

Article

THE GOOD-ENOUGH SETTING OF ANNA DEAVERE SMITH: RESTAGING CROWN HEIGHTS

M Castelloe

New York University, New York

Correspondence: M Castelloe, New York University, 140 West, 76th Street, Suite 2B, New York, NY 10023, USA
E-mail: msc214@nyu.edu

Abstract

*Anna Deavere Smith developed a genre of theatre that combines journalism and social commentary in order to investigate cultural conflict. Her play *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn and Other Identities* is a solo performance that addresses group trauma and the task of racial healing in contemporary America. This essay analyzes how this one-woman docudrama intervenes into the psychodynamics of the public response to the Crown Heights crisis. Specifically I want to consider how Smith's restaging creates what DW Winnicott calls a "facilitating environment" for the Black and Jewish people of the neighborhood and "potential space" for social change.*

Keywords

Anna Deavere Smith; performance; trauma; theatre

Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society (2004) 9, 207–218.

doi:10.1057/palgrave.pcs.2100018

Introduction

The theatre is a symptom of history.¹ According to Herbert Blau (1982), it holds up a mirror to culture, "somewhat fractured for what it sees" (Blau, 1982, p 26). Anna Deavere Smith has developed a genre of theatre that combines journalism and social commentary in order to investigate cultural conflict. Her play *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights*,



Brooklyn and Other Identities is a solo performance that addresses group trauma and the task of racial healing in contemporary America.

This one-woman docudrama had its premiere in New York at the Shakespeare Festival in 1992 and was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. My essay will analyze how Smith's work intervenes into the psychodynamics of the public response to the Crown Heights events. Specifically, I want to consider how Smith's restaging of the crisis creates what DW Winnicott calls a facilitating environment for the Black persons and Jews of the neighborhood and "potential space" for social change. It will be useful to begin by reviewing the violent circumstances that inspired the play.

One summer night, August 1991, the Grand Rebbe of the Lubavitcher sect of Hasidic Jews, was returning to Crown Heights from his weekly visit to the grave of his former wife. A car from his motorcade ran a red light, jumped the curb, and pinned two African-American children to a window grating. Angela Cato was seriously injured; her cousin, Gavin, aged 7, was killed. Rumor quickly spread that a private ambulance service operated by Jews was first to arrive on the scene and came to the aid of the Hasidic driver and his passengers while neglecting the wounded Black children, one of whom lay dying. After 3 h, in retaliation for what the African-Americans perceived as the murder of a helpless child by the Hasidim, a group of Black youths a few blocks away surrounded a young Hebrew scholar, Yankel Rosenbaum, and stabbed him to death. These events sparked 3 days of civil unrest and Brooklyn became the site of widespread arson and rioting in which citizens, police, and journalists were beaten. Both Black persons and Jews protested the city's handling of the incidents.

Performing barefoot in black pants and a white shirt at the Public Theatre a year later, Smith recreated the events of Crown Heights based on taped interviews taken from the residents of the neighborhood including Yankel Rosenbaum's brother, Gavin Cato's father, a local rabbi, a Lubavitcher woman, several anonymous community members, and the Reverend Al Sharpton. Smith also interviewed street people, journalists, academics, and artists. The interviews were conducted both in person and over the phone during about 8 days and compiled from men and women across a range of age, race, and economic differences. Smith then edited the interviews, reconstructing the crisis based on these subjective accounts.

It is important to note that Smith edits mainly the length of the transcripts, determining where each monologue begins and ends. Yet she refrains from altering the text within these bounds so that each point of view retains its integrity in terms of content, rationale, and associative movement. As she puts it, "I try to find a section that I don't have to interrupt. The performance is much more difficult if I've created chaos in their frame of thought. I'd rather have a section in which their psychological through-line is reflected in language" (Smith cited in Martin, 1993, p 199). Smith then re-enacted the conflict for the community in which the events occurred. Later productions were presented for

a general audience across the US, but this paper will deal exclusively with the earliest presentations for the residents of Crown Heights.

