Black-White problem', as Koltès termed it, which served as the parameters for the discourse of ethnicity in *Combat*. The Hispanic family falls into the interstices of this 'problem', this 'chasm' as Koltès would perhaps have termed it.[20] Their ethnicity provides differentiation along what has now evolved from a simple black-white binary into a continuum that includes other positions in between. In addition, the immigrant's state of quasi-itinerancy in the warehouse introduces differentiations into simple distinctions between immigrant and native, between foreign and domestic. These questions of 'who belongs most' will feed quite significantly into questions of hierarchies of ethnicity.

If *Quai ouest*, like *Combat*, proposes a slide for the whites towards an authenticating yet destructive blackness, what lies in store for those characters whose ethnicity, or more specifically — skin colour — lies in between the poles of black and white? Considering Koltès' virulent anti-Western and anti-white feelings, in combination with his simplistic reduction of ethnicity to skin colour, it follows logically that an observer may justifiably wonder to what extent those of his characters who are not entirely black are punished for their 'hybrid' status of being infected with whiteness? How does the example of the other immigrant characters, caught partway along the various continua under discussion, shed more light on the nature of compacted contradictions in *Quai ouest* and the problems with notions of hierarchies of ethnicity in general?

3.10 Cécile

Abad is doubly uprooted by being banished from both his home and his country. Cécile is doubly uprooted and a hybrid many times over. She is disenfranchized as a result of her double displacement, which first involved being uprooted from her aboriginal homeplace to Lomas Altas. She was then 'dragged' from from Lomas Altas to the warehouse in the unnamed port. We learn of her past when she attacks her husband, addressing him as:

> toi qui m'as tout appris, toi qui m'as sortie du ruisseau où je croupissais pour m'élever jusque dans la merde des Lomas Altas et qui m'a tirée de la merde des Lomas Altas pour me traîner dans cette merde-ci, vieille, malade, sans force, sans idée. (1985, 79)
>
> [you who taught me everything, you who took me from the stream where I was squatting and brought me up to the shit of Lomas Altas and who took me out of the shit of Lomas Altas only to drag me through this shit, old and sick and weak as I am.]

This uprootedness has led to Cécile's cultural *métissage*. Her initial aboriginal ethnicity has been hispanicized and 'civilized' with her marriage to the South American Rodolphe,

[20] Recall Koltès' description of the situation between the blacks and whites in *Combat* where "il s'agissait déja de deux mondes" [the play dealt with two worlds] which "se parlaient comme au dessus d'un précipice" [spoke to one another across a chasm] (1986b, 60).

and she has been forced to adapt once again to a new culture with her arrival in the West. This voyage has been an overwhelmingly frustrating one for Cécile. Indeed, the move towards the dream of freedom and success of the West has been, it would seem, in vain. Cécile came "depuis notre pays jusqu'au pays d'ici" [from our country to this country] (1985, 38) with the intention of turning her son Charles "en un être humain de première catégorie" [into a first class human being] but now he is simply, according to her, a "larve pourrissante au soleil" [maggot rotting in the sun] (1985, 38).

As has been discussed, the logic of opportunism and *arrivisme* that characterizes the simple social ladder of the warehouse creates the circumstances in which the immigrant family find it expedient to pinpoint someone or something to blame for their descent into the 'dark.' Such gestures of incrimination also serve to help those pointing the finger to purge themselves of the darkness that they manifestly abhor. Their self-hatred is a public 'performance' clearly for the benefit of those they emulate in order to curry favour. In her desperation to 'lactify' herself in the eyes of the new arrived whites, she purges herself of the 'darkness' she contains by also indirectly attacking Abad. When Abad appears on stage with a machine gun late in the play, Cécile exclaims to Koch:

> Dieu, monsieur, Dieu lui-même vous a conduit ici par la main pour que nous nous unissons contre les chiens et les sauvages, ne nous laissez pas nous noyer parmi les sauvages, ne nous laissez pas nous confondre avec les chiens parmi lesquels nous vivons ; tendez-moi votre main. (1985, 84)
>
> [God himself, sir, has led you here by the hand so we can unite against the dogs and savages, don't let us drown among these savages, don't let us turn into the dogs we live with; give me your hand.]

Cécile's abuse of Abad is contextualized by her reminiscences of better times. When speaking to Koch, she contrasts her family's current condition of living in the 'dark' with

[For, to see us like this, anyone would think we were stray dogs, but we know who and what we are and that is our consolation. In fact, at home, we are people of some note, and if we went back tomorrow the best families of Lomas Altas would kiss our hands if we came off the boat. They kissed our hands, sir, when we took the boat at the end of the war, with this poor man half-crazed and barely able to walk, and the defeat, and our money which was now worthless. We made our way to the port, because I wanted to make a first-class human being out of my son, and since our money was worthless, what was the use of having a position back there ? At the port, ten ships were making ready to sail for ten unknown destinations, we didn't know which one to take, the child was pulling at my left hand, we followed him and now we are here, in the dark, while back there, in our absence, the best families continue to honour this man's heroism, sir, this man who lost half of his feet and most of his strength and almost all of his mind in a forgotten war, and who today is losing his sight. But here, no one honours that war, no one honours this man, and here we stand, reduced, like stray dogs, with short-term visas, in the dark.]

Once again, following Cécile's earlier assertions that she plans to scam Koch, it is evident that she hopes to benefit by her acts of derogatory naming of 'darkness'. She later suggests to Koch that his way of helping may be to provide assistance in the process of naturalization the family are trying to pursue:

Nous vivons ici comme de pauvres chiens oubliés dans le noir, cet homme à demi détruit par la guerre, mon fils qui vous a soutenu dans votre chute, et toute une famille, attendant un dossier de visa qui n'en finit pas de grimper les écheleons jusqu'à ce qu'il soit au sommet. (1985, 69)

[We live here like poor dogs, forgotten in the dark, this man half broken by the war, my son that caught you when you fell, and a whole family waiting for a visa application that rises higher and higher to the top of the pile.]

Cécile's continued derision of the 'dark' within which she finds herself works in combination with her direct attacks on Abad as we discussed earlier earlier in the chapter. Her previous diatribe functions in association with the derogatory references to darkness and signals a major shift. This shift is the switch from the association of blackness with derogatory stereotypes of the primitive, the dominant trope in *Combat,* to the association of blackness with derogatory stereotypes of immigrants and immigration.

When Cécile's various anti-immigrant articulations and insinuations are understood in the context of her own status as immigrant, it comes as little suprise that Cécile is in a state of psychic dissonance. I have examined Cécile's long scene in which she speaks to Abad alone. She begins by affirming that she has something in common with him. She makes reference to her ethnicity as an aboriginal who has been 'colonized' by her husband Rodolphe's desire to make her into a good Hispanic woman. "Je m'entends bien avec les sauvages, je suis une vieille sauvage moi-même" [I get on well with savages, I'm an old savage myself] (1985, 52), she states before suggesting that she and Abad have a cigarette together. Shortly after admitting similarities between them she quickly asserts difference, re-inscribing his association with the warehouse in contradistinction to the place from which she hails:

> C'est très sale, ici. (Elle regarde autour d'elle.) C'est dégueulasse. J'en ai honte pour vous, jamais vu une telle dégueulasserie. Dans mon pays on aurait honte d'imaginer un endroit pareil. Même les rats des égouts de mon pays refuseraient de s'accoupler avec les rats d'ici. (1985, 53)
>
> [It's filthy here. (She looks around) It'd make you puke. I'm ashamed for you, I've never seen such squalor. In my country we'd be ashamed to imagine such a place. Even our rats wouldn't fuck the rats from round here.]

She has cast Abad as somehow unclean compared to her: "C'est le monde renversé mais Dieu, merci bien, a l'habitude de distinguer les animaux purs des animaux impurs, on ne couchera jamais sur la même couchette, merci bien, vous n'embarquerez pas sur le même bateau que nous" [The world is out of joint, but the Lord can always tell the pure from the impure, we'll never sleep in the same bunk, praise God, you won't even get on the same boat as us] (1985, 52). Indeed, Cécile continuously demonstrates an ambivalence towards her own origins and would appear to be caught in, and struggling with, a dynamic Fanon describes. In *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon describes a situation in which the colonial subject is pinned between never being able to attain whiteness, nor being able to shed the ethnic roots he or she has been taught to devalue:

> The black man wants to be like the white man. For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white. Long ago the white man admitted the unarguable superiority of the white man, and all his efforts are aimed at achieving a white existence. (1967, 228)

In an assertion with which she justifies her behaviour, one which also points towards the inevitability of violence in the Koltesian contact zone, Cécile tells Abad that "les sauvages entre eux se bouffent le nez, c'est connu, au lieu de s'entraider" [everybody knows savages would sooner fight each other than help each other out] (1985, 53). It would appear that the only strategies for selfhood that emerge in the Koltèsian contact zone are those related to immediate survival, drives which are tied closely to the primitive impulses dictated to the characters by the hegemonic neo-colonial discourse within which both they and Koltès found themselves.

Most of the qualities the other characters ascribe to Cécile are in line with Koltès' own assertions about Cécile which appear in an appendix to the play entitled "Mettre en scène *Quai ouest*" ('Staging *Quai ouest* '). Koltès informed the reader in this text that:

> Il ne faut pas prendre Cécile pour une imbécile; tout le monde, autour d'elle, s'en charge. Prendre Cécile pour une imbécile, ce serait la prendre pour une mère, pour une aristocrate en exil, ou pour une Indienne qui possède je ne sais quels pouvoirs magiques; alors qu'elle n'est, elle le dit elle-même, qu'une mouche enfermée dans un placard, et qui crèvera à coup sûr avant qu'on ouvre la porte. (1985, 106)
>
> [Cecile must not be taken for a fool. Everyone around her does so. To take Cecile for a fool would be to take her for a mother, for an aristocrat in exile or an Indian possessed of some kind of

magical powers, when she is simply, as she says herself, a fly caught in a cupboard that will surely die before the door is opened.]

The identification and mythologization of Cécile in the text of the play takes the forms Koltès suggests in this quotation. Charles, for example, finds her to be little more than an annoying mother. When she tries to encourage him to begin swindling Koch, he tells her: "Ne t'occupe de rien, reste dans ton coin, ce ne sont pas tes affaires, tu es beaucoup trop vieille pour trafiquer, et malade" [Don't deal anything, stay in your corner, it's none of your business, you're far too old to make deals, plus you're sick] (1985, 41). For their part, Koch and Monique find her grandiose stories of the richness of the immigrants' lives at home alternatively annoying and amusing:

MONIQUE (bas, à Koch). — Je trouve les pitreries de cette femme dégoûtantes.
KOCH. — Elles me plaisent, à moi.
(1985, 70)

[MONIQUE (quietly, to Koch). — I find this woman's antics disgusting.
KOCH (quietly, to Monique). — I rather enjoy them.]

For Rodolphe, his wife's 'savage' aboriginal origins are a source of her strength. He calls Charles to watch her arrive on stage:

Regarde-la, comme elle montre ses jambes, ta mère; dans le fond de la nuit, dans le froid, comme elle découvre ses jambes: pas une veine, pas une tâche bleue, pas un frisson, pas le moindre petit point de chair de poule; elle soutient ce gros tas mou en vacillant sans trembler. Regarde, petit, regarde comme ses jambes sont belles; malgré le froid de la nuit, regarde ses jambes, à cette sauvage, soutenant ce tas rose et pelé, humide et sale, regarde. Comment, avec une mère comme cela, aurais-tu voulu que je fusse un bon père. Regarde, la sauvage, belle et forte, qui avance. (1985, 76-77)

[look, boy, at how she shows off her legs; in the middle of the night, in the cold, she sure knows how to show them off: not a single vein, no hints of blue, not a shiver, not even the slightest hint of goose flesh; she may waver a bit showing off her heaps of flab, but there's no trembling. Look, look my boy, at how beautiful they are; even in the cold at night, look how the savage holds up her pink, scabby heap.]

Cécile's seemingly inescapable savagery continuously serves as grounds for her family's dislike of her. Towards the end of the play Charles wants to be blessed by his father before he makes an attempt at leaving the warehouse for good. The emasculated Rodolphe, literally and metaphorically castrated in the face of the volitional and libidinized Cécile, has no desire to bless his son and exclaims: "Demande à ta mère et fous-moi la paix." [Go ask your mother, and leave me the hell alone] (91) Charles retorts: "Je ne veux rien demander à ma mère" [I don't want to ask her for anything]. Rodolphe responds by agreeing with Charles, retelling his wife's 'upward' movement from low, wet places to dining rooms and dinner tables. It seems, however, that the primality within her is dangerous and vampiric, one which cannot be erased:

> Tu as raison. C'est une chienne. Cette chienne profite de ce que je peux à peine marcher et que je ne peux plus cracher que des demi-crachats. Cette sauvage traînait dans le ruisseau ; c'est moi qui l'ai pêchée comme un têtard dans l'étang, qui l'ai lavée et habillée, qui lui ai tout appris, comment marcher, manger, rire, pleurer, appris que la terre était ronde et que le soleil tourne autour, appris une langue correcte elle qui ne parlait qu'une langue obscène, appris la religion ; et une fois nourrie, habillée, sachant cracher dans les crachoirs et se laver les doigts dans les rinces-doigts, la sauvage s'est réveillée et elle s'est mise à travailler à mon malheur, sans raison, pour son foutu plaisir de sauvage. Ainsi la pourriture gagne un fruit sain, mais jamais la santé ne regagne un fruit pourri. (1985, 91)

> [You're right. She's a bitch. That bitch exploits the fact that I can hardly walk, hardly even spit. That savage was in the gutter; I fished her out like a tadpole from a swamp, I washed her and dressed her, I taught her everything, how to walk, eat, laugh, cry, taught her a proper language when all she could speak was a filthy jargon, I taught her religion. And once she was fed and dressed and knew how to spit in spittoons and wash her fingers in fingerbowls, the savage in her woke up and she started to plan my downfall, for no reason, for her own savage pleasure. So it goes, the rot spoils a healthy fruit, but health never comes back to a rotten fruit.]

Cécile seems happy enough to fulfill these various roles if it will help her achieve her desired ends. For example, she will play the part of the interventionist mother/deal-maker in order to get her son to assist her. When speaking to Charles about Koch's arrival, and her son's unwillingness to include her in his plans to swindle him, she exclaims:

> Il est venu pour nous tous, pas pour toi seulement. Quoi ? une automobile arriverait pendant la nuit, tout le monde sortirait pour trafiquer et moi, on me laisserait dans mon coin sous prétexte que je suis trop vieille et malade ? je trafiquerai quand-même puisque tu ne fais rien. (1985, 40)

> [He's here for all of us, not just you. Come on. A car comes in the night and everybody runs to get in on the deal and I get left in my corner because I'm too old and sick? I'll make my deals anyway since you aren't doing anything.]

As we have seen, Cécile has no difficulty bragging to Koch about her origins, especially when she neglects to tell him of her aboriginal heritage: "In fact, at home," she explains, "we are people of some note, and if we went back tomorrow the best families of Lomas Altas would kiss our hands if we came off the boat". And, as I have indicated, she evokes her 'savage' ancestry in order to catalyze momentary solidarity with Abad before anxiously proceeding to insult him.

Koltès explained in the endnotes to the play that her capacity to play roles is central to her identity:

> Si l'on vous prend pour un imbécile, de l'une des mille manières qui existent de prendre quelqu'un pour un imbécile, je connais trois réponses possibles :
>
> —afficher une imperturbable dignité ;
>
> —monter à quel point on peut jouer l'imbécile. (Il s'agit là d'un art qui fut une spécialité des Noirs du ghetto de San Francisco, qu'on a baptisé le "mau-mauing", et qui consistait à raisonner ainsi : le Blanc nous prend pour des Sauvages, faisons-lui un sacré numéro de sauvages.)

— Cécile dit : montrons à quel point je suis capable d'être une imbécile, à ce point imbécile que je prétends, les pieds dans la merde, afficher une imperturbable dignité. (1985, 106-07)

[In the event that someone takes you for a fool (in one of the many thousands of ways that there are to take someone for a fool), I know of three possible responses:

— displaying an imperturbable dignity;

— showing to just what point you can play the fool (this was a speciality of the blacks in the San Francisco ghetto, called mau-mauing, the thinking behind it being that 'if the White Man takes us to be Savages, let's put on one hell of a Savage Show').

— Cecile's answer is: let me show you to what point I'm capable of being foolish, so much so that, ankle deep in shit, I still presume to display an imperturbable dignity.]

