

Embodying Trace: the Theatre of Wajdi Mouawad

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Doctor of Philosophy in Medieval and Modern Languages
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Abstract

This thesis explores the profound influence of twentieth-century philosophy, and in particular the writings of phenomenologist Jan Patočka, on Wajdi Mouawad. While Mouawad's literary and dramatic sources have been widely discussed in recent scholarship, his philosophical sources have remained underexplored. Seeking to rectify this critical lacuna, the thesis addresses the key concepts Mouawad draws from the writings of Patočka including the central role of 'trace'. Through its investigation of Mouawad's engagement with Patočka, this thesis delineates Mouawad's philosophical and ethical aims.

The thesis first considers the multiplicity of self in Mouawad's work, and its relationship to Patočka's 'shakiness' and 'care for the soul'. Chapter 1 investigates how an internal confrontation provoked by trace leads to a search for meaning as 'the soul discovers itself'. It analyses Mouawad's first play, *Willy Protogoras enfermé dans les toilettes*, and the more recent *Seuls*, to address the evolution of Mouawad's notion of self. Chapter 2 explores the significance of temporal awareness and time, as Patočka's three movements of human existence drive Mouawad's protagonists in their experience of shakiness. The plays discussed are *Littoral*, in which Mouawad first essayed non-linear time structures, and *Incendies*, which utilises a complex temporal oscillation. Chapter 3 turns to space as what arises through the individual's relationship to the world, focusing on *Forêts* and *Ciels*, two of Mouawad's most spatially complex productions. Chapter 4 examines two of Mouawad's recent plays, *Temps* and *Sœurs*, in its investigation of the role of testimony in developing the solidarity that emerges through the encounter with the other. The thesis then concludes with a discussion of how, and to what extent, Mouawad tackles his ambitions, particularly in their relation to trace.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the profound influence of twentieth-century philosophy, and in particular the writings of Czech phenomenologist Jan Patočka, on the dramatic corpus of Wajdi Mouawad. Although Wajdi Mouawad's literary, dramatic and classical sources have been investigated in detail in the growing body of scholarly literature surrounding this influential playwright, Mouawad's often cited philosophical sources, and in particular the works of Jan Patočka, have rarely been explored in any depth. The breadth and range of Mouawad's philosophical references demonstrates a deep and lasting engagement with Patočka's phenomenology. Mouawad discovered the works of Patočka in 1991 at the age of 23 (an experience he describes as a 'revelatory encounter'), and throughout his career he has frequently referenced Patočka's writings in his exegetical texts and interviews, as well as in the plays themselves. Patočka's ideas have provided Mouawad with a language and philosophical framework for his artistic project and ambitions. Mouawad's plays are suffused with the vocabulary and imagery of Patočka's writing, such as the blood of others, night versus day, the demonic-orgiastic, parasites and the abyss. Most crucially, Patočka's notions such as 'metanoia', 'care for the soul', the 'three movements of human existence', the 'hardness of the real' and the 'solidarity of the shaken', are foundational for Mouawad's dramatic work.

The 'trace' is central to these key philosophical notions, on the basis of which Mouawad's plays are structured. Mouawad's particular interpretation of revelation, or anagnorisis, as the experience required for the transition to Patočka's 'shakiness', is predicated on the trace. In Mouawad's plays, the trace operates as the disruptive presence of what is absent – often a remnant of the past, either historical or personal – that fragments protagonists' accepted understanding of the world. The trace frequently functions for Mouawad's characters as a *memento mori*, provoking a realisation of mortality and loss. Mouawad seeks to both incarnate trace in his plays, and verbalise the significance of trace through dialogue, often in the final act protagonist monologues with which Mouawad concludes the majority of his plays.

Seeking to rectify the current dearth of scholarship on Mouawad's philosophical influences in general, and specifically on the convergence between Patočka's phenomenology and Mouawad's theatre, this thesis is structured around the key concepts that Mouawad draws from Patočka's philosophical works.

The introduction provides contextual and background information relevant to the following chapters, including Mouawad's biographical information, his career history and details of existing scholarship on his work. It also situates Mouawad's theatre in relation to recent critical theatre theory, in particular Jean-Pierre Sarrazac's notion of the 'rhapsodic'. It argues that Mouawad's use of cohesive narrative structures may be viewed as a response to what the playwright perceives as the fragmentation and disjunction ubiquitous

in contemporary Francophone theatre. After addressing the themes and tropes common to Mouawad's corpus, the introduction concludes by turning to Mouawad's emphasis on meaning, and the role of language in provoking a confrontation with hidden aspects of the self that is characteristic of Patočka's shakeness.

In order to clarify this understanding of self, Chapter 1 considers the multiplicity of self as manifested in Mouawad's work, and its relationship to Patočka's concepts of 'shakeness' and 'care for the soul'. For Mouawad, theatre facilitates the exploration and articulation of the inner multiplicity. However, unlike the fragmented multiplicity of self characteristic of postmodern theatre, Mouawad's understanding of self is one united in the perspectival frame. This incarnates Jan Patočka's notion of 'care for soul', which for Patočka is the self-awareness that is a response to the desire for unity within the self despite man being 'originally and always, not in this unity with himself.' In Mouawad's plays, an internal destabilisation is provoked by a confrontation with death by means of the trace. This is Patočka's shakeness, the 'understanding what life and death are all about' that ultimately leads to the growth of self-awareness. This is when 'the soul discovers itself, through its own movement, through thinking self-definition and reflection on this defining: precisely this is the care of the soul, care of oneself.' This realisation enables the 'scales [to] fall from the eyes of those set free, not that they might see something new but that they might see in a new way.' For Patočka, as for Mouawad, this realisation in turn facilitates a genuine connection to others, predicated on mutual awareness of the self and the meaning inherent in life and death. Focusing its analysis on Mouawad's first play, *Willy Protogoras enfermé dans les toilettes*, and a more recent production, *Seuls*, the chapter highlights the fundamental importance of 'care of the soul' and 'shakeness' not only in terms of Mouawad's depiction of his characters, but also to his ambitions in terms of his audience. By analysing an early and a later play, the chapter is able to highlight the continuity and evolution of Mouawad's notion of self throughout his career. The chapter concludes by considering the relationship between Jan Patočka's 'shakeness' and Mouawad's artistic interpretation of this as the 'wise and wild life'.

Chapter 2, building on the notions of inner multiplicity, shakeness and care for the soul explored in Chapter 1, explains the temporal awareness and the correlate metanoia that are necessary to provoke shakeness. For Patočka, human life consists of three distinct yet constantly interpenetrating movements. These are, in Patočka's own terms, 'the movement of acceptance, the movement of defense, and the movement of truth.' The first, associated with the past, is a person's rootedness in the world into which he or she comes into being. The second movement, associated with the present, is the movement of sustenance and survival: it is the world of work. For Patočka, these two movements together form what he calls the 'everyday', in which humans are either in danger of losing themselves, or which they seek to escape through what Patočka refers to as the sacred and orgiastic. A confrontation with death engenders the *metanoia* that brings characters to confront their own temporal existence. In confronting the past, individuals seek to understand their own existence and come to recognise life as an endless process of questioning received knowledge, and seeking to discover meaning. This is Patočka's third movement, the movement of truth. Truth for Patočka is not simply uncoveredness, or unconcealment, to use

Heideggerian terminology. Truth is also the *act* of revealing; it is *praxis*. It is this act of uncovering that drives Mouawad's protagonists, the 'envie de clarté' (*desire for clarity*) that, according to the playwright, leads to the discovery of how to ask questions. The chapter then discusses the temporal structures that operate in *Littoral*, which marks a transition from the representation of time in Mouawad's earlier plays, in which linear time structures predominated. *Littoral* premiers a disrupted time structure, which Mouawad goes on to replicate in his next two plays, *Incendies* and *Forêts*. The chapter then proceeds with a thematic analysis of the function of time in *Incendies*, considering the constant oscillation between past and present that forms the play's complex temporal structure. Finally, the chapter concludes by discussing the importance of artefacts, which play a fundamental structural and thematic role in Mouawad's representation of time, and are one means by which the playwright is able to embody and explore the trace. In Mouawad's *Le Sang des promesses* cycle, the search for meaning is driven by the artefact, which evokes a past life that is brought to bear on the present. Characters struggle to understand the artefact's meaning and causal sequence, and in doing so confront the past represented by the object, as a result of which they may come to terms with themselves and others

Chapter 3 turns to temporality's correlate, space, as that which arises through embodied action within a specific reality. For Patočka, 'Le corps personnel n'est pas une chose dans l'espace objectif. Il est une vie qui, par elle-même, *est spatialement*, qui *produit* sa propre localisation, qui se rend elle-même spatiale' (The body is not a thing in objective space. It is a life that, in itself, *is spatially*, that *produces* its own localization, that renders itself spatial.) Space comes into being through the embodied life that produces its own spatiality. This spatiality arises through the individual's corporeal relationship to the world, what Patočka calls the 'hardness of the real.' This reality is always given perspectively. In Mouawad's plays, characters are situated within a specific spatio-temporal environment and must come to terms with their own perspectival relationship to that environment. Mouawad explores Patočka's fascination with perspectival reality through his interest in frames, windows and blindness. For Mouawad's protagonists, the spatial openness of the journey is combined with the spatial intersection that arises through human encounters. This chapter focuses its discussion of space in Mouawad by exploring *Forêts* and *Ciels*. These plays are the most complex and interesting productions in terms of spatial representation in Mouawad's corpus. While *Forêts* simultaneously juxtaposes multiple cross-continental spatial environments, *Ciels* is Mouawad's only foray to date into non-frontal site-specific environmental theatre. Through two widely different approaches, these plays also highlight the spatial disruption characteristic of Mouawad's plays. Where *Forêts* transitions between different places and time periods, the action of *Ciels* unfolds in a single location. Yet in both plays, the space of the present is intersected by other places, which is facilitated by the interaction between physical and conceptual space. The chapter also considers the spatial presentation of corporeal existence in *Forêts*, a play in which the physical bodies of its female protagonists are at the core of both structure and narrative, and the role of absence in terms of silence and violence in *Ciels*. The chapter concludes by considering the relationship between space and power in *Ciels*, and acknowledges the significance of testimony in resisting oppression by facilitating the 'solidarity of the shaken'.

Chapter 4 develops the analysis of the central role of testimony in developing the solidarity that emerges through the encounter with the other in the writings of both Patočka and Mouawad. It is in bearing witness to inner shakenness, provoked as a result of the *metanoia*, made possible by confrontation with the past and encounter with the other, that the self assumes responsibility in her relationship to others. For Patočka, the person who has the privilege of 'la fascination par la totalité et par l'être, par cet intérêt primordial qui est la source de toute clarté [...] devient celui qui est envoyé dans le monde pour rendre témoignage à la vérité' ('being fascinated by the totality and by being, by this primordial interest that is the source of all clarity [...] becomes the person who is sent into the world to bear witness to the truth'). The truth to which the characters in Mouawad's plays bear witness is that of clarity; the clarity that comes through revelation, metamorphosis and shakenness. In disclosing her inner experience of shakenness, the character's testimony offers a truth contract to the addressee, which in the theatre consists of other characters within the fictional world of the play, and the audience without. In presenting the inner experience of shakenness, the self demands to be recognised and acknowledged. This discussion will focus on two of Mouawad's more recent plays, *Temps* and *Sœurs*. In both of these works, the act of bearing witness is the nucleus around which the play is structured. *Temps* is a play that articulates the incest survivor's transition from silent victim to vocal witness. The multiple deferrals of meaning that operate in the play are also addressed, and the chapter considers how this deferral adds power and veracity to the act of bearing witness, and links dialogue to the trace. *Sœurs* is the story of women bearing witness to each other's experience, and the consequent transition to a life of responsibility enabled by this process. In *Sœurs*, flight from Patočka's life of the 'everyday' proves unsatisfactory, and it is through their testimony that the protagonists achieve a self-confrontation and come to accept responsibility for themselves and others. Finally, the chapter concludes by exploring how, through a confrontation with the self, as articulated through testimony, Mouawad attempts to catalyse the process Patočka describes: '[to] meet in the shaking of a given meaning, and so create a new way of being human – perhaps the only mode that offers hope amid the storm of the world: the unity of the shaken but undaunted.'

The thesis concludes with an overview of its investigation into Mouawad's engagement with the work of Patočka, which outlined the phenomenological foundations of Mouawad's plays, as well as the philosophical and ethical aims that Mouawad holds for his theatre. After summarising the findings regarding Mouawad's use of philosophical sources and their significance in terms of the themes and structures of his work, the thesis subsequently considers the means by which Mouawad tackles his ambitions, and the degree to which he achieves these philosophical and ethical objectives. The four key philosophical ambitions most frequently expressed by Mouawad - metamorphosis, the recognition of the other, responsibility, and the solidarity of the shaken – are each discussed in turn. This section distinguishes the ways in which these ambitions successfully operate in the plays, from the significant problems that have a material effect on their role in Mouawad's work. Finally, the conclusion considers the relation of these objectives to the central issue of trace, and how the function and use of

trace in Wajdi Mouawad's plays is key to identifying his philosophical achievements and limitations.

For Maman, Dad
and H  l  ne
whose love and curiosity taught me
to seek the wonder in things

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Note on method

The following analysis is a thematic study of Wajdi Mouawad's theatre; the aim is not to exclude Mouawad's work in screenwriting or fiction, but to identify the distinct patterns, themes and structures that operate within his work as playwright. Wajdi Mouawad's career as a playwright is inseparable from his work as a director. Plays are developed in coordination with the actors, and although Mouawad writes the final dialogue, his actors have significant input. This helps emphasise the inherently transient nature of each play: despite the availability of print editions, each production only comes into being through the involvement of its participants, and the text is intimately bound to the staging in which it develops. Aware of the significance of theatre as a living art form, this work has evolved as a combination of text and performance analysis in an attempt to do justice to the physical and linguistic components of each production.

Note on translation

All footnoted translations from French to English are my own, unless otherwise stated. German to English translations courtesy of Didier Descamps. Published English translations were used where possible.

Introduction

While pursuing his degree in acting at the École Nationale de Théâtre du Canada, Wajdi Mouawad played the part of the author in Claude Gauvreau's *L'asile de la pureté*. This role necessitated long periods of sitting at a desk in the heavens, scribbling on sheets of paper. As Mouawad later recalled:

Comme je devais écrire quelque chose à chaque représentation, je me suis mis à écrire ma propre pièce. Après, mon travail a été influencé par des philosophes. J'ai lu, par exemple, les Essais hérétiques de Jan Patočka, un livre très difficile pour moi parce qu'il fait référence à la phénoménologie. Il y parle de "la solidarité des ébranlés", une expression qui m'a foudroyé. Car c'est justement à travers cet ébranlement que l'acteur peut transmettre au théâtre des mots qui ne sont pas les siens pour contaminer le spectateur.¹ (Mouawad, 2009. *Le Tanneur*)

From the start of his theatrical career, then, Mouawad was reading philosophy, attempting to incorporate philosophical ideas into his plays, and seeing this process as fundamental to his work as a playwright. Mouawad's fascination with philosophy is consistent: he references Heraclitus in his notes on *Seuls* (*'Les chiens aboient contre ce qu'ils ne connaissent pas'*)² and the opening notes to *Forêts* (*'La nature aime se cacher'*);³ quotes Nietzsche in his booklet for a French National Theatre's season (*'Je marche au milieu des hommes comme au milieu de*

¹ As I had to write something at each performance, I started writing my own play. After this, my work was influenced by philosophers. I read, for example, Jan Patočka's *Heretical Essays*, a book that was very difficult for me because he references phenomenology. In the book he speaks of the 'solidarity of the shaken', an expression that I found profoundly striking. Because it's precisely by means of this shakiness that the actor can, through theatre, transmit words that are not the actor's own in order to contaminate the spectator.

² 'Dogs bark at those whom they do not recognize.' (Freeman 1962: 31)

³ 'Nature likes to hide.' (Freeman 1962: 32)

fragments dispersés, et de membres d'hommes.);⁴ and most of all, he discusses, quotes, echoes and references the Czech phenomenologist Jan Patočka, the discovery of whom he has described as a 'revelatory encounter'.⁵ A cursory glance at direct citations from Patočka's work shows the pervasive influence of the philosopher on Mouawad's corpus. A passage from the sixth essay of Patočka's *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, 'Wars of the Twentieth Century and the Twentieth Century as War' is cited in *Littoral* (Mouawad Leblanc 2009: 74) and referenced in a letter to his actors regarding *Incendies* (Mouawad 2009a: 52); Patočka is mentioned in the notes for *Forêts* (Mouawad 2009a: 60); the passage from the sixth essay is again quoted in *Ciels* (Mouawad 2009d: 57-58); and cited in the published notes for *Seuls* (Mouawad 2008a: 115). Mouawad also makes multiple references to Patočka and the philosophical tradition from which he draws in talks and interviews.⁶

Whereas Mouawad's literary, political and biographical influences have been extensively explored in the critical literature surrounding his work,⁷

⁴ 'I walk amongst men as amongst the fragments and limbs of human beings.' (Nietzsche, trans. by Hollingdale, R. J. date: 161)

⁵ Mouawad has stated that he discovered Patočka when, at 23, he found a copy of the *Heretical Essays* in a bookshop and was intrigued by the title. However, it also appears possible that he was introduced to Patočka when, at 23, he met Radio Canada producer François Ismert and worked on Ismert's six-hour special on Jan Patočka.

⁶ Mouawad is familiar not only with the *Heretical Essays*, but with a wide range of Patočka's writings. He specifically refers to *L'Europe après l'Europe* and *Platon et l'Europe*. In terms of the wider philosophical tradition, Mouawad directly references Heraclitus, Aristotle, Nietzsche and Derrida.

⁷ 'On a beaucoup insisté dans les études consacrées à l'œuvre de Mouawad, sur certains motifs essentiels qui la parcourent et qui l'inscrivent dans la mouvance de la littérature migrante, à savoir, entre autres, la guerre, l'exil, le voyage, la déterritorialisation, le passage des frontières, la quête des origines, la filiation, la mémoire, la survivance et la «demeurance».' (Peterson 2013: 16) ('In studies devoted to Mouawad's oeuvre, there has been an intense focus on certain

Mouawad's philosophical heritage has, with very few exceptions,⁸ remained in the shadows. This is particularly true of the influence of Patočka, which has only been mentioned in passing, despite the fact that Patočka is one of Mouawad's most consistent and profound influences.

This thesis aims to remedy the lacuna in critical and academic writings by providing an in-depth exploration of the philosophical background, themes and ambitions of Mouawad's productions. As Mouawad's major philosophical source, Jan Patočka will feature heavily, as Patočkan-derived concepts such as *metanoia*, the voice of the other, responsibility, and shakiness are at the heart of Mouawad's artistic project. For Mouawad, trace is the provocation through which these four transformations are brought into being. And, as we shall see, the journey towards these four ends, catalysed by trace, is not only explored in Mouawad's narratives onstage, but it is a journey that he aims to replicate offstage through the provocation of an ethical and philosophical awakening in his audience.

essential motifs common to his work and that inscribe his plays in the migrant literature movement, namely, among others: war, exile, travel, deterritorialisation, crossing borders, the quest for origins, filiation, memory, survival and "remaining".) Those who have focused on these themes include Yana Meerzon, Mai Hussein, Lise Lenne and Elizabeth Dahab.

⁸ Dr Mai Hussein's excellent doctoral thesis on Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the 'rhizome' and its relationship to Mouawad's work, and François Jardon-Gomez's interesting master's thesis on the use of catharsis in the *Le Sang des promesses* tetralogy, *Un tragique de l'ébranlement : usages et enjeux de la catharsis dans Le Sang des promesses (Littoral, Incendies, Forêts, Ciels) de Wajdi Mouawad* are notable exceptions; however, neither explores the complex relevance of Patočka's philosophy and phenomenology to Mouawad's plays.

1 Orientation

This introduction will cover the background and context of this thesis, before moving into a brief overview of trends and patterns within Mouawad's work. Section 1 provides an overview of Mouawad's biography and works. Section 2 covers the history of Lebanon, focusing on events in the lifetimes of Mouawad's parents, and his own childhood in Lebanon; a timeframe that is a recurring subject of his plays. Section 3 covers the theatrical context out of which Mouawad's plays emerge. Section 4 discusses patterns across the plays, namely the influence of Sophocles, genre, imagery and character.

As discussed above, this thesis is structured around the points of interaction between Mouawad's plays and philosophy. It aims to explore the playwright's understanding and use of foundational notions such as shakeness, self-alterity, time, space, bearing witness, solidarity, and the central importance of the trace. Chapter 1 addresses the notion of 'shakeness' in Patočka, and what this means for Mouawad's characters, examining Mouawad's first play, *Willy Protogoras enfermé dans les toilettes* (henceforth *Willy Protogoras*), and one of his more recent productions, *Seuls*. Chapter 2 investigates the significance of time in terms of shakeness, as well as the temporal structures and phenomena articulated in Mouawad's plays, focusing on *Littoral* and *Incendies*. Chapter 3 considers Mouawad's relationship to space and what Patočka calls the 'hardness of the real', looking at *Forêts* and *Ciels*. Chapter 4 turns to the notion of solidarity and how this solidarity is contingent on testimony, with specific focus on two of Mouawad's most recent plays, *Temps* and *Sœurs*. Finally, the conclusion will

summarise the philosophical ideology, themes and aims of Mouawad's plays, and provide an analysis on the degree to which Mouawad fulfils his ambitions as a philosophical playwright.

2 Life and works

Wajdi Mouawad was born in Beirut in 1968, to a sales representative working in plastics and a stay-at-home mother. In 1975, aged seven, Mouawad witnessed the Ein al-Rumaneh bus massacre:

C'est depuis le haut de cet immeuble, situé dans le quartier de Ain el Remeneh, en banlieue de Beyrouth où nous habitons, que j'ai assisté le 13 avril 1975 à l'attentat contre l'autobus de civils palestiniens perpétré par la milice chrétienne. Cet événement a marqué officiellement le début de la guerre civile. J'avais 7 ans.⁹ (Mouawad 2009a: 20)

Following the outbreak of war, Mouawad's parents took advantage of the French government's offer to allow Lebanese nationals temporary emigration, and in 1976 Mouawad left Lebanon with his mother and siblings for Paris, where they were later joined by his father. Mouawad refers to this departure as his first experience of exile.¹⁰ They lived in Paris until 1983, when the family's application for permanent residence in France was denied, but they were offered citizenship

⁹ It is from this building, located in the Ain el Remeneh district in the suburbs of Beirut where we lived, that on 13 April 1975 I witnessed the attack on the bus carrying Palestinian civilians perpetrated by the Christian militia. This event officially marked the start of the civil war. I was seven years old.

¹⁰ One of the earliest productions that Wajdi Mouawad directed was the play *Exils* written by his brother, Naji. Mouawad makes frequent references to his experience of exile. See Perrier 2009: 3; interview with Jean-François Côté, in particular his likening exile to a car accident, p. 68; Mouawad 2013 (Grand entretien avec Wajdi Mouawad on France Inter).

in Canada.¹¹ After what Mouawad describes as a difficult transition, he was accepted by the École Nationale de Théâtre du Canada in 1987. While studying, Mouawad wrote his first play *Willy Protagoras*, an allegorical tragicomic account of the Lebanese Civil War.

In 1991 Mouawad graduated, and embarked on a career as a playwright, director, artistic director,¹² scenographer, writer, scriptwriter and actor. The result is an extensive body of work, including adaptations of the seven surviving plays of Sophocles, two novels, one film¹³ and twenty-three original plays. A number of Mouawad's plays are grouped in cycles. The first of these is the *Le sang des promesses* tetralogy (henceforth *Le Sang*) which includes *Littoral*, *Incendies*, *Forêts* and *Ciels*. The second cycle, which Mouawad has called the *Domestique* cycle, currently consists of two works, *Seuls* and *Sœurs*; Mouawad has stated that he plans to add three more plays to this cycle, entitled *Frères*, *Père* and *Mère*. Mouawad also divided Sophocles' seven works into sub-cycles; *Des Femmes* (The Women of Trachis; Antigone; Electra), *Des Héros* (Ajax; Oedipus the King) and *Des Mourants* (Philoctetes; Oedipus at Colonus).

Mouawad has served as artistic director at a number of theatres, including Montreal's Théâtre de Quat'Sous and the French Theatre at the National Arts

¹¹ For additional biographical information, please see:
<http://www.wajdimouawad.fr/wajdi-mouawad/biographie;>
<http://gestion.evalorix.com/cas/leadership-et-comportement-organisationnel/wajdi-mouawad-linsatiable-soif-de-linfini>

¹² Wajdi Mouawad has collaborated with some of Canada's best known French language theatres, including Le Théâtre du Trident, Théâtre du Nouveau Monde, Le Théâtre d'Aujourd'hui, Le Théâtre de Quat'sous (artistic director 2000-2004) and the Centre National des Arts (artistic director 2007-2012).

¹³ *Littoral*, written and directed by Mouawad. Another film, *Incendies*, is based on Mouawad's play, was directed by French-Canadian Denis Villeneuve and written by Villeneuve and Valérie Beaugrand-Champagne.

Centre in Ottawa. In 2012 Mouawad relocated to France; in 2013, he moved to Nantes with his partner, the dramaturge Charlotte Farcet, and their children, having been the associated artist for the Grand T theatre since 2011. In April 2016, Mouawad was nominated director of the Théâtre national de la Colline in Paris. He has founded two theatre companies, Abé carré cé carré in Québec (in collaboration with Emmanuel Schwartz) and Au carré de l'hypoténuse in France. He has also published a number of exegetical texts about his theatre, in which he explores the various facets of his artistic approach through a diverse range of materials (paintings, diary entries, notes, letters to actors etc.). He has won a number of awards for his work, including the SACD francophone award in 2004, a Molière award for best francophone author in 2005¹⁴ and the Grand Prix du Théâtre from the Académie Française in 2009.

3 Lebanon: a history of conflict

Wajdi Mouawad was born in Lebanon in 1968, ten years after the civil war known as the Lebanon Crisis, and seven years before Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war. Lebanon has a long history of sectarian civil war, both before and after its independence in 1943. There was the nineteenth century 'movements' crisis (approx. 1840-1860), the 1958 Lebanon Crisis and most recently the Lebanese

¹⁴ Wajdi Mouawad refused the Molière as a reproach to theatre directors' 'indifference' to contemporary dramatists. See the article in *Le Devoir* 'Théâtre – Mouawad refuse un Molière': <http://www.ledevoir.com/culture/theatre/81441/theatre-mouawad-refuse-un-moliere>.

Civil War (1975-1990). There were also averted crises in 1918-1920 and 1936.¹⁵ Since its independence, Lebanon has functioned with a confessional political structure on the basis of the unwritten agreement between the country's various confessional groups known as the National Pact. Leaders are elected to specific positions on the basis of their faith: the President is Maronite, the Prime Minister Sunni, the Speaker of Parliament Shia, the Deputy Speaker and Deputy Prime Minister Greek Orthodox, and the Chief of Army Staff Druze.

These sectarian divisions were not solely responsible for the conflict that would eventually prove the catalyst for the Mouawad family's emigration from Lebanon. Immediately post-independence, under the Presidency of Bechara El Khoury, Lebanon was active in founding the Arab League, and involved in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. Lebanon's economy suffered, and, in the first fifteen years of its existence, Lebanon failed to create strong national institutions. The country faced economic troubles as it struggled to address the influx of Palestinian refugees as well as the wide gap between the country's rich, largely Christian population, and poor, largely Muslim population, which did little to foster the development of a national identity (Choueri 2007: 53-54). With the influx of more than 100,000 Palestinian refugees, the Sunni population demanded a greater proportion of political power. In 1956, pro-western Christian president Camille Chamoun refused to break ties with France and Great Britain, following their invasion of Egypt during the Suez crisis. This move, perceived as anti-Arab and a threat to Arab nationalism, further angered Lebanon's Muslim population,

¹⁵ For more detail on these periods of conflict and the emergence of modern Lebanon, see *Lebanon: A History, 600-2011* by William Harris; *Inventing Lebanon* by Kais Firro; *Breaking the Cycle: Civil Wars in Lebanon*, ed. Youssef Choueiri; *Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War* by Robert Fisk.

as well as Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. Chamoun's illegal attempt to secure another presidential mandate in 1958 through gerrymandering was the catalyst for widespread unrest in the country and sectarian fighting in Beirut known as the Lebanon Crisis. (Fisk 1990: 70-71) Following the 14 July Revolution in Iraq in 1958, Chamoun appealed for American intervention under the terms of the 1957 Eisenhower doctrine, enacted amid fears that Syria would fall to communism. Despite Soviet threats to use nuclear weapons in the event of American involvement (a result of the Arab League's close yet complex ties with the Soviet Union) the first 1,200 US marines (of a total force of approximately 14,000 soldiers and marines) landed in Lebanon on 15 July 1958 under Operation Blue Bat.

A full-scale civil war was avoided, as mediation negotiations ensured that Camille Chamoun stepped down as President, replaced by Fouad Chehab. Chehab's impartiality was widely recognized by both Christian and Muslim communities, and his Presidency heralded a period of relative stability, prolonged by his successor Charles Helou. This, however, was short-lived, as violent outbreaks and skirmishes accelerated as Lebanon's economy grew. The young country's sectarian divisions sporadically erupted in violence from 1958 onwards, and Lebanon was later unable to withstand the economic, demographic and regional pressures of the mid and late 1960s. As historian William Harris notes:

From the 1940s to the early 1970s, Lebanon was a beacon of freedom and tolerance in an Arab world that descended into demagoguery and dictatorship. Thereafter, however, the strains were too much. The coalescence of a hostile Middle Eastern environment with the country's contradictions overwhelmed its state and society. (Harris 2012: 193)

Lebanon did not participate in the Six-Day War, but the subsequent arrival of a new influx of Palestinian refugees alarmed Lebanon's Christian leaders, who feared that the permanent resettlement of Palestinian Muslims in Lebanon would overwhelm the Christian population. At the same time, the Palestinian cause and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) were gaining support in Lebanon following the defeat of the Arab Nations. With a weak army unable to fight the rising power of the PLO in Lebanon, the Lebanese government signed the 1969 Cairo Agreement, effectively transferring control of Palestinian refugee camps to the Palestinian Armed Struggle Command, and authorising the pursuit of the war against Israel from Lebanese territory.

After the Jordanian Civil War, known as Black September, during which the PLO fought the Jordanian Monarchy for control of the country, the PLO was expelled from Jordan. PLO fighters and numerous Palestinian refugees fled to what had effectively become a PLO state-within-a-state in Lebanon: PLO headquarters at the time were located in Beirut. From Lebanon, the PLO launched numerous attacks on Israel, and Lebanon became the target of Israeli retaliation. However, the PLO received support from groups within Lebanon that supported a pan-Arab ideology, in opposition to the pro-western Christian-dominated government. Sectarian divisions continued to widen as opposing militias grew in size and power. Tensions rose between the multiple factions now operating in Lebanon. In 1975, Maarouf Saad, the mayor of Sidon, was assassinated during a fisherman's protest, which led to clashes between the Lebanese army and radical PLO groups. This was closely followed by the Ein al-Rumaneh bus massacre, witnessed by seven-year old Wajdi Mouawad, in which

27 Palestinians were murdered by the Christian Phalangist militia in East Beirut on 13 April 1975. The attack is widely considered to mark the start of the Lebanese Civil War.

4 Theatrical context and the rhapsodic

Mouawad's success has, at times, been met with resistance, primarily through criticism focused on his emphasis on storytelling. In an interview given on the occasion of the 2009 Avignon Festival, Mouawad stated:

On me disait : « Tu es un conteur... », « Tu es un fabricant... », « Tu es un affabulateur... », « Tu es un manipulateur... » [...] Y a-t-il un tabou de la narration en France ? Est-ce un diktat de la mode ? Est-ce ringard?¹⁶ (Mouawad 2009e: 36-37)

In fact, since the late twentieth century, Francophone theatre has been marked by a trend away from a predominantly narrative mode. If postmodern theatre can be said to exist on the basis of identifiable principles, it tends towards the continued rejection of traditional plot and character structures, as initiated by modernism, and on an insistence on the performative aspects of theatre. The upheavals and transformations that affected theatre with the advent of 'modern' movements such as realism, naturalism, symbolism, and expressionism, have come to redefine the nature of theatre. Though there is not space here to provide a thorough description of this complex subject, a brief overview of the literary and theatrical context out of which modern theatre evolved will prove helpful.

¹⁶ "They told me: "You are a storyteller...", "You are a counterfeiter...", "You are a pretender...", "You are a manipulator..." [...] Is there a taboo on narrative in France? Is it a fashion diktat? Is it outdated?"

The idealisation of art as a revelation of eternal truth, prevalent in German Idealism (primarily Kant and Hegel) profoundly influenced romantic period artists such as Goethe and Schiller (Carlson 1993: 248). The search for unity amidst a 'condition of fragmentation' characteristic of Romanticism (Taylor in Manolopoulos 2009: 212); Hegel's teleological dialectic (Althusser in Keenan 2004: 268), and his notion of the observing consciousness' experience of dialectic reconciliation (Versöhnung) in tragedy¹⁷ (Lehmann 2013: 91) were subsequently contested by those who rejected the essentialism attested to in such aesthetic theory, such as Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche.

Throughout the nineteenth century, European theatre moved away from Romanticism, with its emphasis on universal ideals. This took a number of forms. In France, the Realism and the social drama of Emile Augier and Dumas fils (Carlson 1993: 272) was followed by Naturalism, represented by André Antoine's Théâtre-Libre and the work of Emile Zola. The latter movement aimed to bring characters to natural life on stage, contrasting with the didacticism of the former. (Carlson 1993: 275-76). These movements in turn contrasted with the emergent symbolist theatre (e.g. Aurelian Lugné-Poe's 'Théâtre de l'Œuvre'; Maurice Maeterlinck) and its emphasis on the centrality of the poet, text and evocation of inner or hidden meaning. In *Théâtres Intimes*, published in 1989,

¹⁷ 'Es vereinen sich in der denkenden Wahrnehmung der Tragödie die *Erschütterung* über das Los des Helden und die *Versöhnung* in der Betrachtung der Ganzheit der Tragödie. Anders als die tragischen Helden erfährt und genießt das betrachtende Bewußtsein die tiefere Einheit der Widersprüche, weiß sich in diesem Begreifen aufgehoben, versöhnt und befriedigt.' ('In the observing consciousness' perception of tragedy, astonishment concerning the hero's fate and reconciliation are combined when considering the tragedy as a whole. Contrary to tragic heroes, the observing consciousness experiences and enjoys the deeper unity of conflicts, knows itself to be sublated in this understanding, reconciled and satisfied.')

French playwright and theatre specialist Jean-Pierre Sarrazac traces the subtle commonalities and specific differences among a number of major playwrights from Henrik Ibsen onwards, including (but not limited to) Maeterlinck, Strindberg, Pirandello, O'Neill, Chekhov, Brecht, Sartre and Duras. He describes the shift in theatre's focus in the late nineteenth century as a shift from the intersubjective to the intrasubjective.

Dès lors, le drame ne se déroule plus principalement dans la sphère interpersonnelle, intersubjective – ce que Szondi appelle l'« entre-deux » -, mais dans une nouvelle sphère, intrapersonnelle et intrasubjective.¹⁸ (Sarrazac 1989 : 81)

Drawing on Robert Abirached's seminal 1978 text, *La crise du personnage dans le théâtre moderne*, Sarrazac points to the inherent instability of this new sphere, which is 'une « insularisation » du drame dans la psyché du personnage.

Comment, dès lors, l'auteur dramatique parvient-il à rendre compte de ce conflit dans l'intime de l'être ?¹⁹ (Sarrazac 1989: 11) As a theatre of the intrasubjective is no longer propelled by a causal sequence of events, it turns to the psyche and its relationship with the external world.²⁰

Avant-garde theatres in the form of futurism and Dadaism

simultaneously advocated the central significance of the performative in theatre.