Using her body to imitate the speech patterns, vocal rhythms, and physical habits of her informants, Smith memorizes the interviews and refracts the events through a series of personal monologues. Ann Pelligrini (1997) describes this play as a theatrical talking cure (Pelligrini, 1997, p 71). The performer calls herself an “empty vessel, a repeater,” an inhabitant of other peoples’ words (Smith, 1993, p xxv). The opening monologue is called “Identity,” based on an interview Smith conducted with the Black poet and playwright Ntozake Shange:

Identity – it, is, uh...a psychic sense of place...a way of knowing I’m not a rock or that tree? And it’s a way of knowing that no matter where I put myself that I am not necessarily what’s around me. I am part of my surroundings and I become separate from them and its being able to make those differentiations clearly that lets us have an identity. (Smith, 1993, p 3)fs

This section introduces the central questions that lie at the heart of Smith’s performance and unfold throughout the fractured narrative. Where do I end and you begin? How do I define the difference between “me” and “not me”? What’s the distinction between what’s mine and what’s somebody else’s?

Winnicott (1971) elaborates this process of adaptive identity through the notion of the transitional object – the edge of a worn blanket, a favorite doll or toy, a baby’s babblings, a soothing lullaby (Winnicott, 1971, pp 2–13). This object comes into play as the first experience of love is splintered by disillusion and loss. It signals a rupture in the fabric of self as the child is torn from primary identification with the mother or caregiver. The transitional object cushions, provides a sense of cohesion and “potential space” for the management of separation. This beloved thing also functions as a bridge between subjective perceptions and objective reality. Winnicott suggests that the original transitional object is actually the mother’s face, the first objectively perceived subject in the environment (Winnicott, 1971, p 111). Emotional development is intertwined with the facilitating environment that, in the beginning, adapts to the child’s needs through belief and empathy. In his terms, the “good-enough” mother facilitates the illusion that the transitional object was created by the child, himself, endowing him with trust in his own creative power and continuity of self.

The idea of transitional phenomena expands on Freud’s theory of sublimation and proposes a fruitful theory of emotional growth, one that emphasizes the connection between internal thought and social change. Transitional behavior is not confined to childhood but continues to be a means of adaptation throughout adult life as in artistic work and intellectual or scientific inquiry. Smith’s performance shows us how transitional behavior becomes the location of play and cultural discourse. Her project is about being en route, what she calls “identity in motion” (Smith, 1993, pp xxxiv). I want to examine how she functions as a transitional object for the residents of Crown Heights.

In Crown Heights of the 1980's and 1990's, identity was strongly tied to racial difference and group formation. The crisis that erupted that summer reflected long-standing antagonisms between the Lubavitchers and Black people, as well as the pain and oppression these communities have historically endured through their distinctive conflicts with other groups. African-Americans said that the motorcade of Rebbe Schneerson crossed the intersection each week exceeding the legal speed limit, and that the entourage of the Lubavitcher's spiritual leader was an intrusion. That the Hasidism enjoyed special concessions condoned by local law enforcement agencies magnified group hostilities: traffic on major thoroughfares was suspended during Jewish holidays and times of worship. In turn, the Lubavitchers felt increasingly threatened by Black anti-Semitism and street crime. The August riots included chants of "*Heil Hitler*," calls to "Kill the Jews," and "Heat Up the Ovens." The Lubavitchers, members of a Jewish sect that fled Nazi Germany, are a particularly insular community due to their orthodox beliefs, style of dress, and strict codes of religious behavior.

According to Smith, Crown Heights was the most graphic display of racial difference she had ever witnessed. On the streets, group affiliation was symbolized through wardrobe and bodily ornamentation:

The overall picture of Crown Heights was black and white. The residents were, for the most part, Blacks and Whites...Everyone wore their roots on their heads. The Hasidic men wore yarmulkes and black hats, and the women wore wigs. The African American and Caribbean Americans frequently had on hats with Afro-centric meaning, or dreadlocks and shells in their hair. The lines were so clearly drawn that at any moment they were ready to snap.