Cécile's strategy, as far as Koltès described it, does not explicitly involve 'playing the Savage' as he suggests the blacks of San Francisco did. The 'playing' she engages in, Koltès suggested, is rather to take on the role of the dignified person to such an extent that, when one considers the potential for lack of dignity in her circumstances, her extreme adoption of such a role makes her seem foolish.

Koltès' use of the example of 'mau-mauing', and the hyperbolization of various indicators pertaining to ethnicity that this activity would appear to entail, does not seem to be entirely arbitrary, however. The reality of the representation of Cécile in *Quai ouest* is that she is shown to be more than simply 'a fly in a cupboard' which will surely die. In fact, she is inscribed with the identity of the 'savage' in a fashion which is naturalized in that this identification remains unquestioned by the text. Despite Koltès' assurances that Cécile is simply playing roles, and to take her any other way would be to unjustly take her to be a fool, the text itself repeatedly and very evidently supports the derogatory accusations of 'savagery' directed at her by the other characters.

It is now important to discuss the extent to which the 'savage' mask that Cécile apparently 'chooses' to wear is in fact attached quite snugly to her face by the text's wider representational discourse. It is essential to note that Cécile's savagery is particularly evident in her frequent associations with the primitive and the primal. Earlier, I discussed how Koltès was quite concerned that Abad not be considered a 'savage.' I suggested that Koltès was motivated by a recognition on some level that the link between blackness and the primitive evident in the character of Alboury had to be severed. The two notions of 'blackness' and 'the primitive' entertained a close relationship in *Combat* and had contributed to the play's romanticization and exotification. Although these two factors had been instrumental in the play's popular acclaim, as we have seen, Koltès subsequently rejected them. In an interesting development from *Combat*, atavistic associations of primitivity still exist in the text, although now they have been shifted away from the black character, who bears derogatory associations with the immigrant, and they have been hoisted upon Cécile.

Once again as in the case with Abad, the location of the warehouse and Cécile's affiliations with it play an important role in the emergence of the discourse of primitivity associated with the character. There is a post-apocalyptic feeling in the location, with nature behaving chaotically and capriciously throughout the now abandoned neighbourhood. Stage directions early in the text note a suddenness of the changes in the surrounding light conditions, and the recurrence of such indications even seem to hint at some form of intentionality:

> Une soudaine trouée dans les nuages éclaire fugitivement l'immense façade du hangar et l'autoroute déserte sur laquelle tombe une pluie de feuilles silencieuses; puis l'obscurité revient, et il reste le clapotis de l'eau contre les murs. (1985, 14)
>
> [A sudden opening in the clouds briefly lights up the huge facade of the warehouse and the deserted motorway, on which a silent rain of leaves is falling.
> Then darkness, and nothing but the lapping of the water against the walls.]

The hints of a kind of animism are variously confirmed by the shamanic behaviour of the Hispanic matriach. Initially, Cécile's relationship with surrounding 'nature' is determined by the extent to which she protects her children from it. In her opening scene with Charles, she entreats him to get up off the ground and come up with a plan to swindle Koch. As the sun moves across the sky behind her, it repeatedly shines in Charles' eyes. On two occasions he states: "J'ai le soleil dans la figure" [The sun's in my face] (ibid., 40) and on each of these occasions the stage directions read "Elle bouge et lui fait de l'ombre" (ibid.). [She moves to shade him from the sun]. On a final occasion at the end of the scene when he demands: "Fais-moi de l'ombre" [Give me some shadow]. Cécile, before weeping, responds with "Je n'ai plus d'ombre." [I don't have any more shadow] (ibid.,43).

Her ability to block the elements escalates as she becomes increasingly enraged over the course of the text. At the beginning of her following scene with Abad we read that the warehouse is "traversé de rayons dorés" [crossed by beams of golden light] (ibid., 51) from the sun. She has previously suggested to Charles that the sun in this new place 'spoils people.' Part way through her vitriolic tirade to Abad the stage directions read that "Elle tourne le dos à Abad, regarde le plafond, marche de long en large" [She turns her back on Abad, looks at the ceiling, walks back and forth] (ibid., 53) before yelling at the sun:

> Couche, descends, dégringole, tu n'es pas encore fatigué de nous rôtir comme des larves, tu n'en as pas encore marre de m'embêter ? tu ne veux pas, s'il te plaît, être gentil et faire ton plongeon et me laisser la place ? (1985, 53-54)
>
> [Down, come down, down with you, are you not yet tired of roasting us like maggots, are you not yet sick of tormenting me ? Would you please be so kind as to just set, and get the hell out of my way ?]

At the end of the scene, Rodolphe's assertion that she is a savage is fully confirmed as

she manages to make the sun set through a primal force of will. She turns her rage at Abad skyward:

> Avant, tout était bien ici ; il n`y avait ni douleur dans les jambes ni douleur dans le dos, dans le cou, dans les yeux, pas de fièvre qui empêche de dormir, pas de mal de ventre ni de mal de poitrine. Alors nos corps à nous marchaient bien dressés, les épaules an arrière et le dos souple. Mais votre honte a courbé lentement nos épaules et baissé notre tête, et ça a été le commencement de notre malheur. Je ne veux plus te voir, je ne veux plus rien voir. (Se tournant vers le plafond) Couché !
>
> Les rayons dorés clignotent doucement et perdent leur éclat. (1985, 55)

> [Before, everything was good; there were no pains in the back or pains in the legs, in the neck, in the eyes, no fever to keep you awake, no aches in the stomach or in the breast. Our bodies stood upright, shoulders broad, backs supple. But your shame slowly bent our shoulders and forced down our heads, and that was the beginning of our misfortune. I don't want to look upon you anymore, I don't want to look upon anything. (Turning towards the ceiling) Down !
>
> The golden beams flash softly and lose their brightness.]

Koltès' use of the word 'ceiling' in the stage directions as opposed to the word 'sky' suggests some distanciation from Cécile's mystical powers. His use of terminology relating to the theatre in which an eventual production will take place as opposed to the illusion created suggests an implicit authorial recognition that Cécile's ability to make the sun set is a theatrical effect. However, this recognition seems to be little more than a *clin d'oeil* in the overall discourse of the stage directions however, in which the lighting effects which mimic the sun are described as "golden beams", or even more explicitly referred to as the sun, such as when "Cécile apparaît, le soleil monte dans le ciel à toute vitesse" [Cécile appears, the sun rises quickly in the sky] (1985, 37). Koltès' unmediated descriptions of illusion and the corollary lack of objectivity about the stage effects which are described contribute to the naturalization of Cécile's acts of shamanism within the text. This process of naturalization in turn contributes to the supposed self-evidence of the association of shamanistic characteristics with the Hispanic matriarch.

In the ante-penultimate scene of the play, Cécile's devolution towards a hispanicized and shamanic primality is fulfilled. Over the course of the scene, she begins screaming in Spanish, much to the horror of her family, then in Quechwa, before finally expiring. Rodolphe continues with the discourse of primitivization when he first hears her break into Quechwa by saying "C'est l'Indienne qui se réveille" [The Indian wakes] (1985, 98) in explanation to their daughter. Shortly before she dies, after a long tirade of Quechwa, Rodolphe exclaims: "L'Indienne s'endort" [Ah, the Indian sleeps] (1985, 99). The discourse of the primitive is confirmed by the stage directions which tell the reader that after her last words, and shortly before she ceases moving altogether, "Cécile regarde le soleil, le soleil dégringole" [Cecile looks at the sun, the sun falls] (ibid.).

An examination of the translation of Cécile's Spanish text demonstrates a reverse pathologization of whiteness and non-aboriginal cultures. A portion of her translated text, presumably referring to her husband Rodolphe, reads as follows:

> Cet impuissant m'a fait pousser des racines dans ce pays de sauvages, ce châtré m'a poussée dans le lit des sauvages, il m'a fait forniquer avec les larves, il a fait s'accoupler l'orchidée avec le pissenlit, et me voilà à crever au milieu de cette merde.
>
> Je veux retourner aux Collines Hautes, non, je ne veux pas retourner là-bas, l'air y est pourri et il sent la merde; j'y ai perdu toutes mes couleurs et mes forces et ma virilité; j'y ai perdu la vie, (1985, 103)
>
> [That impotent bastard made me put down roots in this land full of savages, that eunuch forced me into the savages' bed! He made me fornicate with maggots! He made the orchid screw with the weeds, and now here I am dying in the midst of all this shit.
>
> I want to return to the High Hills [Lomas Altas] — no — I don't want to return there! The air stinks of shit. I lost all my colour and my strength and virility there. I lost my life there.]

Rather than simply being a 'savage', a charge she has jokingly levelled at herself in her discussion with Abad, Cécile now levels the accusation of 'savagery' at the Hispanics she met in the unnamed South American society into which Rodolphe introduced her. Like Abad, who associates the presence of a white man with his double disenfranchisement, Cécile exclaims that part of her downfall was a loss of 'colour', a loss associated with the erosion of 'strength', 'virility' and even 'life'. Earlier in the text she has derided in a similar fashion those inhabitants of the Western location in which she is now living when she tells Charles that she fears that he will move on and abandon the family "plantés dans cette merde au milieu de sauvages que je ne connais toujours pas, ni les habitudes, ni les manières, ni la religion" [stuck in this shit surrounded by savages I still don't understand, not their habits, not their customs, not their religion] (1985, 40).

The counternarrative that Cécile proposes depends simply on pointing the oppressor's weapons back at him. Her strategy does not challenge the simple binaries (of savage/civilized) within which her own conception of identity is anchored. It is difficult to ascertain whether the inevitability of conflict within the contact zone results from this simple redirection of aggression or whether, conversely, Koltès' arguably pessimistic determination to demonstrate the inevitability of conflict demands this simple strategy. What is clear is that, whatever Koltès' intentions, this reverse derogatory naming which involves a 'decentering' of various shades of 'whiteness' does nothing to prevent Cécile's continued psychic devolution over the course of the production. A consequence of Koltès' binarist superstructure for the conceptualization of identity is that no new identities can emerge. Violence is once again rendered inevitable, yet on this occasion it is internalized. Cécile, like Alboury in *Combat* before her, is offered up as a

representational sacrifice, awash in stereotypes directed at her by other characters and confirmed by the implicit hierarchies of ethnicity in the text, stereotypes from which she cannot escape. Her descent towards savagery, closely intertwined with her role as a powerful woman, kills her. Cécile's final words are a vituperative damning of the restrictive sexual inevitabilities on which have been predicated her identity and her very existence:

> Maudites soient les nuits où s'attifent les femmes pour forniquer avec le chacal errant ; et elles se désattifent neuf mois après sur une plage détestée en criant ; maudit soit le cri des femmes au coeur de la nuit, qui accouchent d'autres femmes qui s'attiferont et se désattiferont et crieront à leur tour. Maudit soit l'instrument de la reproduction de la femme et maudit soit le dieu qui a maudit la femme par l'instrument errant de l'homme comme un chacal affamé. (1985, 103-04)

> [Damned be the nights when women get all done up to screw the stray jackal! Damned be those nights — nine months later — when they find themselves undone and wailing on some deserted beach! Damned be the wailing of the women in the heart of the night, women who will give birth to other women that get all done up only to find themselves undone and then wail in their turn! Damned be the woman's womb and damned be the God who damned the woman with the stray tool of men no better than starved jackals.]

Koltès suggests in the notes following the play that Cécile is "comme un miroir qui reflète ce qu'on attend d'elle, et le reflète acec une lumière si puissante qu'elle parvient à éblouir le partenaire" [like a mirror reflecting what is expected of her, and reflecting it with a light so bright that she manages to dazzle her partner] (1985, 107). This type of role-playing has taxing effects on her character, however. Koltès explains that "A cet infini jeu de défense, Cécile dépense une infinie énergie ; parfois, elle perd le fil et se demande : où en étais-je? [In this infinite game of defences, Cécile expends an infinite quantity of energy. Sometimes she loses the thread of it all and asks herself: where was I?] (ibid.). In the type of role playing Cécile engages in, it is easy to lose onesself and no longer have a coherent sense of one's identity. It would appear that this loss of coherence leads towards the devolution characteristic of the type of primality that Cécile experiences. When one loses one's course, one heads towards death and primality. These qualities are associated with 'blackness' which is at once a quality both of primality and death, as well as a quality of authenticity and resistance. There is an implosion of meaning at a fundamental level as the semantic barriers between vastly different, even polar opposite, categories of significance break down.

This binary implosion would appear to be result of a world of inevitable combat followed to its logical conclusion. But if notions of hierachies of ethnicities are exacerbated, and their troubling implications exposed, they remain fundamentally uncritiqued by Koltès. Indeed, his plays derive their dramaturgical drives from such mechanisms. It would seem evident that in *Quai ouest*, as in *Combat*, the supposed counternarrative is less counter-hegemonic, let alone anti-hegemonic, than it may at first appear, and may leave the reader wondering if the overall systems of significance in the text are not as

counternarrative as Koltès might have hoped or intended.

Not only is Cécile's hybridity questionable and unstable, but it would also seem that her very status of Hispanic and aboriginal is simply less authentic than the blackness incarnated by Abad. Not only is she a cultural hybrid, but she is somewhere on the grey scale between the good/bad binaries of black and white. Her denigration for being a 'hybrid' in this sense would seem entirely consistent with Koltès' adoption of a relatively simplistic hatred of whites and Europeans in general complemented by a belief in the 'authenticity' of blacks. Cécile would appear to have more 'authenticity' than, for example, Koch, particularly as a result of her shamanic aboriginal qualities, but she does share certain qualities with her lactic associates to whom she is somewhat proximate on the epidermal continuum.

For example, in the notes to the play Koltès describes Koch in a fashion reminiscent of his description of Cécile: that of a performative entity without a 'true' grounding of identity. Koltès posits Koch to have an eternally regressing series of horizons within his psyche, with nothing at his core.

> Le pire qui peut arriver à Koch, c'est qu'on le fasse douloureux et profond, alors qu'il est capricieux et secret. La vraie profondeur de Koch, s'il en est une, vient de la multitude de barrières qu'il a élevées entre ce qu'il révèle et son secret; au point que, quand on croit avoir découvert enfin le coeur du problème, on peut être certain que ce n'est encore qu'une barrière façonnée pour empêcher qu'on pénètre davantage, au point qu'il n'est pas sûr du tout qu'à la fin il y ait un secret, sinon que Koch se présente comme une infinité de cercueils pharaoniques emboîtés les uns dans les autres et destinés à tromper le regard ; et que vouloir profaner l'infini mystère de cette tombe conduirait probablement l'explorateur à découvrir une dernière boîte renfermant quelques cendres mortes et dépourvues de sens. (1985, 105-106).
>
> [The worst that could happen to Koch would be to make him pained and profound, when really he's capricious and secretive. Koch's real depth, if you could call it that, comes from the multitude of barriers he has erected between what he choses to reveal and what his secret is — so much so that when you finally believe you've reached the heart of the problem, you can be sure that it's simply another well-constructed barrier to prevent you from penetrating any further — so much so that it's not at all clear in the end whether there is a secret at all, except that Koch presents himself as an infinite series of sarcophagi, each one inside the other and designed to trick the eye. To wish to desecrate the infinite mystery of this tomb would probably lead the explorer to discover a final box containing a few dead and meaningless ashes.]

Cécile is different from Koch in that the core of her identity revolves around the primitive qualities which will finally consume her (despite Koltès' assertions that she is simply a 'fly trapped in a cupboard'). The 'roles' that she seems prepared to play are similar in function to the 'barriers' that Koch erects within himself. Both characters have psychological blockages that would seem to obstruct, by means of the 'twisting and turning chat of language' Koltès discussed early in his career (1999b, 97; app. B,3), the emergence of any 'real' identities. Unlike Abad, whose identity is based on his blackness and all the associations of sexuality, secretiveness and oppression that this quality carries

with it, Koltès suspects that beyond the walls of 'barriers' and 'roles' the white and 'less-black-than-black' characters really have nothing constituting them at all.

It would appear that the contact zone of the warehouse, infused as it is with a host of restrictive rules and inevitabilities, does not permit any successful hybridity. Koltès' contact zone would also seem to be the antithesis of Pratt's description of the colonial/postcolonial contact zone introduced in the previous chapter. Pratt indicates that far from understanding colonialist encounters as meetings between monolithic homogeneous subjects, the concept of the contact zone stresses "interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonialist encounters", treating relations between colonizer and colonized in terms of "copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices" (Pratt 1992, 7). In a fascinating logical extension of the terms which Koltès himself establishes, hybridity, be it cultural or biological, can only be a horrible thing in *Quai ouest* for it signifies a collapse of one homogeneous system into another. The result of the penetration of the immigrants into the new location is a fracturing hybridity and eventually death. Cécile in particular lives in a restless, fractured and decentered psychic state, torn between 'Old World' and 'New', embodying the volatile and ultimately fatal disequilibrium of an unsatisfactory hybridity — a Mother Courage of the interstices.