Surrealism, the product of a schism within the French Dada movement, as

¹⁸ 'From this point, drama no longer takes place primarily in the interpersonal, intersubjective sphere – what Szondi calls the "in-between" -, but in a new, intrapersonal and intrasubjective sphere.'

¹⁹ 'An "insularisation" of drama in the character's psyche. How then can the dramatic author recount this conflict in the intimacy of being?'

²⁰ Abirached points out that both the self and the world are found lacking: 'Le monde et le moi sont ainsi considérés comme des réalités inachevées.' (Abirached 1978: 243).

defined in André Breton's Surrealist Manifesto in 1924,²¹ focused on the spontaneous expression of thought not subject to either reason, or moral and aesthetic constraints. The rise of Marxism, and in particular its articulation of the social and political dimensions of power structures, had a profound influence on theatre, specifically on the work of Bertolt Brecht. Brecht's emphasis on the 'epic', whereby the spectator's rational response to plot is brought about through a distancing that enables the spectator to reflect on events and recognize their mutability, aims to 'awaken man to the possibility of change in all things.' (Carlson 1993: 392). In contrast to Brecht, Antonin Artaud argued for a theatre of intensity, one where 'c'est par la peau qu'on fera rentrer la métaphysique dans les esprits.'²² (Artaud 2004: 153) Although differing in their aims and outlook, the mid-century plays of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus placed the burden of meaning on man in the face of an impersonal world. Finally, playwrights such as Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco and Jean Genet rejected the emphasis on linguistic meaning as well as the psychological development of character.

This all-too-brief overview of major shifts in theatre theory and practice since the advent of Romanticism highlights some of the major concerns that continue to affect theatre. The explosion of forms, philosophies and approaches often referred to as postmodern theatre draws on several of these positions, in particular the displacement of what is considered a hegemonic narrative structure, in favour of an emphasis on the performative, and on the multiplicity

²¹ SURREALISME, n. m. Automatisme psychique pur par lequel on se propose d'exprimer, soit verbalement, soit par écrit, soit de toute autre manière, le fonctionnement réel de la pensée. Dictée de la pensée, en l'absence de tout contrôle exercé par la raison, en dehors de toute préoccupation esthétique ou morale.

²² 'Metaphysics will enter the spirit through the skin.'

of form and voice. Sarrazac defines this combined displacement and multiplicity as a 'crise sans fin', an endless crisis; '[U]ne crise permanente; d'une crise sans solution, sans horizon préétabli. D'une crise tout en imprévisibles lignes de fuite.'²³ (Sarrazac 2010: 19)

Sarrazac coined the term 'rhapsodic' to describe this crisis, which he summarises in "*Le drame en devenir*" as:

[R]efus du "bel animal" aristotélicien et choix de l'irrégularité; kaléidoscope des modes dramatique, épique et lyrique; retournement constant du haut et du bas, du tragique et du comique; assemblage de formes théâtrales et extra-théâtrales, formant le mosaïque d'une écriture en montage dynamique; percée d'une voix narratrice et questionnante qu'on ne saurait réduire au sujet épique szondien²⁴ (Sarrazac 1997 :55)

The rhapsodic is a piecing together of heterogeneous forms in response to the 'éclatement du monde lui-même.'²⁵ (Sarrazac 1997: 55) Other concepts and terms that attempt to describe twentieth century developments in theatre, such as postmodern, experimental, and postdramatic,²⁶ share with 'rhapsodic' this

²³ 'A permanent crisis; a crisis without solution, without a pre-established horizon. A crisis in unpredictable vanishing lines.'

²⁴ '[R]efusal of Aristotelian magnitude and opting for irregularity; a kaleidoscope of dramatic, epic and lyric modes; constant inversion of the high and the low, the tragic and the comic; assembly of theatrical and extra-theatrical forms, forming the mosaic of a writing undergoing a dynamic montage; the piercing through of a narrative and questioning voice that cannot be reduced to the Szondian epic subject.'

²⁵ 'Explosive fragmentation of the world itself.'

²⁶ Hans-Thies Lehmann defines dramatic theatre as that which creates the illusion of a world on stage. Postdramatic theatre foregoes the wholeness of a world as the 'guiding principle' of a production. (Lehmann 2006: 22) In the postdramatic, '[I]ntrigue, story or drama are hardly present; instead distance, emptiness and in-between-space are turned into autonomous protagonists. The actual dialogue takes place between sound and sound space, not between the interlocutors.' (Lehmann 2006: 76) Although the use of story is not excluded from postdramatic productions, story is displaced from the central role, becoming one performance device among many.

idea of shattering the known and creating the multiplicity of forms that constitute the heterogeneity of contemporary theatre.

In a number of respects, Mouawad's work adheres to trends in the rhapsodic theatre of his contemporaries: the blending of modes and genres (see Section 4); frequent use of a delivery tempo that is often at odds with the dialogue's content and context; blending of 'dramatic, epic and lyric modes' (to borrow Sarrazac's terms) with plays that combine influences such as Chekov, Tennessee Williams, Homer, Sophocles and Hölderlin, among others. Yet in other respects, Mouawad's work is antithetical to rhapsodic aims: he utilises strong and cohesive narrative structures; his characters are stable yet evolving; he inscribes his plays, and himself as a writer, into a long theatrical and literary tradition; and his plays typically contain a redemptive arc through which his protagonists suffer loss and undergo a process of self-actualisation. In fact, Mouawad's work can arguably be viewed in light of a response to the rhapsodic, in the form of a quest to find meaning in the face of the fragmentation and disjunction prized in contemporary Francophone theatre.

Mouawad explains the disjunction between his own work and that of his contemporaries by stating: 'Je raconte des histoires pour comprendre mon histoire'²⁷ (Mouawad 2009e: 39-40). Narrative for Mouawad is a means by which revelation, which he characterises as 'the most profound experience there can be', becomes possible. This notion is closely associated with Jan Patočka's 'shakiness', as will be explored in Chapter 1.

²⁷ 'I tell stories to understand my own story.'

5 Intertextual traces: patterns and commonalities across the plays

5.1 Sophoclean heritage

In 2011, Mouawad began work on the Sophocles cycle, a five-year project which he titled *Le dernier jour de sa vie*. He divided Sophocles' seven surviving works into three sub-cycles; *Des Femmes* (The Women of Trachis; Antigone; Electra), *Des Héros* (Ajax; Oedipus the King) and *Des Mourants* (Philoctetes; Oedipus at Colonus). Robert Davreu translated the first five of these plays from Ancient Greek. After Davreu sadly passed away, Mouawad adapted the final two plays alone.²⁸ In the production programme for the cycle, Mouawad explains that 'J'avais 23 ans lorsqu'un ami m'a conseillé de lire les Grecs.'²⁹ (Mouawad 2014: 4) At that time, Mouawad had just begun his career as a playwright with *Willy Protogoras*, so his interest in Sophocles dates back to the start of his professional career. In a collection of interviews and essays published for the 2009 edition of the Festival d'Avignon, for which he was the associated artist, Mouawad clarifies his affinity for Sophocles, while defending his own form of theatre:

Pourquoi, par exemple, je lis Sophocle et moins Eschyle ou Euripide, ou même Beckett. [...] Parce que Sophocle doute, parce qu'il dit que nous sommes devant un monde compliqué, parce que tous les personnages chez lui sont confrontés à la révélation de leur être, que cela leur crève les yeux ou les amène à tuer leur fils. [...] Cette expérience de l'instant de la révélation est pour moi l'expérience la plus profonde qui puisse

²⁸ *Inflammation du verbe Vivre*, loosely based on *Philoctetes*, and *Les Larmes d'Oedipe* based on *Oedipus at Colonus*.

²⁹ 'I was 23 years old when a friend suggested that I read the Greeks.'

être. Pour arriver à la révélation, il faut passer par la narration.³⁰ (Mouawad 2009e: 40-41)

In this short passage Mouawad enumerates four components of Sophocles' theatre that are central to his own: the distinction between the individual and the world; an emphasis on character; the recurring narrative of a character confronting the 'revelation of their being',³¹ and the important role of narration³² which enables revelation.

As in Sophocles, Mouawad's plays begin immediately before or after an initial incident that catalyzes a chain of events. As in Sophocles, this event often arises from the confrontation of the individual's character, in the sense of *ethos*, with the world. There is a strong focus on character introspection, and Mouawad

³⁰ 'Why, for example, do I read Sophocles and less Aeschylus or Euripides, or even Beckett. [...] Because Sophocles doubts, because he says that we are faced with a complicated world, because all of his characters are confronted with the revelation of their being, that brings them to gouge out their eyes or kill their son. [...] This experience of the instant of revelation is for me the most profound experience there can be. In order to achieve revelation, it is necessary to use narration.'

³¹ The focus of Chapter 2.

³² 'Narration' here requires some clarification, given the attention paid to the term in French theatre criticism. Jean-Pierre Sarrazac notes: 'D'une part, le drame est action et non point narration, il ressortit au mimétique plutôt qu'au diégétique, il n'est pas l'affaire du rhapsode mais celle de l'acteur; et s'il y a des récits dans un drame, ils sont soigneusement circonscrits, soumis à la structure générale de la relation intersubjective dialoguée.' (Sarrazac 1989: 119) ('On the one hand, drama is action and not narration, it is mimetic rather than diegetic, it is not the domain of the rhapsodic but of the actor; and if there are stories in a drama, they are carefully circumscribed, subject to the general structure of the intersubjective relationship developed in dialogue.')

Sarrazac here employs the Aristotelian distinction between narration as a narrated account of events, and drama with its 'imitators as agents and engaged in activity.' (Aristotle 1996: 5) Given the character-driven plot structures of Mouawad's plays, his emphasis on narration does not signal a move away from drama as a mimetic form engaged in 'intersubjective dialogue'. Mouawad is referring to narrative in the sense of story and presentation, or storytelling, as this thesis will demonstrate.

invites the audience to engage with characters' emotions and predicaments. It is through verbal encounters and interactions that anagnorisis occurs. As Aristotle explains in his *Poetics*, 'Recognition [anagnorisis] as in fact the term indicates, is a change from ignorance to knowledge.' (Aristotle 1996: 18) Such a transition is crucial in all of Mouawad's plays. This is what Mouawad calls a 'revelation of being', which provokes the metamorphosis necessary for 'shakenness', which as we shall see is a central concept in Mouawad's theatre.³³

5.2 Genre and mode

You could say that one of contemporary theatre's great virtues – almost, its *raison d'être* – is that it isn't imprisoned within the confines of genre storytelling. (Edgar 2009: 91-92)

Although often described as tragedies,³⁴ Wajdi Mouawad's plays in fact draw on numerous genres and modes. Most of his plays have a quest narrative, whereby an active protagonist with a clearly defined goal (finding a lost father and

³³ See Chapter 2, p. 99 on the significance of 'metanoesis', or change in thinking, and its relationship to shakenness.

³⁴ Note the title of François Jardon-Gomez's MA thesis, *Un tragique de l'ébranlement : usages et enjeux de la catharsis dans Le Sang des promesses (Littoral, Incendies, Forêts, Ciels) de Wajdi Mouawad*. For examples of articles that reference Mouawad's plays as tragedies, see the following:

<http://www.ledevoir.com/culture/theatre/282380/tragedies-fleuves-au-fta-et-au-carrefour>; 'Et si la tragédie dans ce qu'elle a de plus classique vibrait aujourd'hui encore sous la plume d'un auteur bien vivant, plongé dans les drames du siècle présent?' ('And what if tragedy, in its most classical sense, once again came to life under the pen of a living author, fully immersed in the dramas of the current century?') or http://www.cndp.fr/crdp-reims/poletheatre/service_educatif/passagers_mouawad.pdf;

'Wajdi Mouawad échafaude en effet ses tragédies modernes à force d'heureux emprunts tant au théâtre antique qu'au roman de chevalerie, au mélodrame et au cinéma' ('Wajdi Mouawad in fact bolsters his modern tragedies by happily borrowing from ancient theatre as much as from chivalric romances, from melodrama and the cinema')

brother, uncracking a terrorist organisation's code, burying an estranged father etc.)³⁵ embarks on a journey that provokes self-revelation. Thematically, this structure is complicated by a preponderance of tragic elements, and frequent use of other conventions derived from disparate genres and modes such as thriller (*Ciels*), mystery (*Seuls*), coming-of-age drama (*Le sang* and *Domestique* cycles), domestic saga (*Incendies*, *Forêts*, *Temps*), magical realism (*Littoral*, *Forêts*, *Temps*) and the gothic (*Forêts* and *Temps*). Derrida refers to the law of genre as a 'principe de contamination, une loi d'impureté'³⁶ (Derrida 2003: 256); the thematic continuities between Mouawad's plays make it possible to identify their relationship to each other, but their multiplicity ensures that Mouawad's plays are not 'imprisoned within the confines of genre storytelling.' (Edgar 2009: 91-92)

Although Mouawad's early plays are identifiable as tragedies, plays from *Littoral* onwards are not tragedies in the most basic sense of portraying events and revelations with disastrous consequences that precipitate the downfall of the protagonist. Aristotle famously defined tragedy in relation to theatre as 'an imitation of an action of serious stature and complete, having magnitude [...] accomplishing by means of pity and fear the cleansing of these states of feeling.' (Aristotle, trans. Heath, M. 1996: 26) David Edgar states that 'Man's doomed attempt to surmount the limitations of his earthly life is a reading of tragedy appropriate to our times.' (Edgar 2009: 91) However, Mouawad's protagonists rarely experience the downfall that often provokes sentiments of pity and fear,

³⁵ *Incendies*, *Ciels*, *Littoral*.

³⁶ 'A principle of contamination, a law of impurity.' (Derrida trans. Ronell 1980: 59)

nor are his characters' efforts to 'surmount the limitations' of their lives doomed to failure. Instead, the calamitous event that forces his protagonists to confront death and their own mortality (usually through the initial, catalytic incident of the play) initiates a process of self-discovery that in the end proves liberating and empowering.³⁷

Yet there is also an undeniable preponderance of tragic elements in Mouawad's plays: accidental incest; mistaken identity leading to disaster; suicide. The significance of the tragic in Mouawad's plays is closely related to the philosophical themes central to his work. This is closely aligned with the emphasis on tragedy found in the philosophy of Jan Patočka. For Patočka, tragedy finds its sources in myth, and myth articulates human existence as the tension between opposites and the consequences thereof (Chapter 2, p.116-117). In myth, the human is the 'être qui lui-même ose faire irruption dans un domaine qui n'est pas le sien, dans un domaine où par son origine il n'est pas chez lui.'³⁸ (Van Lerberghe 2009: 700) Myth articulates the strangeness of the world for the individual, and provides explanations for the uncertainty of that world.³⁹ Tragedy, for Patočka, plays out the human being's questioning of existence, an existence characterized by 'blind wandering'. According to Patočka scholar Lubica Učník, for Patočka:

³⁷ For instance, in *Littoral*, Wilfrid internalises the trace of the past and is consequently able to envisage a meaningful future. In *Incendies*, revelation of Nawal's torture enables Jeanne and Simon to come to terms with her past and consequently with themselves. And in *Forêts*, Loup's discovery of her lineage enables her to overcome her rage and bury her mother.

³⁸ Being who dares to burst into a world that is not his, in a world where by his origins he is not at home.

³⁹ See Chapter 4, 'Clarity and Blind Wandering in the Mythical World' (Patočka, trans. Lom. P. 2002b).

Tragedy begins when questions suddenly appear that myth cannot answer. Tragedy is the playing out of our blind wandering; it calls all participants to engage and learn about human hubris, about humans' forgetting that their lives in the world are finite and that there is no possibility of knowing beyond one's place in the world. (Učník 2013: 183)

Tragedy therefore enacts the process of self discovery through a recognition of finitude, and a questioning of human existence in the world. For Mouawad,

Le tragique est révélation de soi dans un sang commun, celui de la tribu, qui provoque un rejet par la communauté.⁴⁰ (Mouawad 2011d: 5)

Here is the sense in which Mouawad's works are tragic: they enact a process of self-revelation whereby the individual becomes alienated from her community or understanding of the world. The protagonist experiences an event whereby he comes to question his blind existence in the world, which leads to a form of self-revelation (1.III.b.)

Other modes and genres are often incorporated into the basic structure. Aspects of magical realism⁴¹ appear early on in Mouawad's works when the distinction between the real and unreal is blurred with the appearance of Marguerite Coutant in *Willy Protogoras*. A similar blurring occurs in *Littoral* with the mythical Knight and speaking corpse. In *Forêts*, the fantastical is even more pronounced, with the remnant of a dead woman's jawbone at the centre of

⁴⁰ The tragic is self-revelation in a common blood, that of the tribe, which provokes a rejection by the community.

⁴¹ Wendy B. Faris suggests five primary characteristics of magical realism, : 'an "irreducible element" of magic'; 'a strong presence of the phenomenal world'; 'the reader may experience some unsettling doubts in the effort to reconcile two contradictory understandings of events'; merging of 'different realms'; and the disturbing of 'received ideas about time, space and identity.' (Faris 2004: 7)

another woman's brain, a monstrous, unnamed twin who lives at the bottom of an 'abyss'; and the appearance of a Second World War soldier in the 1990s.

In addition to these elements of magical realism, *Forêts'* many references to darkness and monsters, added to the central importance of the forest as a site of horror (incest, murder, repeated cycles of violence) also lend the play gothic overtones. Likewise in *Temps*, the cursed town, isolated home haunted by secrets, cruel patriarch, foreboding landscape and themes of madness, revenge and incest, all tie the narrative into classic gothic tradition, perhaps influenced by Lautréamont, whose work Mouawad has cited in numerous texts.⁴²

5.3 Imagery

Wajdi Mouawad repeatedly draws from a recurring set of imagery that is often fairly consistent throughout his theatrical corpus. Imagery of dreams and dreaming are frequent; in *Littoral* the Knight Guiromelan tells Wilfrid: 'Tu continueras à rêver [...] et si tu refuses, tu meurs !'⁴³ (Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 74); in *Sœurs* Layla tells Genevieve 'soir après soir, tu étrangles tes rêves.'⁴⁴ (Mouawad 2015: 45); in *Forêts* Albert claims: 'les rêveurs agissent en fonction de leurs rêves et non pas en vertu de leurs intérêts.'⁴⁵ (Mouawad 2009c:

⁴² In *Rêves*, the protagonist Willem cites Lautréamont (Mouawad 2002a: 18) and Mouawad also cites Lautréamont in his interview with Jean-François Côté (Côté 2005), *Seuls* (Mouawad 2008a), and in *Inflammation du verbe vivre* (2016a). In the last text, he repeatedly references Lautréamont's dogs and 'thirst for the infinite'.

⁴³ 'You will continue to dream... and if you refuse, you die,' p.74.

⁴⁴ 'Night after night you strangle your dreams.'

⁴⁵ 'Dreamers act in the function of their dreams not in the function of their interests.'

75). In 1999 Mouawad even titled a play *Rêves*. Stabbing imagery features heavily from his early to his most recent plays, as in *Journée de nocés chez les Cromagnons* when Nellie says: ‘Votre gros couteau rouge ne le lui enfoncez pas dans la gorge.’⁴⁶ (Mouawad 2011b: 59); in *Forêts* when ‘Edgar, d’un seul geste, pélican plongeant dans la mer, a planté son couteau dans le dos de son père’⁴⁷ (Mouawad 2009c: 78); in *Incendies*, where ‘l’enfance est un couteau planté dans la gorge’⁴⁸ (Mouawad 2009b: 91); and in *Littoral*, with the Knight’s repeated sword attacks. There is a strong line of classical imagery, frequently connected with Apollo (e.g. Apolline the mayor and archer in *Temps*, or in *Forêts* the ‘Oracle de l’oblique, / Du Dieu qui frappe de loin’⁴⁹ (Mouawad 2009c: 26)) or the legend of Theseus, as with *Sœurs*: ‘Lorsque Thésée pénétra à l’intérieur du labyrinthe pour y affronter le Minotaure, il prit soin de se munir du fil d’or...’⁵⁰ (Mouawad 2015: 16); or *Temps*, ‘Les labyrinthes, il ne suffit plus de rentrer dedans. Il faut maintenant les dynamiter.’⁵¹ (Mouawad 2012a: 48) Other instances of frequently recurring imagery, too numerous to be explored in detail here, include threads, home, twins⁵², exile, stars, fire, windows and defenestration.

Much of Mouawad’s imagery is binary, often forming oxymoronic pairings that generally contain thematic or ideological significance. For instance, the

⁴⁶ ‘Do not stab your large red knife in his throat.’

⁴⁷ ‘Edgar in a single gesture, a pelican diving into the sea, planted his knife in his father’s back.’

⁴⁸ ‘Childhood is a knife stuck in the throat.’

⁴⁹ ‘Oracle of the oblique, of the God who strikes from afar.’

⁵⁰ ‘When Theseus entered the labyrinth to battle the Minotaur, he took care to carry the golden thread.’

⁵¹ ‘It’s no longer enough to enter the labyrinths they must be dynamited now.’

⁵² For a discussion on the relevance of twins in Mouawad’s work, see Chapter 3, footnote 18, p.170.. See also: Campmas 2014: 481-483; Lenne 2007, section ‘Soi-même comme un autre’: intérieuriser le double’.

recurrent, often violently conflictual, imagery of parents and children: in *Ciels* 'arrêter le bras des pères [...] le couteau au sacrifice des fils !'⁵³ (Mouawad 2009d: 62); in *Forêts* 'Tout fils veut être à la hauteur de son père, mais certains pères grimpent vers des hauteurs insoupçonnées par peur d'être rejoints'⁵⁴ and 'Pourquoi faut-il absolument que toujours [...] les pères veuillent sacrifier leur fils ! Quelle mal est-ce qu'on t'a fait ?'⁵⁵ (Mouawad 2009c: 76) A number of the plays exploit the contrast between human inhabited civilisation and the wild, as in *Forêts* where Albert declares: 'je vais acquérir une terre, isolée de tout, loin de la suspicion des hommes et de leurs perversités'⁵⁶ (Mouawad 2009c: 62); through the opening stage direction in *Forêts* which reads: '*Froid extrême au-dehors. Fête au-dedans.*'⁵⁷ (Mouawad 2009c: 11); or in *Temps*, where Apolline describes the 'La Forêt de sel / [...] une incendie l'a ravagée ; le feu a dû chasser les rats et les rats sont apparus à Fermont [...] Le mur-écran nous protège, la ville nous protège.'⁵⁸ (Mouawad 2012a: 16)

As with theme, Mouawad's imagery is heavily influenced by Jan Patočka, and in particular the *Heretical Essays*. Patočka frequently employs imagery of day and night, often to categorize entities traditionally celebrated (peace, life etc,

⁵³ 'Stop the arm of the fathers [...] the knife, from sacrificing the sons!'

⁵⁴ 'Every son wants to be up to his father's standard, but some fathers climb to unsuspected heights out of fear of their sons catching up to them.'

⁵⁵ 'Why is it absolutely necessary that fathers always [...] want to sacrifice their sons? What have we done to you?'

⁵⁶ 'I'm going to acquire land, isolated from everything, far from the suspicion of men and their perversity'.

⁵⁷ 'Extreme cold outside. Party inside.'

⁵⁸ 'The salt forest / [...] ravaged by fire; the fire chased the rats and the rats appeared in Fermont. The curtain wall protects us, the city protects us.'

associated with day) or feared (war, death etc, associated with night).⁵⁹ He talks about ‘The night out of which the light of being strikes’ (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 32); of ‘the open night of what is’ (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 43); about what is ‘used in the service of the day what belonged to the night and eternity’ (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 127); and of ‘day, life, peace, [which] govern all individuals.’ (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 129) Mouawad echoes this in lines such as ‘À moi tout seul, j’ai inversé le jour avec la nuit et la nuit avec le jour en tuant ma mère pour coucher avec mon père.’⁶⁰ (Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 22); ‘Depuis des nuits je rêvais à ce jour où nous nous rencontrerions.’⁶¹ (Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 63); and ‘Pauvre nuit, comme si tout s’est arrêté cette nuit-là, et comme si, pour les siècles à venir, tout n’est plus qu’une seule et grande et profonde nuit.’⁶² (Mouawad 2009c: 78)

Patočka uses the imagery of blood to signal moral culpability, as when he argues that in the First World War: ‘The West [...] had to pay with its own destruction and blood for the victory of this competitor’ (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 128) and when he describes those who resist shakiness as ‘parasites on the sidelines who live off the blood of others.’ (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 135) This strain of imagery is also exploited by Mouawad; ‘Tout sang d’homme qui tache des mains d’homme / [...] Est le sang d’un fils qui tache les mains d’un

⁵⁹ For Patočka, these oppositions and the consequent privileging of concepts associated with the day are a source of war. Patočka insists on the need to confront the night, and on the significance of *polemos*, strife, in order to stimulate shakiness.

⁶⁰ ‘I alone have inversed the day with the night and the night with the day, by killing my mother to sleep with my father.’

⁶¹ ‘For endless nights I dreamt of this day when we would meet.’

⁶² ‘Poor night, as if everything stopped that night, and as if for centuries to come everything was only a single and great and profound night.’

filis !'⁶³ (Mouawad 2009d: 14); 'le temps court comme un fou, à droite, à gauche, et de son cou décapité, le sang nous inonde et nous noie.'⁶⁴ (Mouawad 2009b: 51); and – most explicit in its referencing of Patočka – 'D'un de ceux qui, confortables, sont embusqués en arrière et vivent leur bonheur aux dépens du sang des autres !'⁶⁵ (Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 74) This strain of imagery is also suggested visually, as when Wilfrid, beginning to recognise his moral culpability as a person trapped in a sensual, unreflecting existence, takes a bath and emerges soaked in blood.

For Patočka, the image of an abyss is often employed to visually represent a chasm in human motivation or understanding; the 'abyss between the true world [...] and the approximate, apparent, impressionistic world defying a rigorous grasp which our ordinary experience treats as the only reality.' (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 65) Likewise, in Mouawad, 'Mais si tu tombes sur le ventre, les yeux seront rivés à l'obscurité du gouffre et c'est déjà ça de perdu.'⁶⁶ (Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 83) 'Une nuit, on entre dans un abyme. On trouve une phrase dans un livre. On ne craint plus rien.'⁶⁷ (Mouawad 2012a: 49) and 'Ludivine n'est pas la réponse, mais la clé d'une porte qui te conduira au fond du

⁶³ 'The blood of any man that stains the hands of man / [...] Is the blood of a son that stains the hands of a son!'

⁶⁴ 'Time runs like a madman from right to left, and from its decapitated neck, blood is inundating us, is drowning us.'

⁶⁵ 'One of those who, comfortable, is a parasite and lives their happiness at the expense of the blood of others.'

⁶⁶ 'If you fall on your stomach, your eyes will be fixated on the obscurity of the abyss, and that's already something lost.'

⁶⁷ 'One night, one enters into an abyss. One finds a phrase in a book. One fears nothing anymore.'

gouffre.’⁶⁸ (Mouawad 2009c: 51) Other imagery likely derived from Patočka includes that of metanoia or metamorphosis, parasites, orgies, the everyday, and shakiness (as will be discussed in detail in Chapter 1).

5.4 Themes

Wajdi Mouawad’s plays contain a number of strong, recurring thematic patterns. Two highly important thematic preoccupations are childhood and exile, subjects extensively addressed by Yana Meerzon and Elizabeth Dahab.⁶⁹ Both scholars highlight a pervasive sense of alienation in the playwright, which they attribute to his emigration as a child. Mouawad in fact writes of the loss of childhood as the loss of a homeland: ‘L’enfance, qui est le véritable pays. Celui où l’on arrive jamais.’⁷⁰ (Mouawad 2009a: 91).

Another thematic current that is perhaps even more pervasive is that of metamorphosis (also see imagery, above). For Mouawad, metamorphosis is not only the transformation experienced by the character on stage, but one of the greater objectives of his theatre. All Mouawad’s protagonists experience a metamorphosis that is temporally conditioned: through a revelation regarding the nature of time and of mortality, protagonists undergo a transformation.

⁶⁸ ‘Ludivine is not the answer, but the key to a door that will lead you to the bottom of the abyss.’

⁶⁹ Yana Meerzon’s chapter ‘To the Poetics of Exilic Adolescence: On Wajdi Mouawad’s Theatre of Secondary Witness and Poetic Testimony’ in *Performing Exile, Performing Self: Drama, Theatre, Film* and Elizabeth Dahab’s chapter on Mouawad entitled ‘Of broken promises and mended lives: the war-ravaged world of Wajdi Mouawad’ in *Voices of Exile in Contemporary Canadian Francophone Literature*.

⁷⁰ ‘Childhood is the true homeland. The one we never reach.’

Correlated to metamorphosis, the past is also ubiquitous to Mouawad's plays, as in every play the past is somehow brought into a relationship with the present. This is effected in a number of ways. First, through the use of artefacts, such as letters in *Littoral* and *Incendies*, wills and items bequeathed in *Incendies* and *Forêts*, and objects physically carried by characters, such as the jaw fragment in Aimée's skull (*Forêts*) and the bullet in Edward's shoulder (*Temps*). Second, through references to and representations of dead or missing people; Wilfrid's parents in *Littoral*, Loup's ancestors in *Forêts*, or the lost sister in *Sœurs*. Third, through various linguistic devices, including recurring phrases, for instance Jeanne unknowingly echoing the words of her dead great-grandmother Nazira: 'Apprends à lire, à écrire, à compter, à parler: apprend à penser.'⁷¹ (Mouawad 2009b: 31) in *Incendies*, and the phrase 'Je ne t'abandonnerai jamais'⁷² (Mouawad 2009c) used by every generation of the Keller family in *Forêts*. There are also references to lost languages, such as Harwan's inability to communicate in Arabic in *Seuls* and the lost alphabet in *Ni le soleil ni la mort ne peuvent se regarder de face*. Finally, the multiple references to Ancient Greek mythology and the use of incantations and prophetic statements invoke a long dead past.

The plays in the *Le sang* cycle are thematically united by the protagonists' exploration of the past and their contact with previous generations. The promises referenced in the title are those made and broken across generations, ties between people that transcend the immediacy of the present. At first glance, *Ciels* forms a structural and thematic counterpoint to the first three plays (Mouawad 2009c: 8). While the first three plays feature a main protagonist

⁷¹ 'Learn to read, write, count, speak: learn to think.'

⁷² 'I will never abandon you.'

engaged in an exploration of the past, *Ciels* is a multi-protagonist play whose main action is focused on the future. However, the solution to the mystery in *Ciels* is once again conditioned by the past, and made available only through an artefact, in this case the poetry written by Valéry's grandfather. The cause of Valéry's suicide is also the fulfilment of a promise made to his son, a reflection of the fact that the majority of promises made throughout the cycle are between family members.

Family is another crucial theme in Mouawad's work. The family may be a source of conflict and danger, characterised by feelings of claustrophobia, as in *Willy Protagoras*, where Willy barricades himself in the toilet to withstand his parents and community⁷³; in *Littoral*, where Wilfrid's aunts and uncles crowd around, refusing to allow him to bury his father⁷⁴; and in *Temps*, where the child Noëlla is trapped in a prison-like home with her cruel, paedophilic father.⁷⁵ Yet family can also represent personal identity and responsibility. The main motivation for the protagonists in the first three plays of *Le sang* is the search for family history. The discovery of this history also leads to an acceptance of responsibility. In the domestic cycle, Harwan assumes a degree of responsibility for his relationship with his father, which enables a form of reconciliation. In *Sœurs*, Layla is initially burdened by the responsibility required of her by her father, but in the end reconciled with the past and her obligations.

The ubiquitous theme in Mouawad's work, addressed in detail in this thesis, is the inner life. Mouawad's plays typically stage the opposition between

⁷³ See Chapter 1, p.57-60.

⁷⁴ See Chapter 2, p.265.

⁷⁵ See Chapter 4, p.229.

the individual and the collective, or inner self and the world. Often this inner, actualized self is associated with creativity; in *Willy Protagoras* and *Seuls* painting, in *Ciels* poetry,⁷⁶ in *Littoral*, singing (Simone) and drumming (Massi). At other times, the inner life is associated with intellectual activity: in *Incendies*, Nawal and Sawda achieve maturity by learning to read and write, and in *Ciels*, it is two intellectuals, Clément and Valéry, who are able to decode the planned terrorist attack.

5.5 Character and meaning

Wajdi Mouawad's plays are developed through a collaborative process,⁷⁷ in Quebec a widespread practice in the 1980s. Actors are often contacted in advance of rehearsals, and provided with a genealogy and certain aspects of their character. It is through rehearsals that the story is developed; afterwards, in the evenings, Mouawad collects the information and dialogue developed in rehearsals and rewrites it for distribution to the actors the following day. This ensures a symbiotic relationship between text and performance, as they are developed in tandem on the basis of the actors' interpretation of character, and Mouawad's approach to the text. Mouawad considers casting crucial, drawing on an actor's skills and experience in order to develop her character. It is perhaps in terms of his characters that Mouawad's debt – and also differentiation – from playwrights such as Pirandello, Samuel Beckett, and even Claude Gauvreau is

⁷⁶ See Chapter 3, p.205-206.

⁷⁷ On the distinction between collective and collaborative theatre in Canada, see Diane Bessai's *Playwrights of Collective Creation*; on the collective and collaborative as related processes, see Lorraine Mary York's *Rethinking Women's Collaborative Writing: Power, Difference, Property*.

clearest. In their book *Le Personnage théâtral contemporain : décomposition, recomposition*, Jean-Pierre Ryngaert and Julie Sermon examine recent transformations to the notion of character and the relationship between character and language.

Comme cela a toujours été le cas dans l'histoire du théâtre, les modes de définition du personnage sont une sorte d'épreuve sensible de l'époque à laquelle il appartient, des présupposés et des postulats sur lesquels repose l'idée qu'on se fait alors de la personne, du langage et du monde.⁷⁸ (Ryngaert and Sermon 2006: 83)

Mouawad's characters reflect the contemporary 'presuppositions and postulates' typical of contemporary theatre. The self, as explored through his characters, is heterogeneous, yet united in a perspectival frame; what Ryngaert and Sermon call 'la définition contemporaine de l'identité, désormais moins conçue comme accomplissement d'une même et unique volonté que come réseau mobile de constituants hétérogènes, maillage plus ou moins aléatoire d'intentions, de contingences et de déterminismes locaux.'⁷⁹ (Ryngaert Sermon 2006: 83). Yet Mouawad's heterogeneity has a different emphasis than that of most other contemporary playwrights. The heterogeneity of the self is drawn together into something that can be called a 'self' through the process of self-revelation.

Narrative remains central precisely because it is through the events of a play that

⁷⁸ As was always the case in the history of theatre, the ways of defining character are a test that reflects the given time period, and therefore the presuppositions and postulates that form the basis of the idea that we then create of the person, language and the world.

⁷⁹ The contemporary definition of identity, nevertheless conceived less as an accomplishment of a same and unique will than as a mobile network of heterogeneous components, a more or less random interconnection of intentions, eventualities and local determinations.

the main characters are confronted with the question of self⁸⁰, leading to revelation. Revelation is characterised as positive, in the sense that it is not a negation⁸¹ but an intense experience that leads to self-knowledge. In Mouawad's plays, the focus on the intrasubjective leads to the self's own narrative, that is, the discovery of meaning through the questioning of existence. Mouawad persistently expresses a belief in the possibility of striving towards meaning.

The emphasis on meaning is closely tied to Mouawad's interest in the role and potentialities of language. For Mouawad, language both facilitates self-understanding and makes possible a certain form of engagement, or community (see Chapters 1 and 4). Mouawad perceives linguistic and non-linguistic thinking as contrasting aspects of a self that is by nature multifaceted and conflictual. These opposing facets of human understanding come to light at various times and in various forms (see Chapter 1). Language in Mouawad serves four purposes. It facilitates an exploration of self. It enables communication between individuals. It allows the marginalised to communicate. And it provides a means of unconcealment, and illumination. In an interview in *Le Soir* newspaper in June 2015, Mouawad explained his understanding of language:

Vous êtes attentifs à tout ce que vous dites ?