(Smith, 1993, pp xxxiii-xxxiv)

On stage, Smith sports a yarmulke or cap of African Kente cloth to imitate these unbending lines of racial segregation. She draws on the power of words and physical mimicry to represent what Cornell West (1993) calls the "tribal mentality" of these two groups (West, 1993, p xx). West asserts that tribal feelings involve the degradation of the urban public sphere where trust of other citizens of dissimilar customs, religion, or ethnicity is withdrawn. The popular media coverage of Crown Heights during the riots exacerbated cultural emotions and contributed to the polarization of the community.

Initially transitional behavior is the process of creating a subjective boundary, a threshold or absolute difference in response to the porousness of the child's ego. In Simon Grolnick's description (1978), it mediates the transition to a more differentiated level of self and object relations (Grolnick, 1978, p 220). However, in later periods of emotional life this behavior involves a more complex knowledge of object-relations and an understanding of how the other is different from but also, paradoxically, similar to the self. The task that confronted Smith was how to facilitate empathy and communication across a

treacherous racial divide and enable the residents of Crown Heights to recognize, despite ethnic differences, the experience of inhabiting many common social worlds.

The overall structure of her docudrama is disjointed, dreamlike; monologues often emerge in random sequence. The performance not only retells the events of Crown Heights but also revisits shared experiences of group oppression. Wearing black tails, a white shirt and bowtie, Smith enacts the Minister Conrad Mohammed, one of Louis Farrakhan's reverends, as he recalls the horrors of the African Middle Passage: "This is a crime of tremendous proportion...a disgrace in the eyes of civilized people. That, uh, crime also stinks in the nostrils of God...We were so thoroughly robbed." Smith listens beyond individual suffering to a history of collective grief. The Minister claims that Black people, as a result of their historical subjugation, are cut off from their past. The Black Man, he says, is an "amnesia victim...He has lost knowledge of himself." The historical suffering of Black people becomes linked to the idea of a chosen people: "The Honorable Louis Farrakhan teaches us that we are the chosen of God." Conrad proceeds to reprimand the Lubavitchers for usurping the Black man's favored position: "We are those people that almighty God Allah has selected as his chosen, and they are masquerading in our garment – the Jews."

Volkan *et al* (2002) suggests that being among those chosen to have a special, precarious fate signifies the experience of collective trauma and the complications of group mourning that, in cases of extreme suffering, often remain unresolved (Volkan *et al*, 2002, p 42). Volkan, a Cypriot Turk and leader in the field of informal diplomacy, argues that the mythology of a chosen people is a way of attempting to make sense of massive group trauma and the experience of extreme torment at the hands of others. Such a turn towards God or Fate attempts to compensate for intense narcissistic injury, helps victims to try to assimilate and understand the personal experience of tragedy. Being chosen also fortifies an us/them mentality and erects a rigid psychological border between groups, inhibiting the capacity to identify with members of another assemblage. The implication of viewing oneself and one's collective in light of being chosen is that anyone distinct from one's group is irretrievably "unchosen," among those rejected by God, a victim of his enmity and a rival with which one cannot empathize.

Smith contrasts the Black slavery experience with the Holocaust. In a striking passage, the Minister says he has little empathy for victims of the *Shoah* when compared to 300 years of African-American slavery. Despite the enormity of a historical abomination such as the Holocaust or Middle Passage, each of these events is singularly catastrophic and in some sense incomparable to each other or any other massive or large-scale historical trauma. However, the notion of being "chosen" is an important idea, one that I would like to consider with greater care.

Drawing on Freud's ideas of psychology, Volkan *et al* (2002) elucidate how the experience of trauma operates on a collective as well as individual level and provides the cornerstone of a group identity. They argue that when a large group suffers massive trauma induced by others, there is shared affective bond. Despite individual experience being variegated due to diverse ego vitality and object relations, different family backgrounds and developmental conflicts – the traumatized individuals share certain feelings of anxiety, shame, humiliation, rage, helplessness, and guilt in relation to the survival of the event. This shared emotional experience catalyzes a particular group-identity process. The trauma shapes a common mental representation of history for group members and becomes connected to a special group identity that frequently supersedes individual identity. This mental representation of history becomes foundational to the mind of the group as a racial, ethnic, religious or national marker (Volkan *et al*, 2002, pp. 42–43).