3.11 Language and hybridity

Koltès described all the characters' use of language in an interview taken while he was still writing the text:

> dans ma prochaine pièce, tous les personnages parlent le français sans qu'il soit la langue maternelle d'aucun d'eux. Cela apporte une modification profond de la langue, comme lorsqu'on fait un long séjour dans un pays étranger dont on ignore la langue et que l'on retrouve la sienne modifiée, de même que ses propres structures de pensées. (1999a, 27)
>
> [in my next play, all of the characters speak French, although French isn't a mother tongue for any of them. This brings about a deep change in the language they use, such as when you take a long trip in a place where you don't speak the language and you find your own speech and thought patterns altered.]

This preoccupation with the staging of a translingual 'deep change' also extended to the possible effects of similar inscriptions and interventions on a broader sphere:

> La langue française, comme la culture française en général, ne m'intéresse que lorsqu'elle est altérée. Une langage française qui serait revue et corrigée, colonisée par une culture étrangère, aurait une dimension nouvelle et gagnerait en richesses expressives, à la manière d'une statue antique à laquelle manquent la tête et les bras et qui tire sa beauté précisement de cette absence-là. (1999a, 26-27)
>
> [The French language — and in fact the French culture in general — only interests me when it is

altered somehow. A French language which has been re-written and corrected — colonized — by a foreign culture would gain a new dimension and richness of expression, in the same way that a classical statue without a head or limbs is made beautiful by their very absence.]

What remains to be seen is the way in which Koltès inscribes 'foreignness' into the French language, his own native tongue. In what way does he take his recollections of the 'alteration' of his own speech and thought patterns and use them to create the linguistically altered speech of his characters who are speaking in translation? It can be very useful to extend the analysis of the character of Cécile by taking a closer look at the language she uses.

In *Quai ouest*, the linguistically complex and hybridized character of Cécile emerges from the darkened warehouse. Her emergence marks an important pattern of linguistic insurgence in Koltès' writing which can be understood to be closely related to his binarizing dramaturgical strategies. Indeed, the moment when the heterogenizing elements of a foreign language emerge within the confines of the known or domestic language is, for Koltès, a moment when existing linguistic structures, and thus existing discursively produced cultural structures are, by association, productively disrupted.[21] Koltès complemented his use of the figure of the marginalized foreigner in his texts with the use of language and syntax which ostends what he asserted were the restrictive and sclerotized nature of existing linguistic structures. "Je continue à ne pouvoir écrire que comme étant la langue française dans la bouche d'un étranger" [I can still only write the French language as it sounds from a foreigner's mouth] (Attoun 1997, 242) he stated in 1983 during the staging of *Combat*, noting that this positioning as a wordsmith outside his direct experience "permet d'envisager le langage sous un angle mille fois plus intéressant — et d'abord plus beau, plus complexe et beaucoup plus riche" [allows you to experience the language from a new angle which is one thousand times more interesting — first of all, it's more beautiful, more complex and much more rich] (ibid.).

A characteristic portion of Cécile's dialogue can be used as the basis for an investigation of some specific inscriptions of 'foreignness'. In her first scene one quarter of the way through the play, she enters from the dark periphery of the warehouse, an avenging maternal angel, come to force her son to take advantage of the wealthy and vulnerable

[21] Earlier in the chapter I explored how, late in his life, Koltès would recall a moment in his youth when "I very quickly understood that it was them, the Arabs, who are France's new blood, that if France lived from the blood of the French alone, that would become a nightmare, kind of like Switzerland — a total sterility regarding the arts as well as everything else." (1999a, 116)

new arrivals[22] :

> Dis-moi, Carlos, dis-moi ce que tu comptes faire pour en tirer, très vite, tout ce qu'on peut en tirer, pour le faire cracher, pour plumer ce pigeon, pour saigner ce vieux coq jusqu'à la dernière goutte de son sang avant qu'il n'ait pu, à force de trahisons et de complicités, remettre son automobile en marche et qu'il file avec la poule et toutes nos espérences et tout le gâteau sans nous laisser une part, nous laissant dans le noir et dans la misère noire sans eau sans argent, tout juste bonne à marcher à quattre pattes et lécher la pisse des chiens sur le trottoir et boire de l'eau de pluie dans les poubelles et crever sous l'averse d'une sortie d'égout pendant que toi, Carlos, larve pourrie au soleil, tu dors alors que tu devrais déja être accroché à lui comme une chauve-souris dans ses cheveux (1985, 38)
>
> [Final translation in Dublin production: Talk to me, Carlos, tell me how you'll do it, squeeze everything out of him, quick as you can, make him cough it up, pluck that pigeon, bleed that old rooster down to his last drop, before he can get his car going again with all his scheming and lying and make off with that tart, and all our hopes. 'Cause he won't leave us our slice of the cake, he'll dump us here in the dark, in our misery, with no water and no money, where we can hardly even crawl, or lick the dogs piss off the sidewalk or drink the rainwater out of the dustbins or die in the trickle from the gutter, while you rot here, Carlos, like a maggot in the sun, and sleep, when you should be sticking to him like a bat in his hair.]

This rhythmical accumulation of clauses is a lyricism of crud. Cecile's flight of tongue articulates a process of gradual degradation of the human as she first objectifies the other

[22] I have supplied Koltès' French version and the English translation staged in a 1999 Dublin production. As I have already stated, the act of translation is by no means a transparent activity. It is inflected with aesthetic and ideological choices resulting from the translator's experience as both an individual and historical subject. Therefore, I thought it would be most relevant to provide here a somewhat detailed description of the choices that contributed to the final English language section of text featured above. It was team-translated by myself, Joseph Long and Alex Johnston.

A version of the above text which simplified or contained the rambunctious flow of words and images might render Cécile's declarations more lucid ("You must tell me, Carlos, how you'll do it. You must tell me how you will squeeze everything out of him as quick as you can, and make him cough it all up"), but would result in the containment of her imperatives in a mind clearly less transfixed by external dreamlike and determining 'forces', rendering her use of image-laden entreaties laborious and portenteous ("You must tell me how you will pluck that old pigeon, how you'll bleed that old rooster down to the very last drop of his blood ... He will leave us here in the dark, alone and miserable without water and without money, and we will barely be able to crawl or even lick the dog's piss off the pavement.).

Similarly, a possibility which emerged with regard to Cécile was to provide an 'upper class' or more formal version of her speech, and transform the repetitious quality of the French into the ornate and stylized formal talk of an 'old school' landed gentry (And we, Carlos, we will be left to drink the rainwater from out of the dustbins and left to perish under the spray of a sewer pipe while you, Carlos, you rot like a maggot under the sun, and you sleep, you sleep when you should be close to him as a bat flying around in his hair.). This approach, although it provides at least a stereotypical anchoring point for one of her ethnic archives, would simply recover her to a psychological realist paradigm and unproductively reduce the tension between the amount of energy with which Koltès invigorated the language/rhythms and Cécile's evocation of an entropic vision of the world. In addition, a more structurally ornate form of speech would not correspond to the very simple words and phrases she employs, consistent with Koltès' assertion that foreigners use language "comme un prisonnier qui taperait contre son mur pour communiquer en morse avec son voisin" [like a prisoner tapping on his wall to communicate in morse code with his neighbour] (Attoun 1997, 242).

We were faced with the challenge of finding an adequate means of capturing the language of a twice culturally 'uprooted' individual, a difficulty which was in a sense already half-solved by Koltès' refusal of specific cultural and linguisitic moorings, as well as his disavowal of cogent, psychologically coherent characters.

characters with the disjunctive pronoun "eux." She then disregards the conventional constructs of personality in favour of comparing them with the 'baser' forms of birds, dogs, maggots and bats. Her speech bursts through pretensions of psychological coherence and verisimilitude with the continuous jumbled emergence of images, a surging which suggests that her subconscious has released an imaginative language which is taking over, even resulting in the quasi-denial of the presence of her interlocutor.

Although Koltès frequently uses run-on sentences to underscore rhythmically his characters' anxious vitality, Cécile's concatenation of clauses sometimes continues for hundreds of words at a time. This suggests that the refraction into French of her Hispanic and aboriginal roots results in a particularly potent kind of hispanicized shamanism discussed earlier in the chapter. It would appear that in symbolic and in rhythmical terms, the transformation of the French language, in the above passage at least, plays into the ethnic stereotypes with which Koltès animates the character's identity. Indeed, on a lexical level, the only evidently Hispanic word in the above passage is her naming of her son Carlos, rather than Charles.

Counter to Koltès' discussion of languages other than French, no actual Spanish words or phrases manifest themselves in the French Cécile speaks before she actually breaks into Spanish in her last scene. Although this may be a result of the interference run by a deeper layer of aboriginal language and identity that manifests itself shortly before her death, Koltès' tendency towards universalist subsitutionalism prevents the emergence of any recognizeable culturally specific cadences in the French he has her speak. Just as Koltès is less interested in the specific qualities of a location, but rather in what it evokes in allegorical terms and permits as regards human relationships, so the specific qualities of a foreign language leave Koltès unengaged. It is the relationships one entertains with that language,[23] and what it reveals in and around around those employing it which attract him.

Indeed, Koltès asserted that he was particularly interested in language when it was worked in "a strange way. That's the rapport I have with it and that's how I try to use it."(Prique 1998, 242). Deleuze and Guatari would perhaps describe Koltès as an author who is "a foreigner in his own tongue" (Deleuze and Guatari 1987, 10), because he attempts to release minor linguistic variables through stylistic innovation in order to subvert the dominant linguistic order. This process is activated, in the case of Cécile, by

[23] Koltès remarks that "Je trouve le rapport que peut avoir un homme avec une langue étrangère — tandis qu'il garde au fond de lui une langage 'maternelle' que personne ne comprend — est un des plus beaux rapports qu'on puisse établir avec le langage; c'est peut-être aussi celui qui ressemble le plus au rapport de l'écrivain avec les mots." [I find the rapport that a man can have with a foreign language — while he has a native, 'maternal' language deep within him that no one can understand — is one of the most beautiful relationships that one can have with a language. It's also the rapport that most resembles an author's relationship with words.] (1999a, 44)

the aestheticized stylization of her language, and such a transformation is brought about within the play's referential discourse by the pressures of the combative binarist representational matrix within which she struggles. It would seem, however, that in this case at least, Koltès' 'foreignizing' of the French language is limited by the fact that French is his first language, and that the disruptive 'foreign' qualities in the language are tied to the types of ethnic stereotypes discussed throughout this investigation.

3.12 A space of implosion

The tenebrous, multilingual, 'babelaisian'[24] space Koltès evokes in *Quai ouest* would appear in some senses to be the dark engines generating the postcolonial aftermath. The liminal location of the warehouse does not guarantee the freedom for new identities to emerge, indeed the restrictive violence of the warehouse's interstitiality ensures that identities are fixed within it, rather than providing safe passage from the evolution of one identity to the next. The hyperbolized and ostended time and space of encounter results in a contact zone viewed almost entirely in its sclerotizing negative. This dark singularity of a location is not in Cécile's case, nor in that of any other characters, qualified by any auto-ethnographic statements which would demonstrate a conscious understanding that the character's identity is constructed by the pressurized circumstances they inhabit. Nor does the constricting space allow for an even momentary Pirandello-esque recognition of themselves as Koltès' projections of a strategic essentialism or of dramaturgically efficacious stereotypes, as characterizes the characters in Genet's *Les Nègres*, for example.

In amplifying ethnic stereotypes, rather than investigating their construction, and in hyperbolizing the conditions of the postcolonial aftermath, Koltès showed some of the effects of imperial practice on a variety of his characters. I have discussed the enforced and radiant silence of Abad, the suicidal tendencies of a Koch desperate to 'find himself' in the darkness, the hysterical devolution of the unsatisfactorily hybrid Cécile. Koltès' own categorical and binarist tendencies risk, however, simply perpetuating and re-inscribing stereotypes generated by the colonialist discourse. As a result, the heightened, vigorous and frequently illogical quality of Cécile's and other characters' speech in *Quai ouest* does not guarantee a character's move through an enforced binarist dialectic to forge new identities and solidarities. The quality of the language does, however, provide enough energy to sustain the dark singularity of Koltès' space long enough for an audience to witness the sordid and distended effects of an obscure postcolonial aftermath. Inevitably, language finally fails, the fragile and fraught structures of debate and encounter implode into violence, and the brittle characters are dragged down into annihilation. Despite Cécile's plunge into Spanish and finally Quechuan, her desperate trajectory towards home results not in the arrival at some form of resuscitating

[24] This, *cher lecteur*, is a pun.

authenticity but instead at a point of extinction, both of the language and of herself.

3.13 The staging

With the return to a frontal staging model, and thus the capacity for the audience to take in the stage with one synoptic gaze, a number of the theoretical questions raised with regard to the collapse of a variety of factors associated with theatricality in the staging of *Combat* are somewhat less relevant. There is, for example, little evidence to suggest whether Chéreau's intentions were similar to his lucid desire to play with questions of the real as he explained in reference to *Combat*. Indeed, Isaach de Bankolé described how over the course of the rehearsals Chéreau payed less and less attention to the actors, and more and more to the set, even though Bankolé felt that this may have had something to do with the ability of the actors chosen:

> The huge size of the sets ate up all of Chéreau's attention. He was like a big kid playing with machines. It was like Christmas for him. He was happy like that. He became less and less demanding about the actor's work. I think it had to do with the confidence he put in the actors he chose. (Bankolé 1997, 44-45)

It would appear that with this staging the struggles of the actors and text against the design were less acceptable to audiences. The rate of attendance for *Quai ouest* dropped to 50% from the 103% attendance that had marked *Combat*. Indeed, only a small proportion of the critics felt that the inaudibility of the actors was justified dramaturgically. Isaac de Bankolé described how

> The walls [as described in the text of] *Quai ouest* are supposed to have holes in them to let in the light and to stay in shadows at their summit, but the huge [shipping] containers created the opposite effect. The only thing to be seen was the containers, and they also obscured the characters that could be heard about as well as fish talking from under water. You just saw them move around a bit and make a few splashes. (1997, 46)

An observer may wonder if Chéreau encouraged an overbearing design as a way of recognizing the importance that the location takes in the script. The warehouse may at times have been easier for the audience to understand than the plot itself. Indeed, Chéreau himself would later suggest that the text had proven to be difficult to work with:

> il était plus difficile de suivre [l'histoire de *Quai ouest* que celui de *Combat*]. Le spectateur ne doit pas se perdre dans les difficultés narratives qu'il rencontre. La clarté de la narration m'a toujours paru essentielle. Il faut donner ce plaisir-là au spectateur. (Chéreau 1988, 23)
>
> [*Quai ouest*] was more difficult to follow [than *Combat*]. The spectator cannot get lost in the narrative challenges that are presented to him. The clarity of the narration has always been essential to me. You have to give the spectator that pleasure.

The invisibility of the actors in *Quai ouest* would seem to have to do less with questions of aesthetic choice, however, than as a result of a certain amount of inattention or perhaps

even neglect. Indeed, Chéreau did not appear to encourage the actors to understand their roles in any kind of broad context. For example, Isaach de Bankolé, like Sidiki Bakaba before him playing the role of Alboury, was initially very pleased to be working with well-recognized people:

> The wonderful thing for me is to be on stage with so many great actors, and under the direction of someone who is a master, one without a method, without fixed notions, but someone who is teaching us to search, to doubt, to live. (Héliot 1986a, 25.)

Bankolé is reported in the papers as suggesting that he felt "very close to Abad" because of Abad's decision not to talk. He suggested in fact that he felt like "we are brothers" (Héliot, 1986a). It would seem that shortly before Bankolé was cast in the role of Abad, he was living with his girlfriend's family and decided not to speak as a kind of joke. He continued with his prank but things became serious and he was eventually put in a straight-jacket and taken to a psychiatric hospital for the night. He explained that "this experience taught me a lot about listening and how to express things without speech" (Bankolé 1997, 43). Bankolé asserted that he recalled his sensory experience of voluntary muteness for the creation of his character. There is, however, no evidence to suggest that the actor's assertion that he felt like Abad's 'brother' was at all grounded in any sense of the double-disenfranchisement that Abad had experienced as a result of being banished both from his family and his homeland.