Ah oui ! C'est ce que le philosophe dit : « tout était langage, même l'aboiement ». Retrouver un mot, c'est commencer à retrouver une oasis au milieu du désert. [...] Ecrire pour moi, c'est cela : parler à la place de « je ne sais pas qui », probablement une partie de moi qui ne sait pas parler et une partie collective de moi. [...] La médiation par le langage devient une sorte d'acte, peut-être par son archaïsme. Il est là

⁸⁰ I will privilege the term 'self' rather than 'identity', in order to avoid the etymological implication of the singular and identical. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 1, p.73

⁸¹ Unlike Sophoclean tragedy, the revelation is not a reversal of fortunes or an inversion, but a discovery of inner being.

depuis la nuit des temps. Se parler, s'envoyer des mots, c'est déjà une rencontre physique. La construction du langage, ensuite, son élaboration permet une sorte d'injection dans l'autre d'une partie de soi. En fait, les mots éclairent : on éclaire la part obscure de l'autre par ses mots à soi. Avec des mots, je vois ce qui, pour moi, est insupportable.⁸² (Mouawad in Delvaux 2015)

Mouawad perceives communication as a form of encounter that facilitates the injection of self into the other, and the other into the self. For Mouawad, this encounter cross-contaminates, and in doing so illuminates hidden aspects of the self. The following chapter will explore this complex and responsive understanding of self, and the process of self-discovery that is key to Mouawad's interpretation of Jan Patočka's shakiness.

⁸² 'You are attentive to everything you say?

Oh yes! It is what the philosopher says: "everything was language, even barking." Finding a word is to begin finding an oasis in the middle of the desert. [...] Writing for me is that: speaking in the place of "I don't know whom", probably a part of me that does not know how to speak, and a collective part of myself. [...] Mediation through language becomes a sort of act, perhaps as a result of its archaism. It has been there since the dawn of time. To speak to each other, to throw words to each other, is already a physical encounter. The construction of language, its subsequent elaboration makes possible a sort of injection of a part of oneself into the other. In fact, words illuminate: we illuminate the obscure part of the other by our own words. With words, I can see what for me is unbearable.'

Chapter 1

The self as odyssey

'À travers cette histoire, chacun racontera la sienne!'¹
(Mouawad, and Leblanc 2009: 86)

For Mouawad, the quest for meaning is best articulated through stories. He perceives storytelling as a means of ordering of the world that enables individuals to perceive and come to terms with their existence (Mouawad 2009e: 39-40). Through his fictional universe, Mouawad aims to communicate an understanding of self, and the self's relationship to world. Discussing what he hopes to achieve with his actors in an interview given to the Théâtre Le Grand T in Nantes, Mouawad explained that: 'Le plus important, c'est qu'ils réalisent qu'ils doivent aller chercher au plus profond d'eux, à chaque instant, une manière de bruler.'² (Mouawad 2009g: 1'50") It is this 'burning' effervescence of the individual that Mouawad seeks from his actors in the process of developing a play. The following chapter will clarify Mouawad's notion of character, its relationship to the self, and the sources of Mouawad's understanding of self, which span philosophy, literature and theatre. Analysing one of Mouawad's earliest plays, *Willy Protogoras*, and one of his more recent productions, *Seuls*, this chapter will highlight the continuity and development of Mouawad's notion of self over the course of his career. Finally, the chapter concludes by considering the

¹ 'Through this story, each person shall tell their own story!'

² 'The most important is that they realise that they must seek in the deepest part of themselves, at every instant, a way of burning.'

relationship between Mouawad's concept of 'self' and Jan Patočka's 'solidarity of the shaken'.

1 The inward odyssey

The majority of Mouawad's plays loosely follow a quest narrative,³ as his protagonists engage in a journey of self-discovery motivated by the pursuits of a clear external goal. In *Littoral* and *Incendies*, adult children leave their homes and journey to their parents' countries of origin for the first time; in *Forêts*, the teenage protagonist goes to Europe to discover her ancestors' history; *Ciels* is about the quest to discover life-saving information; in *Seuls*, Harwan is on a mission to complete his doctoral thesis. Articulating a popular trope within quest narratives, what transpires in these plays is that the external objective becomes secondary to the process of self-discovery. Mouawad describes this process in his plays as an odyssey.

De manière personnelle, j'ai été frappé par le fait que les histoires racontées par Robert Lepage mettaient toujours en scène un personnage qui, quittant sa maison, tentait de découvrir le monde ; cela m'apparaissait comme l'exact opposé de mes propres histoires qui mettaient en scène un personnage égaré, tentant de rentrer chez lui. Cela me rappela ces mots de Georges Banu lors d'une émission à Radio-Canada : « La quête, c'est la tentative de découvrir le monde ; l'odyssée, c'est la tentative de rentrer chez soi. »⁴ (Mouawad 2008a: 45)

³ Cf. Campbell, Joseph. 2008. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

⁴ Personally, I was struck by the fact that Robert Lepage's stories always focused on a character who left home in an attempt to discover the world; this seemed to me the exact opposite of my own stories that focused on a character who, lost, tries to find his way home. This reminded me of Georges Banu's words from a Radio Canada

Mouawad highlights a key difference in perspective and motivation. As demonstrated in this chapter, the return home is not a physical return. Mouawad says that it is 'L'enfance, qui est le véritable pays. Celui où l'on arrive jamais.'⁵ (Mouawad 2009a: 91) The homeland is therefore a state of being; one permanently lost. What remains possible for the characters is a reconciliation with the loss of childhood.⁶

Mouawad's characters are feeling and thinking beings, confronted and shaped by the world both past and present. They articulate the complexity of the relationship between a perceived multiplicity of inner selves (self as is, self as was and self as becoming) and between the intimate and the external. Here, the self is a being that exists in the world and that shapes and is shaped by other people and events. The individual simultaneously shapes and must contend with the context into which she is born and lives. In Husserlian terminology, this process is transcendental subjectivity; in Heideggerian terms, Dasein. Given Mouawad's intense interest in Jan Patočka as noted in the Introduction,⁷ it is hardly surprising that his investigation of the self resonates with phenomenological philosophy's approach to ontology.

As in the works of major phenomenological and post-phenomenological philosophers such as Husserl, Heidegger, Derrida, Levinas and Patočka, the self as

broadcast: 'A quest is an attempt to discover the world; an odyssey is an attempt to return home.'

⁵ 'Childhood, which is the true homeland. The one we never reach.'

⁶ As we shall see in Chapter 2, this is a process that enables characters to move forward with their lives, to envisage their relationship to the future. See chapter two, 3. Embodying the temporal trace.

⁷ See Introduction, p.2-4.

disclosed in Mouawad's narratives is not something given in full, either to the character or the audience. The character's odyssey is one of self-realisation; however, the self that is realized is not disclosed in its entirety. There is always something in the character that exceeds and resists appropriation. In Mouawad's plays, narrative as story is the main locus for the character's experience of the world (both in terms of the experience of objective reality and the intersubjective) and communication with the audience. However, the hermeneutic experience of the productions overflows the meaning conveyed through narrative structure alone. The physicality of theatre presents the spectator with a living, experiencing being in the form of the actor. In a letter to his *Incendies* actors written in October 2004, Mouawad cites a passage from Patočka's *Heretical Essays*:

Je vous laisse avec ça : l'ébranlement. Ce sont les paroles du philosophe Jan Patočka : « La solidarité des ébranlés, c'est la solidarité de ceux qui sont ébranlés dans leur foi en le jour, en la nuit. Celui qui trahit cette solidarité doit savoir qu'il est un embusqué qui vit, à l'arrière, du sang des autres. » Le théâtre que j'ai envie de faire consiste à placer sur une scène des êtres qui font témoignage, et non pas étalage, de leur ébranlement. Qu'est-ce qui vous ébranle dans votre foi, dans votre existence ?⁸(Mouawad 2009: 52)

This citation dismantles the division between actor and character. In Mouawad's theatre, the actor struggles to articulate experience, a process Mouawad calls

⁸ I will leave you with this: shakeness. In the words of the philosopher Jan Patočka: 'The solidarity of the shaken is the solidarity of those who are shaken in their faith in the day, in the night. He who betrays this solidarity must know that he is a parasite on the sidelines who lives off the blood of others.' The theatre that I want to create consists in staging human beings who do not simply display, but instead enact a testimony to their shakeness. What is it that shakes you in your faith, in your existence?

'bearing witness'.⁹ What is articulated is simultaneously physical and linguistic, expressed in the body, the voice, and linguistic as well as non-linguistic forms of expression. Here, each actor's 'shakiness' is being expressed.¹⁰ As we shall see, shakiness is provoked by a willingness to confront oneself. For Mouawad, it is through both the production as performance, and the thematic aspects addressed in the narrative that the spectator comes to question her own self-awareness and relationship to world. As Bert O. States summarizes in *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater*: "The actor enables us to recognize the human "from the inside" (States 1985: 46-47). As we shall see, this is a factor that Mouawad both recognizes and articulates.

2 Postmodernism and the self

The title of Elinor Fuchs' text on postmodern drama, *The Death of Character*, points to the paradigmatic shift away from character-focused drama to one that questions the very possibility of the representation of a unified self. The material identity of the character is rejected by Fuchs as an illusory narrative construct. In postmodern theatre, and particularly in what Hans-Thies Lehmann characterizes the postdramatic, the subject is displaced from a central narrative, as the production highlights the false illusion and impossible foundation of all unifying constructs (whether in terms of the narrative, plot, character or meaning). Instead, such

⁹ See Chapter 4, p.211.

¹⁰ For a more detailed investigation of Patočka's notion of shakiness see Chapter 1, p. 88-90

constructs are systematically disrupted, and ordinary assumptions about them are challenged.

The challenging of constructs is achieved through various stylistic, narrative, and performance techniques¹¹ that disrupt the illusion of continuity on stage, and draw attention to the disparate and often incomprehensible diversity of human experience. This poses a challenge to the audience, and in postdramatic productions, the absence of a cohesive narrative structure deliberately displaces engagement with the story. Instead, the apparent narrative destabilisation that occurs as a result of the shift away from a character-driven plot makes spectators aware of other performance aspects (language, lighting, the body, staging, voice) or, in many cases, on the absence thereof: silence and emptiness. The emphasis on disrupted form highlights the impossibility of an affirmative, dominant content – what Fuchs refers to as ‘presence’. Denied the central role of propelling a story forward, the character instead acts as a force of disruption, exposing the subject as something both fragmentary and fragmented.¹²

This representation of character as a fragmented construct embodies a

¹¹ Often a use of contrasts, for example, a style of delivery that contrasts with content, in order to shift the audience’s attention from narrative to the question of the role, purpose and very possibility of theatre.

¹² In *History of European Drama and Theatre*, Erika Fischer-Lichte traces the history of the fragmentation of the self and cohesive identity in theatre. See in particular ‘The dissolution of the self in history’ (233-238) and ‘Dismemberment and rebirth’ (324-351). See also Hans-Thies Lehmann: ‘In this sense, the place of the organic, knowable whole is taken by the unavoidable and commonly “forgotten” fragmentary character of perception that is explicitly rendered conscious in postdramatic theatre.’ (Lehmann trans. Jürs-Munby 2006: 88)

specific understanding of character, and of the self and its relationship to representation. In her 1985 article, 'Presence and the Revenge of Writing: Re-thinking theatre after Derrida', Elinor Fuchs concludes:

Theatre is ever the presence of the absence and the absence of the presence. Both are component in its every motion, but until recently its motions have taken place within phonocentric limits. One might say that we have been witnessing in contemporary theatre, and especially in performance, a representation of the failure of the theatrical enterprise of spontaneous speech with its logocentric claims to origination, authority, authenticity – in short, Presence. This motion amounts to a virtual deconstruction of the defining hierarchy that has sustained theatre since the Renaissance. (Fuchs 1985: 172)

This deconstructive notion of the contamination of presence by absence is discussed in Derrida's 1967 response to Husserl, *La voix et le phénomène*. In the concept of auto-affection, whereby the self is always in dialogue with the self, Derrida denies the notion of privileged access to a thinking 'I' of pure presence, as stipulated in Husserl's phenomenology. (Derrida 1967c: 90-98). Instead, the self is always already in dialogue with itself; we speak to ourselves as though speaking to an other, and thereby formulate our understanding of self as a relationship to an other that is simultaneously constitutive of the self. Derrida's response to Husserl and Heidegger proceeds to develop this idea of a self that is not metaphysical in nature, i.e. that is neither the knowable locus of being as transcendental subject or *Dasein*.

Deconstruction's focus on the significance of representation and privileging of presence helped transform the theatre of the late twentieth century. Highlighting the perceived hegemony of narrative structures as encapsulated within a text,

performance artists and groups such as the Wooster Group, Robert Wilson and Goat Island have made use of interstitial performance techniques to disrupt the dominant metaphysical hegemony of narrative as the source of meaning and signification. By displacing the central importance of the text (text understood in the wider sense of signification, whether linguistic or symbolic representation) and emphasizing the singular importance of each aspect of performance, postmodern performance focused on highlighting the multiple facets of a fragmented and non-unified self. The human being was shown as voice, as construct, as a multiplicity of moments whose significance did not need to extend beyond the significance of the moment. Instead, the traditional barriers of the art form were called into question in performance, reconfiguring the understanding theatre's meaning.

In the introduction to his recent comprehensive study of the tragic, *Tragödie und dramatisches Theater*, Hans-Thies Lehmann writes that considering any play exclusively as text denies the performative complexity of the genre. (Lehmann 2013: 17) This is far from a recent revelation in the field,¹³ and Mouawad's plays are no exception. Mouawad's work itself emphasizes the performative, and the multiplicity of self. And while it places a particular emphasis on the notion of auto-affection, Mouawad rejects the concept of self as fragmentary. Instead, he uses narrative structure to facilitate the exploration of the self's relationship to self as other. As we shall see, this recognition of the division inherent within the self is the catalyst for Jan Patočka's concept of shakiness. The character-driven plot incarnates a process

¹³ Cf. J.P. Sarrazac on Diderot, *Critique du théâtre 2: du moderne au contemporain, et retour* p. 71-75

of self-discovery, where the ‘resolution’ of the question of self is a non-resolution, the suspension of the definitive. As in Patočka’s phenomenological philosophy, which draws on Husserl and Heidegger, living is a process whereby the self perpetually constitutes and is constituted by the world. It is this characterisation of the self that lies at the core of Mouawad’s works, and, despite his variety of narratives and thematic foci, this notion of self and its position in relation to time and space remains consistent.

3 The development of the self: from Ungeziefer to ‘poisson-soi’

3.1 Kafka

Lorsqu’on me demande si je suis québécois, français ou libanais, je répons que je suis juif et tchèque.¹⁴ (Mouawad 2005: 69)

From his earliest work, Mouawad has been fascinated by the self, and the self’s relationship to world. The issue of self is carefully addressed through a combination of linguistic affirmations, events and character actions, closely linked to Mouawad’s literary influences. In the preface to the published edition of *Willy Protagoras*,¹⁵ Mouawad explains the dual influence of Franz Kafka and Claude Gauvreau.¹⁶

¹⁴ When I am asked whether I am Quebecois, French or Lebanese, I respond that I am Jewish and Czech.

¹⁵ Published eleven years after the original production, after the majority of Mouawad’s other plays had already been performed and published.

¹⁶ For a discussion of the significance of Claude Gauvreau, see Section C, below.

Dans ces tout premiers textes, il était sans cesse question d'un personnage métamorphosé en quelque chose de terrible et de son rapport nouveau au monde. [...] Avec l'écriture. Je me sortais du néant. Pour cela, il a fallu une détonation. Gauvreau en fut l'incendie, Kafka la bombe.¹⁷ (Mouawad 2004: 7)

The texts referenced here – *The Metamorphosis* and *L'asile de la pureté* – reflect the same structural foci that underpin Mouawad's plays. On the one hand, there is an emphasis on the intimate character, and the character's relationship to world; on the other, a sustained concern with the sound and aesthetics of language.

Mouawad describes Kafka as a catalyst that transformed his life. Reading Kafka marked the end of his struggle to shape himself to the world, and the beginning of introspection through identification.

Moi qui, jusqu'à cet âge, lisais pour être un héros que je n'étais pas, voilà qu'un auteur obscur à mes yeux, mort depuis longtemps, avait écrit l'histoire d'un héros que je n'aurais jamais voulu être, mais que j'étais. Cet homme métamorphosé en insecte, c'était moi. Cette histoire n'avait d'ailleurs été écrite que pour moi. Elle n'existait que pour moi.¹⁸ (Mouawad 2004: 5)

The intensity of this description is indicative of the emphasis Mouawad places on the importance of story as source of discovery and revelation. His encounter with Gregor's story marks the shift from the *néant*, everyday existence that Mouawad

¹⁷ In these very first texts, it was ceaselessly a question of a character metamorphosed into something terrible and that character's new relationship to the world. [...] with writing. I brought myself out of nothingness. For this there had to be a detonation. Gauvreau was the fire. Kafka the bomb.

¹⁸ I, who until that age read in order to be a hero that I wasn't, suddenly found that an author who to me was obscure, and who had been dead for a long time, had written the story of a hero that I would never have wanted to be, but that I was. This man transformed into an insect was me. This story had in fact been written only for me. It existed only for me.

refers to as the banal,¹⁹ to a revelatory introspection. This transition recurs in Mouawad's work as a linchpin of character development in his plays. As Mouawad explains: 'S'arracher par soi-même au néant impose une simultanéité impossible.[...] Être et ne pas être à la fois, pour que la partie de soi qui existe arrache au néant celle qui n'existe pas.'²⁰ (Mouawad 2004: 5). This confrontation between the existing self and the non-existing self, between the perceiving being and that in the self which remains concealed, is an articulation of Jan Patočka's 'shakiness', as explored at the end of this chapter.

There are three distinct thematic parallels with Kafka in Mouawad's work: the relationship of a third person self with a first person self; the relationship of the self to the world; writing as essential to being.²¹ In *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor's transformation is a double alienation. As we shall see later in this chapter, a double-alienation operates in both *Willy Protagoras* and *Seuls*. 'As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect.' (Kafka 2005: 89). Although an everyday figure of speech, the use of the reflexive 'he found himself' implies a self that is not contiguous with itself. One form of the self (the mind) is surprised by the complete transformation of another form of the self (the body). This intimate division is reflected in Gregor's alienation from the outside world, and confinement to an increasingly dehumanised space.

¹⁹ Talk given at Ombres Blanches, Toulouse, 2009; also referenced in the preface to print edition of *Seuls* (Mouawad 2008a: 116)

²⁰ To tear oneself away from nothingness requires an impossible simultaneity. To be and not to be at the same time, in order for the part of the self that exists can tear the part of the self that does not exist away from nothingness.

²¹ See 31 July 1914 journal entry below.

In Kafka's novels, stories, letters and journal entries, the sense of self-alienation expressed in the use of the reflexive pronoun recurs frequently. The self exists in an uncanny relationship with itself.

I will have to turn backwards in the circle. So the best resource is to meet everything as calmly as possible, to make yourself an inert mass, and, if you feel that you are carried away, not to let yourself be lured into taking a single unnecessary step, to stare at others with the eyes of an animal, to feel no compunction, to yield to the non-conscious that you believe far away while it is precisely what is burning you, with your own hand to throttle down whatever ghostly life remains in you [...] (Kafka 1976: 178)

In his journals, Kafka often seems to be telling another self what to do. In the above passage, the narrative transitions from the first person (*'ich werde mich im Kreise zurückdrehn müssen'*)²² to the third (*'Der beste Rat bleibt deshalb [...]als schwere Masse sich verhalten und fühle man sich selbst fortgeblasen [...]'*)²³ where *sich* is translated as 'yourself' in English.²⁴ This oscillation does more than relate the experience of the individual 'I' to the general 'you' – it is a form of self-dialogue. This dialogue points to the self's encounter with the other(s) of the self, that in Kafka's writing is variously characterized as the known that remains unfamiliar and

²² 'I will have to turn backwards in the circle.'

²³ 'So the best resource is [...] to make yourself an inert mass, and, if you feel that you are carried away [...]'

²⁴ Although the use of the third person implies a generalised statement, in this context the passage is a specific response from Kafka to Kafka's state of weariness, specified at the beginning of the entry. Interestingly, the first part of the section in which this entry appears begins in the third person, with: *'Aus einem solchen Zustand sich zu erheben, sollte eigentlich selbst mit gewollter Energie leicht sein.'* ('To lift yourself out of such a mood, even if you have to do it by strength of will, should be easy.' (Kafka 1976: 178))

estranged (in the diaries),²⁵ split (*The Judgement*),²⁶ a physical estrangement (*The Metamorphosis*),²⁷ or distantiation (*The Castle*).²⁸ The self in Kafka often appears divided or multiple: inner selves struggle to find expression and concordance with another self that communicates with the world at large, and which is more closely related to physical corporeal existence.

Mouawad shares Kafka's struggle to express a self that is multiple, in flux, and in a sense contiguous with itself, yet simultaneously 'non-conscious'. There is a sense in which the conscious self is haunted by its various selves. Dialogue with these selves remains elusive and at odds with the self as contiguous with the world it inhabits. In Mouawad's early productions, characters undergo a transformation that redefines their relationship to the world. In *Willy Protagoras*, Willy rejects an imposed social order with suicide. In *Littoral*, Wilfrid's father's death transforms Wilfrid's understanding of heritage. Rather than a physical metamorphosis, Mouawad's characters experience a transformation whereby the individual comes to reject the simplicity of a contiguous worldly being, in acknowledgement of a multiple inner self.

²⁵ 'Forget everything. Open the windows. Clear the room. The wind blows through it. You see only its emptiness, you search in every corner and don't find yourself.' (Kafka 1976: 362)

²⁶ See W.H. Sokel's analysis of the split self, represented by Georg and the friend from St Petersburg. (Sokel, 2002:183).

²⁷ Gregor Samsa's physical alienation is expressed in the first line of the story, where Gregor wakes up and does not recognise his own body. (Kafka 2005: 89).

²⁸ 'Hours passed [...] in which K. kept feeling that he had lost himself, or was further away in a strange land than any-one had ever been before, a distant country where even the air was unlike the air at home, where you were likely to stifle in the strangeness of it, yet such were its senseless lures that you could only go on, losing your way even more.' (Kafka 2009: 40)

In Kafka, the part of the self that is able to communicate with the world acts as a sort of intermediary between inner selves and outward existence. This intermediary self is the embodied self, physical, living and speaking. For Kafka, it is the interaction between the intermediary self and the world that leads to a self forgetting, or an occlusion of inner selves. Kafka's own struggle was to find a form of expression for the inner self; the self not governed or determined by the external (bureaucracy, laws, social mores etc.). As he states in his journal (31/07/1914): 'I will write in spite of everything, absolutely; it is my struggle for self preservation.' (Kafka 1976: 300). Through writing, Kafka is not simply expressing himself, but rather giving partial form to multiple forms of inner selves, whose gaps and inconsistencies provide a space through which the 'irrelevant might force its way'. (Kafka 1976: 149). Through gaps and paradoxes, that which is beyond the mastery of the individual can come to the fore. Kafka wrote in his letters of the extraordinary depth of the inner self that overflows the self of language and expression: 'The outside world is too small, too straightforward, to hold all... contained in one man.' (Kafka 1973: location 1153)

3.2 'Poisson-soi'

Despite Kafka's significant influence on Mouawad's work, there is a fundamental divergence between self in Kafka and in Mouawad. The despair and resignation that Kafka's protagonists frequently experience is absent from Mouawad's plays, where there is a fundamental belief in the power of the self to 'tear' itself from nothingness,

and struggle against everyday existence. This is intimately tied to Mouawad's conviction that language and artistic expression can evoke a variety of meanings within the self that help bring the 'I' into a more intimate relationship with that which is most intense and powerful within. Since 2009, Mouawad has often referred to the image of a 'poisson-soi'²⁹, the 'self fish' whose presence is made known by a flash of scales, each of which forms 'la perfection du miroir' (Mouawad 2011: 26). *Le Poisson Soi* (2011g) explores this idea of the 'self fish' in a series of fragments, thoughts and 'reflections'. He also succinctly alludes to this notion in 'Nous sommes des immeubles', the preface to the programme of the Centre National des Arts of Canada during his tenure as artistic director.

[I]l y a là, dans le noir des immeubles que nous sommes, des salles-aquariums où flottent les poissons les plus étranges, les plus carnivores, les plus effrayants!³⁰ (Mouawad 2008c: 4)

The image Mouawad uses is at times singular but implies plurality in the multiple reflections offered by the mirror scales; at other times it is plural in the multiplicity of the types of fish, yet implies a singular in the structure that contains the 'aquarium rooms'. In the preface cited above, Mouawad refers to 'us' as cavernous buildings inhabited by a multitude of entities, by a 'locataire dont nous ne connaissons rien'.³¹ (Mouawad 2008c: 4). Although these selves are at once multiple, elusive and unknown, they are nevertheless tenuously held together by the

²⁹ For an English speaker, the etymological reference to selfish is unmistakable.

³⁰ There, in the darkness of the buildings that we are, there are aquarium rooms inhabited by the strangest, most carnivorous, most terrifying fish!

³¹ 'Tenant of which we know nothing.'

'I' – this building in which these entities are harboured. This is crucial for the entire scope of Mouawad's productions.

Throughout the plays, there is a rejection of multiplicity as disparate and meaningless fragmentation. The playwright's interest lies in exploring an inner multiplicity that is nevertheless united in the being that is the self, and which can be made visible through theatre. Mouawad describes this unity as a building that harbours unknown wonders, inhabited by a tenant that the theatre illuminates:

L'œuvre d'art est ici, dans ce théâtre, vue comme un feu obligeant le locataire en moi à se faire connaître, à révéler son identité à l'immeuble que je suis pour qu'en courant partout, il ouvre enfin les portes derrière lesquelles se terrent les trésors les plus intimes et les plus bouleversants de mon être.³² (Mouawad 2008c: 5)

Mouawad's chosen medium for exploring this multiplicity of self is a living medium, one that is by definition not solitary, but verbally and physically communal. Theatre is therefore a site where the 'most intimate' and 'most overwhelming' aspects of inner being are made manifest, that is, voiced, facilitating the encounter. This follows a similar double structure of self, as identified above in the works of Kafka: first, a multiplicity of inner selves; second, an embodied self that communicates with the world. It is through theatre that the most 'overwhelming' inner treasures are to be found, yet this discovery is contingent on an art form whose very nature is

³² Here in this theatre, the work of art is considered a fire that forces the tenant within me to know himself, to reveal his identity to the building that I am, so that as he runs left and right, he finally opens the doors behind which are hidden the most intimate and most overwhelming treasures of my being.

physical, external and communicative. In order to be made manifest, the inner relies on the forms of expression available to it: the body and the voice.

4 Performing the self

The division between the performance and the text of a play has been a source of debate at least since Aristotle's *Poetics*, which is to say, roughly throughout the documented history of theatre. This debate reaches the heart of the question of character. For Aristotle, character is useful insofar as it serves the purposes of the plot. A famous passage in the *Poetics* minimizes the importance of spectacle, which:

[...] is attractive, but it is very inartistic and is least germane to the art of poetry. For the effect of tragedy is not dependent on performance and actors. (Aristotle 1996a: 13)

The distinction between performance and text was increasingly important over the course of the twentieth century, as playwrights experimented with form. In *Dramatic Theories of Voice in the Twentieth Century*, Andrew Kimbrough explains that:

Not primarily oriented toward the eye, postmodern theatre demotes the text in importance, appeals to many senses, celebrates communication technology with the *mise-en-scène*, and avoids the causality and linearity of the traditional, text-based Western theatre of the past several hundred years. (Kimbrough 2011: 249)

Kimbrough's work on the use of voice in twentieth century theatre considers the implications of phenomenological philosophy for theatre performance, particularly

in terms of the relationship between language, voice and meaning. For Kimbrough, phenomenology helps illuminate similarities between Artaud, Grotowski, Brook and Schechner in terms of their shared 'belief in the dependence of expression upon the embodiment of the speaker, the ability of vocal sounds to become constituent of sense, and the operation of *logos* within voice and language as an unconcealment of potential meanings and states of being'. (Kimbrough 2011: 141). Kimbrough argues that the deconstructive approach to understanding postmodern theatre is fundamentally inadequate, in that it denies all meaning, which he considers inherent in vocal communication. Despite certain shortcomings in Kimbrough's analysis of Derridean thought,³³ he brings to light the question of the constitutive versus mimetic power of language in theatre, and thus addresses the heart of contemporary questions about the nature of theatre: can theatre present and actively create experience rather than merely representing? How does that which lies beyond the meaning of words, the performative aspect of a production, generate meaning, and how does this role of performance reconfigure the role of the text? For Mouawad, theatre creates an experience that generates meaning as a result of both text and performance; there is no dichotomy between language and the non-verbal aspects of performance, but rather language as sound combines with movement, here understood in the widest possible sense as a series of temporal transitions. In Mouawad's theatre, all forms of movement articulate a certain form of meaning.

³³ Particularly in terms of auto-affection and Derrida's responses to Husserl and Heidegger, his emphasis on 'more empirically sound investigations into language undertaken in other fields' (Kimbrough 2011: 244) is perhaps cavalier.

Mouawad's theatre is therefore concerned with the performance and text of a play as co-constitutive and indissociable aspects of any production. This is perhaps made most clear in *Seuls*. In his preface to the print edition, entitled 'Un oiseau polyphonique', Mouawad cites Charlotte Farcet's description of the play:

L'écriture ici n'est pas seulement les « mots » écrits par Wajdi ; elle est aussi les projections vidéo qu'il a tournés, les sons qu'il a captés, les voix qu'il a enregistrés. Tout cela est l'écriture du spectacle. L'écriture ici relève de la polyphonie et nous nous entêtons à travailler encore sur un rapport mot/acteur en nous imaginons que le reste relève de la scénographie, du son, de la musique qui viendront appuyer ce rapport.³⁴ (Mouawad 2008: 13)

This characterisation of writing is much wider than that attributed to the traditional script. The 'writing' is the polyphonic nature of the production, incorporating 'scenography, sound, music'. The difficulty in finalising the production was the stubborn persistence of those involved to privilege a word/actor relationship and consider the rest of the polyphony as secondary. Once this dominant word/actor conviction was overcome, the play finally coalesced. For Mouawad, all expression is communication, and thus language.³⁵ Throughout his career, Mouawad has expressed an interest in language, and the sound of language.

³⁴ Writing here is not only the 'words' written by Wajdi: it is also the video projections that he shot, the sounds he captured, the voices he recorded. All of this is the writing of the production. Writing here is polyphony and we remained determined to continue working within a word/actor relationship while imagining that the rest is part of scenography, sound, music that support this relationship.

³⁵ Cf. Introduction, p.34, 'C'est ce que le philosophe dit : « tout était langage, même l'aboïement ».' (It is what the philosopher says: "everything was language, even barking.")

Discussing his early influences, Mouawad refers to Quebecois poet and playwright Claude Gauvreau. Gauvreau was a key contributor to Canadian, and specifically Quebecois, literature. His plays and poetry, including sound poetry, emphasize the importance of language and sound. It is to Gauvreau that Mouawad credits his own ability to voice anger. Gauvreau's work 'vient réconcilier ce qui semblait irréconciliable : le théâtre d'une vie (théâtre autobiographique) et le théâtre de la vie ou « théâtre de la cruauté », tel que le concevait Antonin Artaud.'³⁶ (Bénard 2004: 119). Part of the theatre of cruelty, particularly in terms of Gauvreau's work, is the importance of the 'cri', or primordial voice.

Artaud's experience shows how the experience of theatre, the theatrical "as if", stands at the beginning of a subject's becoming and how, through the voice, theatre can provide a setting for the constitution of a subject. (Finter, in Scheer 2004: 52)

For Gauvreau, the complexity of the becoming of the subject is precisely what is expressed in his use of glossolalia, his *exploréen*. It is the subject hidden behind the constructs of language, or rather, the subject's expression as buried under the structures of discourse. As Jean-Pierre Denis asks:

Et ce que soulève/relève/désensevelit Gauvreau à travers ses glossolalies, n'est-ce-pas une langue barée, emmurée vivante, une langue interdite – par l'Histoire, par le bilinguisme qui rature la langue maternelle, par l'absence de père ?³⁷ (Denis 1993: 494)

³⁶ 'Reconciles what seemed irreconcilable: the theatre of a life (autobiographical theatre) and the theatre of life or "theatre of cruelty", as Antonin Artaud conceived it.'

³⁷ And what Gauvreau raises/uncovers/disinters through his glossolalia, is it not a language that is closed off, buried alive, forbidden – by History, by the bilingualism that crosses out the mother tongue, by the absence of the father?

It is in Gauvreau that Mouawad encountered an attempt to bring to light, to ‘disinter’ a forbidden language or a voice buried alive by history. Gauvreau incorporates two of Mouawad’s fundamental interests: theatre as a universalisation of the particular, and the significance of language in the constitution of the self.

As noted in the Introduction, while still a student Mouawad was cast in the role of the author, Gauvreau, in Gauvreau’s 1953 play *L’asile de la pureté*.³⁸ Mouawad noted the irony of the performer with no Canadian heritage being cast as Gauvreau³⁹: the juxtaposition of identities in the semantic attribution of cultural affiliation. While playing Gauvreau Mouawad began his first play, *Willy Protagoras*, which contains structural similarities to Gauvreau’s *L’asile de la pureté*.⁴⁰ One aspect of Gauvreau’s work that Mouawad resurrects is his emphasis on the sound of language, integral to the poetic cadence of his scripts. Like ‘postdramatic’ playwrights, Mouawad is particularly attentive to the role of sound, and places a great deal of emphasis on auditory experience.⁴¹ However, unlike many

³⁸ The relationship to Gauvreau is also mentioned in the introduction to *Willy Protagoras*. ‘Alors que j’étais étudiant en première année à l’École nationale de théâtre, on avait demandé aux élèves de ma classe de tenir les rôles secondaires dans *L’asile de la pureté* de Gauvreau [...] Le rôle qui me fut confié était celui de l’auteur lui-même.’

³⁹ Frequently in public talks, however explicitly referred to in the talk given at the Ombres Blanches bookstore in 2009, and the post-performance talk given in Rennes in 2015.

⁴⁰ For more information on the resonance between *Willy Protagoras* and *L’asile de la pureté*, see ‘Quand Mouawad digère Gauvreau: enjeux interculturels et intertextuels du passage de *L’asile de la pureté* à *Willy Protagoras*’ by Sophie Létourneau (Annuaire théâtral, n.41 2007, p.149-160)

⁴¹ This was perhaps made most clear in the polemic surrounding Mouawad’s choosing Bernard Cantat to compose and perform the music in his *Des Femmes* cycle; for more information, see Conclusion p.274-276.

postdramatic performances, the semantic is never secondary to word-sound. Sense is simultaneously generated by what is felt (vocal cadence and sound) and what is meant (semantics).

It is through the words they speak that Mouawad's characters discover themselves. Often dialogue provokes a transition, which ultimately leads to a form of transformation. In an interview, playwright Michel Vinaver noted the significance of speech in terms of transitions: 'ce qui m'intéresse au théâtre (dans la vie aussi), ce que j'aime, c'est ce que quelque chose arrive. Et pour cela, il faut un passage d'une situation à une nouvelle situation, par le fait de la parole.'⁴² (Sarrazac, Naugrette, Banu 2011: 51). This approach to theatre is not shared by all contemporary practitioners, but is an accurate description of Mouawad's work. Transformations on stage, both intrasubjective and intersubjective,⁴³ transpire as a result of communication and language, and the failure thereof. To use Mouawad's own imagery, drawing on the Sophoclean heritage, language is the crossroads of the intrasubjective and intersubjective. In Mouawad's plays, it is by means of language that the character experiences the growth of self-awareness, that the internal is given agency and is able to affect others, and that the character is in turn affected by the linguistic expression of others.