The key to understanding this shared identity is Volkan's controversial idea (1997) of "chosen trauma," the unconscious choice to pass on such bonds of affect to future generations. This term signals a mental image of historical injury that is too vast to be mourned, a limitless grief that remains alive within collective memory for years, even centuries. The effects of chosen trauma are severely consuming and, in some sense, unfathomable. This internalized inscription signifies shared feelings of unutterable loss and a sense of appalling injustice. Implied in this term is the notion that following a calamity of massive proportion such as the Holocaust, the work of mourning remains tremendously complicated and is therefore transmitted to survivors' progeny in the unconscious hope that one's descendants can resolve something that their ancestors could not (Volkan, 1997, pp 38–42).

With its references to being chosen, Smith's performance gestures towards the intergenerational transmission of severe group trauma. The Minister's monologue is juxtaposed to one spoken by the Jewish writer and feminist, Letty Cottin Pogrebin, as she recounts the story of her uncle Isaac, the "designated survivor of his town," who forged Aryan papers and was coerced onto a train and given the task of herding those from his town, including his wife and children, into the gas chamber. Isaac migrated to New York years later "with prematurely white hair and a dead gaze" and his story was told to the interviewee by her mother who translated his words from Yiddish. Pogrebin says, "Isaac is my connection to dozens of other family members who were murdered in concentration camps... A monstrous tale that dwarfed the demonology of legend and gave me the nightmare I still dream to this day." This woman's account illustrates how the phantasms of a previous generation haunt the dreams and internal world of the survivor's offspring.

Volkan accounts for certain societal processes that result from the experience of shared catastrophe, particularly its transgenerational effects. Along with Ast and Greer (2002), he asserts that when a group undergoes massive psychic and

physical trauma and there is no means of working through the experience and the people cannot mourn, cannot reverse the injury inflicted by another group – through certain psychic mechanisms they pass the experience onto the next generation. Survivors pass on the experience of an injurious history by projecting or “depositing” these traumatized images (Volkan *et al*, 2002, pp. 36–37). In turn, the “carrier” introjects images of wounded self and perpetrator representations and becomes a repository for the parent or caregivers’ intolerable aspects of self. Such introjective–projective processes occur when intersubjective boundaries are unstable and there is a fluidity or porousness of psychic borders: between children and their parents, or even between adults relating to one another under regressed states (Volkan *et al*, 2002, p 42). The younger generation becomes the “reservoir” for the unacceptable, troublesome parts of an older generation. The image of the event and its conflictual relations may become an intrusive presence in the mourner’s life. Volkan (1997) describes such people as “perennial mourners,” those heir to a shared loss that is incapable of being mourned so that it is recalled continually (Volkan, 1997, p 64). The future generations of persons who suffer massive psychic trauma are therefore obliged to perform certain unresolved psychological tasks.

Smith’s work offers a public venue for potential social change and gives us an insight into what Volkan *et al* (2002) call an “intergenerational repetition compulsion” (Volkan *et al*, 2002, p xiv). It provides a viable attempt to address racial melancholia and engage the regenerative work of mourning. Her restaging of Crown Heights strives to engender empathy between the African-Americans and Jews and enables an adaptive resolution of loss.

Part of the idea behind this performance was to attract people to the theatre who did not usually go to the theatre, to bring folks together in the same room who normally would not be in close physical proximity and engage them in dialogue. In performances presented for the community, the audience often erupted spontaneously in verbal response. Black persons in the audience frequently gave verbal commentary during the show with expressions like “Yes,” “All right,” and “Teach.” Smith (1993) says that “Once I heard a woman saying throughout the show, ‘Oy’... When the audience talks, they are talking as much to each other as to me.” (Smith, 1993, p xxxviii) Post-performance discussions in which both Black people and Lubavitchers responded to Smith’s portrayal of the people and events of the neighborhood were also crucial in instigating cultural discourse.