In addition, the type of destabilization of the actors that occurred in the creation of *Combat* took on a particularly dramatic form in the work on *Quai ouest*. Isaach de Bankolé describes how Chéreau left the actors to fend for themselves at the production's opening by leaving one scene completely unrehearsed:

> over the course of the rehearsals, strange things began to happen. For example, the last scene... was never rehearsed. We never even blocked it. We read it during the first day of table work, and we never came back to it... So the opening was coming up, and I'm thinking 'Wait a minute here, you're in a scene that we never even tried to block'. So I asked Hammou Graïa, who was playing Fak, what was going to happen. He said "Don't count on Patrice, he's done with us. We'll have to sort it out ourselves." I didn't believe him. The next day was the dress. I thought that he would at least ask us that afternoon to give him a quick look at what could possibly happen. He didn't do it. We opened. He never said anything. And that's the way it stayed. (Bankolé 1997, 44)

In his early work with *Les Amertumes*, Koltès had attempted to create between stage and audience a deep, if unsettling relationship or communion between actors and audience. Even when he wrote *Quai ouest* Koltès' used the same type of language of emanation and revelation when discussing Abad that he employed when describing the results of Alexis' growth and emergence before the audience of *Les Amertumes*.

> Il faut donc choisir l'acteur qu fera Abad en fonction de ce qu'il a à faire, et non pas en fonction de ce qu'il est dispensé de faire. Nul besoin qu'il sache parler, sans doute ; mais, lorsqu'on le met dans un coin, à l'abri, son corps se met à dégager de la fumée. C'est pour cela qu'il doit être choisi.

(1985, 108).

> [The actor playing Abad should be chosen with regard to what he has to do, and not with regard to what he is exempt from doing. There is no reason why he should be able to speak, of course, but when you put him, sheltered, into a corner, his body begins to emit smoke. That's what he should be chosen for.]

On the other hand, Chéreau's work, or rather absence of work, with actors seemed to be pushing towards both a literal and metaphorical distance between stage and audience. Although Koltès' texts constantly deny the possibility of a communion based on surrender both between his characters and the actors and the audience, a number of essential indicators remind the observer that a constant hope for such a communion is a fundamental component of Koltès' oeuvre. These include his desire for the central characters to be seen before they are affected by the 'forces' of the other characters; his emphasis on humour in his texts; and the naiveté of a character like Claire in *Quai ouest*. Chéreau led relentless and somewhat flippant nihilist attacks on the various manifestations of this optimistic aspect of Koltès' work. This could lead one to surmise, in agreement with Christophe Bident that, despite Chéreau's interesting exploration of theatricality, Koltès would eventually, because of Chéreau's aesthetic nihilism, entrust the direction of his last play, *Roberto Zucco* to another director (Bident 2001, 66).

Despite the reduced importance of some of the questions of 'theatrical' collapse that became evident in the discussion of *Combat*, it is clear that, in addition to the issue of multi-dimensionality discussed above, questions of tensions between the 'allegorical' and the 'real' were still very much part of the design's relationship to the text. This becomes evident when we read Peduzzi's suggestion that "I didn't want to inscribe *Quai ouest* into a precise context, I wanted to be both modern and atemporal, because I don't think the text's strength is a passing one" (Peduzzi 1996, 98).

The stage location presented served to extend the allegorical qualities attributed to the design by the stage directions, poetics of primitivity which, as I have discussed in both Chapters Two and Three, are related to the ethnicity of the characters. Take, for example, the shamanistic Cécile who seems to control the sun by ordering it about: the lighting design created an environment in which the powers attributed to Cécile by the text were seen to be enacted on stage. The lighting designer for the production explained that:

> The light has a presence of its own. When Cécile is in the warehouse with Abad, she waits for dusk to fight with the sun. When she says "Down!" the sun sets. Cécile disappears into the shadows and the light comes up behind her. As if the sun passed behind a building and reappeared. It's a game of hide- and-go-seek between Cécile and the sun. (Delannoy 1996, 99)

This and other similar lighting effects, in combination with Peduzzi's commitment to atemporality, served to recreate the kind of decontextualized imaginary world that became

manifest as a result of the design in *Combat*. This effect was described most succinctly by a critic who suggested that *Quai ouest* was "A play so resolutely modern that it defies current events to become myth instantly" (Klausner, 1986).

Indeed, the pretense of performing with a certain realism that informed the acting work in *Combat* was abandoned with *Quai ouest*. The division between the performance styles of various ethnicities visible in *Combat* was eroded. The performance style was rather undifferentiated and non-realistic in all the performers. The description that Peduzzi provided of the design in the theatre's advertisement pamphlet for the season can be appropriately applied to the representational discourse of the penumbra in which the actors found themselves onstage:

> Dusk is the moment of the day when the penumbra follows the blinding light of the sun, the moment of grace when forbidden flowers become hopes, the favourite moment *when colours melt, disconnect, and superimpose without ever opposing one another.*"(my emph.) (Peduzzi 1986, 19)

In the dark warehouse, this ground zero of human difference, individual likenesses disappear, and we all realize we are searching for something, according to Peduzzi. He continued to explain that as the dusk

> draws us into the tenebrous avenues of unknown neighbourhoods at the time when the streets are suddenly filled with dark forms, when we scurry among the blocks looking for fugitive silhouettes, when we get lost in strange suburbs, lost and tripping through the basements of the night. (ibid.)

The 'we' Peduzzi discusses is clearly the urban white 'we' embodied by Koch and Monique, for they too find themselves lost and encountering strange figures in the dark. The discourse of centre and periphery, in which the 'we' of the centre go to 'get kicks' by visiting the margins, seems to have infiltrated the production in quite a systemic fashion if the comments by one of the cast's best known actors, Maria Casarès, are anything to go by:

> I think Koltès is a wanderer, an *errant* who searches the edges of towns, the edges of the world, the most distant and lost places. In my opinion, those distant edges are going to become the center of the world. Europe, which was the beacon of humanity has seen the extremities of the world come and plant itself right in the middle of things. I have the deepest impression that in his plays he takes everything which was on the periphery and places it dead center. (Casarès 1990, 27)

Yet that which was on the periphery and which is now dead centre is still being experienced from the centre's perspective. Chéreau's production of Quai *ouest* would seem to endorse the slide of the white characters towards the terrifying ethnic immigrant other at the heart of the text of *Quai ouest*. This is a devolution that also was visible with the collapse of difference between the whites and the primitive blacks in *Combat*. Although it may appear that the centre may not be able to hold and things may be falling apart, in the case of Koltès as supplemented and extended by Chéreau, the centre still holds a firm sway over both its perspective and the gaze that supports it.

CONCLUSION

One of the more fascinating aspects of Koltès' work is the remarkable consistency of concern he demonstrated over the course of his writing life. As early as the age of eleven Koltès wrote of a desire to find solace away from everything that was soiled and corrupt about home, to be in solidarity with other people, far, far away:

> Fuir la ville, fuir la fumée, fuir tout ce qui nuit! Vivre en un autre pays, connaître une autre race, travailler pour cette race! (1999b, 43)
>
> [To escape from the city, to escape from the smoke, to escape from everything harmful! To live in another country, meet another race of people and work for that race of people!]

The trajectory of many of Koltès' characters in *Combat* and *Quai ouest* is marked by a similar desire: an occasionally desperate, and perpetual struggle to flee from the complications of sex (Claire), the restrictions of family (Charles), strangers (Cal), emasculation (Rodolphe, Horn), alienation of various types (Leonie) and exclusion based on socio-economic conditions and/or ethnicity (Cecile, Charles, Fak). The remaining central characters, Alboury and Abad, have suffered such exclusion that their voyages have brought them to a different country altogether — that of the condemned. Unlike the other characters who continue their futile battles, the two black characters find themselves in a glorious realm of potent neutrality, a fecund darkness whose full powers and capacity for resistance emerge only when they are provoked. When this provocation occurs, the less grounded and less authentic characters in the environs must be prepared to suffer the consequeces of their inauthenticity. An avenging justice will be meted out either by Alboury and Abad themselves, or by the dangerous environments (compound, warehouse) whose quasi-animate presences the black men bring to life with their atavistic powers. Everyone else present, including the audience, stands warned.

Alboury and Abad contain within them the qualities of both ethical observer and punitive force that marked their predecessor, Alexis. In addition, Koltès' first central character also presented audiences of *Les Amertumes* with a choice regarding the extent to which they want to let themselves be immersed in the more 'authentic' identity which Alexis represented, embodied and finally even 'projected' towards them. What, then, are the 'choices' which Alboury and Abad offer the audience during their violent 'growths' (to employ the term Koltès uses to describe Alexis' emergence) at the end of their respective texts and productions?

What Koltès and Chéreau offered the audiences of *Combat* and *Quai ouest* was an aesthetic experience which gave the spectator an opportunity to enter into the deeply unsettling transactions that occur at the border of a variety of binary positions within his texts and productions. In *Les Amertumes*, Koltès had combined a variety of devices which intensified the space of enunciation in which his characters encountered one another (the subordinations of exteriority by interiority, of the inauthentic by the authentic, and of the character by the actor) and had also gradually calibrated the rules of the theatrical game to increase the violence and efficiency of dramatic exchange. The model of theatrical reality as created by Chéreau for *Combat* and *Quai ouest* had much less to do than *Les Amertumes* with attempting to establish direct communion between the Alexis figure and the audience. Despite the ambient environment of *Combat* and the mesmerizing cargo containers of *Quai ouest*, their theatrical environments were generally much more traditionally representational. Within this conventional mode, the exterior 'threat' of blackness surfaces inside the compound of *Combat* just as the blackness of the warehouse in *Quai ouest* emerges within the offending Western world. By the time of *Combat* and *Quai ouest*, Koltès has generated an eschatology of his own, a doctrine of last or final matters, for indeed there appears to be only one way to move beyond struggle generated by these incursions of 'blackness'. In the challenging circumstances of the worksite of *Combat* or the warehouse of *Quai ouest*, the rigidity of individual boundaries, both reified and tenderized through struggle, only give way when identity slides towards the emancipating aspect of blackness, or in other words, death.

The assault upon representation embodied in the proto-model of *Les Amertumes* contained the hope for the collapse of the signified and the signifier into one simple 'permeating' (Derrida 1978, 237) meaning which could circumvent the meddlesome 'psychological' channels of reception that were such an affront to Koltès early in his career. By trying to collapse sign and signified, Koltès attempted to move out of history, to move to that time before birth or beyond death, which, as Derrida so usefully indicates in his discussion of Artaud, is "a life before birth and after death ..., and not a death before birth and after life" (233). Indeed, the vision of Koltès at the point of the creation of *Les Amertumes* was a fundamentally 'positive' one. His attempted collapse of representation into immediacy culminating in Alexis' profoundly personal performance, although it did involve a sacrificial freezing of the other characters in the violent red stage light, was destined for the aesthetic and spiritual 'expansion' of the audience. Of this type of evolution Derrida has noted that

> Artaud, therefore, does not call for destruction, for a new manifestation of negativity. Despite everything that it must ravage in its wake, 'the theatre of cruelty is not the symbol of an absent void.' It affirms, it produces affirmation itself in its full and necessary rigour. (1978, 232)

Alexis' final act answered Artaud's call for cruelty in the theatre, in that it was a fundamentally affirming act. Koltès' staging of Alexis in this fashion would seem to echo the faith in human capacity for affirmation in the face of difficulty which was present in Gorki's original text. Ronald Wilkes, one of Gorki's commentators has remarked that

> What is amazing in [*My Childhood*] is the compassion and understanding Gorki shows to mankind at its lowest. We are left, not with an impression of bitterness or cynicism, but with the assurance that the author, much though he suffered as a boy, still retains strong hopes that men will grow out of their evil ways in the end. (Gorki, 10-11)

Koltès' adoption of the title *Les Amertumes*, or 'the bitternesses', foreshadows the evolution of Koltès' work towards a tragic realist or pessimistic quality. Indeed, the final acts committed in these later plays by Alboury (with the assistance of the guards) and Abad are geared towards a cleansing and purging of 'impurities'. They are not, however, 'affirming' acts in the artaudian/derridean sense because of the infiltration of the colonial discourse into the text and production. The 'authenticity' of blackness in colonial representational schemes is inevitably related to notions of primitivity closely related to "a death before birth and after life" rather than "a life before birth and after death" (Derrida, 233). This is true even if the colonialist representations are unconscious in origin. When the hegemony at the heart of recent European colonial representations is reversed, and blackness takes whiteness' place as the positive term, the binarist thinking justifying such a structure remains intact. The result of the counter-hegemonic as opposed to anti-hegemonic procedure is that the processes of exclusion (individual, cultural, ontological) of the initial hegemony continue, but simply come to flow in the opposite direction.

This makes unsurprising, inevitable even, the destruction or death of various non-black characters in *Combat* and *Quai ouest*. Charles' death at the hands of Abad at the end of *Quai ouest,* for example, is more complicated than a simple retribution. Koltès informs us that Charles receives death as a gift from Abad. Charles' modest status on the hierarchy of ethnicity would appear to restrict him to a lower 'authenticity,' and therefore, like the characters other than Alexis in *Les Amertumes*, he would appear to be damned, in major part, for this reason. Charles' death, the emasculated state of his father Rodolphe, the self-destructive state of his mother Cécile, and the fundamental emptiness of Koch and Monique are all qualities intimately linked to their ethnicity and, as such placed in counterpoint with the strength and resilience of Abad. Similarly, it comes as no surprise that Cal is murdered by a formless black quasi-musical mass of guards at the end of *Combat*, that Leonie finds herself permanently scarred, and that Horn's construction project, like his sexuality, is left lacking in the face of this potent Africa.

An argument might be made in favour of an anti-hegemonic, anti-identarian reality in *Combat* and *Quai ouest*, with the suggestion, for example, that Koltès was in some

sense aware of the constructedness of his vision of blackness and that, like Genet before him, he was simply staging, with full self-awareness, the self-destructive feeding frenzy of the end of Western theatrical representation as we know it. This argument would need to be sustained by evidence of awareness of the risks of exoticism, or by statements and framing devices suggesting that Koltès was making manifest certain representational strategies as a means of critiquing their prevalence in the surrounding culture. However, all the evidence explored to date, rooted in the seeds of a restrictive essentialism in *Les Amertumes* which later bloomed in *Combat* and *Quai ouest*, outweighs his very occasional awareness of the risks of exoticism. The limitations of the early theatrico-spiritual project of *Les Amertumes* manifested themselves when socio-historical determinants, specifically related to ethnicity, were grafted onto this early model in the later projects. Suddenly and inevitably, as a result of Koltès' simplistic reversal of the Manichean allegory, the abjectification of the black and then 'ethnic' non-white characters invades the signifying networks of the plays. This abjectification occurs despite his attempt to make Alboury and Abad impervious, both in the plays' plots and through these characters' use (or lack of use) of language, to the invasive tendencies of the other characters. An ever-tightening signifying loop ends up garroting the voices of the dispossessed with whom Koltès so evidently patriated himself early in life, and they live on in his plays as unself-aware projections of the colonial culture to which he was adamantly opposed. Chéreau's productions simply magnify the colonialist projections, and he is unable to stage a critique of the contradictions inherent in the texts, something which had been one of his dramaturgical strengths earlier in his career.

If one were to extrapolate outwards towards the broader human and political implications of *Combat* and *Quai ouest*, it would appear that they suggest that human experience cannot be perceived in non-imperialist terms. The binarism and the foundations of ethnic 'authenticity' only become more systemic following increased differentiation, such as during the emergence of a hierarchy of ethnicity in *Quai ouest*. It is the mythologization and pathologization resulting from such binarism that makes the discursive process of productive 'in-betweenness' invoked by Homi Bhabha very hard to carry to fruition in a material fashion:

> What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of self hood — singular or communal — that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (1994, 1-2)

In one sense Koltès is displaying the difficulty of enacting the proposition of such a generative, and positive, liminal space. In another important fashion, however, he perpetuates the difficulty of envisioning such a speculative space as a result of his

simplistic portrayal of identity.