For Mouawad, the theatrical relationship with the audience is also contingent on language, and invokes a shared relationship to history, through trace, that in fact

⁴²'What interests me in the theatre (as well as in life), what I love, is for something to happen. And that requires the transition from one situation to a new situation, through speech.'

⁴³ See Introduction, 'Theatrical context and the rhapsodic', p.11-17.

stimulates an encounter with an Other in the Levinasian sense: one that simultaneously resists appropriation and evokes a sense of responsibility in the spectator. It is through the relationship between character and spectator that Mouawad strives for the 'solidarity of the shaken', as described by Patočka in the *Heretical Essays*.⁴⁴ In the following sections I will analyse *Willy Protagoras* and *Seuls*, seeking to elucidate these plays' depiction of self through narrative structure, and the nature of the self and the self's relationship to world. I then turn to the wider implications of Mouawad's characterisation of self, and its relationship to Patočka and to phenomenology.

5 *Willy Protagoras*

5.1 Framing the self

Mouawad's first play, *Willy Protagoras*, contains many of the major themes of his later writings: struggle, the self, art, friendship, youth, exile and oppression. The protagonist, Willy, strives to assert himself in an oppressive and absurd context. He desperately tries to live for that which is important to his sense of self, and rejects the imposed structure of the external world. Willy tries to hold onto his love of poetry, music and painting, which are threatened by the progressive intrusion of the neighbours into his family apartment. Rejected by his parents and his society, Willy

⁴⁴ See Chapter 4, p.213 and 260-263 on the encounter with the Other and its significance in terms of the solidarity of the shaken.

finds he must conform to the exigencies of the external social world or be permanently ostracised.

We are introduced to Willy through a conversation between neighbours: Willy is ugly, illiterate and fat, in contrast to his beautiful sister Nelly, who – to the neighbours' chagrin – is leaving. The neighbours explain that Willy has locked himself in the bathroom in protest at the 'invaders' occupying the family's apartment. Initially invited, the Philisti-Ralestine family now refuses to leave, and the situation has become untenable.

A thinly veiled allegory of the Lebanese war, easily identified through the etymology of the invaders' last name (Palestinian is pronounced *Filastīnī* in Arabic), the play focusses not on the reasons behind the war, but on its sheer absurdity. Willy's refusal to leave the toilet until the 'guests' depart gradually exposes the violence, fickleness and bestiality of the play's characters.⁴⁵

Act I consists of the neighbours' gossip about the Protagoras and Philisti-Ralestine conflict, followed by Nelly's departure which sheds additional light on the situation. Just before Nelly enters, the notary Maxime Louisaire, a legally justified

⁴⁵ Willy's use of scatological language is not unconsciously animalistic. He uses the excremental intentionally for other purposes, as we shall see below, thereby distinguishing him from the bestiality exhibited by the other characters. Willy transforms the excremental from a mere bodily function to a purposeful appropriation, something characteristic of human existence. To use Heidegger's terminology, the excrement is no longer waste, but *pragma*. Patočka discusses Heidegger's term *pragmata*, and the significance of their readiness-to-hand for human meaning. 'The mode of being of a pragma is *Zuhandenheit*, that is, availability. It means that it is good for something. [...] People understand the way they breathe. When I take the chalk in hand, it involves a certain act of understanding [...] Precisely because humans are always understanding beings they can explicitly indicate, explicitly explain. [...] That is precisely why humans can speak, have meanings.' (Patočka trans. Kohák 1998: 104-105)

and divisive foreign authority, makes a direct reference to humanity's animalistic nature:

Nous sommes tous des animaux, mon cher Rémillard, et personne n'hésitera à écraser les autres pour avoir la meilleure place au soleil.⁴⁶ (Mouawad 2004: 24)

In Act II, we are reminded of this description of people as animals when Willy's sequestration in the toilets prevents the apartment's other residents from relieving themselves, and the play's language turns scatological, aggressive and violent:

ASSAD PROTAGORAS (*qui s'est réveillé*) Willy!
WILLY C'est toi, mon père, qui me parles à travers cette porte ?
ASSAD PROTAGORAS Qui veux-tu que cela soit, bougre d'imbécile, veux-tu bien sortir de là ? Je veux chier. [...] Willy ! Nom d'un chien, vas-tu arrêter tes conneries, bordel de Dieu ? Je te dis que je veux chier.⁴⁷ (Mouawad 2004: 32)

The anger expressed by Willy's father Assad is echoed by Conrad Philisti-Ralestine when he finds, upon awakening, that Willy is still in the toilet.

CONRAD PHILISTI-RALESTINE Willy Protagoras, je te préviens, je ne ferai aucune concession ; je ne succomberai à aucun chantage de ta part.
JEANNINE PROTAGORAS Ecoute monsieur Philisti-Ralestine, Willy.
CONRAD PHILISTI-RALESTINE T'entends ? Même ta mère, d'ordinaire si peu preste, est d'accord avec moi. Degage, enfoiré !
ASSAD PROTAGORAS Willy, ne sors pas. Juste pour le faire chier !

⁴⁶ We are all animals, my dear Remillard, and nobody will hesitate to crush the others in order to have the best place in the sun.

⁴⁷ ASSAD PROTAGORAS (*who woke up*) Willy!

WILLY Is that you, Dad, who is speaking to me through the door?

ASSAD PROTAGORAS Who do you think it is, you bloody idiot, will you get out of there? I want to take a crap. [...] Willy! For goodness' sake, will you stop this nonsense, goddammit! I tell you, I need to take a crap.

CONRAD PHILISTI-RALESTINE Ca te fera chier tout autant que moi, le clebs.
JEANNINE PROTAGORAS Willy, je t'en prie, fais-le pour moi, sors.
ASSAD PROTAGORAS Compte sur moi que je vais chier, et sur ton bout de tapis aussi.⁴⁸ (Mouawad 2004: 33)

This exchange begins with Conrad's condemnation of Willy's stubbornness, followed by Willy's mother's pleading. Jeannine is conflict averse and unwilling to understand her son. This is the first indication of a shift in allegiance, away from the family bond and towards a unity of shared objectives.

This is reinforced when Assad unites with Mr Philisti-Ralestine against his son. Both men forego further negotiations and call a truce long enough to devise ways of making Willy suffer and thereby force him to open the door. The father has turned against his son, to the point of devising cruel ways to force capitulation. Jeannine, Willy's mother, decides that they need outside help to find a solution. Ignoring her son's desperate entreaties to the contrary, which foreshadow the conclusion of the play, she invites the notary Maxime Louisaire into the apartment to resolve the initial conflict. Louisaire subsequently moves in for three weeks to assess the situation, and eventually lays claim to the apartment.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ CONRAD PHILISTI-RALESTINE Willy Protagoras, I'm warning you, I will make no concession; I will not give in to any blackmail on your part.

JEANNINE PROTAGORAS Listen to Mister Philisti-Ralestine, Willy.

CONRAD PHILISTI-RALESTINE You hear? Even your mother, who is normally quite slow, agrees with me. Get out of there, you bastard!

ASSAD PROTAGORAS Willy, don't come out. Just to annoy the crap out of him!

CONRAD PHILISTI-RALESTINE It will make you crap as much as me, you cur.

JEANNINE PROTAGORAS Willy, I beg you, do it for me, come out.

ASSAD PROTAGORAS You can bet that I'm going to take a crap, and on your bit of carpet as well.

⁴⁹ This is a scathing critique of the involvement of foreign powers in the Lebanese war, and particularly of Syria who entered Lebanon at the request of the Maronite

Act III begins with a discussion between Assad Protagoras and Conrad Philisti-Ralestine, united against Maxime Louisaire but unable to act for fear of exacerbating the situation with their neighbours. Like the Lebanese war, conflict divides neighbours and families,⁵⁰ encouraging factions to form alliances solely in the interest of defeating an enemy, whether real or perceived. In the case of the apartment feud, the notary is an insidious, destructive force, an animal-like man who will stop at nothing for 'the best place in the sun'. However, by the time the warring families see that Louisaire is a threat it is too late. He has garnered the approbation of the apartment building's other residents, and the will of the larger community overcomes the objections of individuals (including those of Assad, who owns the apartment). Act III also stages a number of dialogues between Abgar, the Philisti-Ralestine's son and Willy, who are best friends. Abgar explains that his sister, Naïmé, has disappeared and that Maxime Louisaire is preparing a petition for his family's departure. This is the first time that the play's younger generation is brought together. In spite of the family feud, the young people have maintained bonds of friendship and have not succumbed to the violence and bestiality of their elders. Abgar remains Willy's best friend, despite the fact that he doesn't understand his sequestration. However, Abgar also remains outside the toilet. Unlike Willy (locked away), Nelly (gone), and Naïmé (missing), Abgar is in direct contact with the community elders.

community in 1976, and remained in the country until ousted by the Cedar Revolution in 2005.

⁵⁰ See Mouawad's Presentation at Ombres Blanches, Toulouse, 27 November 2009.

Willy entreats his friend to find Naïmé, which Abgar agrees to do. An exchange between Louisaire and Willy reinforces the dominance of the collective (represented by the notary) over the individual (Willy) and articulates Louisaire's determination to break Willy. Willy refuses to submit, giving an impassioned speech about painting:

WILLY La peinture est une balançoire ! Avec ses couleurs, couleurs, voyager ! Voyager ! Sortir de chez moi et marcher la tête droite ! La tête droite ! Ne pas avoir peur que le vent fasse tomber votre chapeau. En l'an 223, vivait un garçon que tout le monde a oublié ! Aujourd'hui, je veux penser à lui ! Je me demande quelle texture ça a le caca ! Avec un peu d'effort, ça devrait bien s'étaler ! J'essayerai !⁵¹ (Mouawad 2004: 56)

It is worth noting here that visual art plays an important role in Mouawad's work; it is often an expression of individuality, freedom from external constraints, and the individual's ability to transcend the present by connecting with others, both past and future.⁵² Willy wants to connect with another boy from the year 223, to think about that individual and express his connection through art. He will use his excrement to paint, to create something beautiful out of waste. This is another consistent theme in Mouawad's work, summarized on his website's homepage:

⁵¹ Painting is a swing! With these colours, colours, travel! To travel! Get out of here and walk with my head high! Not to worry about the wind knocking your hat off. In the year 223 lived a boy that everyone has forgotten! Today, I want to think of him! I wonder what texture poop has! With a bit of effort, it should be spreadable! I will try!

⁵² This is a theme that is again explicitly articulated in *Ciels*. 'Tu verras des verts qui étaient là bien longtemps avant ta naissance et qui vont continuer à être là bien longtemps après ta mort !' (Mouawad 2009d: 72). ('You will see greens that were there long before you were born and that will continue to be there long after your death!')

De ces excréments dont il se nourrit, le scarabée tire la substance appropriée à la production de cette carapace si magnifique qu'on lui connaît et qui émeut notre regard : le vert jade du scarabée de Chine, le rouge pourpre du scarabée d'Afrique, le noir de jais du scarabée d'Europe et le trésor du scarabée d'or, mythique entre tous, introuvable, mystère des mystères. Un artiste est un scarabée qui trouve, dans les excréments mêmes de la société, les aliments nécessaires pour produire les œuvres qui fascinent et bouleversent ses semblables.⁵³ (<http://www.wajdimouawad.fr>)

Without food and water, Willy finds nourishment in art (even the idea of art).

However, his brief poetic outburst is short-lived and immediately followed by the arrival of the building's other residents, summoned to hear Maxime Louisaire's solution to the conflict. The community intrudes again, this time by penetrating the apartment. As a result of his three weeks of 'research', Louisaire has come to the conclusion that the neighbours should vote for the immediate expulsion of the Philisti-Ralestines. He deflects all arguments by implying that Conrad Philisti-Ralestine is a threat to the other residents. With all convened, there is no argument from the other residents, in spite of the Philisti-Ralestines' obvious distress.

Abgar Philisti-Ralestine has few lines in Act III after his initial discussion with Willy, until end of the act, when the cadence of his speech gains momentum in tandem with his parents' distress. He first speaks when the other residents enter the

⁵³ 'From this excrement with which it nourishes itself, the beetle draws the substance it needs to produce the magnificent carapace for which the beetle is so well-known, and by which we are moved upon sight: the jade green of the Chinese beetle, the purple of the African jewel beetle, the jet black of the European beetle, and the treasure that is the mythical, untraceable golden beetle, the mystery of mysteries. An artist is a beetle who finds, in the very excrement of society, the nutrients necessary to create the works that fascinate and overwhelm others.' (Mouawad (n.d.), n.r.). (<http://www.wajdimouawad.fr>)

apartment: 'J'en ai assez, mais assez ! Mon Dieu, vraiment assez!'⁵⁴ (Mouawad 2004:

60) Ignored by the others, Abgar speaks again when Louisaire confirms that everyone is present:

ABGAR PHILISTI-RALESTINE Non, il manque quelqu'un. Il manque Naïmé Philisti-Ralestine, ma sœur.
MAXIME LOUISAIRE Elle ne compte pas, elle n'est pas encore majeure.⁵⁵ (Mouawad 2004: 60)

As with Willy, Louisaire negates Naïmé as an individual, this time on the grounds of the law. Personhood is determined solely by an external authority, negating the importance of the person in and of herself. Willy responds to Louisaire's statement by singing, and one of the residents asks what the sound is. Again, Louisaire negates the voice, saying 'Aucune importance'⁵⁶ (Mouawad 2004: 61). As Louisaire refocuses the discussion on his assessment, he is persistently interrupted by Willy's poetic singing. Willy's song distracts two of those present, Catherine Octobre and Astrid Machin, bewildering them with its beauty, as it repeatedly disrupts Maxime Louisaire's banal discourse. Abgar has one line during the debate, responding to Willy's poetry prior to Maxime Louisaire explaining his decision.

ABGAR PHILISTI-RALESTINE Willy! Willy, je ne te reverrai plus.⁵⁷ (Mouawad 2004: 62)

⁵⁴ I've had enough already, enough! My God, really enough!

⁵⁵ ABGAR PHILISTI-RALESTINE No, someone is missing, My sister, Naïmé Philisti-Ralestine, is missing.

MAXIME LOUISAIRE She doesn't count, she isn't yet an adult.

⁵⁶ 'It is unimportant.'

⁵⁷ ABGAR PHILISTI-RALESTINE Willy! Willy! I will never see you again.

Unable to continue living in his present context, Abgar recognizes his impending fate. As the pace of the scene accelerates, Conrad collapses, and Abgar encourages his father to get up. As Conrad begins to submit to Louisaire's decision, Abgar speaks:

ABGAR PHILISTI-RALESTINE Nous nous en irons, papa, vous vous en irez, toi et maman.⁵⁸ (Mouawad 2004: 66)

In this line, Abgar shifts semantically from an inclusive first person plural to the second person plural, removing himself from the family unit. Jeannine and Maxime Louisaire explain that everything is ready for their departure, in the middle of which Abgar speaks again, about the beauty of the sea. His mother responds to him, but the discussion continues until Abgar expresses his exasperation:

ABGAR PHILISTI-RALESTINE Quelle vie, quelle vie. [...] Je n'ai rien choisi. Je voulais dire en fait que ça ne va pas très bien, mais ça ne sert à rien, car personne ici ne va particulièrement bien. [...] Si vous pensez que j'ai vraiment envie de trimpler des valises.
WILLY. Maman, si la fenêtre est ouverte, ferme-la.
[...]
ABGAR PHILISTI-RALESTINE Merci, Willy, de toujours me comprendre, même maintenant, mais la fenêtre est ouverte, et il est trop tard.⁵⁹ (Mouawad 2004: 66-67)

⁵⁸ We will go away, Dad, you will leave, you and Mom.

⁵⁹ ABGAR PHILISTI-RALESTINE What a life, what a life. [...] I never had a choice. I wanted to say in fact that I'm not doing very well, but it's pointless, because nobody here is doing very well. [...] If you think that I really want to lug suitcases around.
WILLY Mom, if the window is open, close it. [...]
ABGAR PHILISTI-RALESTINE Thank you Willy, for always understanding me, even now, but the window is open, and it's too late.

Abgar throws himself out of the window. The first youth casualty in a senseless conflict perpetuated by others and sustained by the community. The act ends with Willy shouting that he is coming out of the toilet.

Act IV first begins with a change of set: the audience is now with Willy in the toilet. It is the first time the audience sees Willy. Spectators hear the voice of Abgar's sister, Naïmé, who yells at Willy to stay in the toilet, no matter what happens. By encouraging Willy to remain, Naïmé violates the community's consensus and contradicts their efforts to extrude Willy from his barricade. As Maxime Louisaire says: 'Naïmé n'est plus rien a nos yeux,'⁶⁰ (Mouawad 2004: 78). The community hangs Naïmé, leading Willy to leave the toilet at the end of Act IV.

Act V is structurally a return to Act I: the neighbours are gossiping, this time inside the apartment and in the presence of Willy's family. Once again, Willy is described to the audience by the other characters, this time in positive terms, as he has yielded to the community. Voiceless, he sits at the table, only speaking at the very end of the play to Maxime Louisaire, through the window, after all of the characters have left or died. Willy, therefore, has the play's final words:

WILLY Il est vrai que j'ai tout perdu, mais aujourd'hui c'est moi qui me tiens devant cette fenêtre si belle ! Et c'est à travers elle que je vous parle, Maxime Louisaire, et c'est de l'autre côté de cette fenêtre que vous m'écoutez, que vous m'écouteriez toujours, que vous m'écouteriez sans cesse ! Sans cesse ! Maxime Louisaire, le cri que j'ai lancé résonne sans cesse ! [...] Et plus tard, Maxime Louisaire, plus tard, lorsque cet immeuble se sera écroulé, lorsqu'il ne restera de vous et de moi qu'un tas de cendres, après la peur de la mort que vous ressentirez tout comme moi, après tout cela, il restera toujours mon cri, Maxime Louisaire, le mien, et non pas le

⁶⁰ 'Naïmé is nothing to us.'

votre, car vous êtes de ceux qui écoutez ! [...] Entendez-vous le cri d'amour que je suis ? *Willy se défenestre*.⁶¹ (Mouawad 2004: 89)

His cry and his voice express the individuality that is preserved, first by means of a barricade against the tyranny of the community, and second through suicide. Here the voice is an externalised expression of the self, and Mouawad is articulating a fundamental struggle between life and life; that is, between a life of acceptance and a life lived in meaning. For Willy, as for Abgar, the emotive cry of individual expression is negated by the community. The only freedom they have is to choose between a life subject to the will of others, which annihilates freedom, and death. Through death these characters assert their freedom as individuals.

5.2 Protagoras

Of all the things the measure is man, of the things that are, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not. (Protagoras 1983: 126)

Willy's character is far from the fragmented character of the postdramatic, although he does not represent a return to a cohesive character identity. The character is not a given, but rather a process of actualisation that yields self-affirmation. However,

⁶¹ It is true that I lost everything, but today, I am the one holding myself before this beautiful window! And it is through this window that I speak to you, Maxime Louisaire, and it is from the other side of this window that you listen to me, that you will forever listen to me, that you listen to me endlessly! Endlessly! Maxime Louisaire, the cry that I have thrown resonates endlessly! [...] And later, Maxime Louisaire, later when this building will have collapsed, when there will be nothing left of you and me than a heap of ashes, after the fear of death that you will feel as I feel, after all this, my cry will still remain, Maxime Louisaire, mine, and not yours, as you are of those who listen! [...] Do you hear this cry of love that I am? (*Willy jumps out of the window.*)

this affirmation is one that is achieved through recognition of finitude and mortality, as evidenced by the temporal significance of Willy's suicide speech. The self is mortal, subject to loss, and simultaneously there is something of the self that can transcend time. Willy's speech is one of several references in Mouawad's work to the individual's transcendence of time through a lasting trace of the self.⁶²

The name as trace of identity is significant throughout Mouawad's work.⁶³ The etymological significance of the name Philisti-Ralestine was cited above; in *Willy Protagoras*, characters' names situate the production within a Franco-Arabic environment. The use of Arabic names (Ghassane Mahbousse, Hakim Mahkoum, Noha em Naïm) and French names (Maxime Louisaire, Remillard Ervefel, Catherine Octobre) act as semantic markers of multicultural affiliation.⁶⁴ Names act as markers that carry within them traces of past and present signification. In the case of Willy, the name Protagoras refers to the question of subjectivity and man's relationship to the world.⁶⁵

Protagoras of Abdera was one of the earliest Sophists, the fifth century Athenian teachers and thinkers disparaged by Plato for engaging in an 'appropriative, coercive, hunting art which hunts animals, land animals, tame animals, man, privately, for pay, is paid in cash, claims to give education, and is a

⁶² Another example from this production: WILLY Ne vous inquiétez donc pas pour ma peinture, même dans un cercueil je trouverai encore le moyen de tracer une ligne! (Mouawad 2004: 55).

⁶³ On the significance of names, see Chapter 3, p.190, footnote 54 and Chapter 4 p.239.

⁶⁴ During the Lebanese war, names could have a deadly significance: surnames categorised individuals according to a family's religious affiliation.

⁶⁵ The use of the name Protagoras also indicates Mouawad's interest in philosophy at the very start of his career.

hunt after rich and promising youths, [which] must—so our present argument concludes—be called sophistry'.⁶⁶ A contemporary of Sophocles, Protagoras lived during the Golden Age of Ancient Greece and is primarily memorialised in Plato's dialogue that bears his name. A few fragments have also survived, including the citation that is conventionally translated as: 'Of all things the measure is Man, of the things that are, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not.' (DK80b1⁶⁷).

One of the central themes in *Willy Protagoras* is the self's complex relationship to the world. The question of the individual's self-determination within a given environment is a significant point of departure from Greek tragedy. In Mouawad's work, the self has agency (if only self-destruction) and is not subject to fatalistic determination. Rejecting absolute determinism, Mouawad's artistic world is one in which the individual's perspective and knowledge shapes his or her environment. The relativistic implications of the Protagoras fragment are addressed at length in Plato's dialogue *Protagoras*. The fragment was again the focus of attention in the works of Nietzsche,⁶⁸ with which Heidegger takes issue in his work

⁶⁶ Plato, trans. by H. N. Fowler, 1921. *Sophist*, 223b (*Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 12, Cambridge, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd; <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3atext%3a1999.01.0172%3atext%3dSoph.>)

⁶⁷ This numbering system refers to the Diels-Kranz compilation of Pre-Socratic fragments, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. The English translation is from Kathleen Freeman's English translation of the Diels fifth edition, published under the title *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*.

⁶⁸ 'His method is to treat man as the measure of all things, but in doing so he again proceeds from the error of believing that he has these things [which he intends to measure] immediately before him as mere objects.' (Nietzsche 2012: 26)

on Nietzsche.⁶⁹ Heidegger's characterisation of Protagoras' statement is closely related to his critique of post-Platonic philosophy's 'forgetting' of un-concealment. Manfred Frings summarizes Heidegger's position: 'For the theme in this fragment is the Beingness of things and nothingness in their relatedness to man.' (Frings 1974: 120). In his 1940 typescript 'Nietzsche's Metaphysics', Heidegger explains Nietzsche's 'Will to Power' as a reformulation of the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*, and rejects Nietzsche's interpretation of the Protagoras fragment as a reflection of absolute subjectivity. It is not man who appropriates the world and determines the being of things in the world, but rather man is the measure whereby that which is concealed and unconcealed in terms of beings can be ascertained. Man lives in relation to the 'Beingness of things', rather than as the entity that determines Beingness. In *Willy Protagoras*, the conflict between Willy and Maxime Louisaire is the conflict between the self as a being living in relation to the world, and the self as subject to the determinations of the external.

The emphasis on concealment and unconcealment identified by Heidegger in his interpretation of the Protagoras fragment is also important for *Willy Protagoras* and for Mouawad's characterisation of the self. In this early play, the main character Willy is concealed, locked in the toilet, and does not become visible until Act IV. At this point, the change of set places the spectators in the toilet with Willy. Mouawad is playing with the visible and invisible: at the point at which Willy was about to

⁶⁹ 'For Protagoras, man in his selfhood is defined by his belonging in the radius of the unconcealed. [...] For Protagoras, man is the measure of all things in the sense of a measured restriction to the radius of the unconcealed and to the boundaries of the concealed.' (Heidegger 1991: 122)

reveal himself to the audience, the audience is transported into Willy's confined space, away from the physical intersubjective and into the site of the intrasubjective. Towards the end of the act, Naïmé asks: 'Willy, dis-moi vite : qui est-ce qui est enfermé, toi ou moi. Qui est-ce qui est à l'intérieur et qui est-ce qui est à l'extérieur ?'⁷⁰ (Mouawad 2004: 80) This inversion helps amplify the sharp distinction between the external, social world of the apartment and the space that Willy has claimed for himself. Yet, although Willy is claiming a space for himself, he is not self-constituting. Meaning is not defined on the basis of what Willy is able to appropriate for himself, but rather by what exceeds him, and thereby connects him to others. This is explicitly stated in Willy's conversation with the figment of his imagination, Marguerite Cotaux, when she says: 'Tu vas mourir Willy Protagoras, mais quelque chose de plus grand que toi, de plus grand qu'eux, de plus grand que vous tous, survivra. À l'instant où tu fermeras les yeux, un éclair t'apparaîtra et tu comprendras.'⁷¹ (Mouawad 2004: 80). This 'flash of lightning' is the revelation of understanding; the unconcealment of knowledge.

Willy's final self-affirmation critiques Louisaire as one who 'listens' and divides people into those who subjectively listen and those who resist, voicing their cry. Mouawad distinguishes between those who accept the appearance of the given and the everyday life (the neighbours) and those who struggle towards their

⁷⁰ 'Willy, tell me quickly: who is locked in, you or me? Who is inside and who is outside?'

⁷¹ 'You are going to die, Willy Protagoras, but something greater than yourself, something greater than them, something greater than all of you will survive. The instant that you will close your eyes, a flash of lightning will appear and you will understand.'

individuality, their self-ness (in this place, the youths Willy, Abgar and Naïmé). In Patočka terms, Willy, Abgar and Naïmé are among those who struggle for their very humanity. As the philosopher Ivan Chvatík explains:

[A]fter the collapse of metaphysics, positive science and its outgrowth, technology, have succeeded in so far-reachingly uncovering what-is that this discovery has completely covered up, concealed the understanding of Being which makes it possible. Patočka proposes to solve through conflict the conflict in Being consisting in revealedness causing concealment—to solve it, more precisely, by means of a sacrifice which would not be for anything existent but rather for appearing as such: to overturn the total levelling down to the sustaining of life for life and make clear that man is fully human only when he exceeds this level. (Chvatík 2009: 9)

This rejection of the passive life, Patočka's everyday 'life of sustenance',⁷² is precisely what the sacrifice of Naïmé, Abgar and Willy entails. In struggling against the imposition of the everyday, they realize that they must sacrifice themselves in order not to negate themselves, and in order to be fully human. In the realm of the everyday, they are negated, both implicitly (by the community) and explicitly (by the law). (Mouawad 2004: 61). Through self-sacrifice, Willy and Naïmé follow in Abgar's footsteps. They reject the imposed life and choose to leave the everyday, throwing themselves out of the window.⁷³

⁷² See Chapter 2, p.107

⁷³ Given Mouawad's interest in Patočka, it is surely relevant that the characters in *Willy Protogoras* die by defenestration. At numerous points in Czech history, defenestration played a vital role in shaping historical events, usually when a political dissident mysteriously died by falling from a window. For instance, in 1948, Jan Masaryk, a politician who was unpopular with the Communist political regime, and the son of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, a philosopher and the first President of Czechoslovakia (also a great influence on both Husserl and Patočka) died by falling

6 *Seuls*

6.1 Beheading the banal

Chacun ne peut regarder que par sa propre fenêtre. Le lieu où nous sommes installés ne nous renseigne pas sur le paysage que chacun observe. Nous naissons et la fenêtre naît avec nous, nous mourons et la fenêtre s'efface en laissant cependant une trace de son existence, trace plus ou moins vive en fonction de celui qui a regardé à travers la fenêtre : un enfant, une œuvre, un geste... pérennité de la trace sur le regard. [...] Jamais personne, ni dans le passé, ni dans le présent, ni dans le futur, n'a vu, ne voit, ne verra, ce que moi j'y vois. Mon regard est à moi.⁷⁴ (Mouawad 2009e: 24-25)

Mouawad's characterisation of the self as a window at the end of *Willy Protagoras* recurs in his solo performance *Seuls*.⁷⁵ Written sixteen years after Mouawad's first play, *Seuls* revisits many of the themes of *Willy Protagoras*: expression, legacy, self-discovery and unconcealment. In *Seuls* the protagonist, Harwan, played by

from a window. This was ruled a suicide by the Communist authorities, but a post-Communist era police forensics report concluded that Masaryk was thrown to his death. For many Czechs, Masaryk's defenestration marked the physical and symbolic end of opposition to the Communist Party. As for Mouawad's *Willy Protagoras*, the price of resistance was death.

⁷⁴ Everyone can only gaze out of his or her own window. The place where we are located does not give us information on the landscape that each person sees. We are born and the window is born with us, we die and the window is erased, but leaves a trace of its existence, a trace that is more or less marked depending on the person who looked through the window: a child, a work, a gesture... the persistence of the trace on the gaze. [...] No one, either in the past, the present or the future has seen, sees or will see what I see. My gaze is mine.

⁷⁵ *Seuls* was first performed in 2007 at the Espace Malraux, scène nationale de Chambéry et de la Savoie. It has subsequently been performed in France, Canada, Belgium, Lebanon, Spain, Russia, Colombia, Romania and Mexico (Avignon 2008) and completed its early 2015 run on 24 March in Rennes.

Mouawad, is writing a thesis on the work of Robert Lepage. Harwan is at odds with his world; his thesis is eluding him, he has just broken up with his girlfriend, and argues with his sister and father. Meanwhile, Harwan is preparing to travel to St Petersburg to meet Lepage. While having his passport photos taken, he receives a phone call from the police informing him that his father has had a cerebro-vascular accident and is in hospital. Harwan calls his sister Layla to tell her of the accident and she convinces him to travel to St Petersburg regardless. Before leaving he visits his father in hospital, and addresses a long monologue to the audience. Harwan travels to Russia, only to discover that Lepage is in America. Despairing, he listens to a recording of Lepage reading the story of the prodigal son, and opens his suitcase to find it filled with paint and paintbrushes. The hotel phone rings, followed by his disconnected apartment phone. Layla leaves a message on his machine. Listening to it, Harwan realizes to his horror that his sister is speaking to him, urging him to wake up, and that he is in fact the one who had a cerebro-vascular accident, and everything that happened since his passport photos has been a delusion within a coma.

The play opens with Harwan practicing a speech for his thesis defence. He struggles to find his conclusion:

[J]e commence a comprendre qu'il n'existe sans doute pas de conclusion à ma thèse, cette hostie de thèse reposant finalement sur une théorie qui est en train de totalement crisser le camp, tabarnac! *Il se défenestre.*⁷⁶ (Mouawad 2008a: 127)

⁷⁶ I am beginning to understand that in all likelihood there is no conclusion to my thesis, this damned thesis which is based on a theory that is in the process completely unravelling, fuck! *He jumps out of the window.*

The stage direction – *il se défenestre* – is precisely that used at the end of *Willy Protogoras*. Harwan, in a projected image, climbs over the bed-bound Harwan and jumps out the window. In *Seuls*, Harwan’s thesis on Lepage is entitled ‘Le cadre comme espace identitaire dans les solos de Robert Lepage’, or ‘The frame as a space of identity in the solos of Robert Lepage’. In Mouawad’s plays, the frame is not a space or demarcation of identity, but rather the individual perspective or consciousness; it performs a dual function: as consciousness, it is constitutive of the self, and spatially it is the physical demarcation of inside/outside. In *Seuls*, the inside/outside is not the simple division between self and community in *Willy Protogoras*. Rather, the inside/outside is an internal division between selves. When the projected Harwan goes to the window and jumps out, he gazes back at the sleeping Harwan, and later in the production, the projected shadow of Harwan attacks the sleeping Harwan before jumping through the window. The window marks the delimitation between one form of self (within the room) and the other (that jumps).⁷⁷

The external world (his dissertation, family, ex-girlfriend and new apartment) frustrates Harwan. The projected selves that jump out of the window increasingly conflict with the living, everyday Harwan. The first projection jumps out the window, a later projection violently shakes the bed on which Harwan is sleeping, and another comes toward the reminiscing Harwan with a knife. These

⁷⁷ It is perhaps relevant that in both *Willy Protogoras* and *Seuls*, the act of jumping out of the window represents a move towards a certain authenticity of self in rejecting the ‘everyday’ life.

projections all occur within the first act;⁷⁸ that is, before the photo booth scene in which Harwan has his cerebro-vascular accident. They are all aspects of Harwan's self, unperceived by him. After his accident the projections stop. There is a marked transition between the disaffected protagonist in conflict with his environment of the first scenes, and the Harwan who believes his father is in hospital. This transition is the result of the 'disappearance' of the physical Harwan, as, from this point on, the action is entirely taking place within Harwan's consciousness.

Act II begins with Harwan's monologue in the hospital. He is finally able to speak candidly to his father, with whom communication is difficult, reminiscing about Lebanon and discussing the nature of exile:

L'exile c'est peut-être ça : l'impossibilité de rattraper le retard. [...] Je voulais être étoile filante, ensuite océanographe, ensuite ingénieur biomécanique et là, professeur à l'université. J'ai l'impression d'un déclin. Il faudrait tout redéployer pour retrouver l'enchantement d'avant. Parce qu'il y avait bien un enchantement, papa ? Je veux dire ça ne peut pas être ça la vie : avoir mal et s'habituer à avoir mal ? Gérer l'ennui perpétuel, le manque d'enthousiasme.⁷⁹ (Mouawad 2008: 151)

The everyday Harwan is aware of having lost what he terms 'enchantment', which elsewhere in the monologue is associated with pictures he painted as a child. Exile is

⁷⁸ Like most of Mouawad's plays, *Seuls* is divided into scenes not acts. However, the main plot points in *Seuls* point to a broad three act structure. Referring to the events by act helps to delineate a broader section of the production than otherwise possible in a listing of scenes.

⁷⁹ Perhaps that is exile: the impossibility of catching up lost time. [...] I wanted to be a shooting star, then an oceanographer, then a biomechanical engineer, and now university professor. I have the impression of a decline. It would be necessary to redeploy everything in order to again find the enchantment of the past. Because there was in fact an enchantment, dad? I mean, life can't be this: being in pain and getting used to being in pain? Managing perpetual boredom, the lack of enthusiasm.

not only physical exile from a land of sun and sea, to a land of snow, but the perpetual estrangement from childhood and its correlate wonder. It is an estrangement from the self as embodied by the child, whose trace is buried in the process of living.

When Harwan hears Layla's message, explaining that he is in a coma, there is another reversal as he comes to realize that he is confined to his own consciousness, which has since his accident deceived him. The walls of the room are suddenly his confinement. Slamming himself against the window, now solid, behind which a projection of a hospital bed is visible, Harwan screams: 'Non! Je suis là! Je suis là! Layla, Layla, je suis là, je suis là! C'est moi, Harwan, je suis là!'⁸⁰ (Mouawad 2008: 163). He cannot climb through the window, and panicking, begins to look around him. Sounds begin to filter through: of breeze, birds, and a dog in the distance. Against a combined soundtrack of sounds from his childhood, and his sister's voice, Harwan climbs into a tub and pours a bucket of 'hot water' over himself, which stains his body red.⁸¹ Climbing out of the tub, the stage directions indicate:

B. ARPENTAGE

Il pose un pied devant l'autre.

Laisse les traces rouges de chacun de ses pas.

Il arpente son territoire.

Les traces de ses pas forment un rectangle:

*c'est son territoire.*⁸²

⁸⁰ 'No! I am here! I am here! Layla, Layla, I am here, I am here! It's me, Harwan, I am here!'

⁸¹ Note the similarity with the staged 'blood bath' in *Littoral*. See Introduction, 4.c.

⁸² B. LAND SURVEYING

He places one foot in front of the other.

Leaves the red traces of each of his steps.

He is surveying his territory.