Fires In the Mirror is part of a series of performance pieces called *On the Road: a Search for American Character*. This was a project in which the performer interviewed people and later performed them using their words. Smith (2000) was specifically interested in how the language of an individual reflects the character of the group: “I travel in pursuit of language, my tape recorder is my camera,” she adds (Smith, 2000, p 80). Just as words reveal what

is unseen in an individual, it is also a snap-shot of what is unseen about race, society and group formations. She describes the self-reflexive dimension of her work in terms evocative of childhood play: "I'm just like one those ol' Baby Huey dolls you had when you were a kid. You punch 'em and they come back up" (Smith, 2000, p 296).

The actual events of death in Crown Heights are recounted in the concluding section of the show through the monologues of Norman Rosenbaum, brother of Yankel, as he describes the circumstances surrounding the discovery of his sibling's death. This final portion also relates the testimony of Carmel Cato, father of Gavin, which Smith conveys in pronounced West Indian accent: "Gavin was still. They was trying to pound him. I was the father. I was 'it, chucked, and pushed, and a lot of sarcastic words were passed towards me from the police while I was trying to explain: It was my kid!" Smith carries the affective residues of Cato's despair, anger, fear, confusion – lending her body as a medium of mimicry, an external locus for unresolved grief. This closing monologue fosters compassionate attention between the Jews and African-Americans. The actress creates a facilitating environment of adaptive care for the informant at a time of ineffable loss, when there is a radical break in life's continuity and objective perceptions are severely harrowing.

As Richard Schechner describes it (1993), Smith incorporates her informants and their experience of trauma acting as a ritual shaman who attempts to cure a possessed or diseased patient (Schechner, 1993, pp 63–64). Implied, here, is that Smith's mechanism of representation draws on classical ideas of *katharsis*, Aristotle's theory regarding the emotional impact of tragic poetry. The purgation of affect retained importance for Freud and Breuer who, in the 1890s, adopted the term "cathartic method" to describe their early procedures of therapeutic cure. Their treatment of hysteria was based on the process of uncovering the unconscious meaning of a bodily symptom through the narrative of the patient. Language was thought to release psychical energy connected to an underlying trauma. As language became a substitute for the action of traumatic injury, the meaning of the symptom gradually arose to consciousness ultimately abolishing the need for its repeated manifestation.

However Smith does more than elicit an affective or cathartic response from her informants. Her method of representation is complex and also involves the implementation of analytic distance. Even while revisiting a scene of hopeless despair, Smith uses Bertolt Brecht's theatrical technique of *verfremdungseffekt*, a refusal of emotional identification, a kind of knowing through distance. The purpose of this "alienation" effect is to allow the spectator to criticize constructively from a social rather than personal viewpoint. It affords a measure of objectivity and indicates the intercessions of judgment. Brecht's work emerged as a direct influence of Marx, in the aftermath of WWI, a historical moment permeated by what Raymond Williams (1996) calls a "consciousness

of the weight of suffering” (Williams, 1996, p 156). Brecht’s Epic Theatre was a rejection of classical tragedy, one that advocated critical detachment from mankind’s suffering.

Typically, in alienated acting the performer demonstrates rather than impersonates his character: Smith cites or quotes the words of her informants much like the analyst within the clinical context. This distinction between word and meaning promotes a dual experience for the listener: the recognition of identification and estrangement. Like the transitional behavior of childhood, Smith’s re-presentation signals travel from the subjective to the objective realm. Playing, asserts Winnicott (1971), is inherently precarious and exciting because it deals with the razor edge between subjective feeling and that which is objectively perceived (Winnicott, 1971, p 52).

The ambiguity of the performer’s own racial position as a light-skinned African-American woman allows her to play across ethnic borders with ease. Yet she never loses herself completely in the role she enacts, but relishes the gap between herself and her interviewee. In other words, there is a simultaneous presence of the performer and performed.