That the exotic was simply too intoxicating for Koltès, led to a variety of accompanying issues related to exoticism: the implicit act of cultural self-criticism through the apparent valorization of the 'Other'; the inevitable idealization of an unknown other which in colonial circumstances can only lead to primitivism; the exchange of recollections for illusions; the use of mock foreign words to prevent the exotic from disappearing through the process of its evocation. Indeed Koltès is like many allegorists who have gone before him, French artists and thinkers from Diderot to Artaud,

> all of those who make a purely allegorical use of others, a use dictated not by the identity of those others and that which may be known about them, but by an autonomous ideological project, conceived independently of any contact with the people called upon to serve solely as example and illustration. (Todorov 1993, 341)

Koltès' perpetual pursuit of the exotic, of experiences of estrangement, put him in a category of individuals which Todorov has labelled 'The Exote', those who must constantly cultivate a state of alienation so that can still stay fresh to all the experience they witness (346), even if this means that they do not elevate to the level of subject those with whom they inspire themselves.

Koltès' own suspicions about exoticism kept on surfacing, however. Just as Koltès had been dissatisfied with the romanticism and exoticism he felt plagued the production of *Combat*, so did the poor reception of *Quai ouest* trouble him. Isaach de Bankolé who had played Abad in *Quai ouest* explained that Koltès was not particularly happy with the production and that the two men had plans to remount it together "without any artifice, without anything at all, on an empty stage so that the play's intentions could be front and center" (1997, 45). It would appear that the stresses to which the text had been subjected as a result of Chéreau's staging had evacuated the possibilities for humour that Koltès felt inhabited the play. Bankolé explained that he himself had staged the text in English in Kenya:

> Based on all the conversations that [Koltès] and I had, I was deeply reassured about my view of the work, of its humour. I'm still certain that *Quai ouest* is a comedy and I have the proof in that the

audience laughed throughout (Bankolé 1997, 45).[1]

Perhaps Koltès felt that if *Quai ouest* was staged in a fashion different than it had been by Chéreau, perhaps even in a non-Western location with a non-white creative team, there was a way of somehow sidestepping the exoticism he had not been able to shake in the writing of the play. Based on the epistolary evidence available to researchers to date, these possibilities would appear to be unverifiable. What can be discussed however is the representation of ethnicity in his last three major plays. Indeed, a full analysis of *Dans la solitude des champs de coton* (1986), *Le Retour au désert* (1988) and *Roberto Zucco* (1990) would serve as a major second installment of the overall study of ethnicity in Koltès work. A brief introduction here can serve to help conclude the present study and perhaps launch the possibility of another.

Chéreau describes how for the creation of *Solitude*, staged a year after *Quai ouest*,

> Bernard est parti d'une scène qui a duré une minute: quelqu'un qui l'a abordé dans la rue à New York en lui disant 'J'ai tout ce que tu veux, de la coke, de l'héro, tout . (1995, 65)
>
> [Bernard was inspired by an encounter that lasted one minute: someone came up to him in the street in New York and said 'I've got everything you need: dope, coke, heroine, everything.]

Starting with this meeting, which Chéreau would come to feel very strongly was at root a seductive encounter (ibid.), Koltès created a sixty-one page long dialogue between a Dealer and a Client, initially written for a black and white man respectively. The two characters, seemingly without a past nor a future, pursue an unremitting game of verbal hide-and-go-seek in which the black Dealer has nothing to sell and tries to get the Client to confess his desires, while the Client refuses to buy anything but will not leave the verbal exchange. Both poetic and prosaic, the text begins as a series of monologues in juxtaposition to each other which resemble, in a striking fashion, the symmetry of Greek stichomythic dialogue with its coherent question and response framework. This formality of exchange served as Koltès' continued rarification and differentiation of the game of

[1]Koltès and Bankolé had already worked together on a short play which Lucien Attoun at the Théâtre Ouvert had commissioned. Koltès explained to Bankolé that he did not want someone with whom he was not acquainted directing the text, and so they decided to stage it together. Bankolé explained that

"He was very happy throughout the entire period when we were rehearsing at the Théatre Ouvert. It was there that I saw Bernard at work, and realized he had studied directing at Strasbourg. I saw him enjoy getting ideas, confronting himself with the stage... I think he really liked actors. For him, actors were the active element, the bearers of meaning, the ones who could string together the story, the ones from which he could begin his voyage. It was actors who inspired his writing." (Bankolé 1997, 47)

Elsewhere Koltès would himself state that his "greatest pleasure" of all was to work with actors "to watch them grab hold of a character, to hear them speak, to listen to their questions." (1999a, 175)

We can only speculate about what would have happened had Koltès continued his work as a director of actors. Would the type of attempts at a 'total theatre' that characterized Koltès' work on *Les Amertumes* have returned to the stagings? What of Koltès' faith in theatre's potential for the transformation of individual spectators as a result of aesthetic and spiritual interventions from the stage?

theatrical exchange which at this point in his career had taken the form of what he called 'deal'. Koltès defines the 'deal' in an epigraph to *Solitude*:

> Un deal est une transaction commerciale portant sur des valeurs prohibées ou strictement contrôlées, et qui se conclut, dans des espaces neutres, indéfinis, et non prévus à cet usage, entre pourvoyeurs et quémandeurs, par entente tacite, signes conventionnels ou conversations à double sens — dans le but de contourner les risques de trahison et d'escroquerie qu'une telle opération implique—, à n'importe quelle heure du jour et de la nuit, indépendamment des heures d'ouverture réglementaires des lieux de commerce homologués, mais plutôt aux heures de fermeture de ceux-ci. (1986a, 7)

> A deal is the commercial transaction of some valuable, prohibited or strictly controlled, in neutral, unspecified territory, not set aside for the purpose, between he who purveys and he who has to have, and conducted by tacit agreement, convention or double meaning — with the aim of avoiding the risk of betrayal or swindle that such operations involve — at any hour of day or night, outside regular opening hours and off business premises, usually indeed during the very hours such premises are closed. (2001, 15)

With this mock-bureaucratic language he formalizes a fugitive encounter, generating, in somewhat of a tongue-in-cheek fashion, regimented formal parameters for an event which, in 'real' time, might pass unnoticed by an observer. By using a normalizing idiom and syntax generally associated with more conventional 'daytime' commercial encounters, Koltès defamiliarizes connotative images of the 'deal' an audience may have constructed from images of drug deals, arms deals, or any other such illicit or nefarious types of exchange. The detailed nature of the epigraph prepares us for how Koltès, beginning with a simple yet fated generative glance between two characters, dilates an encounter's silences, filling them with exfoliative language and meticulously articulating the subtlest of dynamics as the respondents cavort verbally within the lure and allure of the unnamed object of desire. "It's not a real situation" explained Spanish director Lluis Pasqual, "It's stretched out. Problems occur when we think that putting such things into words is too 'intellectual', when we think that such questions "belong to people who are not us." Pasqual believes that Koltès is verbalizing what is essentially a "chemical, electrical process", recalling the almost Sarrautian 'tropistic' internal dynamics of character that Koltès discussed very clearly in *Les Amertumes* (Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester, November 1996).[2]

[2] This notion of the deal is a fascinating paradigm for human encounter that generates a powerful resonance with the potentially reductive world of commercial exchange. Like Brecht's Verfremdung, Pinter's unverifiability of intention or Beckett's pursuit of impotence, Koltès notion of the 'deal' is of pivotal significance to an understanding of the specificity of the texts. As a mode of exchange its zone comprises those liminal spaces between desire and attraction, foreigness and hostility, death and eroticism, a "fundamental commerce" of simultaneity, embracing war and love all at once (Benhamou 1996, 21) . The permeating presence of this model throughout all Koltès' plays carries with it the suggestion that "theatre itself is a form of transactional communication" where characters use language to effect change upon one another. In Koltès, this invasiveness results in contests "of an intensely dramatic kind"(Bradby 1997b, xviii) where we witness battles between kin and the other tribe, and between kin *become* the other tribe.

Koltès' characteristic essentialist understanding of identity began to become apparent when he noted about the play that

> J'avais pensé d'abord à mettre face à face un chanteur de blues et un punk: deux conceptions de la vie absolument opposées, et c'est ça qui compte. Quand la distance entre deux personnes est aussi grande, qu'est-ce qui reste? La diplomatie, c'est-à-dire le langage. Ils se parlent ou ils se tuent. Donc ils se parlent. (Godard 1987)
>
> [At first I thought about putting a black blues singer and a punk face to face; two absolutely opposing conceptions of life, and that's what counts. When the distance between two people is so remarkable, what's left? Diplomacy; that is to say language. They either speak to each other or they kill each other. So they speak.]

True to his earlier understanding of ethnicity, the different 'conceptions' of life represented by each character are reconnected to a poetic structure in which the blackness of the Dealer is related to the night, while the whiteness of the Client resonates with the clarity of the day. Recalling Koltès' career-long affiliation of blackness with the deeper recesses of the mind, the Client crosses into the unconscious of the nighttime world of the Dealer, finding himself amidst decomposing memories (1986, 14), and derides the Dealer and his shady surroundings: "mais quelle obscurité serait assez épaisse pour vous faire paraître moins obscur qu'elle?" [How dark would it have to be to make you appear less dark than the dark itself?] (1986, 14;2001, 19). The white Client finds himself surrounded by animals (1986, 15), to which the black Dealer compares himself on a variety of occasions (ibid., 16, 21), rehearsing similar strategies employed by Alboury and Abad. Like these earlier black characters, the Dealer has an innumerable number of siblings "en nombre incalculable comme une crise de hoquet après un grand repas"[I don't know any more than you know how many hiccups you get after you've eaten a lot] (1986, 47;2001, 35). The Dealer is more 'authentic' in the sense of being rooted in something. Chéreau described it in this manner "Bref, le Dealer a des racines, une famille, une mémoire. Le Client lui, est un desparado"[Basically, the Dealer has roots, a family, a memory. The Client is simply a desperado] (Benhamou, 1995). The Client pursues neutrality in the face of the Dealer's barrages of sales attempts, aware perhaps of the inevitability of violence between the two:

> Je veux être zero. Je redoute la cordialité, je n'ai pas la vocation du cousinage, et plus que celle des coups je crains la violence de la camaraderie. Soyons deux zéros bien ronds, impénétrables l'un à l'autre, provisoirement juxtaposés, et qui roulent, chacun dans sa direction. (1986, 52)
>
> [I want to be zero. I dread cordiality, I have no vocation for cousinage and, even more than the violence of any blow, what I fear is the violence of camaraderie. Let us both be zeros, both perfectly round, impenetrable one to the other, side by side for a while, but each rolling in his own direction.] (2001, 37)

Like Cal and Koch before him, the only place of neutrality the Client will be able to find is the place of repose after fighting brought to him by blackness: death.

An interesting development in *Solitude* is the manifest sexualization of the relationship between the characters, with the Dealer taking the 'male' role and placing the Client in the role of 'demoiselle' when he likens the Client's evasive tactics to

> la distance qui se maintiendra toujours entre les brutes et les demoiselles qui peuplent le monde ... c'est le mystère infini et l'infinie étrangeté des armes qu'elles portent dans leurs sacs à main, dont elles projettent le liquide dans les yeux des brutes pour les faire pleurer. (1986, 30).
>
> [the distance there will always be in the world between the brute on the one hand and the young girl the other ... [it] is the infinite mystery, and the infinite strangeness of weapons, those little canisters they carry in their handbags for instance that squirt stuff into the eyes of brutes so suddenly there they are crying] (2001; 27)

Indeed, pursuing this notion of desire being at the root of the encounter is what lay behind Chéreau's various versions of the piece. Koltès had initially written a short piece about the inevitability of conflict between cats and dogs in the programme of the first production in 1986 (1986c), but Chéreau ultimately found it difficult to understand the piece entirely in these terms:

> [Koltès] a l'inconvenient de privilégier cette hostilité par nature que je trouve impossible à jouer pendant une heure et demie, et surtout d'exclure toute idée de désir. (Benhamou, 1995)
>
> [(Koltès) unnecessarily foregrounds this natural hostility which I find impossible to perform for an hour and a half, and thereby excluding all consideration of desire.]

And so, after the first version of the production when, Isaach de Bankolé, the actor who had played the Dealer (and ealier, Abad) could not return to the project, Chéreau took his place and moved the production's emphasis in another direction:

> Or, le mot qui revient les plus dans la pièce, c'est le mot désir: je le prononce onze fois dans ma première réplique et le Client me reprend sept fois dans la sienne, il n'y a pas de désir entre un chien et un chat (ibid.).[3]
>
> Therefore, the word which surfaces the most in the play is the word 'desire': I speak it eleven times in my first speech, and the Client answers me with the word seven times in his, there is no desire between a dog and a cat.

Koltès was famously unhappy about this decision, for suddenly Chéreau's white body no longer had the anchoring authenticity that Bankolé's had had. Moreover, in a fascinating admission that indicates once again the importance of Koltès' views on the relationship between sexuality and blackness, he felt that in the revised verions homosexual overtones between them had become too overt (Schmitt). Blackness had

[3] Chéreau pursued this vision of the text and by the time the third production came to pass in 1995, he was able to assert that "la pièce est une fantastique situation de drague, purement et simplement, tirée jusqu'à la limite de la durée possible. Aucun des deux hommes ne veut s'avancer, ne veut être celui qui sera pris en flagrant délit de proposer à l'autre le but de l'opération qui est le sexe." (Schmitt).

served to date for Koltès as a means of signifying but also containing his sexual drives within texts, but this system had been ruptured with Chéreau's adoption of the role of the Dealer. Chéreau would recall this issue after Koltès' death

> Non. Il l'avait écrit pour un Noir. Il estimait qu'un Blanc ne pouvait pas le jouer. Mais, quelque temps avant de mourir, il m'a invité à déjeuner. Il avait compris — et accepté — mon obstination passionnée. (Duparc, 110)
>
> [No. He wrote it for a black person. He felt a white person couldn't play the part. But, shortly before dying, he invited me to lunch. He had understood — and accepted — my passionate obstinacy.]

Koltès' following text, *Le Retour au désert*, involves a complex representation of ethnicity and history deserving of protracted study. It is useful at this juncture 'however' to trace briefly the evolution of a number of trends relevant to the preceding study. The first is that, as David Bradby has indicated, the play returns to the subject of much earlier work, namely the family: "In a way that recalls both Faulkner and *Sallinger*, Koltès presents individuals who may feel alienated within the family structure, but who return to it as the only environment in which they can discover self-definition" (1997b, xxxi). Moreover, the family relationships mirror the tensions of the society outside the intimate space of the family (ibid., xxxi-xxxii): set in the Metz of Koltès' youth, the play features Mathilde, sister to Adrien, returning to France from a long self-imposed exile in Algeria. She arrives at the family house unannounced with the intention of reclaiming it, much to Adrien's anger and disbelief. Meanwhile, covert battles between French and Arabs erupt sporadically throughout the town and we discover that Adrien is involved with a group of town leaders plotting to blow up an Arab-owned café. As specified in the introduction, this period in French history saw the renegade military General Massu exiled by De Gaulle to Metz for a cooling-off period, and tensions between the OAS (Organisation de l'Armée Secrète) and Arab citizens of the town frequently flared up.

Like Abad and Alboury before her, Mathilde embodies a way of life alien to the purebread life of the *français de souche* whom the play critiques. Her disruption is enacted on a variety of levels, but generally revolves around her challenge of the ethnic and linguistic puritanism of a France, embodied by Adrien, which is in denial of the realities of the Algerian war. Indeed, Adrien is reminiscent of both Horn and Koch with his pro-French cultural fundamentalism which is blind and oblivious to 'otherness'. He states with regard to questions of language that:

> Un bon Français n'apprend pas les langues étrangères. Il se contente de la sienne, qui est largement suffisante, complète, équilibrée, jolie à écouter; le monde entier envie notre langue. (1988b, 25)
>
> [A true Frenchman doesn't learn foreign languages. He is content with his own, which is quite sufficient, complete, balanced, and lovely to listen to; the whole world envies our language] (1997a, 90)

Mathilde brings another disruptive reminder of France's difficult history for Adrien to deal with in that her own personal history involves having been run out of town after the Second World War following a false accusation of collaboration with the Nazis.[4] First of all, rather than an entirely spatial container characterized by its relationship with the embodied 'otherness' of Alboury and Abad (the compound in *Combat* surrounded by the black African night and the dark warehouse in the core of the Western city in *Quai ouest*), *Retour* has a *temporal* matrix related to the Algeria from which Mathilde has come. The play is divided into sections which bear the names of portions of the Islamic day and calendar which regulate the overall flow of action. "In this way", Bradby explains, "the North African world is constantly present as a defining framework, ignored by most of the characters, but no less present for that" (1997b, xxxiv). This suggests that Mathilde bears the weight of a colonized world coming home to roost in the colonizing country, and the ease with which it slips by the French characters' awareness indicates the extent to which they have lost control over their own cultural and temporal referents (Mounsef, 42). Mathilde's presence also functions as a linguistic incursion in that her first lines are in Arabic, echoing previous exotic linguistic transgressions by Cécile in *Quai ouest* and Alboury in *Combat*.