Interestingly, the title of the stage directions recalls literature's famous 'arpenteur' or surveyor, K. from Kafka's *The Castle*. In his article 'Surveying the Castle: Kafka's colonial visions', John Zilcosky discusses K's work as land surveyor and its implications for the interpretation of *The Castle*. Zilcosky observes that:

Because K. gains no visual high ground throughout the novel, he can never sufficiently organize the village as a view, can never frame or map it. He thus remains inexorably inside of what he is trying to measure and describe. He is not a distinct (the hero of a narrative of self-discovery detachedly observing objects) but a subject who is also an object among objects. (Zilcosky, in Rolleston 2003: 298)

To a great degree this also explicates *Seuls*. As Harwan moves away from his thesis, he becomes increasingly unable to organize his thoughts, to formulate the framework that concludes his analysis of the 'frame as a space of identity'. Unable to find a theoretical high ground, Harwan finds himself bewildered by the external world. His cerebral haemorrhage marks the moment wherein Harwan finds himself 'inexorably inside what he is trying to measure and describe': the frame. However, unlike K., this does not entail a loss of individuation, but rather Mouawad's own conception of the 'space of identity'. Harwan is in the space of self-discovery, where his own steps visibly trace his territory in bright red paint. In *Seuls*, self-discovery is a process of reconnecting with the primordial self, a process that takes place through connection with specific artefacts: paint and paintbrushes. Self-discovery

*The traces of his steps form a rectangle:
It is his territory.*

only becomes possible once the detachment characteristic of the first act of the play is abandoned in favour of expression in Act III.

During this act Harwan does not speak, only crying out during his self-mutilation. This act marks the character's forced exile from the everyday life, to a confrontation with internal consciousness. Punctuated only by the voices of others (e.g. Harwan's sister and his thesis director) this act consists of a series of events propelling Harwan's process of self-discovery through art. He returns to the paints of his childhood, painting himself in vivid colours against the walls of his consciousness.

C. BUSTE

Il se dirige vers la membrane qui le sépare de la chambre d'hôpital.

Il se voit toujours couché.

Il se colle contre la membrane et y imprime la trace de son corps rouge.

*Contre la paroi solide qui sépare en deux la grande membrane:
Harwan écrit son prénom 'Harwan' de droite à gauche.⁸³
(Mouawad 2008: 168)*

He paints his name in Latin script, but from right to left, as in Arabic, across the window now closed to him; as he finds himself within his consciousness, there is no open window through which to plunge. Harwan covers himself in paint and literally leaves a trace of himself as he presses his body against the transparent membrane

⁸³ C. BUST

He goes towards the membrane that separates him from the hospital room.

He sees himself still in bed.

He presses himself against the membrane, leaving the trace of his red body.

Against the solid wall that divides the large membrane in half:

Harwan writes his first name 'Harwan' from right to left.

that separates him from his physical, hospitalised self. He staples his clothes to the wall, forming a body. Harwan and his traces are inhabiting a room of the 'building' that is the self, and making himself anew through colour and words, uniting verbal and non-verbal expression.

Mid-way through this process, Harwan hears the doctor explain to his sister and father that though he will recover, he will be blind. Harwan then goes to his thesis, tears the pages apart, wraps his head in the paper, takes a knife and blinds himself. He then stabs the knife into his lower belly and guts himself.

*Harwan est abasourdi par ce qu'il vient d'entendre.
Il se lève.
Sa main attrape un couteau.
Il erre.
Il s'arrête.
Il se crève les yeux : ses yeux saignent.
Il s'éventre.
Il erre le couteau enfoncé dans le bas-ventre.⁸⁴ (Mouawad
2008: 171)*

The action is accompanied by Harwan's moaning cries, intensifying throughout. In these scenes, which are combined under the header '06. Corps' (body), Harwan is raging against physical incapacitation, inflicting wounds upon his consciousness. Subsequent scenes, under the header '07. Conscience' mark a transition from rage, at the end of which Harwan seems to see the paints anew. This section is divided

⁸⁴ *Harwan is dumbfounded by what he has just heard.
He gets up.
His hand grabs a knife.
He wanders.
He stops.
He gouges out his eyes: his eyes bleed.
He eviscerates himself.
He twists the knife that is thrust into the lower stomach.*

into two short scenes: 'A. MÉNAGE' (clearing up) and 'B. NETTOYAGE' (cleaning up). In scene A, Harwan begins to organize his paints; the scene concludes with the stage directions '*Il saisit un pinceau. Il comprend.*'⁸⁵ In scene B, Harwan begins to paint again, but this time with purpose, and not desperation. The next header is '08. Esprit' (spirit). Scene 'A. LES MAINS DU PEINTRE' (the hands of the painter) begins with the stage directions '*Harwan se lève. L'esprit clair.*'⁸⁶ Through his self-mutilation, Harwan has cut away his corporeal everyday self; through the process of internal tidying of the mess caused by desperation, he has accepted his integration into his internal consciousness. As with Willy, physical annihilation here enables the emergence of the authentic, the discovery of the inner self. This becomes clear in the final three scenes of Act III, 'B. LES GESTES DU PEINTRE', 'C. L'ESPRIT DU PEINTRE' and 'D. LE LIEU DU PEINTRE'.⁸⁷

Harwan has removed the mask-like painted paper from his head, and stapled it to the silhouette on the wall. At this point, Harwan returns to his painting, throwing paint onto the walls and onto himself. He unfolds the wall-membranes to form a sort of enclosure, and uses his hands to colour the membranes, i.e. the contours of his consciousness. In scene C., the voice of his thesis supervisor suddenly interrupts, as Rembrandt's *The Return of the Prodigal Son* is projected onto the now-solid 'window'. The supervisor, Paul Rusenski, reads Harwan his

⁸⁵ '*He seizes a paintbrush. He understands.*'

⁸⁶ '*Harwan gets up. His mind is clear.*'

⁸⁷ B. THE GESTURES OF THE PAINTER; C. THE SPIRIT OF THE PAINTER; D. THE SITE OF THE PAINTER.

conclusion, which they found among his things. In the solo performances of Robert Lepage, Harwan had written, the frame escapes the laws of time, space and gravity:

Ce cadre est le lieu de tous les possibles, mais aussi de tous les rêves, lieu d'apparition, d'imaginaire, inépuisable. Il est donc d'une nature paradoxale : le lieu fini est celui de l'infini, la limite offre l'illimité, la frontière l'ouverture, la borne l'insoupçonné. L'opacité disparaît et la surface, sur laquelle le regard s'arrêtait, révèle une profondeur ou l'esprit n'étouffe pas sur lui-même mais s'ouvre sur un espace où le corps, enfin libéré, aborde le rivage des sensations retrouvées...⁸⁸ (Mouawad 2008: 182)

The frame moves beyond the confines of the canvas. It is the visual representation of the self. Each body or person is a self whose finitude points to the infinite within, whose physical limits are merely a structure harbouring multiplicity, the denial of which is the negation of the authentic self. In 'rediscovering sensations', the body is turning to itself, to its own experience, and acknowledging what lies within. It is an acknowledgement of the traces of the past that an individual carries within the self. As explored in Chapter 2, these traces, through confrontation, memory and openness, draw the self into a rejection of the banal, everyday world imposed by routine and stifling society.

Coma comme espace de bataille où,
tel Persée,
Harwan aura à trancher
la tête d'une méduse :

⁸⁸ This frame is the site of all possibilities, but also of all dreams, the site of apparitions, the imaginary, inexhaustible. It is therefore paradoxical: the finite site is the site of the infinite, limitations offer the unlimited, the boundary openness, the boundary marker the unsuspected. Opacity disappears and the surface, on which the gaze rested, reveals a depth where the spirit does not suffocate itself, but opens onto a space where the body, finally free, approaches the edge of rediscovered sensations...

la vie banale et ennuyeuse
à laquelle il se destinait !⁸⁹ (Mouawad (2008) p.116)

The battle against and consequent annihilation of banality is a rejection of the everyday. In the published notes included with the script of *Seuls*, cited above, Mouawad tells a tale that often appears in his exegetical works, about a child who gets up in the night for a glass of water to find a tiger in the kitchen.

Visiblement, le tigre est affamé et s'approche de l'enfant qui, tendant la main, attrape un grand couteau. Aussitôt, une pensée naît dans l'esprit de l'enfant : soit je tue le tigre et je retourne dans mon lit et la vie continue comme avant, soit je laisse le tigre me dévorer pour que, une fois avalé, je devienne, dans le ventre du tigre, le tigre. Malgré sa frayeur, l'enfant opte pour cette seconde alternative et s'entend éclater de rire au moment où le tigre se jette sur lui et le dévore. Une fois dévoré, l'enfant retourne se coucher sachant qu'à jamais il fera toujours le choix d'une vie sage et sauvage.⁹⁰ (Mouawad 2008: 53)

This story echoes Harwan's annihilation by himself; two seeming annihilations that are metamorphoses. In a reverse of Gregor Samsa's fate, the child and Harwan are transformed in their rejection of the accepted life, which entails a consequent awareness of self. Protagonists in Mouawad's works, and Harwan here in particular,

⁸⁹ Coma as the battle site where,
like Perseus,
Harwan will have to
behead a medusa:
the banal and boring life
to which he was being destined!

⁹⁰ The tiger is visibly famished and approaches the child who reaches out and grabs a large knife. Immediately, a thought arises in the child's spirit: either I kill the tiger and return to my bed and life continues as before, or I let the tiger devour me so that, once swallowed, I become, in the tiger's stomach, the tiger. In spite of his terror, the child chose the second option and heard himself burst out laughing the moment the tiger pounces on him and devours him. Once devoured, the child goes back to bed knowing that he will forever choose the life that is at once wise and untamed.

'choose' to enter the frame through which they can glimpse the infinity within.

Seuls ends with the voice of Paul Rusenski reading Harwan's conclusion. As Rusenski vocalises Harwan's theory, Harwan turns toward the projected painting, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, and asks: 'Qui sommes nous et qui croyons-nous être ? Des aveugles qui se pensent doués de vision! [...] Comment dit-on *mémoire* en arabe ?'⁹¹ (Mouawad 2008: 184). In this penultimate scene, Harwan kneels in the position of the son in Rembrandt's *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, and the final lines of Harwan's conclusion are followed by one short stage direction, *Il est le fils prodigue revenu vers les couleurs*.⁹² The final scene, 'D. LE LIEU DU PEINTRE', consists only of six short stage directions.

Il saisit le couteau.
Il fissure le paroi.
Il grimpe dans la peinture.
Harwan traverse les couleurs.
Harwan est a présent dans le ventre du tableau.
*Il est à jamais dans son cadre.*⁹³ (Mouawad 2008: 184)

The first three lines are clear stage directions: Harwan grabs the knife, slices the painting and climbs into it. The second three are explanatory: Harwan crosses through colours; Harwan is in the belly of the painting; Harwan is forever in his

⁹¹ 'Who are we and who do we believe ourselves to be? We are the blind who think they can see! [...] How does one say *memory* in Arabic?'

⁹²*He is the prodigal son returned to the colours.*

⁹³*He seizes the knife.*

He slices the partition.

He climbs into the painting.

Harwan crosses through colours.

Harwan is now in the belly of the painting.

He is forever in his frame.

frame. In slicing open and climbing into the painting, underneath which the traces of Harwan's own silhouette and name are visible, Harwan is not only the prodigal son returned to the paints of his childhood, he is the adult who has simultaneously discovered and returned to his self. By entering the frame, Harwan is no longer gazing at the painting, no longer gazing at life as an object and believing himself to be a blind man 'gifted with vision'. Instead, he has stepped into his consciousness, the 'site of the infinite'.

Harwan's self-annihilation and subsequent self-awareness incarnate the experience of shakiness that Patočka evokes in his call for a solidarity among the shaken. In the published edition of *Seuls*, Mouawad cites a passage from the sixth essay in Patočka's *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* in which Patočka explains the solidarity of the shaken:⁹⁴

Harwan doit entrer en guerre contre lui-même pour libérer les vautours et les hyènes qui sauront dévorer la charogne vivante en lui, c'est-à-dire 'la commodité de sa situation bien commode vivant à l'arrière, grâce au sang des autres*'. *Jan Patočka, *Essais hérétiques sur la philosophie de l'histoire*, Verdier, 1990. ⁹⁵ (Mouawad 2008: 115)

⁹⁴ This is the same passage from Patočka that Mouawad cites in his 2004 letter to his actors during their France tour of *Incendies*. See footnote 8 on page 38 above.

⁹⁵ Harwan must enter into a war against himself in order to liberate the vultures and hyenas who will know to devour the carrion that lives in him, that is, "the comfort of a his very comfortable situation living at the back, off of the blood of others*". Jan Patočka, *Essais hérétiques sur la philosophie de l'histoire*, Verdier, 1990. (Note: Patočka's original reads as follows: 'Celui qui trahit cette solidarité doit se rendre compte qu'il nourrit la guerre, qu'il est un embusqué qui à l'arrière vit du sang d'autrui. [...] Amener tous ceux qui sont capables de comprendre à ressentir en dedans d'eux-mêmes l'inconfort de leur position bien commode' (Patočka trans. Abrams 1981: 145) ('All who betray this solidarity must realise that they are sustaining war and are the parasites on the sidelines who live off the blood of others. [...]) To reach the point when all who are capable of understanding would feel

In the play text of *Seuls*, this citation of Patočka's sixth essay in the *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* is an explicit description of Harwan's self-conflict as an annihilation of the 'comfort of a comfortable situation'.⁹⁶ This is precisely what Mouawad's protagonists strive to sustain within the constraints imposed by their worlds. Their odyssey is one of progression from a form of non-existence, to a self-conflict that annihilates (not without difficulty) a form of existence that feeds off the blood of others. It is the active engagement with internal self-contradiction that enables characters to experience 'shakeness'. The following section will explore what Patočka means by shakeness as 'understanding what life and death are all about' (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 134), followed by a discussion of the implications of shakeness for Mouawad's work.

7 The shaken self: freedom through strife

In order to make sense of the self as articulated in the philosophy of Patočka, it is helpful to briefly clarify Patočka's understanding of ontology. Patočka's response to, and deviation from, Husserlian philosophy and Heideggerian ontology helps to identify Patočka's conception of human existence, consciousness and understanding.

inwardly uncomfortable about their comfortable position.' (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 135)

⁹⁶ Mouawad uses the same citation in the programme for the 2008-2009 season at the Centre National des Arts du Canada: 'Être en guerre pour libérer les vautours et les hyènes qui sauront dévorer la charogne qui se pense vivante en moi : la commodité de ma situation bien commode vivant à l'arrière, grâce au sang des autres.' (Mouawad 2008c: 5) (*To be at war in order to liberate the vultures and hyenas who will know to devour the carrion that thinks itself as living within me: the comfort of my very comfortable situation living at the back, off of the blood of others.*)

Patočka's writings evince a distinct affinity with Heidegger's fundamental ontology. In his preface to the collection of Patočka's writing entitled *L'Art et le temps*, Ilja Srubar succinctly summarizes a key aspect of Patočka's convergence and divergence from Heideggerian ontology.

Adoptant la perspective de l'ontologie fondamentale heideggerienne, il esquisse une conception de l'existence humaine qui lui permet cependant de reléguer au second plan l'opposition de l'authentique et de l'inauthentique pour considérer plutôt l'homme dans la réalisation pratique de ses possibilités, praxis qui seule peut lui donner accès à une véritable compréhension de l'être.⁹⁷ (Patočka 1990: 8)

Becoming, then, is not simply a movement towards an authentic 'I' away from the inauthentic 'they', to use Heideggerian terms, but rather an endless process of the realisation of possibilities. Patočka's emphasis on 'praxis' is one of the means whereby he takes a certain distance from both Husserl and Heidegger. In his 1968-1969 lecture series published under the title *Body, Community, Language, World*, Patočka specifically addresses what he perceives as the insufficiency inherent in Heidegger in terms of the presupposition of consciousness and the position of consciousness in the world. In spite of his indebtedness to Heidegger, it is in relation to the conception of world that Patočka differs most significantly from Heidegger.

This led us to ask for a conception of the world in a sense more radical than that of Heidegger for whom the world is a world of

⁹⁷ Adopting the Heideggerian perspective of fundamental ontology, he sketches an understanding of human existence that nevertheless enables him to relegate the opposition of the authentic and inauthentic to the background, in favour of considering man in terms of the practical realisation of his possibilities, praxis that alone can give him access to a true understanding of being.

ready-to-hand pragmata present in the context of practical significations. We asked for a conception of a world which is on the one hand what enables us to encounter particulars and, on the other hand, to live in truth. Humans are the only beings which, because they are not indifferent to themselves and to their being, can live in truth, can choose between life in the anxiety of its roles and needs and life in a relation to the world, not to existing entities only. (Patočka trans. Kohák 1998: 177)

This passage provides a very specific characterisation of what it means to be human.

Humans can choose to live in relation to the world, which is to enact a life in truth.

Yet what does it mean to 'live in truth'? Patočka's answer comes in the form of two closely related concepts: 'care for the soul' and 'solidarity of the shaken'. To understand these concepts, we must return to the Greeks, for Patočka is adopting and adapting Ancient Greek philosophy in relation to twentieth century phenomenology.⁹⁸

In *Plato and Europe*, his samizdat-published transcription of illegal 'apartment seminars' given after he was banished from teaching following the Soviet invasion of 1968, Patočka discusses the works of Heraclitus. Patočka states that for Heraclitus, the thinker is the 'one to whom belongs the function of manifestation in its entirety'. (Patočka trans. Lom 2002b: 62) He explains:

[Heraclitus] also knows that man blindly wanders [...] People do not have clarity about the world originally. Blind wandering is genuinely characteristic for people. What Sophocles says about Oedipus – this is human destiny. (Patočka trans. Lom 2002b: 62)

That people do not have clarity about the world originally does not mean that clarity is impossible. For Patočka the task of philosophy, and more specifically of the care

⁹⁸ See 'The Philosophical Problem' (Patočka trans. Lom 2002b: 71-90, *Plato and Europe*)

for the soul, is to strive towards understanding, which is an understanding, a thought, of manifesting.

At the end of *Seuls*, after Harwan blinds and eviscerates himself he comes to 'understand'. The stage directions are very specific, in the following order: *il erre; il erre le couteau; Harwan entreprend de tout ranger; il saisit un pinceau; il comprend.*⁹⁹ (Mouawad 2008: 171-174) Harwan 'wanders', yet in blinding himself he achieves a new vision whereby the possibility of art (the paintbrush) is made manifest.

Manifesting, however, is a curious phenomenon, as Patočka notes in his seminars. 'Manifesting is not pure light. [...] Showing is at the same time showing and hiding.' (Patočka trans. Lom 2002b: 173.) Striving towards an understanding of manifesting implies movement, a going towards. Yet it is a movement towards a showing that at the same time conceals. This is Patočka's understanding and invocation of the *polemos*, the strife of Heraclitus' fragments 53 and 80.

Fragment 53: War is the father of all, and king of all. He renders some gods, others men; he makes some slaves, others free. (Robinson 1987: 37.)

Fragment 80: One must realise that war is common, and justice strife, and that all things come to be through strife and are (so) +ordained+. (Robinson 1987: 49.)

Strife is the problematic of the world as a whole, or, as Heidegger phrases it in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, '[i]n con-frontation, world comes to be.' (Heidegger 2000: 65) Strife is what makes the soul manifest, i.e. our relationship 'to our own being'. (Findlay 2002: 63) For Patočka, it is as beings in the world, capable of

⁹⁹ See footnotes 84 and 85 on p.78 above.

thinking towards unconcealment yet recognising that this unconcealment is always partial and involves an element of concealment, that humans step away from that which is given and evident in a life focused on necessity, and claim their freedom. This is the action that Mouawad likens to Perseus beheading the Medusa.

In his notes to *Seuls*, Mouawad references Heraclitus:

La domestication d'une vie sage et sauvage.
Tigres emprisonnés.
Cela ne date pas d'hier :
« Les chiens aboient contre ce qu'ils ne connaissent pas ».
- Héraclite d'Éphèse, VI^e siècle av. J.C. [...]
Guerre au crédible ! [...]
Héraclite est mort dévoré par les chiens !¹⁰⁰ (Mouawad *Seuls*: Notes
www.wajdimouawad.fr/sites/default/files/seuls_notes.pdf)

Mouawad is objecting to what he perceives as Heraclitus' condemnation of the unknown in favour of knowledge, which Mouawad views as ascepticized ('Le mot *comprendre* est devenu propre.' (Mouawad *Seuls*: Notes). Interestingly, it is Heraclitus' *polemos* that makes possible Patočka's 'life in truth'. To live in truth is to recognize that life is the movement of thought in strife, whereby the stability of the known is rejected for the unifying instability of a process. Here the characterisation of the solidarity of the shaken becomes clear. The notion of 'solidarity' unites the physical, relational life of humans as beings in the world with the inner movement of

¹⁰⁰ The domestication of a wise and wild life.
Imprisoned tigers.
This is not new:
"Dogs bark at those whom they do not recognize."
Heraclitus of Ephesus, sixth century BCE [...]
War on the credible! [...]
Heraclitus died devoured by dogs!

thought that rejects the banality of the everyday in favour of a perpetual internal confrontation with oneself (shakiness). As Patočka concludes his last lecture in *Body, Community, Language, World*: 'On the basis of their corporeity humans are not only the beings of distance but also the beings of proximity, rooted beings, not only innerworldly being but also beings in the world.' (Patočka trans. Kohák 1998: 178)

In *Plato and Europe*, following a discussion of the mythical world whose opposition between the everyday familiar and the 'constantly present' darkness Patočka characterizes as the relationship of 'our life', Patočka states that 'our human revealedness is the revealing of the world in its whole, but within it there is at the same time this element and this strange awareness of problematicity.' (Patočka trans. Lom 2002b: 45) In his notes on *Forêts*, the third production in the *Le Sang* cycle, Mouawad describes his process of translating his 'sensation' for a new production, that of creating a play that explores the hatred that develops between people and across generations: 'c'est-à-dire une haine qui mette en cause la mémoire même.'¹⁰¹ (Mouawad 2009a: 59). He goes on to explain:

Je trouvais délicat de tenter de raconter l'histoire du Moyen-Orient, car cela serait une expérience qui se rattacherait irrémédiablement à l'actualité et en serait tributaire. Mais la véritable raison aussi est qu'étant donné la persistance des conflits, je ne voyais pas comment rendre compte, raconter, sans trahir le présent. Il me semblait plus facile d'imaginer avec le passé, car le passé se rattache à l'imaginaire, tandis que le présent, surtout celui qui est sanglant, annule le mythe, la fiction, et oblige presque au documentaire. [...] C'est ainsi qu'en lisant *Platon et l'Europe* de Jan Patočka, j'eus d'abord l'idée de créer un spectacle qui traiterai de la Première Guerre mondiale. [...] La mère du XXème siècle, celle

¹⁰¹ 'That is, a hatred that calls memory itself into question.'

qui accouchera, dans le sang et dans l'horreur, des hommes de maintenant.¹⁰² (Mouawad 2009a: 59-60)

In *Plato and Europe*, Patočka characterizes the mythical world as the site of the opposition that we experience in a life lived in truth. It is perhaps not surprising that this idea appealed to Mouawad, because his staged worlds are worlds that lie somewhere between the imaginary and the real, incorporating traces of the past with contemporary lived experience. He constantly plays with this conflict between the known and the unknown, the familiar everydayness against which the characters strive in their odyssey – an odyssey guided by trace (as language, history and encounters with others) towards problematization, and therefore inwards towards their own being. Each production involves actors embodying their characters' shakiness, a reflection of their own shakiness as beings in this world of opposition: beings whose present, like that of their characters, bears a relationship to the past whose breadth is perhaps more readily explored through the fictional world of a production.¹⁰³

Ébranlement ébranlement!

¹⁰² I found it difficult to try and tell the history of the Middle East, as it would be an experience that would be irrevocably tied to current events, and would be dependent on them. But the real reason also is that, given the persistence of the conflicts, I could not see how to give an account, tell a story, without betraying the present. It seemed easier to me to imagine with the past, because the past is related to the imaginary, whereas the present, especially the bloody present, nullifies myth, fiction, and almost requires a documentary approach. [...] The mother of the twentieth century, she who would, in blood and horror, give birth to the men of today.

¹⁰³ Hence Mouawad's exhortation to his actors cited above to seek that which 'shakes' them in their own life ('Qu'est-ce qui vous ébranle dans votre foi, dans votre existence').

[...]

Pas de « bienvenue » dans ce théâtre ni de « merci » ni de « baisers » rien, ou plutôt rien qu'une tentative de parole de poète dans ses tentatives souvent ratées pour retrouver, de spectacle en spectacle, grâce aux artistes, une vie à la fois sage et sauvage.¹⁰⁴ (Mouawad 2008c: 5)

By engaging with their own shakiness, actors are able to enact characters whose narrative is a testimony to shakiness. For Patočka, shakiness means understanding 'what life and death are all about' (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 134), which Mouawad translates as the 'wise and wild life' (above): wise in its understanding of self as a process of discovery; wild in that this process is endless, excluding any possibility of absolute meaning.

¹⁰⁴ Shakiness shakiness!

No 'welcome' in this theatre, nor 'thank you' nor 'kisses' nothing, or rather, nothing other than a poet's attempt to speak in often failed attempts in order to rediscover, from performance to performance, thanks to the artists, a life that is at once wise and untamed.

Chapter 2

Horizons of time

Le théâtre comme asile pour les mots rescapés de la fragmentation. Le théâtre comme théâtre. Non pas comme un espace, mais comme un temps, celui de la métamorphose. Non pas comme un divertissement mais comme un engagement, celui de la rencontre.¹ (Mouawad in Coutant 2009: 86)

In this short passage from *Les tigres de Wajdi Mouawad*, Mouawad formulates a tripartite vision for his theatre emphasizing the significance of language, the primacy of time, and the importance of commitment (or engagement) rooted in the encounter. The first point, the significance of language, has been discussed in Chapter 1. The last point, the commitment engendered by the encounter, will be addressed in Chapter 4. This chapter will address the primacy of time, exploring the complex representation and function of time in Mouawad's corpus and its relationship to trace. The dramatic time of Mouawad's narratives and the theatrical time of his plays are indebted to philosophical perspectives on time from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This chapter will begin by addressing a number of philosophical perspectives on time. These ideas are explicitly relevant, as they appear in the work of Jan Patočka, with whom Mouawad is highly familiar, as well as implicitly significant, in terms of their influence on theatrical interpretations of time over the course of the twentieth century. The chapter will then explore the role of

¹ Theatre as a refuge for words that have survived fragmentation. Theatre as theatre. Not as a space, but as a time, the time of metamorphosis. Not as entertainment but as commitment, that of the encounter.

time in *Littoral*, the first play in the *Le Sang* tetralogy. The analysis progresses chronologically in order to highlight the persistent disruption of the present by the past, enacted by the play's temporal scheme and dramatic structure. Next, the chapter will move on to a thematic analysis of the function of time in *Incendies*, considering the complex oscillation between past and present that forms the play's structure. Finally, the chapter will discuss the importance of artefacts in Mouawad's work, which play a fundamental role in Mouawad's representation of time, both structurally and thematically.

1 Perspectives of time

1.1 Time: theatre and philosophy

The question of time has proven problematic for analyses of theatre and performance. In 2012, Laura Cull ò Maoilearca noted the lack of 'extended scholarship focused on the relationship between performance and time' (ò Maoilearca 2012: 182) and in 2014, David Wiles referred to the 'conspicuous lack of broad-based books on time as the core of theatrical performance'. (Wiles 2014: 68) This lack is undoubtedly at least in part due to problems of definition. In French criticism, two seminal theatre specialists have addressed the nature of time in relation to theatre. Chapter 3 of Patrice Pavis' *L'Analyse des spectacles* is entitled 'Espace, temps, action' and Chapter V of Anne Ubersfeld's *Lire le théâtre I* is entitled 'Le théâtre et le temps'. Both Pavis and Ubersfeld distinguish between a number of

forms of time at work in theatre. After identifying the experience of time as a dual objective and subjective structure, Pavis differentiates between two forms of theatre time: dramatic time and stage time. For Ubersfeld, there are two distinct temporalities operating during the course of a performance, the time of the performance and the time of the action, which correspond to the dramatic/stage time separation. However, Ubersfeld emphasizes the significance of the relationship between these two forms of time, which is what she terms 'theatrical time'.² In discussing the complex components that structure theatrical time, Ubersfeld proceeds to question what time is in terms of theatre, and notes the difficulty of definition:

L'extrême difficulté de l'analyse du temps au théâtre vient de l'enchevêtrement de ces sens du temps, qui fait de la temporalité une notion plus « philosophique » que sémiologique.³ (Ubersfeld 1996: 152)

The nature of time and temporality has been extensively addressed in philosophical discourse since Aristotle. Yet, a notable lack of consensus as to the nature of time persists in the philosophical field, contributing to the difficulty of analysing time in theatre. The following chapter will therefore identify certain conceptions of time that have had a significant influence on contemporary philosophical notions of time

² '[I]l y a dans le « fait théâtral » deux temporalités distinctes, celle de la représentation [...] et celle de l'action représentée. Il est clair que le temps théâtral peut être compris comme le rapport entre l'une et l'autre.' (Ubersfeld 1981a: 151) (Two distinct temporalities exist in the 'act of theatre', that of the performance [...] and that of the action performed.)

³ The extreme difficulty of analyzing time in theatre is due to the intertwined nature of these meanings of time, which makes temporality more of a 'philosophical' than a semiological notion.

relevant to Wajdi Mouawad's plays. It will not argue the primacy of a given understanding of the essence of time, but rather aim to identify temporal phenomena that operate within and emanate from Mouawad's plays. Once again, particular attention will be paid to the writings of Jan Patočka, as Mouawad's primary philosophical influence.

1.2 Time and philosophy

In defining his theatre 'not as a space, but as a time, the time of metamorphosis', Mouawad is indebted to philosophical enquiries into the nature of time. First, he makes a clear distinction between space and time; second, he uses the indefinite article 'un', suggesting one form of time among many; third, time is characterized as a metamorphosis, which we shall see is crucial to Mouawad's emphasis on theatre's role in developing the solidarity of the shaken.

A division between space and time appears early in the history of philosophy, in Aristotle's *Physics*. Book IV, in which it appears, is divided into three chapters: Place, Void and Time. Chapter 1, Place, begins with arguments in favour of 'place' existing: "These facts support the idea that there is such a thing as place, in addition to body, and that every perceptible body is in place." (Aristotle 2008 trans. Waterfield: 79). Where place is a system of coexistence, Aristotle distinguishes time as one of succession.

For this is what time is: a number of change in respect of before and after. [...] Just as change is perpetually different from what it

was before, so time is too. [...] The 'now' determines time, in respect of before and after.' (Aristotle trans. Waterfield 2008: 106)

The 'now' plays a significant role as the point distinguishing between the past and future; as Ursula Coope succinctly explains in *Time for Aristotle: Physics IV. 10-14*: 'Time is what is between two nows.' (Coope 2005: 85).

Aristotle's definition of time as a series of now points has shaped the history of philosophy. Martin Heidegger noted in his 1927 *Being and Time*: 'Aristotle's treatise on time is the first detailed interpretation of this phenomenon that has come down to us. It essentially determined all the following interpretations, including that of Bergson.'⁴ (Heidegger trans. M. and J. Stambaugh 1996: 23). Heidegger's reference to Bergson is significant, as Bergson is one of several philosophers who developed radical interpretations of the nature of time in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In an explicit refutation of a spatial characterisation of time in Aristotle, Bergson distinguished between two different forms of time: objective, Aristotelian time, and subjective, intuitive time. Bergson argued that unlike the quantifiable succession of objective time, the intuitive, subjective experience of time is one of fundamental heterogeneity, which Bergson

⁴ From Aristotle onwards, philosophers continued to grapple with the problem of time. St Augustine famously asked: 'quid est enim tempus? quis hoc facile breviterque explicaverit?' (O'Donnell 1992, Book 11) ('For what is time? Who can readily and briefly explain this?') As philosophers continued to attempt to respond to this question, a disparity grew between two different interpretations of time. For rationalists such as Descartes and Berkeley, time was formulated in Aristotelian terms with a strong focus on nature. For empiricists, and most importantly for Locke, time became a matter of subjectivity, a manifestation of consciousness. Locke's theory had significant influence on subsequent philosophers, in particular Immanuel Kant who considered space and time to be structures of the mind, a 'form of intuition'.

calls *la durée*.⁵ In claiming this, Bergson shifted attention away from time as measurable succession, towards time as ‘a flux whose movements permeate one another rather than being juxtaposed like objects in space’. (Massey 2015: 171). In his preface to *The Challenge of Bergsonism*, Leonard Lawlor explains that ‘duration equals memory plus the absolutely new.’ (Lawlor 2003b: ix) Time as duration is therefore predicated on memory, the past that precedes and conditions every present instance.

Bergson’s contemporary Edmund Husserl also distinguished between objective and subjective time, but added a third category that he called ‘internal time-consciousness’. For Husserl, internal time consciousness is time-constituting; the temporal structure that underlies all temporal experience.⁶ (Sokolowski 2000: 131-140). Inner time-consciousness has a triadic structure of primal impression, retention and protention; that is, for every primal impression (impression in the now), consciousness is constantly retaining that which has just passed and projecting to what is yet to come.⁷ Yet, Husserl insisted that ‘subjective time

⁵ ‘Car si, par hasard, les moments de la durée réelle, aperçus par une conscience attentive, se pénétraient au lieu de se juxtaposer, et si ces moments formaient par rapport les uns aux autres une hétérogénéité au sein de laquelle l’idée de détermination nécessaire perdît toute espèce de signification, alors le moi saisi par la conscience serait une cause libre, nous nous connaîtrions absolument nous-mêmes, et d’autre part, précisément parce que cet absolu se mêle sans cesse aux phénomènes et, en s’imprégnant d’eux, les pénètre, ces phénomènes ne seraient pas aussi accessibles qu’on le prétend au raisonnement mathématique.’ (Bergson: 2720)

⁶ For a detailed description of time in Husserl’s phenomenology, see Chapter 9, ‘Temporality’, in Robert Sokolowski’s *Introduction to Phenomenology* (2000. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

⁷ Consciousness is ‘not caught in the now’ but is always a ‘moment of the concrete act that is narrowly directed towards the now-phase of the object’ (primal impression) accompanied by the phase of the object that has just been (retention)

becomes constituted in the absolute timeless consciousness, which is not an object.' (Husserl trans. J. B. Brough 1991: 117). Although consciousness constitutes the temporality of experience, it is itself 'timeless'. Heidegger objected to this characterisation of consciousness as atemporal, stressing that temporality is not simply the structure of consciousness, but rather that Being (*Dasein*) unfolds as time, as originary temporality. Being is always a Being-toward-death, and temporality unfolds through the actualisation of possibilities as life moves towards this finitude. Through care (*Sorge*) for itself in its Being-toward-death, *Dasein* gathers itself as it moves towards death. To live as a human being in the world is to constantly project towards what is to come, gather what has transpired, and realize one's possibilities.⁸ As Patočka notes:

The structure of *Dasein* is care. That includes existing in possibilities, understanding oneself as a self-realizing possibility, as a project actualizing itself. [...] Our acting, our active living is in this sense always ahead of what we are realizing at the moment. This being ahead is itself something situated, something that comes from somewhere. (Patočka trans. Kohák 1998: 136)

Patočka is indebted to the characterisations of time that flourished at the beginning of the twentieth century: Bergson's emphasis on the present belonging to the past, and on time as movement; Husserl's demonstration that by its very nature, 'every temporal sequence contains essentially a multifold temporal horizon which makes

and a protention, the 'indefinite intention of the phase of the object about to occur'. (Zahavi 2003: 82-83)

⁸ *Dasein*'s 'ownmost possibility' is Death. 'Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Da-sein.' (Heidegger trans. M. and J. Stambaugh 1996: 23)

that temporal sequence what it is,' (Patočka trans. Kohák 1998: 93); and Heidegger's *Dasein* as a realisation of possibilities, a movement that is in itself temporal.