A crucial monologue from the show portrays the writer, academic and activist Angela Davis through a segment entitled “Rope.” This enactment begins with the observation that for many years race was a way of constructing community based on biology and morphological traits of skin, hair and bone. Race, for her, has become a progressively obsolete way of forming community. Davis urges us to develop new ways of understanding group formations:

When I use the word ‘race’ now I put it in quotations. Because if we don’t transform this intransigent rigid notion of race, we will be caught up in this cycle of genocidal violence that is at the origins of our history...I’m not suggesting that we do not anchor ourselves in our communities. But I think that, to use a metaphor, the rope attached to that anchor should be long enough to allow us to move into other communities...what I’m interested in is communities that are not static, that can change, that can respond to new historical needs.

Our understanding of race relies on the linking action of transitional behavior, the process of bridging certain unspeakable distances. As we witness Smith’s embodiment of various characters, we recognize the experience of moving back and forth between many social worlds. On the one hand, the monologues highlight feelings of group inclusiveness through the recurring use of pronouns such as “us” and “we.” These moments bring to mind what Ted G Goertzel (2002) describes as the “ideological script” rehearsed by terrorists: a rhetoric of racial purity, of “us versus them, with no shades of gray” (Goertzel, 2002, p 107). In other instances, the mentality of me/you or us/them gives way to cross-cultural identifications and the spectator becomes aware of various levels of inclusion and exclusion.

Rather than assuming a singular, objective viewpoint or dramatizing a unified history of Crown Heights, this drama portrays a multiethnic stage of divergent and often vehemently conflicting beliefs. What emerges from the performance is a multiplicity of perspectives rarely expressed and heard within the Black-Jewish dialogue. Through subjects like “hair,” “wigs,” “ovens,” race,” “rhythm,” “rap,” “poetry,” and “rage,” she restages the events of Crown Heights as seen through the experience of Black, Caribbean, Jewish and Gentile men and women. Group-images of seamless totality such as “Black” or “Jewish” are refracted as if in a broken mirror, giving way to the recognition of identities that encompass both similarity and difference. As with interpretations from the analyst, the spectator is placed in the position of recognizing a given traumatic experience in multiple personal contexts. The show inspires us to contemplate how we are, surprisingly, alike in our diversity and the way we participate in multiple identifications. As Smith puts it (1993), the spirit of theater “lives in the bridge that makes unlikely aspects seem connected” (Smith, 1993, p xxix).

Smith’s motley embodiments convene a civic dialogue and offer an intermediate realm distinct from the terrain of the Black or Jewish community to address group affect. Her performance attempts to work through absolutist feeling and foster a way of thinking beyond the polarization that often characterizes religious and racial extremism. She underscores a new arrangement of social reality, one that enables empathy and mutual trust, which is the basis of all play.

The capacity for illusion is of special importance to the good-enough setting. Through her impersonations, Smith facilitates the illusion for her interviewees that they have some part in the creation of an unyielding racial divide and intolerance of others – as well as the sharing of experiences through cross-identification. The illusory aspect of transitional phenomena may also have a regressive quality.

Volkan (2001) describes transitional behavior as a two-sided “imaginary lantern” located between the infant and his surroundings, with one surface translucent and one opaque. During gratification and love, the luminous side of the lantern is turned towards the environment and the subject attempts to comprehend the complexity of external objects. Yet when displeasure arises from pain, hunger or other intrinsic lack – the opaque plane is turned towards ones surroundings, obliterating the exterior world. Volkan argues that the religious belief of extreme fundamentalists is a form of transitional behavior that relies on turning the opaque side of the lantern against an external realm of “nonbelievers” in a gesture of omnipotent narcissism. Totalizing violence frequently follows, the reactivation of chosen traumas and ethnic wars of purgation (Volkan, 2001, pp. 156–160).