That Mathilde is a white *pied-noir*, the name given to the white French population of Algeria who generally wore leather shoes, suggests that she embodies a form of hybrid identity. She has confused Adrien who states:

> Et moi qui croyais te retrouver avec la peau brunie et ridée comme une vieille Arabe. Comment fais-tu, avec ce foutu soleil d'Algérie, pour rester lisse et blanche. (1988b, 17)

> [And here I was thinking that you'd come back all brown and wrinkled like an old Arab woman. How do you manage to stay so smooth and white under the infernal Algerian sun?] (1997a, 83).

Her hybridity is a successful one in that she does not devolve into self-destruction like Cécile whose unsatisfactory hybridity contributes significantly to her death. Like Koltès himself, though, whose references to his own sense of homelessness were discussed in the second chapter, she is left in a state of permanent malaise regarding her homeplace:

> Quelle patrie ai-je, moi? Ma terre, à moi, où est-elle? Où est-elle la terre sur laquelle je pourrais me coucher? En Algérie, je suis comme une étrangère et je rêve de la France; en France, je suis encore plus étrangère et je rêve d'Alger. Est-ce que la patrie, c'est l'endroit où l'on n'est pas? J'en ai marre de ne pas être à ma place. (1988a, 48)

[4] By evoking crimes committed by the French during war and liberation, Koltès is holding forth an opinion pursued by defense lawyer Jacques Vergès about the Klaus Barbie trial of the winter previous to the production of *Retour*, namely the idea that French society suffers from its represed past, that the crimes committed by French troops in Algeria were worse than crimes committed by Germans in France. (Grewe, 186)

> [What country do I belong to? where is my homeland, the ground upon which I rest in peace? In Algeria I am a foreigner and I dream of France; in France I am even more of a foreigner and I dream of Algiers. Perhaps your home is the place you are not at? I'm fed up with never being at home, never knowing where home is.] (1997a, 110)

Aziz, the non-white Arab day-servant at the house, experiences a less satisfactory hybridity, perhaps because of his non-white status. After he has been described as an 'Arab' by Adrien's son Mathieu, Aziz responds that he is not an Arab and the proceeds to show a remarkable level of self-awareness, for a Koltès character, about the construction of his own identity. To the question of what he is exactly, Aziz answers that

> Le Front dit que je suis Arabe, mon patron dit que je suis domestique, le service militaire dit que je suis français, et moi, je dis que je suis un couillion. Parce que je me fous des Arabes, des Français, des patrons et des domestiques; je me fous de l'Algérie comme je me fous de la France; je me fous du côté où je ne suis pas; je ne suis ni pour ni contre rien. (1998a, 73)

> [The Front says I'm an Arab, the master says I'm a servant, the military say I'm French, and I say I'm a fucking idiot. Because I don't give a shit for the Arabs or the French or the masters or the servants. I don't give a shit for Algeria or for France, for which side I'm supposed to be on, or not supposed to be on. I'm not for anyone and I'm not against anyone.] (1997a, 131)

His refusal of any alliances is an acceptance of the post-identarian role the post-colonial space has given him (Mnousef, 45). He has removed himself from the economy of symbolic exchange of *Combat* and *Quai ouest* which involved essentialist understandings of identity and, like Cécile, is susceptible to sacrifice. Shortly after making the above statement, Aziz is killed in the bomb blast Adrien has been involved in planning.

Mathilde arrives at Adrien's doorstep with illegitimate children, one of whom, Fatima, is half Arabic. Adrien is upset with her name and hopes it can be hidden or changed, but Mathilde argues otherwise: "Un prénom, ça ne s'invente pas, ça se ramasse autour du berceau, ça se prend dans l'air que l'enfant respire." [A name is not invented, the child picks it up in the cradle, it comes with the air that she breathes] (1988b, 16;1997a, 81). This vaguely mystical relationship between the child and its name is part of a continued trend in Koltès' work. Koltès has, typically, created this non-white character as the aperture onto the magical and mystical aspect of the story. Indeed, Echoing Cécile's shamanistic qualities in *Quai ouest*, Fatima is witness to the ghost of Adrien's first wife. As Mathilde's daughter, she is contrasted with Adrien's (white) son Mathieu who is simply a perpetuation of his father's foolish dreams of dominance. He explains his desire for wanting to join the fight in Algeria:

> Je veux être admiré par les enfants, je veux que les garçons me regardent avec envie, je veux que les femmes me draguent, je veux que l'ennemi ait peur de moi. Je veux être un héros, riquer ma vie

échapper à des attentats, être blessé, soufrir sans me pleindre, saigner. (1988b, 23)

[I want children to look up to me, I want to be envied by little boys and seduced by women; I want the enemy to be afraid of me. I want to be a hero, risk my life, escape from the attacks, be wounded, suffer uncomplainingly, I want to bleed. (1997a, 89)]

Koltès explained that *Retour* was the first play in which he wanted comedy to predominate (Mounsef, 37). The appearance of the Great Black Parachutist in Adrien's garden, a clear reference to General Massu's paratroopers and the Battle of Alger in 1957 (Grewe, 185), is a comic development on Koltès' representation of blackness. The character, played once again by Issach de Bankolé in Chéreau's 1988 production at the Théâtre du Rond-Point du Champs Elysées, compares himself to "un petit flocon de neige en plein été" [a little white snowflake in summer time] (1988b, 55;1997a, 117) who has floated down from above so as not to disturb Adrien's sleep. This man, like Alboury and Abad before, represents a force which disturbs the complacent core of things, but this time is a member of that most status quo of organizations, the military. "Parle, bourgeois, parle, mais respecte-moi" [You can have your words, bourgeois, but I must be respected] (ibid.) he tells Adrien, who then asks him why he is so aggressive and wonders if the soldier's job is not to keep him safe. The Great Black Parachutist, who as a black man has infiltrated the most profound core of supposed order, answers: "Il faut d'abord porter le trouble, si l'on veut obtenir la sécurité" [First there must be turmoil if you want to obtain safety] (ibid.).

It would appear that this man is a manifestation of the heart of darkness of the army, the necessary yet dangerous unbridled masculinity of the forces of 'order'. He focusses the army with a metaphoric comparison with the body: "Nous, les militaires, nous sommes le coeur et les poumons de ce monde, et vous, les bourgeois, vous en êtes les intestins." [We soldiers are the heart and lungs of the world and you, bourgeois, are its intestines.] (ibid.) He then proceeds to let it be known that soldiers are also the gonads of the world, for he is "exité, exité, exité, oui" [wound up, aroused, exited] (1998b, 56;1997a, 117) and looking for "females, chicks, birds, broads, beavers, pussies" (1998b, 56;1997a, 118) that he can mate with. Adrien is quick to assert that "There are only ladies here" before the Great Black Parachutist responds "Don't worry, old man, I'll make women of them. Hide your mares, the army has loosed its stallions." (ibid.) It is clear that, like *Combat* and *Quai ouest* before it, sexual economy of the play is still controlled by the powerful castrating woman, the black and foreign men.

In a long speech by the Black Parachutist containing words of a famous speech by Charles de Gaulle (Bradby 1995, 18), an ironic recasting of colonial nostalgia occurs:

J'aime cette terre, oui, mais je regrette les temps anciens. Moi, j'ai la nostalgie de la douceur des lampes à l'huile, de la splendeur de la marine à voiles. J'ai la nostalgie de l'époque coloniale, des

> vérandas et du cri des crapauds-buffles, l'époque des longues soirées où, dans les domaines, chacun à sa place s'allongeait dans le hamac, se balançait sur le rocking-chair ou s'accroupissait sous le manguier, chacun à sa place et tranquille dans sa place, et sa place était à lui. J'ai la nostalgie des petits négrillons courant sous les pattes des vaches, et que l'on chassait comme des moustiques. Oui, j'aime cette terre, et personne ne doit en douter, j'aime la France de Dunkerque à Brazzaville (1988b, 56-57)

> I love this land, but I long for the good old says. I'm nostalgic for the soft light of oil lamps, for the glory days of navy under sail. I look back to the colonial era with its cool verandas and its croak of bull-frogs, when evenings were long and when everyone in the country knew his place, stretched out in a hammock, swinging on the rocking-chair or crouching beneath the mangrove, each in his own place, calm and settled, and that place was his. I'm nostalgic for the little nigger boys running behind their cows which you could send flying like mosquitoes. Yes, I love this land, let no one doubt it, I love me France all the way from Dunkirk to Brazzaville (1997a, 118-19)

This statement demonstrates in a strange way the success of the colonial project of assimilation (indeed, a colonialist policy of assimilation was articulated in Brazzaville in 1945), for the black man has been caught up in the fantasies of the colonial past to the point where he dreams complicitously of the subjugation of his own ancestors. On the surface this could suggest that Koltès was moving beyond an essentializing primitivism to positing that even black individuals are prone to adopting complicitous positions of power within hegemonic structures. It would seem, however, that The Great Black Parachutist's statements are simply an inevitable development of Koltès' staging of counter-hegemonic visions of blackness, a sophisticated vision of the primitive vandal phase of black emancipation which, as explored with respect to *Combat* and *Quai ouest*, always follows the primitivization phase.

The Great Black Parachutist's most intimate and violating incursion into Adrien's world is to father twins with his niece, Fatima, whom she names Romulus and Remus. By naming the youth after the brothers from the Roman myth born to Rhea Silvia, a vestal virgin, and fathered by Mars, the god of war, Koltès makes a very specific suggestion about his vision of the history of France. Clearly, the appearance of the black twins at the heart of an upstanding, well-to-do and racist family from *province* signifies a disruption of a certain form of bourgeois continuity, a kind of domestic parallel to Abad' appearance in the heart of the western metropolis. Like Abad's apparition, and that of Alboury before him, the birth of the twins does not announce a future beyond violence. Infused no doubt by the spirit of his warring father, the mythological Romulus eventually committed fratricide, killing Remus for mocking his first attempts to build the city he would eventually name after himself, Rome, suggesting that — as Koltès asserted at the end of *Combat*, *Quai ouest*, and *Solitude* — violence between individuals, especially family, is inevitable. That the twins are black serves as an additional guarantee.

Le Retour au désert was the last of Koltès' plays that Chéreau would direct. Speaking of their relationship he noted that

> Il me disait parfois:'Je ne peux tout de même pas toujours te reprocher de ne pas être noir... C'était un rebelle, il avait des capacités de révolte que je n'ai pas. Peut-être est-ce pour cela qu'il n'a pas voulu me confier sa dernière pièce, l'histoire de l'assassin Roberto Zucco. Pour lui, j'étais trop du coté du système, c'est a dire ailleurs, de l'autre côté.' (Pascaud 1995, 122).
>
> [Sometimes he'd say to me "I can't really hold it against you for not being black forever now, can I?" He was a rebel, he had rebellious qualities that I don't have. Mayeb that's what he didn't want to give me his last play, the Roberto Zucco story. As far as he was concerned, I was too close to the system, that is to say elsewhere, the other side.]

Another well-known director, Peter Stein, was the first to stage *Roberto Zucco* (Schaubühne, Berlin 1990), a fictionalization of the exploits of an Italian serial killer, Roberto Succo, who killed most of his family, and a number of other individuals, before killing himself. Stein was also attracted to the playwright's stance of "total rebellion" that was beyond sentimentality. He says of Zucco:

> This is not the first time in the history of theatre or literature that one encounters a 'criminal' devoid of motivation. But he is the first to be devoid of morality. Roberto has many ancestors, particularly in the work of Genet, but they are more sentimental, even more moral. (Ubersfeld, 72)

In general terms, the white Zucco is "a force in motion" (Danan, 101), the disembodied force of 'moving forward', the juggernaut of emergent and revolutionary possibilities which began with the impersonal tropistic forces in *Les Amertumes*. What is specific to *Zucco* and distinguishes the play from those that precede it, is that the marginal aspect of this transgressive force has lost its affiliations with non-white ethnicity and found purchase in the trope of criminality. Zucco's criminality is, as Stein suggests, an amoral one, strangely passionless, depersonalized and instinctual. Zucco describes himself:

> Je suis comme un train qui traverse tranquillement une prairie et que rien ne pourrait faire dérailler. Je suis comme un hippopotame enfoncé dans la vase et qui se déplace très lentement et que rien ne pourrait détourner du chemin ni du rythme qu'il a décidé de prendre. (1990, 38)
>
> [I calmly cross the prairie like a train that can never leave the tracks. I'm like a hippopotamus moving very slowly through the mud, whose chosen path and pace nothing can alter.] (1997a, 167)

With this impersonality, Zucco has almost become something of a natural element, for he moves through the walls of the prison, addresses the elements on the prison roof and finally falls upwards towards the sun, recalling Koltès' earlier comparison of his own attraction to blackness with pebbles being drawn towards the sun. Zucco, a character both of this world and of another pre-human realm, is without identity beyond the deep force that animates him and which he in a sense rejoins at the end of the play. Danan aptly notes that "It is this very absence of characterization of Zucco that makes his story a myth for our time." (103).

With the role of deep, impersonal and violent force taken over by criminality, the role of the black character becomes marginal. Chéreau noted that the only character that Koltès may have written for a black person in *Zucco* is that of the bouncer:

> "Ne jamais se laisser mordre deux fois par le même chien" dit un personnage qui s'appelle le Balèze — or, Le Balèze, c'est forcément un Noir dans l'esprit de Bernard — dans *Roberto Zucco*, je crois. (Chéreau 1995, 63)
>
> ['Never let yourself get bitten by the same dog twice' says a character called the Bruiser — indeed, the Bruiser, it's Bernard's way of having a black character — in *Roberto Zucco*, I think.]

The only trace of blackness left is Koltès' characteristic echo of the 'proverb' in one character's speech. Similarly, while Koltès was particularly insistent on having black characters played by black individuals earlier in his career, in 1988 he was less adamant and less literal, understanding blacks to be more metaphors than embodiments of oppression:

> Die Tage — Dans un de vos articles, vous vous êtes prononcé contre les adaptations, contre la démarche de certains metteurs-en-scène à l'étranger qui ont remplacé vos Noirs ou vos Arabes par des Turcs.
> Koltès — Cela ne me préoccupe plus aujourd'hui. Je suis d'accord si on y met des Turcs. Il y a le *Combat de nègre* où je me dis que c'est quand même difficile de ne pas le faire jouer par un Noir, étant donné que cela se passe en Afrique. (Gronau 1988, 4)
>
> [Die Tage — In one of your articles, you had come out against adaptations, against the approaches of certain foreign strangers, who replaced your blacks and your Arabs with Turks.
> Koltès — That doesn't bother me anymore these days. I'm in favour of using Turks. There is *Combat* though, where I said to myself, it's kind of difficult not to have him played by a black guy, given that it's taking place in Africa.]

It would appear then that the role of blackness as a locus of resistance, and that of non-white ethnicity in general as a force of disruption, diminished over the course of these last plays, and that other characters with equally trangressive qualities took up the challenge. Was this perhaps the result of an increasing awareness on Koltès' part of the risks of exoticism, or perhaps rather a growing familiarity with individuals of different ethnicities, causing them to lose their exotic and alienating effect on him? Only a fuller study could answer these questions more conclusively. However, it is important to note that despite the racist depictions of blacks throughout his work, the urgent lyricism of his writing forged new paths for playwrights such as Olivier Py, Didier-Georges Gabily, Wadji Mouwad and Michel-Marc Bouchard. In addition, his massive popularity combined with the singularity of his concern for blackness in the early mature work has no doubt helped ensure the success of writers of African heritage such as Koffi Kwahulé and Abdelkader Alloula. One cannot help wondering to what extent Koltès himself resolved his obsession with blackness? Let me finish by noting that one of Koltès' closest friends, a black reporter named Njami Simon, explained in Koltès' obituary that

"Of course, [Koltès] had his foibles, like the Negro Man that he got stuck believing represented the incarnation of God only knows what kind of justice, a vision of the black man that I, as a black man, never really adhered to" (Simon, 1989). Yet, Simon continued, Koltès had explained to him after the mediocre reception of *Quai ouest* that he felt that *Combat* had only been well received because of a 'misunderstanding,' referring presumably to the exoticism and romanticism that Koltès had himself rejected. Simon finished Koltès' obituary by stating, on the subject of the 'misunderstanding' upon which the success of Chéreau's *Combat* was celebrated, that "I feel very strongly today that Bernard-Marie Koltès died on a misunderstanding. And that's too bad..."