During the 1968 academic year, Patočka delivered a series of lectures at Prague's Charles University. A group of students compiled their lecture notes to create what would later be published in English as *Body, Community, Language, World*.⁹ In his lectures, Patočka stated that 'existence is movement' (Patočka trans. Kohák 1998: 144), that 'movement is not a result, a sediment, but rather a process of realization.' (1998: 145). Movement as process is inherently temporal, and in his *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, Patočka provides his own 'original phenomenological analyses, what he calls the "three movements" of human being'. (Dodd in Patočka trans. Kohák 1998: xii).

We distinguish three fundamental movements of human life, each of which has its original form, its (thematic or athematic) meaning, its own temporality indicated by the predominant temporal dimension: the movement of acceptance, the movement of defense, and the movement of truth.¹⁰ (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 29)

⁹ As Jan Patočka's English translator, Erazim Kohák, notes in his postscript to the English edition of this collection, '*Body, Community, Language, World* is a gem of insight and erudition, summing up in bold yet surgically precise strokes the achievements and problems of continental philosophy at mid-century with both scope and depth.' (Patočka trans. Kohák 1998: 179)

¹⁰ Patočka developed this theory over the course of his later life (between the 1960s and 1976). It is explained in *Body, Community, Language, World* in slightly different terms:

If we are to explain the movement of our existence, its fundamental diversity of movements, we need to appeal to a triad of movements which presuppose and interpenetrate each other [...]:

(i) the movement of sinking roots, of anchoring – an instinctive affective movement of our existence;

(ii) the movement of self-sustenance, of self-projection – the movement of our coming to terms with the reality we handle, a movement carried out in the region of human work;

The predominant temporal dimensions of each movement are as follows: the first movement is a primordial movement that 'is related to our primordial past' (Patočka trans. Kohák 1998: 148); the second 'is a movement in the dimension of the present'; and the third movement's 'corresponding temporal dimension [...] is the future'. (Patočka trans. Kohák 1998: 151.) Patočka clarifies that 'each of these movements contains within it the whole of temporality, without which it would not be a movement; yet in each there holds sway a different "extasis," a different "horizon".' (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 33). All movement contains the whole of temporality as the condition for movement, and therefore the condition of existence. For Patočka, to exist is to experience these three movements simultaneously, each of which is associated with a given temporal horizon but all of which engage past, present and future by their very nature.¹¹

(iii) the movement of existence in the narrower sense of the word which typically seeks to bestow a global closure and meaning on the regions and rhythms of the first and second movement. (Patočka trans. Kohák 1998: 147-148)

¹¹ Although for Patočka movement is temporality, temporality is multifold and constitutive of human existence; he carefully distinguishes his understanding of temporality from that of his predecessors. Bergson used the metaphor of the 'snowball' for the significance of the present's conditioning by the past; in *Body, Community, Language, World*, Patočka insists that this 'overemphasizes the aspect of the passive lingering of what had been, of cumulation'. (Patočka trans. Kohák 1998: 145). Patočka insists that this gives undue emphasis to conscious experience and fails to acknowledge that which human life overlooks, which remains hidden from experience (the non-conscious). Unlike Husserl, Patočka does not predicate temporality on an absolute internal time consciousness. Existence is movement, and movement is temporal. As Tamás Ullmann explains in 'Negative Platonism and the Appearance-Problem': 'For [Patočka], there can be no exception to appearing or, consequently, to temporality – neither consciousness, nor Being, nor world.' (Chvatík and Abrams 2011: 81) Heidegger is the philosopher whom Patočka echoes most in his work, yet, here too he distinguishes himself from Heidegger's Being. For Patočka, existence does not have an 'invariant structure' (Ullmann in Chvatík and Abrams 2011: 77) its 'being is a system of possibilities' (Ullmann in Chvatík and

The first movement means that as human beings we are born into a given context, 'we are always already somewhere, we are in the world, integrated in an instinctual affective ground and released by the Earth [...]. We called this anchoring or rooting.' (Patočka trans. Kohák 1998: 156). This is a movement that is received. The second movement, humans create (Patočka trans. Kohák 1998: 157) and it is the 'movement of self-extension, of self-projection into things, of self-objectification and of humanisation of the world, we are governed by that from which we have singled ourselves out – by the Earth. [...] The realm of self-extension, self-projection into things, is the realm of mediation (abolishing immediacy), of work.' (Patočka trans. Kohák 1998: 157). Finally, the third movement is:

Opposed to these two Earth-bound movements, [the] authentically human movement, the movement of existence in which humans attempt to break the rule of the Earth. [...] [The third movement] is always an attempt to integrate into our lives what in the two earlier movements basically cannot be taken into consideration, cannot be seen, what must be overlooked and forgotten. That is first and foremost one of our basic boundary situations – our finitude. (Patočka trans. Kohák 1998: 159)

The third movement is therefore a confrontation with the overlooked, and above all with our finitude. Patočka connects this conception of the third movement of life with 'shakeness' at the end of the *Heretical Essays*, cited in Chapter 2. Those who are shaken understand what

life and death are all about, and so what history is about. That history is the conflict of *mere life*, barren and chained by fear, with

Abrams 2011: 78) that open up as the human being exists in the three movements of life.

life at the peak, life that does not plan for the ordinary days of a future but sees clearly that the everyday, its life and its 'peace', have an end. Only one who is able to grasp this, who is capable of conversion, of *metanoia*, is a spiritual person. (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 134-35, author's own italics)

The shaken confront their own certain futurity, that is, their finitude. Doing so requires a *metanoia*, a change of thinking.¹² Elsewhere, Patočka refers to this process as a 'metamorphosis' (Patočka 1990: 286).

Here, Patočka's influence on Wajdi Mouawad is apparent, and the latter's characterisation of his theatre as one of time, and time as metamorphosis, becomes clear. Theatre is a site of movement, where the temporalities of human life, as elucidated by Patočka, interpenetrate, and where Mouawad strives to stage this confrontation with finitude in an effort to stimulate the experience of shakiness (among actors and spectators). In a 2008 interview, Mouawad likens his theatre to a confrontation with death.

Pourquoi les spectateurs restent? Peut-être parce qu'on touche à l'inconnu, et donc à la mort. [...] Je travaille fortement pour que les gens ne puissent pas savoir comment la pièce qu'ils voient va finir. À l'intérieur de ça, il y a quelque chose qui est proche de la catharsis. C'est permettre aux gens de faire l'expérience de la mort, faire en sorte que quand ils vont mourir ils soient un peu plus préparés... On est loin de la démagogie.¹³ (Mouawad in Navarro 2008: 36-37)

¹² On the etymology of *metanoien*, Dr Thompson states: 'In the noun... while the term itself is primarily intellectual, there is apparently implied in it a change of feeling. These facts lead to the following classification of meaning: 1. Reconsideration [...] 2. A change of mind, apparently involving a change of thought and feeling.' (Thompson 1908: 10)

¹³ Why do spectators remain? Maybe it's because the performance touches on the unknown, and therefore death. [...] I work hard so that people cannot know how the play they are watching will end. Within this, there is something that is close to

The following section will dissect the temporal characteristics of Moauwad's plays, and consider how the experience of finitude as shakeness through metamorphosis comes to light as a result of the function of time.

2 Mouawad and time

In theatre the multiplicity of time is manifest. The structure of time that operates in narrative plays, such as Mouawad's, is correlated to the temporal devices used to separate the time of the story from the theatrical duration of the play, as experienced by actors and audience. This initial duality is further complicated by the multi-temporal nature of many of Mouawad's narratives, in which the dramatic present is persistently intersected by the past and foreshadows the future. Finally, the various devices that may be considered inherent to performance, such as duration, delivery tempo, movement and scene changes, create a temporal rhythm that is not always evident in the structure of the text. So first, we will consider the broad temporal structures operative in the narratives of Mouawad's plays, and then performance devices and their role in relation to these temporal narrative structures.

catharsis. It is to enable people to experience death, so that when they come to die they will be somewhat better prepared... This is a far cry from demagoguery.

2.1 Narrative time structures and temporal devices

The narrative time structures underpinning Mouawad's plays have gradually shifted over the course of his career. The early plays all follow a linear temporal structure, with a clear sequence of events building towards the climax. *Journée de nocces chez les Cromagnons*, *Willy Protogoras* and *Les mains d'Edwige au moment de la naissance*¹⁴ all open during the build-up to an event (a wedding, a departure and a funeral). As the action unfolds, the significance of the anticipated event is slowly supplanted. The protagonists are young adults who reject the obligations imposed by their families and, in a final climactic moment, pay for this rebellion with their lives. These early plays are structured around the present's struggle to free itself from the contextual past, or, in Mouawad's terminology, *s'arracher alors à la tradition*.¹⁵ (Mouawad 2011b: 9).

In the *Le sang* plays, temporal structure is marked by commonalities. *Littoral* marks a break with linear time structure that predominated in Mouawad's earlier plays, introducing the disrupted time structure of the tetralogy's first three plays. The first of *Littoral's* six sections is a mimetic flashback of the main protagonist; the second consists of epistolary-induced flashbacks to a time before the protagonist's birth. Sections three to six follow a linear temporal structure punctuated by narrated flashbacks. The presence of ghostly characters both functions as a suspension of time and a reminder of the passage of time. The following two plays,

¹⁴*Alphonse* also follows a linear time structure.

¹⁵ To tear oneself away from tradition.

Incendies and *Forêts*, also forego a linear time structure in favour of a disrupted time structure. *Ciels* marks another shift, following a tight linear time structure in a single location. Yet it too is disrupted by the past. Mouawad's later plays, the first works in the *Domestic* cycle, i.e. *Seuls* and *Sœurs*, as well as *Temps*, follow the precedent set by *Ciels*, following a linear time structure within a confined space in which the past interrupts the present.

Mouawad uses a number of devices to communicate temporal elements. He encouraged a fast-paced delivery tempo among his actors without 'pauses between lines' (Mouawad 2011e: 8) for every play up until *Ciels*.

Les personnages s'arrachent littéralement la parole, la parole étant ici source de vie. Les personnages s'arrachent la parole comme des assoiffés peuvent s'arracher une source d'eau. ¹⁶
(Mouawad 2011e: 8)

This rushing of lines forces the spectator to work in order to keep up, and constantly anticipate the subsequent words and phrases while still processing those just heard. Arguably, the result is a double anticipation, one at the micro level of speech tempo (we struggle to keep up with dialogue), the other at the level of story (the characters struggle to face their future deaths). Other temporal devices include characters walking the perimeter of the stage to indicate passage of time, changes in lighting or scenery that indicate shifts in seasons or time periods, the staged juxtaposition of characters that the audience knows are from different eras, and use of artefacts that transcend a play's various temporalities. Mouawad strives to make the audience

¹⁶ Characters literally snatch the words from each other, words here being a source of life. Characters snatch words from each other as the parched snatch water.

aware of the temporal sequences, shifts, oscillations and divisions, as ages, time periods, and gaps between time periods are meticulously documented in the performance programmes and supplementary material.¹⁷

Common to all of Mouawad's plays is the consistent interruption of the present by the past, which serves a double function, rooting the protagonist's narrative in a given context (one often previously unknown to him) and bringing characters into contact with death, an experience that frequently enables them to question their present life and experience 'shakeness'.

2.2 Mouawad and the three movements of life

In the supplementary information for the 2009 Avignon Festival, written as *Le Sang* was touring, Mouawad links storytelling with time (characterized here as movement) and with death.

Le temps ! Le temps est un charnier puisqu'il avance en courant avec ses secondes, en marchant avec ses minutes et immobile dans ses heures. Il avance et nous enterre. Raconter, c'est être dans le temps. Raconter, c'est être dans le charnier.¹⁸ (Mouawad 2009e: 18)

¹⁷ For example, the programme for the 2009 performance of the tetralogy specifically indicates that Loup in *Forêts* is 16 in 2006 and that Nawal is played at three different ages: 19, 40 and 65.

¹⁸ Time! Time is a charnel house that runs forwards with its seconds, walks forwards with its minutes and remains immobile in its hours. It moves forward and buries us. To tell stories is to be in time. To tell stories is to be in the charnel house.

As previously noted, Mouawad believes that storytelling is a means of making sense of the world (Mouawad 2009e: 39-40) and an experience that facilitates shakeness.¹⁹ However, to Mouawad, time itself is a source of meaning which he seeks to emphasize in his works. As we shall see, it is only when characters wake from a life lived exclusively in the present, and become aware of their temporality, that shakeness, the metamorphosis Mouawad seeks to initiate through his theatre, becomes possible.

Mouawad's characterisation of the self as a continual process of self-discovery implies a self constituted through, and understood in relation to, time: process implies duration. For all Mouawad's protagonists, self-discovery through shakeness results from an encounter with the past that disrupts the present. Often, this is instigated by a confrontation with the character's immediate (often familial) environment. In *Willy Protogoras*, Willy is stuck in his family's conflict with the Philisti-Ralestines; in *Littoral*, Wilfrid is in conflict with his aunts and uncles; in *Incendies*, Nawal has bequeathed Jeanne and Simon a difficult and seemingly nonsensical task, etc. The early plays begin at a point where the protagonists are already in conflict with the past, in the process of tearing themselves away from the traditions of the world that precedes them, into which they were born. They open subsequent to the protagonist's initial rebellion, and chart the process of the character's 'metamorphosis'.

¹⁹ This resembles Bert States' definition of catharsis as the purgation of time as incoherence in *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: The Phenomenology of the Theatre*. (States 1987: 49)

The temporal pattern introduced by *Littoral*, common to the *Le sang* tetralogy,²⁰ the *Domestique* cycle, and *Temps*, is as follows:

- An experience (death in *Le sang* plays, internal self-conflict brought about by an external incident in the *Domestique* cycle) brings about an instance of anagnorisis that destabilizes the character's life in the present.
- Shock leads to a sense of defamiliarisation of the world. In response, the character embarks on a quest.
- This quest quickly becomes an investigation into a deceased parent's life, and consequently the familial past of which the character was not previously aware.
- In confronting this past, the character comes to terms with his or her sense of defamiliarisation and accepts the transformative process of questioning.

²⁰ *Ciels* is slightly different in that the death is not that of a protagonist's parent. The first instance of anagnorisis in fact occurs prior to the start of the play and is the source of the mystery that the anti-terrorist cell is trying to discover. However, these temporal structure components are present, just reordered and distributed among the play's multiple protagonists. See Chapter 3, p 190.

This sequence is temporal, in that the character's life prior to the initial experience is one characterized by a preoccupation with everyday existence in the present, namely work, activity, the realisation of possibilities in the world. This correlates to Patočka's characterisation of the present as the movement of 'defense', whereby human beings strive to sustain themselves without questioning the basis for that sustenance. The quest that the characters then embark on removes them from their everyday environment and, in the case of *Littoral* and *Incendies*, transports them to the land, language and culture into which the deceased parent was born. That is, they are transported into their familial past. Finally, it is through a process of acknowledging the past and its relevance to the character's present that he or she is able to liberate him or herself from the numbness of the everyday, and accept shakiness.

The following sections of the chapter will explore this temporal pattern in greater depth. The focus is on the first two plays in the *Le sang* tetralogy, *Littoral* and *Incendies*, as *Littoral* was the play which first developed this recurring structural pattern, and, in *Incendies*, the significance of time is overtly discussed.

3 *Littoral*

3.1 Synopsis

Littoral opens with a young man, Wilfrid, frantically explaining to a judge how he learned of the death of his estranged father, Ismail, while having sex. Wilfrid was interrupted by a phone call, announcing that Ismail had died on a bench outside his own apartment, and asking him to identify the body. On his way to the morgue, Wilfrid encounters two alter egos: Knight errant Chevalier Guiromelan (henceforth Guiromelan), and a film director, who periodically reappear throughout the rest of the play. After identifying his father, Wilfrid returns to his mother's family, carrying his father's possessions: a coat and a small red suitcase.

At the wake, it becomes clear that Wilfrid was raised by his mother Jeanne's family, who refuse to allow Ismail to be buried with Jeanne. As the aunts and uncles argue, Ismail's corpse speaks to Wilfrid, telling Wilfrid to run away with him. Ismail clambers out from the coffin and Wilfrid runs after him. In a semi-dream-like state following this escape, Wilfrid opens his father's suitcase and discovers that it is full of unsent letters addressed to Wilfrid, explaining Ismail's reasons for leaving Wilfrid after Jeanne's death. The past comes to life on stage, and Wilfrid watches as Ismail and Jeanne's story unfolds: Jeanne then addresses Wilfrid, telling him that Ismail is a 'keeper of flocks'. Wilfrid is being born. A doctor asks Ismail to decide whether to save Jeanne or Wilfrid, since he cannot save both. Jeanne begs Ismail to save Wilfrid, so, Ismail tells the doctor to save his child and Jeanne dies. Ismail tells Wilfrid that

he was happy in his homeland, as that was where he loved Jeanne. Section one closes as, in the courtroom, Wilfrid requests permission to take his father's body back to his homeland for burial.

The following scene opens with an old man and seer, Wazâân reciting the opening of *The Iliad*, as a woman sings in the distance. Wilfrid arrives with his father, and asks Wazâân if he remembers Ismail. Wazâân remembers Ismail and Jeanne, but tells Wilfrid that he will not be able to bury the corpse in the village, as there are so many dead that they are opening coffins and adding new bodies. The woman's voice cries out, saying 'at the crossroads it is possible that there is the other'. Wazâân explains that the latest death was a young man named Saïd, who loved the singing woman, Simone. The local villagers arrive, furious at Simone's continued singing, since silence is needed to open a grave. Simone arrives and refuses to stay silent.

Tensions mount, until a villager hits Simone and Wazâân intervenes, sending the villagers away. Wazâân introduces Simone to Wilfrid and instructs them to go and tell the villagers that Ismail has returned. However, the villagers refuse to bury Ismail, saying that he fled during the war and is not entitled to burial. A villager tells Simone and Wilfrid to visit Hakim, a militia leader, and request burial ground. They visit the militia man but are repulsed by his pleasure in recounting tales of torture.

Wilfrid and Simone return to Wazâân, who tells them to go and seek another burial ground. On this journey they encounter a series of other outcasts. Each tells his story, and joins their party. Simone decides that their mission will be to 'lay bombs in people's heads' through storytelling. Wilfrid becomes exasperated with

carrying Ismail's corpse and wants to bury his father wherever he can. The other travellers object, and explain that Ismail has become a father figure to them all, and that they will continue their journey until they find a proper resting place. Wilfrid agrees, and the group continues towards the sea.

Act III opens with the arrival of Joséphine, trailing several large books and reciting a long list of names. Joséphine has collected the names and details of as many people (both dead and alive) as possible, and is trying to record their existence. She joins the other travellers and becomes close to Wilfrid. Upon reaching the sea, the travellers decide to bury the corpse at sea. Before the burial, all but Wilfrid and Joséphine run to the water. Joséphine asks the corpse if he could be her father for a moment, and she talks to Ismail about losing her parents. Joséphine then acknowledges to Wilfrid that they are alike. She asks Wilfrid to kiss her, to leave the dead and think of life. The travellers decide that to focus on the future, they need to dispose of the phonebooks as well, so they use them as an anchor for the corpse. Wilfrid says goodbye to Guiromelan and prepares his father's body for burial. The travellers attach the phonebooks to Ismail, and the play concludes with Ismail walking out to sea, engulfed by the water as he speaks about death.

3.2 The present of the past

Littoral, the first play in *Le Sang*, is divided into six sections: *Ici*, *Hier*, *Là-bas*, *L'Autre*, *Chemin* and *Littoral*. This is the structure delineated in the published version,

underlying these divisions is a three-act play, each act consisting of two sections. Act I contains Wilfrid's initial encounter with his deceased father and inner selves. Act II traces the development of a fledgling solidarity that grows between Wilfrid and his travelling companions. Act III recounts the characters' confrontation with mortality, which enables a meaningful life.

Littoral has the simplest structure of the four plays in the cycle. Although the initial sequence (Act I) is a flashback, all other past narratives are either diegetic, or, when mimetic, accompanied with epistolary diegesis (the letters left to Wilfrid by his father). It is the flashback sequence that presents Wilfrid's everyday life as it was prior to the confrontation with death; this flashback presents the present, which once disrupted transports Wilfrid and the audience to a place where the present confronts the past.

Littoral begins with the present's interruption by the past in the form of the announcement of Wilfrid's father's death. This interruption is traumatic and life changing:

J'étais au lit avec une déesse dont le nom m'échappe [...] Il y en a qui ne croient pas au destin, je ne les envie pas, car de toutes les façons, moi non plus je n'y crois pas mais un coup de téléphone à trois heures du matin ça reste un coup de téléphone à trois heures du matin et ce coup-là, juste au moment de l'éjaculation, m'annonçant la mort de mon père, si ce n'est pas le destin, qu'est-ce que c'est bordel ? Quel sens Dringallovenezvotrepèreestmort ça peut avoir sinon !²¹ (Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 11)

²¹ I was in bed with a goddess whose name I can't remember [...] There are some who do not believe in destiny, I don't envy them, because in any case, I don't believe in destiny either but a phone call at three o'clock in the morning is still a phone call at three o'clock in the morning, at that moment, at the very instant of ejaculation, announcing the death of my

Wilfrid's encounter with this woman, unknown except for her beauty, is a sign of his immersion in 'everydayness'. For Patočka, everydayness is 'impersonality; the world of the "worker"', where 'self-alienation becomes more natural than being oneself'. (Schuback in Chvatík and Abrams 2011: 35). A correlate to existence in the present in Patočka's philosophy is the 'orgiastic [...] bondage to life'. (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 113). Wilfrid's life is lived without self-awareness; even his orgiastic pleasures remain impersonal and alienated. The news of his father's death disrupts Wilfrid's stupor of the present. Wilfrid claims that he was 'nothing' until this moment, when the world collapsed (Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 11-12). As indicated by his cry of 'Quel sens Dringallovenezvotre père est mort ça peut avoir sinon !'²², this confrontation with death is the catalyst for Wilfrid's search for meaning.

Through Ismail's death, Wilfrid undergoes the only experience of finitude possible. As Levinas explained, death is 'l'impossibilité du possible' (the impossibility of possibility) (Levinas 1971: 50); the cessation of experience, of future possibilities. Death is an experience beyond the grasp of anyone who survives, except in the form of mourning. Wilfrid experiences his father's death as 'fateful' because death is the ultimate passivity; that over which the individual has no control. As Wilfrid says: 'Si on pouvait marchander, mais rien ! Pas moyen de discuter, de réclamer, d'être entendu !'²³ (Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 16).

father, well, if that isn't destiny, what the hell is it? What meaning can ringhelloyourfathersdead have otherwise!

²² 'What meaning can ringhelloyourfathersdead have otherwise!'

²³ 'If one could negotiate but no, nothing! Impossible to discuss, to demand, to be heard!'

Wilfrid's immediate reaction to this disruption of the present and his encounter with finitude is bewilderment, followed by escapism. As Wilfrid continues his narrative to the judge, the scene transitions from a diegetic to a mimetic form as Wilfrid leaves his apartment to go to the morgue to identify his father's body. It is here that Wilfrid experiences the first of his four 'delusions' prior to arriving at the morgue. The first of these encounters with his own projected alter-egos is with The Film Director.

LE RÉALISATEUR Wilfrid, je n'existe pas, mais est-ce que tu sais de façon certaine si tu existes toi-même ? Marche, Wilfrid, et songe à celui que tu es en train de devenir !
WILFRID Justement ! J'aimerais tellement être encore celui que j'étais hier ! [...] Si je pouvais marcher assez vite pour m'enfuir quelque part, courir, voler, m'envoler loin d'ici, loin de maintenant ! ²⁴ (Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 13)

Wilfrid's consciousness of time grows as he becomes increasingly self-aware. Yet, this awareness is met with internal resistance as he struggles to face the reality of his existence. The director's question ('are you sure that you yourself exist?') represents the first articulation of Wilfrid's existential questioning, and he also references Wilfrid's futurity when he speaks of 'becoming'. In this scene, Wilfrid is acknowledging the transformed present, which is not entirely immersive. In an effort to escape the impending confirmation of death, in the form of identifying the

²⁴ LE RÉALISATEUR Wilfrid, I don't exist, but are you really certain that you yourself exist? Walk, Wilfrid, and think of the person you are becoming!

WILFRID Exactly! I would so much like to still be the person I was yesterday! [...] If I could walk fast enough to flee somewhere, run, fly, fly far away from here, far from now!

corpse at the morgue, and return to his anonymous semi-unconscious life of distraction, he visits a sex shop.

The knight Guiromelan marks the second interruption of the present by the past. It is later made clear that Guiromelan is an imagined figure from Wilfrid's childhood, a remnant of Wilfrid's childhood imagination. Guiromelan suffers the torment of Wilfrid's child self: loss of innocence caused by the experience of sex and the death of his father.²⁵ With his arrival Wilfrid becomes aware of a part of himself that, detached from the present, is brought into a sort of half-existence in the form of a revenant: one associated with childhood, who is horrified by the peep show.

LE CHEVALIER [...] Que l'on arrête ces gémissements.
WILFRID Il faut attendre que ca s'arrête tout seul.
LE CHEVALIER Je suis donc en enfer?! [...] Sors-moi d'ici!
Honte! Honte au monde, honte au mal, honte a la souillure!
Wilfrid au cœur lumineux, délivre-moi de ce cauchemar...²⁶
(Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 15)

²⁵ Guiromelan explicitly refers to 'defilement', an exclamation during which Wilfrid refers to his father's death, associating the two:

LE CHEVALIER Ah! Souillure, souillure de la chair, mille fois souillure! Où suis-je?
[...]

WILFRID Je m'appelle Wilfrid et mon père est mort!

LE CHEVALIER [...] Secours-moi, car je suis perdu. [...] Je suis donc en enfer?!
(Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 15)

(GUIROMELAN *Ah! Defilement, defilement of the flesh, a thousand times defiled!*
Where am I? [...])

WILFRID *My name is Wilfrid and my father is dead!*

GUIROMELAN *Help me, as I am lost. [...] Am I in hell?!*)

²⁶ LE CHEVALIER [...] Stop this moaning.

WILFRID You have to wait until it stops on its own.

LE CHEVALIER Am I then in hell?! [...] Get me out of here! Shame! Shame on the world, shame on evil, shame on defilement! Wilfrid with the luminous heart, deliver me from this nightmare ...

This is the play's second parallel between sex and death. Guiromelan wants the moaning of the sex tape to stop, and Wilfrid explains that they need to wait for it to stop. As with death, in the peepshow bystanders are powerless.²⁷

Scene 4 marks the return of The Film Director. Wilfrid's dialogue becomes increasingly self aware:

WILFRID Et toi, tu es qui ? Qu'est-ce que tu veux ?
LE RÉALISATEUR Je suis toi.
WILFRID Comment ça, tu es moi ?!
LE RÉALISATEUR Je suis celui que tu étais hier !²⁸ (Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 17)

Wilfrid is entering into a communicative relationship with his past selves: one from the immediate past (director) and one from a distant past (knight); traces of Wilfrid's past brought into the present.

Guiromelan resembles one of Fernando Pessoa's 'heteronyms'. Pessoa was a poet born in Lisbon in 1888; he wrote prolifically in English, French and Portuguese. He is well known for writing under distinct personae, called heteronyms. Pessoa distinguished his more than seventy heteronyms from pseudonyms, by the fact that heteronyms have their own distinct writing style; the result of their individual characters and biographies.

²⁷ LE CHEVALIER [D]élivre-moi de ce cauchemar où mes mains mon cœur et mon esprit sont en proie aux tourments les plus obscurs. Je ne sais plus qui je suis, ce que je fais et ce que j'ai à faire! (Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 15)
(GUIROMELAN [D]eliver me from this nightmare where my hands, my heart and my spirit have fallen prey to the most obscure torments. I no longer know who I am, what I am doing and what I must do!)

²⁸ WILFRID And you, who are you? What do you want?
LE RÉALISATEUR I am you.
WILFRID What do you mean, you're me?!
LE RÉALISATEUR I am the person you were yesterday!

Ever since I've known myself as 'me,' I can remember envisioning the shape, motions, character and life story of various unreal figures who were as visible and as close to me as the manifestations of what we call, perhaps too hastily, real life. (Pessoa 2001: 254-255)

Pessoa's earliest heteronym, created aged six, was a knight, the Chevalier de Pas, of whom he wrote: '[his] not entirely hazy figure still has a claim on the part of my affections that borders on nostalgia.' (Pessoa 2001: 255).

Mouawad references Pessoa's poetic work in *Littoral* with the repeated use of the phrase *gardeur de troupeaux* (keeper of herds). This biblical phrase references Abel as a shepherd, and is the title of one of Pessoa's poems (written by heteronym Alberto Caeiro) as well as his poetry collection. Pessoa's heteronyms blur the line between the real and imaginary. The manifestation of non-corporeal 'unreal' figures in Pessoa's work that are endowed with 'shape, motions, character and life story' calls into question 'real life'.²⁹ Likewise, in Mouawad's play, the unreal figure of Guiromelan contrasts sharply with Wilfrid's external reality: the inescapable confrontation with death at the morgue.³⁰ As Wilfrid despairs in his forced confrontation with death, he calls upon Guiromelan to kill the mortician and Guiromelan agrees. Wilfrid then begs Guiromelan to kill him, but when he concurs, Wilfrid changes his mind. Guiromelan reassures Wilfrid: 'N'aie pas peur, Wilfrid.

²⁹ Pessoa's work plays with the notion of the real, and often speaks of the reality of the imaginary. For a discussion on Pessoa's use of heteronyms and his interest in blurring the line between real and unreal, see Richard Zenith's introduction in *Fernando Pessoa & Co.: Selected poems* (1999. New York: Grove Press/Atlantic).

³⁰ This corresponds to Patočka's 'hardness of the real'; see Chapter 4, I.1.d. 'Hardness of the real'.

Délirer ne tue pas. Ça rend différent mais ça ne tue pas.³¹ (Mouawad, Leblanc 1997: 20). Guiromelan 'kills' Wilfrid, and Wilfrid collapses, only to be helped up by the mortician. This incident suggests Wilfrid's growing temporal awareness as he confronts death, his father's in the present and his own in the future, through Guiromelan, a projection from his past.

As a memory of a mythical figure, Guiromelan is doubly 'not-actually real' – a fantasy recollection of a fantastical being. He nevertheless remains a 'dimension' of Wilfrid's consciousness; once summoned, Guiromelan remains present, embodied onstage.³² For Patočka, myth consists of a 'coincidence of opposites', the first instance of which is Guiromelan killing Wilfrid. It is the intervention of the unreal in the world of the real, a death that isn't a death. It is a moment of coincidence between the world in which Wilfrid is seeking refuge and acceptance, and the world that threatens him through the presence of death. In *Plato and Europe*, Patočka explains that:

The relationship between these opposites is the problem of the mythical world, which means of our life. The relation between these two terrible forces, between the power that accepts us into the world and the force that crushes and constantly threatens us – just think about all that is contained in this revealing. (Patočka trans. Lom 2002b: 45)

For Patočka, it is an awareness of this tension between opposites that is essential for living beyond the banality of the everyday. Wilfrid's asking for death, changing his

³¹ Hallucinating doesn't kill you. It changes you, but it doesn't kill you.

³² LE CHEVALIER Excuses-moi, mais moi quand on m'appelle, on m'appelle, je ne fais pas des allers-retours. Quand j'arrive, je reste.
(GUIROMELAN *Excuse me, but when I am summoned, I am summoned, I don't go back and forth. When I come, I stay.*) (Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 21)

mind in fear of actual death, and experience of non-death marks a turning point whereby he becomes aware of the tension between real and unreal, which will increase in subsequent scenes.

In a conversation with Guiromelan, Wilfrid makes an overt mythological association in evoking the Oedipus myth: 'À moi tout seul j'ai inversé le jour avec la nuit et la nuit avec le jour en tuant ma mère pour coucher avec mon père.'³³ (Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 22) Mouawad is rooting Wilfrid's story in a given theatrical tradition, contextualizing it within the history of tragic theatre. In addition to this, Wilfrid's bewilderment at the past is contrasted with the practical decision he faces in the present: what to do with his father's corpse.

Ultimately, Wilfrid's decision to return Ismail's body to his homeland only becomes possible through the involvement of Wilfrid's family. The impetus for Wilfrid's quest is provided by the family's refusal to allow Ismail to be buried alongside Wilfrid's mother in the family tomb. The arrival of the family on stage marks a distinct break in the rhythm of the performance. Incessant movement and talking among several people creates a sense of frenetic activity that contrasts sharply with Wilfrid's introspection. It is in the midst of the family's arguments that the corpse of Ismail (henceforth 'The Father' in the script) speaks to Wilfrid for the first time.

³³ 'I alone have inversed the day with the night and the night with the day, by killing my mother to sleep with my father.'

LE PÈRE Pssst! Wilfrid... Wilfrid... Pssst! [...] On va attendre qu'ils aient le dos tourné, et on va s'en aller en courant!³⁴
(Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 33)

The dead father is resurrected as a speaking being who invites Wilfrid to flee.

LE PÈRE Fuyons! On s'expliquera après!
WILFRID Papa! Papa! Attends-moi! Attends-moi!
LE PÈRE Cours!
LE CHEVALIER Cours, Wilfrid, va, vole, suis ce chemin inusité qui conduit au gouffre, et saute! Saute dans le gouffre! Laisse les chemins, car tous les chemins mènent à la terre, le gouffre, seul, conduit au rêve. Saute, Wilfrid, saute!³⁵ (Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 33-34)

The 'abyss' is the unknown; in following his father, Wilfrid is about to 'jump' into a narrative that requires Wilfrid put aside his desire for certainty, simplicity and 'firm ground' beneath his feet: the world of the everyday. It is only by jumping into the abyss that Wilfrid is able to transcend 'the earth' and begin his journey towards a dream (*rêve*).³⁶

The second section is titled 'Yesterday'. In the first scene, Wilfrid dreams he sees his father's corpse, only to wake up to his father's corpse walking on stage. In

³⁴ LE PÈRE Pssst! Wilfrid... Wilfrid... Pssst! [...] We are going to wait until they have their backs turned, and then we'll run away!

³⁵ LE PÈRE Let's run! We can sort things out later!

WILFRID Dad! Dad! Wait for me! Wait for me!

LE PÈRE Run!

LE CHEVALIER Run, Wilfrid, go, fly, follow this untrodden path that leads to the abyss, and jump! Jump into the abyss! Leave all paths behind, for all paths lead to the earth, but the abyss alone leads to the dream. Jump, Wilfrid, jump!

³⁶ Patočkan imagery is strong here, with emphasis on the abyss and the earth. For a discussion of Mouawad's use of Patočkan imagery, see Introduction 5.3 p. 23

response to Wilfrid's increasingly frantic bewilderment at his dead father appearing and speaking to him, The Father explains his presence:

LE PÈRE [...] J'ai vu que tu avais ouvert ma valise rouge. Je voulais être avec toi pour t'aider à comprendre ce qu'il y a dedans.
WILFRID « Lettres non expédiées » ! Wilfrid, Wilfrid, Wilfrid... des lettres pour moi ?!
LE PÈRE Elles te raconteront ton père, elles te raconteront ta mère.
*Wilfrid ouvre un enveloppe.*³⁷ (Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 37)

With this stage direction, the set transitions to the past. In a combination of on-stage performance and projected film representation, Wilfrid and his father's corpse watch the past unfold as Wilfrid opens letter after letter. This provides a certain clarity for Wilfrid, as he discovers his parents' story. However, this 'past' is perpetually undercut. These scenes are explicitly created by epistolary memory, delusions and dreams. Three Ismails appear on stage: young Ismail, adult Ismail, and dead Ismail. The characters oscillate between several storylines (the story of Jeanne and Ismail, dialogue between Wilfrid and Ismail's corpse about the past, dialogue between Wilfrid and his mother, etc.) creating a disjointed, dream-like narrative. The past is clearly mediated and never fully present.