While any assessment of the curative effect of Smith’s show on the residents she interviewed remains speculative, we can ascertain decisive elements of the performer’s own experience based on her work and extensive writing. Smith

(2000) says that she, herself, grew up in Baltimore during segregation terrified of white kids and haunted by images of African-Americans being burned and hung by trees (Smith, 2000, p 81). Her world as a child was almost entirely a world of Black people and it wasn't until she was a teenager that she had a white teacher or shared a classroom with Caucasian students. At the same time, her work is based on a conceptual model of ethnicity that places importance on shifting boundaries, flexible contours and the mutability of group affiliations. As Smith (2000) puts it in her memoir:

I am continually leaving safe houses of identity. When you leave the house of what is familiar to you – your family, your race, your social class, your nation, your professional area of expertise – it is not likely that you will find another house that will welcome you with open arms. When you leave your safe house, you will end up standing someplace in the road. I would call these places that are without houses crossroads of ambiguity. One the one hand, they are not comfortable places. On the other hand, in them one acquires the freedom to move. (Smith, 2002, p 24)

Fires In the Mirror emphasizes subjectivity as a dynamic and intersectional phenomenon. It advocates the departure from what Smith calls “safe houses of identity” and the construction of new – sometimes uncertain – networks of support. This provocative performance invites us to reflect on the “crossroads of ambiguity” and engage a discomfiting tension between the “me” and the “not-me.” Winnicott (1971) claims that, in fact, the maintenance of paradox is the fundamental feature of transitional behavior (Winnicott, 1971, p 89). He says that this is a paradox that must be tolerated and respected rather than resolved.

An inbetweenness or liminality of this kind lies at the core of Smith's play: a dialectical pressure between self and other, objectivity and subjective longing; the recognition of how life is intertwined with the fabric of death, of how the self is imbricated with loss. Smith's recreation of Crown Heights cultivates emotional flexibility and an expansiveness of object-relations. It serves as a passageway between the familiar and the distressingly unfamiliar. Her stage breaks open old ways of understanding a social landscape gripped by a trenchant racial divide and functions as a transitional realm for the as-yet-to-be-known.

About the author

Molly Castelloe is an actress, playwright and doctoral candidate in Performance Studies at New York University. She has worked extensively in theatre and cinema, including the first bilingual film produced in Sri Lanka. Her dissertation is entitled *Stages of Play: Winnicott, the Good-Enough Setting and NYC Performance of the 1980-90s*. She is a faculty member in the Department of Film and Television at N.Y.U., e-mail: msc214@nyu.edu

Notes

- ¹ This paper expands and elaborates on research conducted on Smith's work published in abbreviated form in *Clio's Psyche*.

References

- Blau, H. (1982). *Blooded Thought: Occasions of Theatre*. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications.
- Goertzel, T. (2002). Terrorist Beliefs and Terrorist Lives. In C. Stout (ed.) *The Psychology of Terrorism*. Westport: Praeger, pp. 97–110.
- Grolnick, S. (1978). Dreams and Dreaming as Transitional Phenomena. In A. Simon, B. Leonard, M. Werner (eds.) *Between Fantasy and Reality: Transitional Objects and Phenomena*. New York: Aronson, pp. 213–231.
- Martin, C. (1993). Anna Deavere Smith: The Word Becomes You: An Interview. In C. Martin (ed.) *A Sourcebook of Feminist Theatre and Performance*. London: Routledge, pp. 185–204.
- Pelligrini, A. (1997). *Performance Anxieties: Staging Psychoanalysis, Staging Race*. New York: Routledge.
- Schechner, R. (1993). Anna Deavere Smith: Acting as Incorporation. *TDR: The Drama Review*, 37 (4), pp. 63–64.
- Smith, A.D. (1993). *Fires In the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn and Other Identities*. New York: Doubleday, All references to the performance are taken from this text.
- Smith, A.D. (2000). *Talk to Me: Travels in Media and Politics*. New York: Random House.
- Volkan, V. (1997). *Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Volkan, V. (2001). Observations on Religious Fundamentalism and the Taliban. *Mind and Human Interaction*, 12 (3), pp. 156–160.
- Volkan, V., G. Ast and W. Greer (2002). *The Third Reich in the Unconscious: Transgenerational Transmission and Its Consequences*. New York: Routledge.
- West, C. (1993). *Fires In the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn and Other Identities*. New York: Doubleday, pp. xxvii–xxii.
- Williams, R. (1996). *Modern Tragedy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Winnicott, D.W. (1971). *Playing and Reality*. New York: Routledge.

Reproduced with permission of copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.