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APPENDIX A

KOLTES TEXTS

KOLTES TEXT 1

Les Amertumes - Programme Notes

Koltès, Bernard-Marie (1998a) *Les Amertumes*. Paris : Minuit, 9 - 10.

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Le théâtre est un jeu. Si l'on veut y participer, il faut en connaître les règles, les accepter, s'y conformer, faute de quoi on se trouve inévitablement dans la position stupide d'un adulte jeté dans le filet compliqué des jeux d'enfants dont il ignore la trame, et auquel il ne pourra jamais se mêler ni rien comprendre.

[The theatre is a game. If you want to participate, you must know the rules, accept them, conform to them, or else you inevitably find yourself in the stupid position of an adult thrown into complicated children's games he doesn't understand, that he will never be part of, and that he will never figure out.]

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Il s'agit avant toute chose de décanter, de se purifier au maximum des encombrements de l'intelligence à fleur de peau, décentralisée jusqu'à l'extrême. Il s'agit de retrouver les facultés de perception premières, et d'autant plus profondes qu'elles sont premières. Il s'agit de chercher la compréhension parfaite, c'est-à-dire celle qui ignore l'exégèse et la justification.

[One must, above all, clarify, purify oneself of any encumbering intelligence. One must regain the faculty of first impressions, impressions which are all the deeper in that they are first impressions. One must look for perfect comprehension, that is to say one which ignores exegesis and justification.]

Compte tenu de cela, la portée de ce spectacle se situe dans l'immédiat, — dans l'expérience immédiate — et, de ce fait, devrait interdire, je crois, toute espèce d'appréciation, en ce sens que l'expérience qu'aura eu lieu ou n'aura pas eu lieu. En dehors de cela, rien ne vaut la peine d'être envisagé.

[With this taken into account, this production occurs in the immediacy of the moment, in immediate experience, and this fact should, I believe, justify the interdiction of any kind of studied appreciation. The experience will simply have taken place or will not have taken place. Beyond that, nothing else is worth envisaging.]

Démonteur du mécanisme, explorateur des règles du jeu, origine et aboutissement du jeu lui-même, le personnage d'Alexis se situe hors de l'action, puisque l'action n'existe qu'en opposition à lui. Mais c'est par lui que le spectateur peut entrer dans les limites de l'expérience, découvrant avec lui au fur et à mesure de son "grandissement" autant l'essence du jeu que la fragilité des conventions sur lesquelles il est établi.

[He who takes apart the mechanism, who explores the rules of the game, who is the origin and end-point of the game itself, is Alexis. He is situated outside of the action, since action only acts in opposition to him. But it is through him that the spectator can enter into the depths of the experience, that the audience can discover alongside him, over the course of his "growth", as much as the essence of the game as the conventions upon which the game is based.]

Comme l'acide sur le métal, comme la lumière dans une chambre noire, les amertumes se sont écrasées sur Alexis Pechkov.
Elles l'ont agressé avec la violence et la rapidité de la grêle et du vent, sans qu'un trait de son visage n'ait frémi.
Arraché, brûlé, debout enfin, il a arrêté les éléments comme on souffle une bougie.
Et sa voix a cloué le silence."

[Just as acid burns metal, or light brightens a blackened room, so the bitternesses crushed down on Alexis Pechkov.
They crushed him with the violence and speed of hail and rain, without disturbing his face in the least.
Ripped up, burnt, and finally standing, he arrested the elements as you might blow out a candle.
And his voiced nailed the silence shut.]

KOLTES TEXT 2

Les Amertumes - Frontispiece

Koltès, Bernard-Marie (1998a) *Les Amertumes*. Paris : Minuit, 13.

Essai de mise en scène, d'une part d'un "élément impressionnant", et d'autre part d'un "élément impressionné", l'élément impressionnant étant les personnages en situation, et l'élément impressionné étant Alexis.

[An attempt at a mise-en-scene, one part of which is an 'effecting element', and the other part, an 'affected element', with the effecting element being the characters in situation and the affected element being Alexis.]

Ce qui est consigné ici n'est donc en fait qu'une partie du spectacle; l'autre partie est constituée par la présence du témoin Alexis, et, à travers lui, des spectateurs-témoins.

[That which is recorded here is therefore only a part of the production. The other portion depends on the presence of the witness Alexis, and, through him, the spectator-witnesses.]

Les spectateurs restent, minute après minute, à côté d'Alexis, jusqu'au moment final où celui-ci se retourne contre eux pour leur lancer le défi — ou leur proposer le choix schématique — de l'adhesion à l'un ou à l'autre des éléments.

Ceci est transposé de l'expérience relatée par Gorki dans *Enfance*.

[The spectators stay, minute after minute, beside Alexis, until the final moment when he turns back towards the audience to lay down a challenge for them — or to propose a schematic choice — to affiliate themselves with one or another of the elements.

This is transposed from the experience related by Gorki in *Childhood*]

KOLTES TEXT 3

Les Amertumes - Description of Alexis

Koltès, Bernard-Marie (1998a) *Les Amertumes*. Paris : Minuit, 15 .

C'est le témoin, celui sans lequel l'action ne serait qu'un vain et écoeurant gigotement, celui par lequel chaque déglutition, chaque ricanement, chaque crime devient un acte lourd et démesuré pour celui qui l'accomplit; celui dont la révolte finale et irrationelle est l'accomplissement de tout de qui (extérieurement à lui) l'a précédé.

[He is the witness, the one without which the action would simply be a vain and disgusting flailing, the means by which each act of swallowing, each snigger, and each crime becomes a significant and excessive act for he who is carrying it out, the one whose final and irrational revolt is the accomplishment of everything exterior to him which has preceded him.]

Il n'est mentionné à aucun moment, mais il est toujours présent. Il regarde, se détourne, s'introduit, s'oppose, encourage, sans que jamais les faits soient transformés, sans que jamais les personnages ne le reconnaissent et, du même coup, ne se rendent compte de l'importance de ce qu'ils sont et de ce qu'ils font.

[He is never mentioned, but is always present. He watches, turns around, moves forward, turns back, encourages, without the facts ever being changed, without the other characters ever recognizing him, and by the same token, do not recognize the importance of who they are and what they're doing.]

Il est sans âge, sans pesanteur encore, situé loin de l'irréalité, mais plus loin encore du grouillement brûlant et coloré dans lequel il est placé.

[He is ageless, without weight, far from unreal, but very distant from the bright and burning swarming in which he is placed.]

APPENDIX B

KOLTES LETTERS

LETTER 1

Koltès, Bernard Marie (1995a) *Les Amertumes- Correspondance : Lettres adressées à Hubert Gignoux* [Letters to Hubert Gignoux] Séquence 2 : 13

Strasbourg, le 14 janvier 1970

Monsieur

A la veille d'entamer l'affrontement aux réalités, la veille d'oser, c'est à nouveau à vous que je m'adresse - et à nouveau par écrit, afin surtout de ne pas abuser de votre temps.

L'attente, longue et abrutissante, du moment où je pourrai apprendre le métier du théâtre, m'a apporté la soudaine espérance d'une réalisation telle que je ne pourrai plus jamais en faire après une formation professionnelle. Je veux dire que, profondément persuadé qu'un "théâtre ignorant" (permettez-moi de préférer ce mot à celui d'"amateur") peut atteindre une perfection par le fait même de son ignorance, je veux tenter l'expérience de l'élaboration par des éléments techniquement inexpérimentés d'un spectacle utilisant précisément leur inexpérience à des fins scéniques.

[Sir

I find myself on the threshold of the confrontation with life's realities, on the edge of daring, and once again I address myself to you, and once again via letter, especially so as to avoid taking up too much of your time.

In this long and difficult wait before learning the craft of the theatre, I suddenly wish for a kind of staging that I can never hope to achieve after professional training. I believe that an "ignorant theatre" (please excuse my preference for this term over the term "amateur") can achieve a kind of perfection by the very fact of its ignorance, and I wish to set out to create a show by means of the elaboration and emphasis of the untrained elements of the production.]

Pour cela, me semble-t-il, la seule forme possible est celle qui n'est soumise qu'aux lois d'une scène, aux possibilités des interprètes, et, dans l'ensemble, à une idée ou à un but affirmés et suggérés en permanence par un metteur en scène-guide.

[The only way to achieve this, it would seem to me, would be to submit the process only to the laws of a stage, the possibilities offered by the performers, and, in overall terms, to an idea or a goal that would be continuously suggested and affirmed by a director/guide.]

L'essai que je vous propose m'a été suggéré à la lecture d'*Enfance* de Gorki: la succession gigantesque de scènes d'images, de mots, empreints de démesure et qui impressionnent un Gorki réceptif, comme la lumière un papier photographique. Loin de m'attacher à la lettre, j'ai cherché à transposer cette série de chocs, mettant les spectateurs à la place d'enfant, dans l'attente de la même réceptivité. Je cherche en effet, par des moyens sinon orthodoxes, du moins aussi efficaces que possible, à placer des individus face à la même angoisse, la même incompréhension, la même stupéfaction que l'enfant

Gorki, espérant ainsi les conduire à l'éclatement final inévitable.

[The attempt that I've sent you was inspired by Gorki's *Enfance* (Childhood), in particular the gigantic succession of outsized scenes, images and words which impressed themselves upon a receptive Gorki, in the same way light impresses itself upon photographic paper. Far from being literal about my borrowing, I tried to transpose that series of forces, putting the spectators in the place of children, who are naturally in a similar state of receptivity. I am seeking in an efficient, if unorthodox, fashion, to place the individuals face to face with the same anguish, the same confusion, the same stupefaction as the Gorki child, hoping to lead them to the the same inevitable final explosion.]

Ce n'est pas une pièce donc, puisque je ne m'attache pas au texte; tout au plus le texte constitue-t-il un point d'appui dont les interprètes pourront se passer lorsqu'ils n'en auront pas besoin, ou transformer lorsqu'il le faudra.

Placé en trait d'union entre le spectacle et les spectateurs, le personnage d'Alexis, dont l'interprétation est libre et doit être profondément personnelle, n'est en fait qu'un spectateur de plus mais qui, en extériorisant sa réceptivité, stimule celle des autres éléments du public.

[It's not a play then, since I'm not really attached to the text; at the most the text will constitute a point of support that the performers can let go of when they no longer have use for it, or change if necessary.

The character of Alexis is placed as a hyphen between the staging and the audience. His performance is a free one and must be profoundly personal. He really is just one more spectator, one whom, by exteriorizing his receptivity, stimulates the receptivity of the rest of the audience.]

Voilà ce que je voudrais réaliser, en dépit des difficultés que je rencontre; ce ne sont d'ailleurs pas tellement celles-ci qui m'effraient, mais plutôt l'angoisse de ne pas atteindre le but et de demeurer inefficace. C'est donc un jugement que je sollicite de votre part. Certes, le texte que je vous adresse non seulement n'est qu'une partie du spectacle, mais surtout n'en n'est qu'au début (je travaille actuellement à la suite). Je préfère cependant, dans l'incertitude où je suis, vous le soumettre dès maintenant.

[This is what I would like to achieve, despite the difficulties that I'm encountering. It's not the difficulties that frighten me, but rather the fear of not acheiving the goal and being ineffectual. And so I'm seeking a judgement from you. Of course, the text I'm sending you is not only part of the overall production, but is itself in its first stages (I'm working on the rest at the moment). Considering the state of uncertainty I find msyelf in at the moment, I'd prefer to send it to you sooner rather than later.]

Je ne sais si vous aurez le temps de le lire, ni du temps à utiliser pour me faire savoir votre opinion. J'ose cependant vous le demander, compte tenu de l'importance que j'attache à votre avis et à l'éventualité de votre intérêt.

[I do not know if you will have time to read it, or any time to spare to give me your opinion of it. I'll venture to ask for your thoughts anyway, considering how important your advice and potential interest in my work are to me.]

Bernard-Marie Koltès

LETTER 2

Koltès, Bernard-Marie (1995a) *Les Amertumes- Correspondence : Lettres adressées à Hubert Gignoux* [Letters to Hubert Gignoux] *Séquence* 2 : 14

Strasbourg, le 7 avril 1970

Monsieur:

Je vous envoie ceci autant pour vous tenir au courant de l'évolution de notre travail que pour répondre à certaines remarques que vous m'avez faites au cours de notre dernière entrevue - remarques auxquelles ma lenteur de réflexion m'a empêché de répondre de suite.

[Sir:

I am sending you this to keep you up to date on the progress our work is making, as well as to answer a few remarks that you made over the course of our first discussion together, remarks that my slow thinking prevented me from answering at the time.]

Vous m'avez parlé de formalisme. En fait, la raison profonde d'un travail formel - et qui peut surprendre de prime abord - c'est que le personnage psychologique ne m'intéresse pas - pas plus d'ailleurs que le personnage "raisonnable" (ce que me fait redouter presque autant Stanislavski que Brecht). Chercher dans ce texte des personnages au sens traditionnel du terme - c'est- à-dire des combinaisons plus ou moins complexes de traits psychologiques définis, et pour lesquels il conviendrait de découvrir dans quelle mesure tel trait l'emporte sur tel autre, et comment tel trait s'allie à tel autre - serait une gageure, et serait surtout sans le moindre intérêt. J'ai toujours l'impression, face à un personnage tracé psychologiquement, de me trouver devant la Xième variation de la même chose, fruit d'un travail acharné sur ce qu'il y a de plus petit, de plus mesquin, de moins original en soi. Demander à des comédiens l'étude profonde de ce qu'ils ont de moins intéressant en eux me paraît aberrant. Ne parlons pas des personnages considérés à la manière de Brecht: si les personnages psychologiques sont petits, ceux-ci semblent inexistants.

[You spoke to me of formalism. Indeed, the deep reason for the formal nature of the work, and which might surprise you, is that the character based on psychological traits does not interest me at all, no more than the "reasonable" character (and so I mistrust Stanislavski almost as much as I do Brecht). To seek in this play evidence of characters in the traditional sense of the term - that is to say more or less complex combinations of definite psychological chracteristics, and about whom one could question how one trait impacts on another, or how one trait is related to another - would be nothing more than a wager, and would be of very little interest. I've always felt, when faced with a psychologically-based character, that I'm seeing yet another variation on the same old thing, the fruit of some tremendous labour on that which is the littlest, most petty-minded, and least original part of one's self. Asking actors to study deeply that which is the least interesting in them seems ridiculous. And you might as well forget characters as far as Brecht understands them: if psychologically-based characters seem lightweight, Brecht's are inexistant.]

En fait, les personnes et les personnages m'apparaissent d'une toute autre

manière. L'ensemble d'un individu et l'ensemble des individus me semble tout constitué par différentes "puissances" qui s'affrontent ou se marient, et d'une part l'équilibre d'un individu, d'autre part les relations entre personnes sont constitués par les rapports entre ces puissances. Dans une personne, ou dans un personnage, c'est un peu comme si une force venant du dessus pesait sur une force venant du sol, le personnage se débattant entre deux, tantôt submergé par l'une, tantôt submergé par l'autre. On a donné parfois à l'une le nom de Destin, mais cela me paraît trop schématique - et trop facile! Dans les rapports entre les personnages, c'est un peu comme deux bateaux posés chacun sur deux mers en tempête, et qui sont projetés l'un contre l'autre, le choc dépassant de loin la puissance des moteurs. Bien au-delà d'un caractère psychologique petit, changeant, informe, il me semble y avoir dans chaque être cet affrontement, ce poids plus ou moins lourd qui modèle avec force et inévitablement une matière première fragile - et le personnage est ce qui en sort, plus ou moins rayonnant, plus ou moins torturé, mais de toute façon révolté, et encore et indéfiniment plongé dans une lutte qui le dépasse.

[In fact, people and characters seem to me to be comprised in an entirely different fashion. The ensemble of an individual and individuals in a group seem to me to be constituted by different 'forces' which confront and combine with each other. Both the equilibrium of an individual and the relations between people are shaped by these forces. In a person or in a character, it's kind of like a force coming from above that presses down on a force coming from below, and the character is left fighting in between them, first submerged by one force, then by the other. Sometimes these forces have been called Destiny, but Destiny seems too schematic, too simple. In relationships between people, it's kind of like two boats sitting side by side in two stormy seas, one projected against the another and the resulting force exceeds in great measure the strength of their individual engines. In each being there seems to be this kind of conflict, one far beyond a small psychological character that is without shape and constantly changing, a conflict which is comprised of a more or less heavy weight which shapes an original primary substance. The character is what emerges from this struggle, more or less radiant, more or less tortured, but in any case rebellious and appalled, and still indefinitely plunged into the battle which exceeds him.]