At the end of this section, The Film Director returns to say that Wilfrid is about to throw himself 'into the abyss', echoing the words of Guiromelan at the end

³⁷ LE PÈRE [...] I saw that you had opened my red suitcase. I wanted to be with you to help you to understand what is in it.
WILFRID 'Unsent letters!?! Wilfrid, Wilfrid, Wilfrid... letters for me?!
LE PÈRE They tell you the story of your father, they tell you about your mother.
Wilfrid opens an envelope.

of Section 1.³⁸ So, at the end of the first section, one of Wilfrid's alter egos instructs him to jump and at the end of the second, the other informs him that he is jumping. Wilfrid has transitioned from a passive encounter with the past to an active decision to 'reconcile the living with the dead'. This concludes Act I, as Wilfrid embarks on his journey:

WILFRID Tu viens, papa ?
LE PÈRE Où va-t-on ?
WILFRID Je te remmène au pays.³⁹ (Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 46)

3.3 First encounters

Where Act I was characterized by the temporal interruption, Act II is characterized by the encounters between individuals displaced from a conventional life in the process of confronting the past. Act II stages the process of metamorphosis towards Patočka's third movement of life. It begins with a woman singing off stage. An old blind man, Wazâân, enters, reciting *The Iliad*, recalling the blind Homer. Wilfrid arrives carrying his father's corpse. The effect of these three uncanny presences on stage creates a mythical atmosphere and suspends the sense of the present largely characteristic of the previous act.

³⁸ 'Wilfrid, sans le savoir, tu es sur le point de quitter les chemins pour te précipiter tête première dans le gouffre.' (*Wilfrid, without knowing it, you are about to leave the paths in order to throw yourself headlong into the abyss.*)

³⁹ WILFRID Are you coming, dad?

LE PÈRE Where are we going?

WILFRID I am taking you back to the homeland.

Wazâân asks Wilfrid who he is. In the inverse of Tiresias' encounter with Oedipus in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, the blind seer is at home, questioning the wandering protagonist. As Oedipus does Tiresias, Wilfrid asks Wazâân about his parents, and Wazâân confirms that Ismail and Jeanne were from this unnamed village. The mythical atmosphere is interrupted by the villagers' arrival. This collective, like Jeanne's family in Act I, is governed by rules that stifle or exclude the individual – the singing Simone. Yet Simone refuses to remain silent.

SIMONE Il n'y a pas si longtemps pourtant, vous m'assuriez que la guerre était une chose mauvaise qui devait disparaître, se terminer justement pour que naisse enfin la liberté. Aujourd'hui, la guerre est terminée. Vous me dites encore ne chante pas, ne parle pas, ne rêve pas. Vous me dites tais-toi, Simone, tais-toi! [...] Je vous insulterais longtemps encore, jusqu'à ce que vous fassiez silence. SILENCE! Ecoutez ma voix! C'est la voix pour rappeler aux vivants les morts.⁴⁰ (Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 52)

Simone's voice represents the present that refuses the obliteration of the dead. It isn't the war alone that has destroyed freedom, it is the silence imposed by the collective. Simone is denied the freedom to speak and to dream; relegated to survival, Patočka's second movement of life, 'life for life's sake', that is an existence predicated on sustenance. Simone's reaction is revolt. Only through revolt against an imposed acquiescence to the will of the majority (as dictated by silence) can the past, represented by the dead, be brought to bear on the present, or the living.

⁴⁰ SIMONE And yet, it was not that long ago, you assured me that the war was something bad that had to disappear, to finish precisely to enable the birth of freedom. Today, the war is finished. You still tell me don't sing, don't speak, don't dream. You tell me shut up Simone, shut up! [...] I will keep insulting you for a long time to come, until you are silent. SILENT! Listen to my voice! It is the voice to remind the living of the dead.

The response of the collective is violence. It was the cause of Saïd's death, as recounted by Simone.⁴¹ And, when she refuses silence, Simone is seized by the villagers and slapped. Wazâân intercedes, separating Simone from the villagers and sending them away. In response to this violence, Simone says to Wazâân: 'Wazâân, c'est vrai qu'il n'y a plus personne! Que les arbres!'⁴² (Mouawad and Leblanc 2009: 52). There is no one left; humanity has disappeared into a violent collective unit that subsumes the individual in seeking to preserve the traditions. Wazâân introduces Simone to Wilfrid, explaining that Wilfrid is the 'answer' Simone has been waiting for, an other confronting the past. Wilfrid carries the past in the form of his father's corpse, Simone carries it through her song, which 'reminds the living of the dead'. Wazâân encourages Simone and Wilfrid to seek others like them, who are 'mad', and to 'hurlez fort pour que tout le monde entende.'⁴³ (Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 53).

The villagers refuse to bury Ismail, and advise Wilfrid to ask Hakim, a powerful former militia chief, for a grave. Simone and Wilfrid visit Hakim and are subjected to Hakim's proud accounts of his acts of torture during the war. This scene once again draws a correlation between past and present, death and sex. Simone and Wilfrid are there to ask for a grave; Hakim is in the middle of telling a graphic tale of his sexual exploits. Human beings are objectified and dehumanized; and the previous conjunction between torture, death and sex continues, culminating in the reappearance of Guiromelan. Wilfrid, 'au cœur lumineux',⁴⁴ cannot bear Hakim's

⁴¹ (Mouawad and Leblanc 2009: 52).

⁴² 'Wazâân, it's true that there is no one left! Only trees!'

⁴³ 'shout loudly so that everyone can hear.'

⁴⁴ 'with the luminous heart'

evident pleasure in recounting the story of a father tortured into raping his infant daughter. Guiromelan appears again when Wilfrid is confronted with a situation in which he is rendered powerless. Violence is met by violence, and the imaginary annihilates the perverse: Guiromelan decapitates Hakim as Wilfrid and Simone flee.

3.4 The Other

When Wilfrid returns to Wazâân for guidance, it becomes clear that he has transitioned from bewilderment to revolt. Wazâân advises Wilfrid to listen to destiny in the form of ‘his star, his bitter star.’

WILFRID Qu’est-ce qu’elle dit?
WAZÂÂN Avancer toujours, même si on n’y croit plus.
Avancer malgré la perte du but, avancer malgré la raison qui nous fige, nous immobilise, malgré la futilité que l’on découvre même dans ce qu’avancer veut bien signifier. Avancer même si on a perdu toute fierté, toute capacité à espérer. Avancer. [...] [J]e leur dirai : Écoutez la colère de la jeunesse qui fera de vous les vaincus des vaincus.⁴⁵ (Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 58-59)

Here, oracular language, the reference to the stars and the future, and the slow tempo in which the speech was delivered in the 2009 production, suspends the sense of passing time, distancing this from the previous intense, violent scene.

Prophetically, Wazâân explains that it is the power of the anger of youth that makes

⁴⁵ WILFRID What does she say?

WAZÂÂN Keep moving forward, even if you’ve given up. Keep moving forward even if you lose your goal, move forward even if reason freezes you on the spot, immobilises you, in spite of the futility that you discover in what moving forward even means. [...] I will tell them: Listen to the fury of youth that will make of you the vanquished of the vanquished.

the revolt against stasis possible. This emphasis is on movement – to move is to become aware of temporality, of the process of duration inherent in movement. It is movement towards the future, and the verb *avancer* echoes the third movement Patočka's temporal schema, associated with the future. This is the movement associated with truth and responsibility; the major concerns of the encounters in the second half of the play.

Here, at the mid-point of the play, the two young people leave for the crossroads. Wilfrid, now in revolt, is able to follow Simone, who is searching for a light that has flashed in response to her singing. This light-seeking leads not to an abstract enlightenment but to encounters with others:

SIMONE Je chanterai tout le temps et l'autre là-bas répondra.
Nos musiques comme repères, nous nous retrouverons. ⁴⁶
(Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 65)

The second half of Act II, the section titled 'The Other', thematically inverts the first. Where the first half consisted of encounters with a collective (the villagers, the militia) the second half depicts a series of encounters with individuals. It begins with Wilfrid, Simone and the father's corpse meeting Amé, the man who shone a light in response to Simone's singing.⁴⁷ Amé, intrigued by Simone's cry, has come to

⁴⁶ SIMONE I will sing all the time, and the other person over there will respond. With our music as landmarks, we will find each other.

⁴⁷ The characters recognise each other, affirming each other's identity as the singing woman/the man with the light. This short dialogue plays with the repetition of *toi* and *moi* in order to create a verbal link between Simone and Amé. For a discussion on the use of pronouns in developing ties between the characters in this section of *Littoral*, see Marilyn Matar's 2013 article "'A La Croisée des Chemins, Il Peut y Avoir L'autre.'" Lecture Croisée de *Littoral* de Wajdi Mouawad, *Les Versets du Pardon de*

the crossroads. He wants to know who Simone is, and what she wants. In their introductory dialogue, Simone and Amé situate themselves in relation to time:

AMÉ Pendant la guerre, je posais des bombes!

SIMONE La bombe que je veux poser est plus terrible que la plus terrible des bombes qui a explosé dans ce pays.

AMÉ On en posera dans les autobus, dans les restaurants...

SIMONE Non! Cette bombe ne peut exploser que dans un seul lieu. Dans la tête des gens.

AMÉ Qu'est-ce que tu veux dire ?

SIMONE On va aller raconter des histoires. Tout ce qu'ils veulent nous faire oublier, on va l'inventer, le raconter ! Ils seront obligés de nous arracher le visage !

AMÉ Quel genre d'histoires ?

SIMONE La tienne, la mienne. Le silence de chacun.⁴⁸ (Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 61-62)

Amé is living as a person of the past; having laid bombs and murdered people, he is initially unable to conceive of doing anything else. However, he rejects either complacency or pleasure in the past. He is an outsider, refusing either the community of the village or the militia. Simone marks her individuation from the collective by singing; Amé is intrigued, and responds to her call.

Simone's figurative violence contrasts with Amé's physical violence. Hers is that of the word used as a weapon against a forgetting imposed by the will of the

Myriam Antaki, et Palestine de Hubert Haddad', *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*.

⁴⁸ AMÉ During the war, I planted bombs!

SIMONE The bomb that I want to plant is more terrible than the most terrible bomb that exploded in this country.

AMÉ We will plant them in buses, in restaurants...

SIMONE No! This bomb can only explode in one place. In people's heads.

AMÉ What do you mean?

SIMONE We are going to tell stories. Everything that they want to make us forget, we will invent it, tell it! They will have to tear off our faces!

AMÉ What kind of stories?

SIMONE Yours, mine. The silence of each person.

collective. The bomb for Simone is the act of storytelling itself. Amé replies to Simone's last line cited above saying: 'Ils s'en foutent des histoires! Ils disent: trop d'histoires, plus d'histoire.'⁴⁹ (Mouawad and Leblanc 2009: 62), The silence imposed by the collective 'they' is the end of history.⁵⁰ It is precisely in defence of history that Simone's storytelling violence is directed, a refusal of Patočka's non-historic life of everyday survival.

At this point Ismail's corpse begins to represent a father figure for Simone and Amé; as the corpse physically represents the past, Amé wants to bury it in the nearest ditch, at which point Simone refers to Ismail as 'this father' (*ce père*) instead of 'his father' (*son père*). With this shift in pronoun, The Father is no longer simply Wilfrid's father, but *a* father. This is when Amé loses his temper.

AMÉ Les parents, on devrait les éventrer [...] On les rassemblera le long d'un grand mur, on les alignera et on leur hurlera ! On leur dira que le mal qu'ils nous ont fait est plus grand que le meurtre, on leur dira qu'ils nous ont pris l'irremplaçable, qu'ils ont tué les visions de notre jeunesse, de nos plus chers miracles !⁵¹ (Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 63)

⁴⁹ 'They don't give a damn about stories! They say: too many stories, no more history.'

⁵⁰ On the significance of history for Mouawad in relation to Patočka, see Chapter 3, 1.e. where Mouawad cites Patočka: 'Il n'y aura de l'histoire qu'aussi longtemps qu'il y aura des hommes qui ne se contenteront pas simplement de "vivre", qui seront au contraire prêts à renoncer à la vie nue pour poser et défendre les fondations d'une communauté de la reconnaissance mutuelle.' ('There will only be history for as long as there will be people who will not content themselves with simply "living" but who will on the contrary be ready to renounce plain life in order to lay down and defend the foundations of a community of mutual recognition.')

⁵¹ AMÉ Parents should be disemboweled [...] We will gather them up against a big wall, line them up and scream at them! We will tell them the pain that they have inflicted on us is worse than murder; we will tell them that they have stolen the irreplaceable from us, that they have murdered the visions of our youth, of our most precious miracles!

Simone calls Amé into the present:

SIMONE Amé, regarde ! Nous sommes tous les deux ici. Depuis des nuits je rêvais à ce jour où nous nous rencontrerions.⁵²
(Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: page 63)

Despite the fact that Amé feels that his youthful ambitions and plans for the future have been murdered, Simone stresses that there is a self that exists in the present. It is a self capable of transitioning from the imaginary (*je rêvais*) to the real (the encounter).

This recognition of otherness and solidarity continues throughout the play. The scenes in this section alternate between Simone and the other travellers (Amé, Sabbé, Massi) and between Wilfrid and his two unreal companions, Guiromelan and The Father. As the encounters multiply, Simone, Amé, Sabbé and Massi are linked through sharing stories. Each had befriended the unknown other prior to the physical encounter, through light or sound (Simone's singing, Amé's light, Sabbé's drum and Massi's laugh). Each has lost friends and family in the war. As this community congregates, Wilfrid becomes increasingly alienated from the group and frustrated with his imaginary companions. In the penultimate scene of the act he asks:

WILFRID Et moi, quelle histoire je pourrais raconter sinon celle des silences que tu m'as légués ? Ils ont pleins de mots pleins et moi vide de mots vides !
LE PÈRE Ils ont vécu la guerre.

⁵² SIMONE Amé, look! We are both here. For endless nights I dreamt of this day when we would meet.

WILFRID Je les envie sincèrement d'avoir vécu la guerre si tu veux savoir ! Ça donne un sens pour parler au monde. Mais moi, on s'en fout !⁵³ (Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 73)

Wilfrid's anger grows and he confronts Guiromelan:

WILFRID Je ne te crois pas ! Tu n'existes pas ! Et si tu n'avais pas existé, je serais plus heureux aujourd'hui !

LE CHEVALIER Et tu serais enfoncé dans ton quotidien, sexe en avant, dans la confusion des corps à jeter dans le ventre d'une autre ton essence de petit satisfait ! Honte ! Je suis chevalier par Dieu et je n'ai pas envahi l'âme d'un scélérat ! D'un de ceux qui, confortables, sont embusqués en arrière et vivent leur bonheur aux dépens du sang des autres ! Arrière !

*Le chevalier tue Wilfrid.*⁵⁴ (Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 74)

Guiromelan's speech is a quotation from Patočka's *Heretical Essays*: 'All who betray this solidarity must realise that they are sustaining war and are the parasites on the sidelines who live off the blood of others.' (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 135). By denying Guiromelan, Wilfrid is submitting to everyday life (comfortable, pleasurable, unquestioning) and avoiding Patočka's 'life at the peak'. So Wilfrid is giving up on his own metamorphosis, and Guiromelan kills him a second time. In

⁵³ WILFRID And me, what story can I possibly tell, other than that of the silence that you bequeathed me? They are full of full words, and I am empty of empty words!

LE PÈRE They lived through the war.

WILFRID You know, I seriously envy them for having lived through the war! It gives them a reason to speak to the world. But no one gives a damn about me!

⁵⁴ WILFRID I do not believe you! You don't exist! And if you hadn't existed, I would be happier today!

LE CHEVALIER And you would be ensconced in your everyday life, guided by your penis, and in the confusion of bodies pumping your essence of small minded smugness into another's belly! Shame! I am a knight by the grace of God, and I did not invade the soul of a miscreant! One of those who lies comfortably crouching at the back, living happily at the expense of the blood of others! Back! *Guiromelan kills Wilfrid*

contrast to the first time at the morgue, this is not a death Wilfrid craved. Previously Guiromelan 'killed' Wilfrid to help him escape the hardness of the real; now it is on the same grounds that he killed other characters; disgust at their enslavement to the everyday and orgiastic present.⁵⁵

In the final scene of the Act, a despairing Wilfrid is about to give up and bury his father hastily. Sabbé tells Wilfrid: '[C]e que je peux te promettre, Wilfrid, c'est qu'à la première nuit, je reviendrai le déterrer et je l'emporterai vers un lieu qui ait un sens.'⁵⁶ (Mouawad and Leblanc 2009: 75). Simone clarifies; like Wilfrid, the other four group-members are parentless, and the corpse has become a figurative father to them all. Ismail's body has become a representation of the past, offering the wanderers a last opportunity to lay their fathers to rest.

SABBÉ Simone, avant d'aller raconter nos histoires à qui que ce soit, nous devons enterrer ce corps. Amé, que tu le veuilles ou non, ce corps est le corps de ton père. [...] Ouvre les yeux et reconnais en lui le père disparu, le père assassiné, le père ensanglanté. Trouvons-lui un lieu et reposons-le pour de bon. Nous repartirons libres, Amé, libres, libres, plus libres!⁵⁷ (Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 77)

⁵⁵ Patočka characterizes the orgiastic and demonic impulses as attempts to escape the everyday that instead result in further 'bondage to life'. These are sometimes collectively referred to as the orgiastic-demonic. (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 99-101, 111-113)

⁵⁶ 'What I can promise you, Wilfrid, is that the very first night, I will come back, dig him up and carry him to a place that has meaning.'

⁵⁷ SABBÉ Simone, before going and telling our stories to anyone and everyone, we have to bury this corpse. Amé, whether you want to or not, this body is the body of your father. [...] Open your eyes and recognise in him your lost father, murdered father, bloodied father. Let us find him a place and lay him to rest for good. Then we will leave free, Amé, free, free, more free!

The wilful casting aside of blindness ('Open your eyes') described here is twofold. It is a reconfiguration of time as the simultaneity of past and future, a laying to rest of the past that liberates the future. The corpse has come to mean something for each character. He has become a father figure for the group of people whose lives have been destroyed by war. The decomposing body represents a chance to come to terms with death, to carry out a burial and pay respects to the dead, both of which have been impossible during and in the aftermath of war. Through this relationship with the corpse, it has become possible for each living character to 'réconcilier les morts avec les vivants'.⁵⁸ (Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 46)

The final Act reaffirms the third movement of life, associated with the future, as the conscious awareness and questioning of the past and present. It also marks a transition in the production, from focus on the individual, to focus on the solidarity that develops between individuals. All five are finally brought together by their willingness to reconfigure their relationship to time (for Simone, Amé, Sabbé and Messi, this is their acknowledgement and sharing of their traumatic past; for Wilfrid it is the confrontation with his unquestioned existence in the present) and thus to themselves. In the first scene of the Act (scene 34), Joséphine arrives, carrying heavy phonebooks and reciting names of the people of the country, many of whom are dead. Joséphine frantically asks for a pencil, as she has lost her own, in order to write down the names that she has memorized. She is only at ease once she has written down the names, granting memorialisation through written testimony.

⁵⁸ 'reconcile the living with the dead.'

With the disappearance of the physical person, through death or absence, all that remains is the name inscribed in the phonebook. Sabbé, Massi and Amé each tell Joséphine to write their names in her phonebook. They tell her their names and provide a brief self-description. 'Ecris: Je suis Sabbé au père décapité, fou du village du bas de la vallée!'⁵⁹ (Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 82). The name is an external affirmation of existence, a signifier that points to a personal history and that through inscription resists erasure.

Each description also marks the traveller as an outsider or 'madman'. As Sabbé remarks, they are called 'mad' by the anonymous 'they'. 'Nous sommes fous mais c'est leur raison qui nous donne raison d'être fous!'⁶⁰ (Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 82). Their 'madness' is the rejection of the 'reason' of the collective. The link between the characters, as madmen, is of fundamental importance; the solidarity between characters evolves out of the recognition of each character's individuality and experience. Each character resists appropriation of or by the other.⁶¹ They are mad for different reasons, forming a 'network of cries, singing and messages thrown in the river'. (Mouawad and Leblanc 2009: 82). Each retains their own form of madness and their own form of communication. There is no normativity, and crucially, no one is silenced.

Joséphine, the newest group member, emphasizes the importance of solidarity: 'Le malheur est grand pour celui qui avance sans personne pour l'appeler

⁵⁹ 'Write: I am Sabbé with the decapitated father, the madman of the village in the lower valley.'

⁶⁰ 'We are mad but it is their reason that makes us mad!'

⁶¹ For the discussion on solidarity and responsibility, see Chapter 4.

par son nom.⁶² (Mouawad and Leblanc 2009: 85). As Simone asks her what she will do with her phonebooks, Joséphine replies:

JOSÉPHINE Je ne sais pas. [...] Wazâân, l'aveugle, m'a dit que je sauvais une mémoire. Il m'a appelé par un nom que je n'avais jamais entendu. Il m'a dit : « Bonne route, Antigone ! » [...]

MASSI Quand tu regardes devant toi, Joséphine, qu'est-ce que tu vois ?

JOSÉPHINE Le sang et l'inverse du sang. Et nous depuis longtemps disparus. À notre place, d'autres cherchant sens et beauté au milieu des catastrophes. Ne trouvant pas de réponses, ils trouveront... nos noms ! Les noms de ceux qui, dix mille ans plus tôt, ont été vaincus ! Où les cacher, à qui les confier pour qu'ils ne soient pas dépouillés, brûlés, jetés ! Je ne peux pas les garder indéfiniment avec moi, c'est lourd, si lourd!⁶³ (Mouawad, Leblanc 2009 : 86)

Here, what disrupts the present, what answers the search for 'meaning and beauty in the midst of catastrophes' is the inscription, the written trace.⁶⁴ Memory is inscribed in writing, a fragile trace that outlives the dead, and yet whose own survival is precarious as they can be 'vandalised, burned, discarded'. The inscription

⁶² 'It is a great misfortune for the person who moves forward in life without anyone to call her by her name.'

⁶³ JOSÉPHINE I don't know. [...] Wazâân, the blind man, told me that I was saving a memory. He called me by a name that I had never heard. He said: 'Safe journey, Antigone!' [...]

MASSI When you look ahead, Joséphine, what do you see?

JOSÉPHINE Blood and the inverse of blood. And we disappeared long ago. In our place, others seek meaning and beauty in the midst of catastrophes. Not finding any answers, they will find... our names! The names of those who, ten thousand years earlier, were defeated! Where to hide them, whom to entrust them to in order to make sure that they are not vandalised, burned, discarded! I cannot keep them forever with me, it's heavy, so heavy!

⁶⁴ The reference to Antigone again recalls the past as tradition, stressing the trans-temporal nature of shakiness. As Antigone followed a moral order so is Joséphine by 'saving a memory' that throughout the play the collective 'they' have been represented as silencing. Both women reject the simple life lived in the present.

is both a present trace of those who are absent, and simultaneously a mark of their absence. The parallel between the corporeal and writing is made clear in the staging as Wilfrid carries his father's corpse and Joséphine her phone books. As Joséphine asks where to hide her phone books, Wilfrid responds with: 'On a comme qui dirait le même problème!'⁶⁵ (Mouawad and Leblanc 2009: 86). This highlights the transient nature of life, which is outlived by the inanimate, and stresses the role played by the inanimate in memorialising the dead, and the past in general, however fragile such a medium may be.

As the characters travel towards the sea, Joséphine reaches out to Wilfrid, calling him into the present as Simone did with Amé.⁶⁶ Increasingly, The Father is on the verge of disappearing, as Wilfrid gradually comes to terms with death. In bringing his father back to the homeland, Wilfrid has become reconciled to his father's death.⁶⁷ Wilfrid has also reconciled himself with his manifest past, both in the form of his father's corpse and his knight, Guiromelan. When he wishes Guiromelan goodbye, he remarks:

J'ai bien appris ce que tu m'as montré. Appris à mourir surtout, qui est la plus grande leçon, mais maintenant je dois faire le dur apprentissage de la vie et pour ça, je dois être seul, sans filet, sans rien, je dois marcher dans le vide à mon tour, sans fantôme pour me tenir la main, mais avec un esprit dans le cœur. [...] Je veux que

⁶⁵ 'It seems as though we have the same problem!'

⁶⁶ See p.126-127.

⁶⁷ Speaking of himself, Wilfrid says: 'Il a nettoyé le corps de son père [...] Son cœur respire. Il est devenu plus lucide.' (Mouawad, Leblanc 2009: 101) ('*He cleansed his father's body [...] His heart can breathe. He has become more lucid.*')

tu vives si ancré en moi que nous ne soyons plus en mesure de nous voir.⁶⁸ (Mouawad and Leblanc 2009: 101)

The embodied imaginary is released because it is no longer necessary for the internal presence of the trace. Wilfrid can accept living as a relationship between opposites: real and unreal, living and dying, the world and the abyss. Like the tideline, the boundary between opposites is continually shifting, as meaning is transformed in experience through the past and future. The temporal self-consciousness of time oscillates between these horizons of time, developing a new relationship to its self, contingent upon the trace of what is irretrievably past and the unknown to come. Here Mouawad is deeply indebted to Jan Patočka, who in *Heretical Essays* writes: 'The means by which this state [everydayness] is overcome is the solidarity of the shaken; the solidarity of those who are capable of understanding what life and death are all about, and so what history is all about.' (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 134)

⁶⁸ I have learned what you have shown me. Learned to die most of all, which is the greatest lesson, but now I need to pursue the difficult apprenticeship of life and that, I need to be alone, without a safety net, without anything, it is my turn to walk across the void, without a ghost to hold me by the hand, but with a spirit in my heart. [...] I want you to live anchored so strongly within me that we will no longer be able to see each other.

4 *Incendies*

4.1 Synopsis⁶⁹

Nawal Marwan has died. Her notary, Hermile Lebel, welcomes her twin children, Jeanne and Simon, for the reading of the will. Nawal bequeaths Jeanne a green canvas jacket with the number seventy-two on the back, and Simon a red notebook. Each twin is to be given a sealed envelope, with precise instructions, after she is buried naked and face down in the earth without a headstone. Each twin is to pass on their envelope: Jeanne must locate their father, and give it to him; Simon must find their brother and do the same. The twins are bewildered, as they thought their father dead and were unaware of a brother. Simon, still furious that Nawal stopped speaking five years before her death, storms out, followed by Jeanne, leaving their inheritance behind. Jeanne later resolves to fulfil her mother's wishes, and returns to collect the jacket and envelope.

4.1.1 Nawal and Sawda

Nawal's story begins at the age of fourteen, when she meets her lover Wahab, a refugee, to tell him she is pregnant. They plan to tell their families and envisage a future together. However, Nawal's mother Jihane is intransigent in her refusal to

⁶⁹ Given the temporal complexity of *Incendies*, the following synopsis is not linear, but rather summarises each of the two narratives that are interwoven to form the plot.

accept Nawal's pregnancy. Nawal must choose either to keep her child, in which case she must leave home naked, or give up her child, in which case she may remain. She submits to her mother's will and Wahab comes to say a final goodbye. Nawal gives birth to a boy, whom the local midwife Elhame takes south. Nawal tucks a red clown's nose that Wahab gave her into the baby's blanket, a symbol of her love for him. The following year, Nawal's grandmother Nazira is dying. On her deathbed, she asks Nawal to refuse the life that is being imposed upon her and to leave the village. Nazira tells her granddaughter to bury her face up, and to return to the village only when she has learned to read and write in order to inscribe Nazira's name on a headstone.

Three years later, Nawal returns to the village to engrave the headstone. Addressing her deceased grandmother, Nawal tells Nazira how she was harassed upon returning to the village and defended herself. She explains that she is going to go find her son. As she leaves, Nawal is accosted by a young woman named Sawda, a refugee from the South, who asks to accompany Nawal, and to be taught to read and write. Nawal teaches Sawda as they travel south, to an orphanage in the village of Nabatieh (southern Lebanon) in search of Nawal's son. She reaches the Kfar Rayat orphanage, but it is deserted. The children have been abducted by the refugees in the area in retaliation for three refugee children murdered by the militia. Nawal decides to go to the refugee camps to find her son, but refuses to allow Sawda to accompany her due to the volatility of relations between the militia and camp refugees.

Nawal's bus to the refugee camp is attacked by the militia in retaliation for the children's abduction. Nawal survives to tell Sawda her story of the bus massacre.⁷⁰ She was spared because she shouted that she wasn't a refugee but 'one of them'. (Mouawad 2009b: 51). Nawal's story then jumps twenty-one years. Now forty, Nawal runs a newspaper with Sawda. Their premises have been attacked, their friends murdered, machines destroyed. Those who finance and read the paper have also been attacked.⁷¹ The women flee to the camps, where Sawda has family, but they become separated and Sawda survives the Kfar Riad and Kfar Matra camp massacres.⁷² She is frantic, having lost her entire family, and vows that she will go into people's homes and kill in revenge. Nawal placates her and explains that instead of killing innocents, Nawal will take a position as a teacher to the daughter of Chad, the head of the militias, and kill him. Nawal succeeds in killing Chad, and is consequently imprisoned in the notorious Kfar Rayat prison; Sawda blows herself up in a café frequented by militia fighters.

⁷⁰ On the significance of the Ein al-Rumaneh massacre in 1975, see Introduction, p.6.

⁷¹ The kidnap and killing of journalists has occurred frequently in Lebanese history. Journalists under Ottoman rule were executed in 1915 and 1916; 6 May is officially 'Press Martyr's Day' in commemoration of those executed on 6 May 1916. Journalists were often targeted during the Civil War; this continued after 1990 with the execution of several well-known journalists. Samir Kassir and Gebran Tueni were killed in separate car bombs in 2005. For more information on the executions of journalists in Lebanon, cf. Mroueh 2015.

⁷² A reference to the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacres.

4.1.2 Jeanne and Simon

Jeanne, Simon and Hermile Lebel bury Nawal. Jeanne decides to search for her father and contacts Nawal's former nurse Antoine to see if he has any information. He explains that Nawal broke her five-year silence only once to say: 'Now that we are together, I am better.' Antoine however, recorded hours of cassette tapes of Nawal's silence in the hopes of hearing her speak, and gives them to Jeanne. Jeanne leaves with over five hundred hours of recorded time in a box. Simon finds Jeanne some time later, concerned that she has cut off from the world and abandoned her doctorate in mathematics. He becomes irate when he learns that Jeanne is determined to fulfil their mother's wishes, and they argue.

Struggling to find more information on her mother, Jeanne later returns to talk to Antoine. She explains that Nawal stopped speaking on her birthday, when she was following a trial at the international criminal court. Jeanne has searched the trial transcripts but cannot find anything specific for that day. All she has found is a small photograph of Nawal, aged thirty-five, with a friend. Antoine offers to help Jeanne by enlarging the picture of Nawal. They discover that the two women are standing in front of a burnt-out bus that bears the inscription 'The Refugees of Kfar Rayat'. Antoine and Jeanne deduce that Nawal was in Kfar Rayat towards the end of the 1970s. Jeanne decides that she must travel to her mother's homeland to continue her search, and calls Simon to say goodbye.

Jeanne arrives at the village where Nawal was born and meets a man who is well informed on village history. He tells her that Nawal and Wahab have become

legendary in the village. Jeanne asks where Kfar Rayat is located, and Jeanne calls Simon before heading south to Kfar Rayat. Upon visiting the prison, Jeanne is told of the legendary singing woman, prisoner number seventy-two – the same number as the one printed on the canvas jacket Nawal left Jeanne. The guide explains that the prison was created in 1978, the same year as the massacres at the Kfar Riad and Kfar Matra camps. Jeanne succeeds in interviewing a former guard who recognizes the jacket, and identifies Nawal in Jeanne's photo as the singing woman. He says she was imprisoned for assassinating the head of the militias. He also tells Jeanne that Nawal was repeatedly raped by the head jailer and torturer Abou Tarek, and that she gave birth in prison. Responsible for throwing babies born in prison into the river, the former guard collected the child that Nawal had placed in a bucket, but once at the river found himself unable to dispose of the child, and instead gave it to a farmer near Kisserwan. The guard tells Jeanne to find a 'white village',⁷³ and ask for the man who raised the singing woman's child. Jeanne finds a farmer named Malak, and asks him about the child of the singing woman. The old man takes Jeanne in his arms, and calls her Jannaane; Jeanne remonstrates that her name is Jeanne. Malak explains that the singing woman gave birth to twins whom he named Jannaane and Sarwan.

Meanwhile, Simon has collected the red notebook which contains his mother's testimony at the international criminal court. Nawal's jailer is on trial, and

⁷³ JEANNE Kisserwan se trouve où?

LE CONCIERGE Un peu plus à l'ouest. [...] Un village tout blanc. (Mouawad 2009b: 67)

(JEANNE *Where is Kisserwan?*)

THE CONCIERGE *A bit further west. [...] A completely white village.*)

Nawal describes how she came to give birth to twins. She predicts that they will one day confront their father in his cell. Simon visits Hermile Lebel, concerned that he will be unable to fulfil his mother's last wishes, and Hermile promises to help. They travel to Nawal's homeland, and in trying to trace the identity of Nawal's son, manage to find a name, Nihad Harmanni. Simon and Hermile are advised to contact Chamseddine, described as the 'spiritual leader' of the southern resistance. When they find him, Simon and Hermile explain to Chamseddine that they discovered that Nawal's son must be Nihad Harmanni. Chamseddine is incredulous, but listens to Hermile's explanation before sending Hermile out to speak to Simon alone. After their conversation Simon stops speaking.

4.1.3 Nihad Harmanni

A young man, Nihad Harmanni, listens to a Walkman, using his sniper rifle to play air guitar and singing 'The Logical Song' by Supertramp. He sees something in the distance, lifts his rifle, shoots, and points a camera in the same direction. He starts singing again, then stops, drops to the ground, takes aim and shoots, goes to the edge of the stage and drags a wounded man onstage by his hair. The man is a war photographer who begs for his life. The young man says that he too is a photographer, and shows the journalist pictures of people he has killed. The young man goes through the photographer's bag, takes out a camera with a cable release and shoots a few pictures. He then attaches the camera to the end of his rifle, points at the photographer, and shoots both the gun and camera. The shutter clicks at the

instant the photographer is shot. The young man speaks to the dead man as though being interviewed by Star TV., then begins singing 'Roxanne' by The Police.

Chamseddine tells Simon Nihad's story: He trained Nihad as a fighter but one day Nihad decided to leave in search for his mother. Unable to find her, he lost all sense of meaning and became a sniper. A foreign army invaded the country. After killing seven of the enemy's soldiers, Nihad was captured but instead of killing him in revenge, they installed him at their newly created Kfar Rayat prison as head jailer. Nihad became Abou Tarek. He didn't kill the singing woman because he liked her voice. Having sought her son, Nawal unwittingly found him in her jailer and rapist.

Nihad reappears to give testimony before the criminal court. He explains that he was given a clown's nose as the marker of his origins. Following the court case, it is this detail that enabled Nawal to recognize her son. That day she stopped speaking.

Jeanne goes to speak to Simon – also mute since discovering his brother's identity. Simon asks Jeanne to explain if one plus one can ever equal one. Jeanne explains how this is mathematically possible and suddenly realizes what Simon is saying.

The twins meet Nihad Harmanni. Jeanne gives him her envelope, a letter from Nawal to Abou Tarek explaining that he is the father of the twins before him. Simon then gives Nihad his envelope, a letter from Nawal explaining that Nihad is the son she always loved. Finally, upon returning home, Hermile Lebel gives Jeanne and Simon the letter from Nawal that he kept for them. In the letter Nawal tells her children that having revealed the past, and removed the 'knife stuck in the throat',

Jeanne and Simon must now 'reconstruct history'. Now that they have 'broken the silence', she asks them to engrave her name on a stone and place the stone on her grave.