Ceci pour tenter d'expliquer un travail apparemment formel - où je n'ai d'ailleurs pas le sentiment d'avoir exactement réussi! - mais par lequel j'ai d'abord voulu fixer l'important - l'important étant telle position à tel moment, tel geste à tel endroit, tel regard à tel autre; compris ou non compris, mais imposé non pas par les personnages, mais par la rapport des puissances qu'ils ont en eux. A présent, ceci étant posé, j'essaie, par un travail plus parlé, plus explicatif, soit d'amener le comédien à comprendre, vouloir, à emplir le geste fixé de tout temps, soit à le faire lutter contre - ce qui est une autre manière de lui donner un sens. Certainement, autant le temps réduit, que mes limites, que les limites des comédiens empêcheront d'arriver exactement - et de loin - au choc envisagé. Mais du moins pourrons-nous, je pense, faire entrevoir au public un peu d'un déferlement poétique, en ayant évité la tentation - et l'écueil - psychologique ou intellectuel.

[All of this to explain what would seem to be a formal work - and I don't have the feeling of having succeeded, by the way! - work that allows me to set down what is important - and that includes such and such a position at such and such a moment, such and such a gesture at such and such a moment, the right gaze to the other at the right time; and whether this be understood or not, it is not imposed by the characters, but by the relations of force between them. Next I attempt, by means of work based more on talk, more on explanation, either to bring the actor to a certain level of comprehension, to desire to fill the eternal gesture, or to get him to to fight against the gesture, which is another way to give it meaning. Of course, the little time we have, as well as my own limtations and those of the actors, will prevent us from attaining - by far - the intended effect. But at least we'll be able, I think, to present the public with a flood of poetic

images and words, while having avoided psychological and intellectual pitfalls.]

Et puis enfin, et surtout, Alexis! La clé, c'est de prendre ce personnage avant : avant l'entrée en effervescence des forces qui l'entoureent, vide, mort, inexistant, et d'assister au travail des puissances, de le voir se faire, se broyer, s'accoucher, naître enfin, et, tout en dernier, vivre. C'est en assistant à la composition d'un être réel, assister à la décomposition de la psychologie.

[And last but not least, Alexis! The key is to take this character before: before the arrival of the seething forces which surround him, when he is empty, dead, inexistent, and to witness the work of these forces, to see him being made, ground into being, given birth to, and in the end, living. It is to be present for the making of a real being, to be present for the unmaking of psychology]

Je suis effrayé par le fait de n'avoir pu encore travailler Alexis - mais je suis encore trop préoccupé par le reste pour retrouver le recul nécessaire. J'espère cependant le commencer bientôt. Je ne puis encore vous dire quand nous ferons un enchaînement complet, étant donné que nous n'avons pas terminé de mettre en place le ballet. Cependant, je puis déjà vous dire que la date probable de représentation sera le 8 mai (je n'ai encore aucune idée de l'endroit), et que, d'ici là, j'espère que vous aurez l'occasion de venir à nouveau à une répétition, et de me dire ce que vous pensez de la progression du travail.

Je vous prie aussi de me pardonner la longueur de cette lettre: j'ai beaucoup de mal à allier clarté et brièveté,

[I'm frightened by the fact that I haven't had a chance to work on Alexis yet - but I'm still too preoccupied by the rest of it to take the necessary steps back. I hope to begin this soon. I can't tell you when we'll do a full run-through, considering we haven't yet put the ballet in place. I can tell you though that the show will probably be on the 8th of May (I still don't know where), and that, from now until then, I hope you'll be able to come to a rehearsal again, and tell me what you think of the progress we're making.]

Also, please forgive me for the length of this letter: I have a hard time being clear and brief at the same time.

Bernard-Marie Koltès.

LETTER 3

Koltès, Bernard-Marie (1999b) *Lettres de Saint-Clément et d'ailleurs. Les Années d'apprentissage de Bernard-Marie Koltès* (1958-1976). Bibliothèques- Médiathèques de la Ville de Metz, 94 - 97.

Undated letter to unknown correspondent, spring of 1976 (extracts)

In this letter Koltès described his reactions to his encounters with people whom he felt were the 'real' exploited.

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A part cela, mes trois jours à Paris ont été très tumultueux; j'ai bien besoin de ces trois semaines de solitude pour mettre mes idées au clair; j'espère que personne ne viendra, je le recevrai très mal. Ce serait long, compliqué de

[Besides that, my three days in Paris were tumutuous ones; I really need these three weeks of solitude to clarify my ideas. I hope nobody comes to visit, I'd be a very bad host. It would be long and complicated to]

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t'expliquer, surtout je ne sais par où commencer, surtout enfin je n'ai pas encore bien clarifié les choses. En bref: je me suis trouvé en contact, — pour la première fois peut-être, en tout cas d'une manière aussi violente — avec ce qui doit constituer le plus bas niveau de la classe exploitée, ou du moins celui qui m'a le plus boulversé, sans doute parce qu'ils avaient moins de vingt ans, qu'ils me ressemblaient sur le plan des aspirations, et qu'enfin ils portaient la marque horrible d'une vie détruite déjà, sur leurs visages.

[me to explain all this to you, especially since I don't know where to start, and most especially because I haven't really clarified things for myself. In short: I found myself in contact with — for the first time maybe, certainly for the first time in such a violent way — with those who have to be in the lowest ranks of the exploited classes, or at least those who troubled me the most, no doubt because they were less than twenty years old, because they resembled me in my aspirations, and because they carried on their faces the scars of lives already destroyed.]

Te donner les détails serait trop long, inutile peut-être; mais disons qu'il s'en est suivi une conversation de toute une nuit, jusqu'à dix heures du matin, qui m'a fait un choc tel que je n'arrive pas encore à calmer mon esprit. Je n'ai pas pu ouvrir la bouche; pour la première fois depuis que je suis au parti, je me suis senti "du mauvais coté", et, enfin, j'ai fui comme un voleur, avec une honte dont je n'arrive pas encore bien à voir quelles sont les causes.

[Giving you the details would take too long, maybe it would be useless. Let's just say that a conversation followed, one that lasted all night, until ten in the morning, a conversation that shocked me so much that I still can't calm myself down. I couldn't open my mouth. For the first time since I've been a member of the party I felt on "the wrong side," and I finally fled like a thief with a guilt I still don't quite understand the source of.]

Tout cela ne t'intéresse peut-être pas outre mesure, mais comment pourrai-je ne rien t'en dire, alors que cela est, pour moi, essentiel? Tout, pour moi, s'était mystérieusement clarifié, sur tous les plans: il n'y a pas d'issue possible hors d'une adhésion complète à la cause et au mouvement de la classe ouvrière, de tous les exploités en général — les raisons, je t'en ai donné quelques-unes déjà, mais elles sont plus nombreuses encore, toutes décisives; cette conviction-là, je l'avais, je l'ai encore plus que jamais; cela seul peut donner un sens à mon travail, travail qui est l'unique raison de vivre. Mais il y a que, ce soir-là, je me suis senti de l'autre coté. La sensation la plus angoissante que j'ai jamais ressentie.

[Maybe this isn't very interesting for you, but how could I not tell you, while for me it's essential? Everything was mysteriously clarified for me, on every level: there is no way

forward besides a complete adhesion to the cause of the worker and of all exploited peoples in general — I've given you a few reasons already, but they're even more numerous than that, and they're all decisive. I had that conviction already, but now I have it more than ever; only this approach could give meaning to my work, the writing which is the sole reason for living. But that night I felt on the other side. That sensation is the most anguishing feeling I have ever had.]

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Pourquoi? me suis-je demandé. Pourquoi maintenant, alors qu'ouvertement je veux me mettre de leur côté, alors que, sincèrement, je veux me mettre à leur service?

['Why?,' I asked myself. Why do I feel this now, especially since I openly want to put be on their side, since I sincerely want to put myself at their service?]

J'ai alors senti le poids énorme de mon individualité: non, je ne serai jamais comparable à ces exploités-là, jamais ma situation n'aura de commune mesure avec ceux dont la vie est détruite avant vingt ans par le travail, et qui n'ont pas, faute de luxe ou de la culture, tous ces refuges de l'esthétisme, dans l'art, dans toutes ces nourritures pour ceux qui ont le temps. Dans cette vision manichéiste du monde que j'ai de plus en plus, que tous les événements confirment, – pour parler en termes de métaphysique, qui te sont plus proches que la langue marxiste! : la part du bien est claire, sûre, bien délimitée, mais celle du Mal est imprécise, elle se déplace à tout instant, elle vous englobe sans qu'on s'en rende compte.

[Then I felt the enormous burden of my individuality: no, I'll never be comparable to those exploited people, my situation will never be the same as those whose lives are destroyed before the age of twenty by work, and who don't have, because of an absence of means or general culture, all those aesthetic refuges, in art, in all those nourishments for those who have the time. All the events that I see confirm the Manichean view of the world that I have. To speak in metaphysical terms, which are closer to you than marxist ones! : the path of good is clear and well delineated, but the Dark path is imprecise, it's in continuous movement and surrounds you without your even realizing it.]

Ainsi, ces exploités de vingt ans, c'est la part malheureuse, c'est — toujours métaphysique! — la part de Dieu, sans conteste possible. Mais si, de l'autre coté, Rothschild, de Wendel, l'argent, et tous les profiteurs, sont le mal incontestable, nous, où sommes nous? Je me dis: je suis au Parti communiste, j'ai choisi mon camp; mais quand la situation me catapulte à la figure les vrais exploités, je vois sur moi, comme des verrues, come une marque indélébile, l'énormité du luxe de mon existence. J'ai choisi mon camp, me dis-je? Mais en cas de catastrophe, sur quelle solidarité compterai-je, sinon sur celle de l'argent, et pourquoi pourrai-je y compter, sinon à cause de mes origines?

Sur quelle solidarité, eux, peuvent-ils compter?

[And so, these exploited twenty year olds, they are the unfortunate lot, they're — again metaphysics — God, without any contest. But if, on the other side, you've got Rothschild and Wendell, money and all those who profit from it, those who are incontestably evil, where are we ? I tell myself that I'm in the communist party, that I've chosen my camp; but when the situation catapults me in the face of the real exploited, I feel the enormity of the luxury of my own existence like warts on my skin, an indelible mark. So I think I've chosen sides, do I? But in a moment of crisis, which solidarity will I depend on, if not on that of money, and then again only because of my background?

Whose solidarity can they count on?]

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J'ai eu le sentiment, enfin, que dans la lutte des classes, le combat ne se fera pas qu'entre nous contre les grosses puissances d'argent, mais aussi entres les vrais exploités et la frange intermédiaire dont je suis.

[At the end of the day, I feel that the combat won't take place between ourselves and those who have money, but between those who are really exploited and the intermediate fringe of which I am a part.]

Je fais là, à l'intérieur d'un cadre "politique", exactement un trajet qui ressemble, chapitre après chapitre, à la "nuit obscure" de Jean de la Croix, avec la monstruosité du mal qui augmente sans limite au fur et à mesure où l'on veut s'engager dans le sens inverse.

[I am tracing a path within the framework of [conventional] politics that resembles, chapter for chapter, Jean de la Croix's 'night of obscurity', with the monstruous quality of evil increasing limitlessly as you work harder and harder to engage yourself in the other direction.]

Je ne sais pas quelle nouvelle décision sortira de cette expérience. Je prends mon temps pour ne pas faire de connerie, mais il en sortira une cela est sûr.

[I don't know what new decision will come out of this experience. I'm taking my time so that I don't screw up, but I'm sure I will screw up somehow anyway.]

BMK

LETTER 4 (extracts)

Koltès, Bernard-Marie (1999b) *Lettres de Saint-Clément et d'ailleurs. Les Années d'apprentissage de Bernard-Marie Koltès* (1958-1976). Bibliothèques-Médiathèques de la Ville de Metz.

Letter to unkown correspondent, July 21 1976.

In this letter, Koltès describes his thoughts on the bonds deeper than love that can arise between people.

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Lorsqu'on a aimé une fois, dans sa vie, on sait — on devrait savoir — qu'il y a au moins deux plans sur lesquels se fixent les liens; il y a celui de l'existence au sens anecdotique,

[When a person has been in love at least once in their life, they know — or should know — that there are at least two levels on which bonds are made. There is the level which is that of existence in an anecdotal sense,]

Page 99 (illustration on page 98)

avec la formation d'habitudes, la constitution d'un passé, l'expérience d'une foule de sentiments secondaires tels que la jalousie, l'aversion, etc. Mais ce plan-là, le seul dont on parle quand on parle d'amour, n'est pourtant pas le plus fondamental, ni même reservé à l'amour.

[that includes the formation of habits, the sense of a past, the experience of a host of secondary emotions such as jealousy and aversion, etc. But that level, the only level being discussed when we talk about love, is not the most important or deep level, nor is it only the province of love.]

L'autre, plus profond, complètement inexprimable, toujours inexprimé, souvent ignoré, c'est celui qui, statique, indifférent aux remous de l'existence, où il se noue comme des cordages entre les êtres, lentement, silencieusement, mais des liens irréversibles, qui sont comme une excroissance qui pousse sur soi-même. C'est cela qui est la seule chose importante, et c'est cela que l'on néglige de penser, que l'on noie dans d'interminable bavardages intérieurs sur les péripéties, qui finissent par enhavir tout l'esprit, qui s'enchaînent l'un l'autre inutilement et de manière infinie, qui s'enroulent sur eux-mêmes sans pourtant ne jamais rien faire bouger.

[The other deeper level, which is completely inexpressible, always unspoken, frequently forgotten, is the level which is static and indifferent to the vagaries of existence, the level where a slow, silent but irreversible type of bond grows between people like an excessence from the self. It is this bond which is the only important thing. We forget to think about it and we drown in this interminable interior twisting and turning chit-chat that ends up invading our entire mind. This chit-chat spins round and round uselessly and indefinitely without resulting in any kind of action.]

Pourtant, la seule pensée d'amour possible, la seule manière, à la plus forte raison, d'arriver à retrouver un être absent, c'est celle qui recherche ce niveau-là où sont les véritables liens. Et de penser aux accidents de l'existence ne peut qu'éloigner de la contemplation de cette réalité qui est une partie de soi-même, et non le fruit d'événements.

[The only hope for love, the only way to find an absent being, is to go looking at the level at which the real bonds occur. To spend time considering accidents of existence can only distance you from the contemplation of that reality which is a part of one's self, and the result of exterior events.]

Il faut apprendre une autre manière de penser, qui est contemplative: qui ne cherche ni l'explication ni la compréhension, moins encore cette forme de jugement qu'est le remords; c'est une manière de penser qui ne peut être que muette (parce que les mots et les images sont un obstacle et une réduction de cette pensée), sans jugement ni

[We have to learn another type of thinking, which is contemplative: one that seeks neither explication nor comprehension, even less so the type of judgement which is remorse. It is a type of thinking which can only be mute (because words and images are an obstacle and reduction to this type of thinking), one without judgement or]

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rêveries (parce que la rêverie, c'est-à-dire tout ce qui est conditionnel — j'aurais pu, j'aurais dû, cela aurait été... — est le pire ennemi de l'appronfondissement de la pensée),

sans sentiment même, au sens des infinies variétés des sentiments superficiels. C'est quelque chose qui ressemble plus à la manière dont, lorsqu'on a quitté une maison, familière et qu'on se sent perdu, on cherche, on retrouve et on reconnaît, bien qu'on en soit loin, un mélange d'atmophère, de chaleur. de bruits et d'odeurs, de mouvement intérieur comme il y a dans le corps, et qui sent la présence.

[daydreaming (because daydreaming, that is to say everything which is conditional — such as 'I could have,' 'I should have,' 'It would have been,' ... — is profound reflection's deepest enemy), without feeling even, in the sense of the infinite variety of superficial sentiment that exists. It's something that resembles the manner in which, when you've left a house and you're feeling lost, you seek, find and recognize, even though you're far from the house, a mix of atmosphere, heat, sounds, odour and movements in the body which together give you the feeling of the presence of that house.]

. . . . .

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