4.2 Oscillation

Incendies est alors l'histoire de trois histoires qui cherchent leur début, de trois destins qui cherchent leur origine pour tenter de résoudre l'équation de leur existence et tenter de trouver, derrière la dune la plus sombre, la source de beauté.⁷⁴ (Mouawad 2009f: 16)

The three main narrative threads of *Incendies* are interwoven to form an intricate double time structure: Jeanne's time and Nawal's time. This is further complicated by the emplotment and staging, which oscillate between different temporal phases within these two time structures. The first time structure is that of Jeanne, who explores the past in order to fulfil her mother's final wishes. Confronted by death (her mother's), Jeanne decides to face the past and discover her origins (her father). This time structure is broadly associated with the past. The second time structure is Nawal's narrative, which moves forward to what the audience knows is her destiny, i.e. the death with which the play opens. This structure, although set in the past, is broadly associated with the future. The narrative time of Jeanne's story moves backwards as that of Nawal moves forwards. The third narrative thread pulls against the first two as the time of the present, represented by Simon and Nihad.

⁷⁴ *Incendies* therefore tells the story of three stories seeking their beginning, three destinies seeking their origin in order to attempt to resolve the equation of their existence, to find, behind the darkest dune, the source of beauty.

The following analysis will focus on the mechanics of temporal representation that creates *Incendies*' time-rhythm. It is this rhythm that draws these three temporal periods into relation with each other, until they finally appear together at the end of the play.

The published text of *Incendies* consists of four parts entitled *Incendie de Nawal*, *Incendie de l'enfance*, *Incendie de Jannaane* and *Incendie de Sarwan*, which each have an average of ten scenes. The first two scenes of the play take place in the notary's office. The third shows the twins' respective lives. In Scene 4, 'La conjecture à résoudre' ('the conjecture to be resolved') Jeanne returns to Hermile Lebel and collects her inheritance. As she leaves the notary's office the fourteen-year-old Nawal appears for the first time, calling for Wahab. The short stichomythic dialogue between Hermile, Nawal and Wahab at the end of the scene marks the transition from Jeanne to Nawal's narrative.

The next five scenes stage the end of Nawal's childhood and her transition into adulthood. First, she announces her pregnancy to Wahab (Scene 5); second, her mother refuses to accept Nawal's pregnancy and makes her choose to leave and keep her child or stay and give up the baby (Scene 6); third, Wahab comes to say goodbye to Nawal (Scene 7); fourth, Nawal gives birth and the baby boy is taken away (Scene 8); fifth, Nawal's grandmother Nazira dies and makes Nawal promise to leave the village and learn to 'read, write, count, speak: to think' (Scene 9). Although the time of the narrative has shifted to the past, the direction of these scenes is future-oriented. In the first scene, when Nawal tells Wahab she is pregnant, she says:

NAWAL Tu ne sais pas le bonheur qui va être notre malheur. [...]
 WAHAB On ne le cachera pas.
 NAWAL On nous tuera. Toi le premier.
 WAHAB On leur expliquera.
 NAWAL [...] Où serons-nous, toi et moi, dans cinquante ans?⁷⁵
 (Mouawad 2009b: 24-25)

In scenes five to nine, the vast majority of dialogue is in the future tense. The 'fifty years' evoked in this passage is precisely the time that elapses between this scene and the time of Nawal's death.⁷⁶ The temporal sequence of these short scenes is quick, as the stage directions indicate that in scenes five and six, Nawal is fourteen. In scenes seven and eight she is fifteen. In Scene 9, when her grandmother dies, she is sixteen. Scene 10, the penultimate scene of the first section, returns to the present for Nawal's burial. A dramatic irony arises from juxtaposing Nawal's childhood, as well as her grandmother's death, with her own burial. The section concludes with Scene 11, 'Silence', where Jeanne visits Nawal's former nurse Antoine and is given his recordings of Nawal's silence. Jeanne is puzzled, and realizes that she doesn't know what happened to her mother during her time in hospital. Her question: 'Antoine, qu'avez-vous fait avec elle pendant tout ce temps?' ('Antoine, what did you

⁷⁵ NAWAL You don't yet know the happiness that is going to be our misery. [...]

WAHAB We will not hide it.

NAWAL They will kill us. And they'll kill you first.

WAHAB We will explain.

NAWAL [...] Where will we be, you and me, in fifty years' time?

⁷⁶ This is an interesting textual detail available to the actors and in the printed script, but not necessarily to the audience. The four Nawals appear on stage to the audience as young, young adult, middle-aged and older. Spectators would only be aware of the age specifics in reading the performance programme, which specifies Nawal's age for each actor credited.

do with her during all that time?') marks Jeanne's transition from a search for proof of her father's death to a search for information about her mother's life.

In the next section, 'Incendie de l'enfance', the shifts between narrative and staged time periods intensify. Whereas in the first section, the first three scenes are set in the present, followed by five scenes in the past and two scenes in the present, section two alternates between time frames from the third scene (Scene 14) until the final scene of the section (Scene 20). The fast pace of transitions between these time periods is compounded by characters from two distinct time periods, Jeanne in the present and Nawal in the past, appearing on stage simultaneously. In this section, Nawal, now nineteen, returns to her grandmother's grave three years after Nazira's death to engrave her name on a headstone (Scene 12). She meets and travels with Sawda in search of her son (Scene 13). In the next scene Simon is frustrated with Jeanne who has cut off from everyone.

SIMON L'université te cherche. [...] Je te cherche. Je t'appelle. Tu ne réponds pas. [...] Tu es en train de faire comme elle.⁷⁷

Jeanne invites Simon to listen to the tape.

JEANNE On l'entend respirer.
SIMON Tu écoutes du silence !...
JEANNE C'est son silence.
Nawal (19 ans) apprend à Sawda l'alphabet arabe.
NAWAL Aleph, bé, tâ, szâ, jîm, hâ, khâ ...
SAWDA Aleph, bé, tâ, szâ, jîm, hâ, khâ ...[...]
SIMON Tu es en train de devenir folle, Jeanne.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ The university is looking for you. [...] I have been looking for you. I've been calling you. You don't answer. [...] You are doing the same thing she did.

⁷⁸ JEANNE You can hear her breathe.

While the twins listen to their mother's silence, on another part of the stage Nawal (19) teaches Sawda the alphabet in Arabic. This staged juxtaposition between past and present, voice and silence has a number of functions. Thematically, it highlights Jeanne's rapprochement to Nawal, and contrasts the women's growing friendship with the twins' growing tension. Temporally, this juxtaposition serves two purposes. First, the past is physically intruding on the present; the spectators are drawn further into Nawal's story as Jeanne takes increasing interest in her mother's past. Second, it contrasts Simon's response to his mother's death with Jeanne's, articulating Mouawad's adoption of Patočka's temporal movements. In response to Simon telling her she is going mad, Jeanne responds:

JEANNE Qu'est-ce que tu sais de moi ? D'elle ? Rien. Tu ne sais rien. Comment on fait pour vivre maintenant?

SIMON Tu jettes les cassettes. Tu retournes à l'université. Tu continues à donner tes cours et tu termines ton doctorat.

JEANNE Je m'en câlisse de mon doctorat ! [...] Il y a quelque chose dans le silence de ma mère que je veux comprendre, que MOI, je veux comprendre ! ⁷⁹ (Mouawad 2009b: 39)

SIMON You're listening to silence!

JEANNE It's her silence.

Nawal (19 years old) is teaching Sawda the Arabic alphabet.

NAWAL Alif, baa, taa, thaa, jiim, haa, khaa...

SAWDA Alif, baa, taa, thaa, jiim, haa, khaa...

SIMON You are going mad, Jeanne.

⁷⁹ JEANNE What do you know about me? About her? Nothing. You know nothing. How do we live now?

SIMON You throw away the tapes. You return to the university. You continue giving classes and you finish your doctorate.

JEANNE I don't give a fuck about my doctorate! [...] There is something in my mother's silence that I want to understand, that for ME, I want to understand!

The twins are here articulating two different temporal movements. Jeanne is describing how subsequent to a confrontation with death and the past, the present needs to be reconfigured. In asking 'how do we live now?', Jeanne is expressing her sense of disjointedness with the present. This is a relationship to the present that Simon refuses. For Simon, Jeanne should 'throw away the tapes' and continue the life of the everyday.⁸⁰ However, for Jeanne, the quest to understand the past has become paramount.

The temporal oscillation continues for the remainder of the *Incendie de l'enfance* section. The section's last scene concludes with the temporal weaving reaching back to the previous section as Jeanne calls Simon.

Je vais raccrocher et tomber tête première, tomber loin, très loin de cette géométrie précise qui structurait ma vie. J'ai appris à écrire et à compter, à lire et à parler. Tout cela ne sert plus à rien. Le gouffre dans lequel je vais tomber, celui dans lequel je glisse déjà, c'est celui de son silence.⁸¹ (Mouawad 2009b: 52)

Here, Jeanne's speech echoes a past unknown to her. Of the verbs that Nazira asked Nawal to promise to fulfil, only one is missing in this sequence: *penser*, to think. As in *Seuls*, thinking is characterized as other than a set of skills; it is the change of thinking that is Patočka's *metanoia*.⁸² In *Heretical Essays*, this process is described as a loss of 'directly given meaning' in favour of a 'sought for and problematic

⁸⁰ For the temporal relationship between Nawal and Nihad, see p. 148.

⁸¹ I am going to hang up and fall head first, fall a long, long way from this precise geometry that structured my life. I learned to write and to count, to read and to speak. None of it is any use anymore. The abyss into which I am about to fall, into which I am already slipping, is that of her silence.

⁸² See p. 100, footnote 12.

meaning'. (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 75). Jeanne is learning to think differently from the mathematical certainty represented by the 'precise geometry that structured her life' by seeking a problematic (i.e. not an absolute) meaning.⁸³

In the following section, *Incendie de Jannaane*, the first eight of the ten scenes continue to switch back and forth between Jeanne and Nawal's stories. This stops abruptly at the end of Scene 28, 'Les noms véritables' ('The true names'), the climax of Jeanne's story, when she discovers that Nawal gave birth to the twins in prison after being raped by Abou Tarek. At this point, there is a scene shift to Simon and an older Nawal. Simon has collected, and opens, the red notebook; as he reads its contents, Nawal speaks a testimony of her torture and rape by Abou Tarek, to the international criminal court and Abou Tarek himself. In the final scene, Hermile Lebel arrives and asks Simon what he will do. Simon is overwhelmed and cries: 'Je ne serai pas capable de le chercher, de le trouver!' ('I won't be capable of looking for him, of finding him!'). Hermile Lebel encourages Simon to find his brother and agrees to travel with him.

In the play's final section, Simon's search brings Nihad's story to light. The main function of this section is to tie together the temporal dimensions of the characters and their interrelation. This is achieved both through the staging and

⁸³ This imagery reflects a passage in Patočka's *Heretical Essays*: 'There is a bond between that mathematical theme, the theme of a truth seen once and for all time, precisely and by anyone under any circumstances, and the theme of Plato's metaphysical thought which is termed *chorismos* and means a separation, an abyss between the true world, accessible to the precise and rigorous insight of reason, and the approximate, apparent, impressionistic world defying a rigorous grasp which our ordinary experience treats as the only reality – our surroundings, the world around us.' (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 65)

tempo, as well as in the temporal focus of the narrative. *Incendie de Sarwan* consists of eight scenes (31 to 38). The first four provide a quick sequence that alternates between Nihad as a young sniper and Simon's search for his brother. Scene 31 opens with Nihad's first rifle-air guitar sequence, followed by the assassination of the photojournalist. Nihad's guitar solo moment is one of unparalleled comedy in the production. This very brief instant is swiftly contrasted with Nihad's assassination of the journalist; the scene then transitions again to the comic, as Nihad pretends to be a star giving an interview to the dead journalist. The severity of what has just occurred is negated, reduced to something imaginary.⁸⁴ It becomes part of Nihad's performance.

The unreal quality of Nihad's violence provides a striking contrast to Nawal's suffering, inflicted by Nihad, one of the dominant themes of the play. This thematic link is temporally conditioned. Where Nawal's story is essentially future-oriented, Nihad's is rooted in the present. The stage directions in Scene 31 indicate the following:

Nihad sort un appareil photographique à déroulement automatique muni d'un déclencheur souple. Nihad regarde dans le viseur et mitraille l'homme de plusieurs photos. Il tire de son sac un gros ruban adhésif et attache l'appareil photo au bout de canon de son fusil. [...] L'appareil est bien fixé. Nihad relie le déclencheur souple à la gâchette de son fusil. Il regarde dans le viseur de son fusil et vise l'homme.

⁸⁴ Audience response to this scene in all four 2009 productions attended was one of persistent laughter. Interestingly, one effect of combining a seemingly comic character with a moment of extreme violence was to transform the event into the event as perceived by Nihad. The journalist is objectified, humorously turned into an imaginary character. The violence is neutralised, subsumed into the performance. For Nihad, 'performance' is his source of dignity (see p.149).

L'HOMME Qu'est-ce que vous faites?! Ne me tuez pas! Je pourrais être votre père, j'ai l'âge de votre mère...
*Nihad tire. L'appareil déclenche en même temps. Apparaît la photo de l'homme au moment où il est touché par la balle du fusil.*⁸⁵

Nihad lives for the instant of death, for the art of capturing the moment he assassinates his victims. He embodies destruction and the annihilation of life. It is here that the temporal parallel between Nihad and Simon most clearly articulates the distinction in Patočka's philosophy between the orgiastic-demonic and the ordinary (also called the sacred and the profane). In Patočka's work, the profane is the ordinary everyday, the boredom of a 'daily striving for the procurement for life's needs'. (Dodd in Chvatík and Abrams 2011: 204). The demonic is an escape from the mundanity of the everyday, a 'release from bondage, from the identification with life'. (Dodd in Chvatík and Abrams 2011: 207). In the *Heretical Essays*, Patočka characterizes these as two aspects of the everyday.

One of the consequences which presents itself at first inconspicuously, then ever more insistently, is boredom. Boredom is not something negligible [...] but rather the ontological condition of a humanity which has wholly subordinated its life to everydayness and its anonymity. [...] A new flood of the orgiastic is an inevitable appendage to [...] bondage to life. (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 112-13)

⁸⁵ *Nihad takes out a polaroid camera with a shutter release cable. Nihad looks through the viewfinder and fires several photos at the man. He takes out from his bag a large roll of adhesive and attaches the camera to the end of his rifle. He looks through his scope and sights the man.*

THE MAN What are you doing?! Don't kill me! I could be your father, I'm your mother's age...

Nihad shoots. The camera shoots at the same time. The camera produces a picture of the man at the very instant that he is hit by the bullet from the gun.

Patočka contrasts boredom with escape, bondage to everydayness with the orgiastic escape from that bondage (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 117). Nihad is Patočka's 'orgiastic brutality' mobilised for conflict (Dodd in Chvatík and Abrams 2011: 210). Nihad's final speech concludes with precisely an expression of this orgiastic as a reaction to boredom, as he puts on his clown nose and exclaims:

Le spectacle, moi, c'est ça ma dignité. [...] Laissez-moi la porter alors et vous chanter une chanson de mon cru, pour sauver la dignité du terrifiant petit ennui.⁸⁶ (Mouawad 2009b : 87)

Nihad's entire existence is a demonic-orgiastic response to boredom, and fascination with spectacle and performance, as the interview scenes demonstrate. Nihad's violence is paralleled with Simon's focus on his present life as a boxer. Only when he loses his match does Simon turn to his mother's red notebook. Unlike Nihad, who is unable to discover the truth about his past (subsequent to which failure he becomes a sniper), Simon has a temporal artefact⁸⁷ in the form of the written record of his mother's testimony to her experience.

Reluctantly, and with the help of Hermile Lebel, Simon seeks answers, both from Chamseddine and from Jeanne. Here Simon begins to move away from the everyday bondage to life (his primary characterisation in the first three sections of the play) and to experiencing *metanoia*. The section ends with Nihad's testimony to the criminal court, attended by Nawal aged sixty. As Nihad concludes his testimony

⁸⁶ The spectacle, for me, is my dignity. [...] Let me wear it then and sing you a song of my own making, in order to save dignity from the terrifying littleness of boredom.

⁸⁷ See following section 'Embodying the temporal trace'.

by singing, Nawal at fifteen and Nawal at forty-five are on stage, giving birth. Nawal at sixty recognizes her son.

The last three scenes of the play consist of letters from Nawal, read aloud by Nawal at sixty-five, her age at death. The first is Scene 36, *Lettre au père*, addressed to Nihad as torturer, informing him that his son and daughter sit before him. Nihad tears the letter to pieces. The next scene (*Lettre au fils*) begins with Simon handing him the second letter, in which Nawal explains that she sought him everywhere and that 'Cette lettre [...] t'apprendra que la femme qui chante était ta mère.'⁸⁸ In the final scene, *Lettre aux jumeaux*, Nawal's letter instructs the twins to move forward. However, this moving forward originates in the past. It is a future that recognizes truth as a process discovery and confrontation with origins.

4.3 Embodying the temporal trace

SAWDA Une vie détruite. Qu'est-ce que c'est que ce monde où les objets ont plus d'espoir que chacun de nous ?⁸⁹ (Mouawad 2009b: 54)

Artefacts play a pivotal role throughout *Le sang* and Mouawad's wider corpus. An artefact is a trans-temporal object⁹⁰ and functions in a number of interconnected ways. As stage objects, artefacts make it possible for the audience to connect various scenes that occur in different time periods. In *Incendies*, the clown nose appears in

⁸⁸ 'In this letter [...] you will discover that the singing woman was your mother.'

⁸⁹ SAWDA A life destroyed. What is this world where objects have more hope than each of us?

⁹⁰ Semiotic analysis has devoted a great deal of attention to the stage object as sign. See Ubersfeld 1981a: 194-202; Ubersfeld 1981b: 125-164 and Sofer 2003.

three different staged time periods: Nawal's first love, Nihad's birth; Nawal's realisation that Nihad is her lost son. This device is the source of anagnorisis in *Incendies*. Artefacts also communicate information across time periods. Nawal's red notebook, containing her testimony to the criminal court, tells Simon about her experience in jail; the letter that Wilfrid receives from his father in *Littoral* tells Wilfrid his parents' story. Correlative to communicating information, trans-temporal objects connect characters across time periods, particularly in the form of legal obligations. *Incendies* begins with Nawal's will, which confers on her children an obligation to find their father and brother. Likewise, in *Forêts* it is Edmond's will that bequeaths his notebook to Loup, providing her with essential information for her quest. Artefacts also mark human absence. They indicate the absence of their creator (letters in *Incendies* and *Littoral*; tattoos in *Forêts*) or of the person with whom they are associated (e.g Joséphine's phonebooks in *Littoral*, headstones in *Incendies*, the jaw fragment in *Forêts*).

The overarching significance of the artefact in Mouawad's plays is temporal. Artefacts embody the past, survive human mortality, and in doing so, preserve something of the past in the subsequent 'present' of the character that encounters the given artefact. This significance of the artefact as a remnant or trace of the past echoes the themes that dominate Mouawad's philosophical sources, in particular Patočka's emphasis on temporality as source of meaning and therefore of shakiness. As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, Patočka's first two movements of life, broadly associated with the past and the present, are only 'shaken' when the person experiences *metanoia*, a change of thinking. This change of

thinking is prompted by a confrontation with finitude which leads to a realisation of life's possibilities.

History arises from the shaking of the naïve and absolute meaning. [...] Fundamentally, history is the unfolding of embryonic possibilities present in this shaking. (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 77)

The third movement of life is above all an awareness of the (inherently temporal) movements that constitute life. That is to say, the *metanoia* is a form of awakening, a transition from life entrenched in the present ('naïve and absolute meaning') to life confronted with the constant interpenetration of past, present and future in the movement that constitutes existence. This is what it means to 'know what life and death are all about'. (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 134). Here, the trace of that which it is not constitutes each temporal movement. The past is not a single dimension but rather a form of the interaction of past, present and future. The same is true for the other two temporal forms.

For Patočka, what ensues from shakenness is a new search for meaning, for 'humans cannot live without meaning'. (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 70). However, the search for meaning is one contingent on a refusal to accept 'absolute' meaning and to realize that meaning is what arises from movement itself.

[M]eaning as that which arises in understanding and knowing as a persisting sediment, that is, significance, conception. [...] Secondly, there is the meaning contained within the thing itself, that with which the thing addresses us and responds to our possibilities, enabling us to come to terms with it or through it with others. (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 76)

Both of these sources of meaning are dynamic: meaning 'arises' through the interaction between the meaning bestowed on the object, its 'significance, conception', and the meaning the object addresses to the person. These are endless processes; meaning is never present and given, but is constantly in development, intersected by other temporalities, a 'task for all of life in its integrity.' (Patočka trans. Kohák 1998: 151). It is here that Patočka's emphasis on the interaction between temporal movements most closely aligns with Derrida's notion of trace in *Voice and Phenomenon*. As Derrida notes, the 'origin of meaning which is as Husserl recognised of a temporal nature, is never simply present, it is '...always already engaged in the "movement" of the trace'. (Derrida 1993: 96).

In Mouawad's *Le sang* cycle, the search for meaning is driven by the artefact, an embodiment of the trace that disrupts the continuity of the present. Each character's initial confrontation with death is incited by this artefact: in *Littoral*, Ismail's personal effects and letters; in *Incendies*, Nawal's will; in *Forêts*, Ludivine's jawbone; in *Ciels*, Valéry's video messages. These artefacts evoke a past life that is brought to bear on the present. The characters struggle to understand the artefact's meaning and causal sequence; in the end, by confronting the past represented by the object, the characters come to terms with themselves and others, forging a solidarity with those who also seek a life whose movement extends beyond the accepted rootedness of the past and immediacy of the present.

Chapter 3

Spacing the narrative

Créer, pour moi, c'est découvrir des espaces. Tenter de les organiser, pour les présenter ; pour faire découvrir le point de vue dans le temps, le mien, aujourd'hui, sur un espace précis.¹ (Mouawad in Côté 2005: 105)

Discovering spaces is central to Mouawad's work as a dramatist. Theatre is, for him, inherently perspectival in its organisation of spaces: the site of the encounter between Mouawad's perspective and that of each audience member. Simone's cry in *Littoral*: 'At the crossroads, it is possible to meet the other!' (Mouawad Leblanc 1998: 50) reverberates throughout Mouawad's plays. As we shall see, this 'crossroads' as the site of the encounter is a complex, multifaceted space; emotional, geographical, metaphorical, literal and dramatic. The theatre is a meeting point for characters, but also for the audience with the characters, the audience with the audience, and Mouawad with his audience. Space in Mouawad's work arises through movement, through the individual's encounter with the world. It is the result of relational processes that makes it possible to present 'a point of view in time, mine, today, within a specific space'.

Space has been defined in various ways in the history of philosophy and in performance studies. Anne Ubersfeld distinguishes between *espace théâtral* (the shared space of actors and spectators), *espace scénique* (actors' space) and *espace dramatique* (abstract space of the play/virtual space of the text) (Ubersfeld 1981a: 113-141). Hélène Laliberté divides the so-called *espace*

¹ For me, to create is to discover spaces. To attempt to organise them in order to present them; in order to disclose a point of view in time, mine, today, within a specific space.

dramaturgique into three spaces with specific attributes: *espace physique* (mimetic, diegetic and 'off-stage'), *espace dramatique* (egocentric, interactive and kinetic) and *espace textuel* (material, and the structure of texts) (Laliberté 1998: 135-136). John Lutterbie has emphasized the distinction between space and place as a distinction between abstraction and situatedness² (Lutterbie 2001). Particularly for a semiotics of theatre, these terms are invaluable. However, the approach of this work is predominantly philosophical, therefore this chapter's focus will be the spatial in phenomenology and its influence on Mouawad's theatrical corpus.

Lutterbie highlights the significance of phenomenology in rethinking space in terms of the body, and the interaction between physical existence in the world and the conceptual understanding of space.

To be in the world is to be in place. [...] Indeed it is our being in place in the world that allows us to apprehend space.
(Lutterbie 2001: 126)

This 'being in place in the world', central to Heidegger's characterisation of human existence as being-in-the-world, is similarly articulated by Jan Patočka. For Patočka, humans have a 'certain knowledge' of the 'distinctive spatiality of the body' which serves to '[root] the body amid things; we are the central point of perspectives, a center of our orientation in the world.' (Patočka trans. Kohák 1998: 27). Mouawad's plays articulate a given perspective on the interaction between physical space (the body, stage, and theatre) and conceptual space

² 'To think about space, then, is to think abstractly, to assume an objective position and to frame our experience in terms of the relationship between objects, whether stationary or in motion. To think about place in the world is to describe our subjective experiences.' (Lutterbie 2001: 128)

(language and narrative).³ As this chapter will demonstrate, space in Mouawad's plays is a process that arises through movement and language.

Mouawad's working method draws on these two broad categories of space: Mouawad stages his own productions, writing the text and developing the set design as rehearsals progress; the narrative framework articulated by the characters creates a conceptual space. The on-stage spatial configuration of a production conditions the writing of the play, just as the text influences staging decisions. The following chapter will address Mouawad's use of space in terms of the physical and conceptual, and explore how, for him, the forms of space provided by the stage and created by the narrative have the possibility of transforming theatre into the site of an ethical encounter.

1 Theatre as presence

In a series of interviews he gave with sociologist Jean-François Côté, Mouawad expressed an aversion to 'mise en scène':

Le travail de mise en scène à proprement parler ne me passionne pas, je l'utilise avant tout pour monter mes pièces. [...] La mise en scène, ça me gonfle.⁴ (Mouawad *in* Côté 2005: 140)

Côté responded as follows:

³ As the focus of this chapter is the phenomenology of space in Wajdi Mouawad's work, I have opted for the broad categories of physical and conceptual space rather than the definitions of space identified by theorists such as Ubersfeld and Laliberté. The emphasis will be on spatial plurality as it emerges, rather than its subdivision or derivation.

⁴ I'm not passionate about *mise en scène* properly speaking, I use it above all to stage my plays. [...] *Mise en scène* does my head in.

Ce que vous dites par rapport à la question de la simplicité dans la mise en scène me semble un peu curieux parce que le travail que j'ai pu voir, celui que vous avez porté à la scène, m'a toujours semblé assez complexe du point de vue des déplacements, animé d'une grande force de mouvement, et guidé par un style très particulier, ou en tous cas une rythmique très singulière.⁵ (Côté 2005: 141)

As Côté notes, Mouawad's work as a playwright is inseparable from the complexity of his staging. Mouawad views his plays, and the theatres in which they are performed, as a meeting point or 'crossroads' that is not subject to the constraints of a single spatio-temporal reality. The stage is a space where distinct spatio-temporal realities can be simultaneously represented and allowed to interact. At times, dialogue is unconsciously shared between those inhabiting different spatio-temporal environments, creating a link between characters through shared language, as well as distantiation through their ignorance of the interaction. These effects combine to emphasize the absence of what is temporally distant. This kind of relationship between space and absence is particularly significant in *Le Sang*, where space facilitates presence, yet, as we shall see, presence is interrupted or conditioned by absence.

⁵ What you say in terms of the simplicity of your mise en scène seems a bit strange to me because the work that I have seen, that you have brought to the stage, has always seemed to me fairly complex in terms of blocking, driven by powerful movement, and guided by a very particular style, or in any case, a very specific rhythm.

1.1 *Forêts*

1.1.1 Synopsis

Forêts tells the story of seven women over a period of one hundred and forty-four years (1872-2006). The narrative is presented through a series of juxtaposed scenes that enable the simultaneous presentation of different time periods and locations.⁶

The story begins in 1989 in Quebec. At her birthday party, French Canadian Aimée announces that she is expecting a daughter, and immediately suffers a series of seizures. During her blackouts she experiences visions, seeing a soldier named Lucien from 1917. Medical examinations reveal that she has a cancerous tumour in her brain, and doctors deduce that it formed around the remains of an embryonic twin. Aimée begins chemotherapy after her daughter Loup is born, and dies twelve years later. Four years after her death, a palaeontologist named Douglas Dupontel identifies the mass in Aimée's brain as the upper jaw of a woman whose skull Douglas' palaeontologist father had painstakingly reconstructed from the remains found at a concentration camp. Douglas convinces Loup to help him discover the identity of the woman, and together they search for answers by tracing Loup's genealogy. They first visit Loup's grandmother, Luce, who tells Loup that Luce's mother's name was

⁶ Mouawad began to use spatio-temporal juxtapositions of scenes in *Littoral* and increased their frequency in *Incendies*. In *Forêts* the technique is pervasive. While the previous chapter focused on the temporal significance of this technique in *Incendies*, this analysis of *Forêts* will address its spatial significance. As with the synopsis of *Incendies*, this synopsis will take a linear form for clarity's sake.

Ludivine Davre. Loup and Douglas travel to Nancy, where they discover records belonging to a Ludivine Davre, who was left at an orphanage with a note saying that she was to be given to Edmond, the son of Albert Keller, grandson of Alexandre Keller.

It is 1872. Germany has just annexed Strasbourg. Alexandre Keller decides that his family will adopt German nationality and remain in Strasbourg. His son Albert, disgusted by his father's decision, decides to leave for a rural life in the Ardennes with his new wife Odette. Alexandre is horrified to learn that Albert has married Odette, who is Alexandre's mistress. She is expecting Alexandre's child, but told Albert that she was raped. Alexandre begs Odette not to leave, and, when she refuses, he asks her to promise never to tell Albert who is the father of her child. Albert creates an isolated zoo in the Ardennes, where Odette gives birth to twins, Edgar and H el ene, followed by another son, Edmond. As H el ene reaches adulthood, Albert takes her for his lover. Edgar is horrified, and becomes increasingly enraged as H el ene and Albert continue their liaison and H el ene gives birth to two girls. One night, Edgar snaps, kills Albert, rapes his sister, and throws himself to the bears. Odette also throws herself to the animals. Edmond leaves the forest, promising to come back to rescue H el ene and her daughters. H el ene subsequently discovers that she is pregnant. She gives birth to twins, a girl named L eonie and a misshapen, unnamed boy who lives in the 'abime' or pit. One night, the unnamed boy comes and captures H el ene, taking her to the pit with him.

It is 1917. H el ene's three daughters have been living alone, until one day they rescue a deserting soldier by the name of Lucien Blondel; the man Aim e

saw during her seizures. Léonie takes Lucien as her lover, and they have a baby girl, Ludivine. Léonie asks Lucien to rescue her mother by killing her twin; Lucien tries and is killed. Léonie leaves the zoo with her daughter, but, finding the world too difficult, places Ludivine in an orphanage before returning to the forest. Other than the note mentioned above, Ludivine is left only with a tattoo that says 'Je ne t'abandonnerai jamais.' In 1943, Ludivine finds Edmond in an asylum, and after she shows him her tattoo, he tells her his family story. Unsure of Ludivine's relationship to the family, Edmond returns to the forest. There he meets Léonie, and stays until she dies in 1951. Edmond leaves a sealed notebook containing his family story with a notaire, Mr Petit, with the instruction that it is to be given to anyone seeking information about him, Edmond Keller. It is this notebook that contains the story of the Keller family, and that Mr Petit gives to Loup.

Horrified at the violence of her family lineage, Loup is about to give up searching for more information when Douglas discovers that Ludivine's file specifies that, as a hermaphrodite, Ludivine was unable to have children. Loup and Douglas then discover that Ludivine had a best friend named Sarah Cohen. During the war, Sarah and Ludivine were members of a resistance organisation that helped downed pilots escape occupied territory. After Sarah's family and her husband Samuel were taken by the Gestapo, Sarah and Ludivine decided to entrust Sarah's baby Luce to an aviator, in order to ensure she survived the war. Luce was taken to safety in Canada, where she was adopted. Meanwhile Sarah and Ludivine remained in France. Notified that they were about to be arrested, Ludivine switched her photo for Sarah's on their identity papers, and took her

place at Treblinka concentration camp, where she died. Having resolved the mystery of Loup's origins, and the story behind the jawbone fragment, Douglas and Loup say goodbye, and Loup prepares to bury her mother.

1.1.2 Space and genre

Forêts, a dizzying four-hour sequence of multiple locations and time frames, exhaustively probes spatial concepts and tropes. Genre plays a role in this exploration of space, specifically the use of two generic traditions which have a rich and complex relationship to geographical and spatial elements: the gothic and magical realism. The influence of the gothic is perceptible in numerous elements of *Forêts*, from its thematic preoccupations (secrets, paternity, isolation, incest and nature) to narrative structure (driven by a quest to solve a violent ancestral mystery) and the play's repeated use of symbolism, pathetic fallacy and the grotesque. Spatially, the clearest influence of the gothic is the significance of the forest itself. Not unlike classics in the gothic tradition like *The Castle of Otranto* and *Wuthering Heights*, *Forêts'* eponymous setting is a claustrophobic space defined by its relationship with a family, haunted by secrets and ruled by a malevolent patriarch. Likewise, Albert's zoo in the Ardennes is an archetypically gothic space: the site of horrors including rape, incest and madness, isolated from the outside world after Albert floods the paths to keep his children from leaving.

Wendy B. Faris' definition of the five characteristics of magical realism includes three spatial elements: it 'merges different realms'; 'descriptions detail a

strong sense of the phenomenal world; and ‘magical realism disturbs received ideas about [space]’ (Faris 2004: 7). *Forêts* fulfils each of these criteria. First, the merging of different realms is achieved through staging, as different geographical and temporal loci not only share stage space but are merged through parallel environmental conditions or events, as when Mouawad’s stage direction reads ‘*Pluie, 2006. Pluie, 1943. Pluie, 1873*’ (‘Rain, 2006. Rain, 1943. Rain, 1873’) (Mouawad 2009c: 68). Second, there is a strong presence of the phenomenal world, creating a sense of realism with familiar and sensory settings which nonetheless contain magical or supernatural events. This is most evident in Aimée’s narrative; she first has the remnant of a subsumed twin embedded in her brain, and this subsequently becomes the jawbone of a holocaust victim (Mouawad 2009c: 37-38). Aimée’s illness is realistically represented through scenes with medical professionals (x-rays, chemotherapy, isolation unit) which contrast with the uncanny, supernatural explanation for her ‘cancer’. Finally, *Forêts* disturbs received ideas about space, in particular through the emergence of space and its role in trans-historical relations, explored in detail below.

1.1.3 Spatial environments

The preface to the published edition of Wajdi Mouawad’s *Forêts* begins with the heading ‘La contradiction qui fait tout exister.’⁷ (Mouawad 2009c: 7). *Forêts* predominantly focuses on the question of existence, the conditions of coming into being, and the relationship existence bears to that which came before. In

⁷ ‘The contradiction that makes everything exist.’

short, it is a play that explores the genesis of manifestation within a particular reality:

*Avec Forêts s'achève pour moi, je crois bien, une manière de raconter et de déplier une histoire, s'achève aussi cette conviction de la nécessité des origines et de l'héritage, comme si, plus important encore que le passé, il y avait les ténèbres qu'il fallait pénétrer, quitte à y laisser sa peau et sa raison, pour tenter d'éclairer la violence de notre présence.*⁸ (Mouawad 2009c: 8)

Forêts is an exploration of *ténèbres*, of darkness given form; and it is within this space of darkness that the violence of presence is manifest. Despite its multiple transitions in time (ranging from 1872 to 2006) *Forêts* is less an exploration of time, than of various spaces and their relationship to time. It explores the question of presence in relation to death and the time of history. It is through the physical presence of artefacts, in the form of tattoos, the journal, the skull and jaw fragment, that the presence of those long-dead is made manifest. It is therefore unsurprising that *Forêts* is the most varied of Mouawad's plays in terms of staging and *mise en scène*. The two preceding plays in the cycle, *Littoral* and *Incendies* explore the past and present through parent-child relationships, and the child's exploration of the parent's past propels him or her towards revelation and self-discovery. *Forêts* has a different structure, because although it shares the basic tenet of the first two plays, in which the protagonist's quest to understand the past is also an odyssey of self-discovery, the temporal sequence in *Forêts* is not conditioned by the dual time structure used in the other two

⁸ I really think that for me, *Forêts* marks the end of a way of telling and unfolding a story; it is also the end of my belief in the necessity of origins and heritage, as if, even more important than the past, there are shadows that need to be penetrated, even if it means leaving one's skin and reason there, in order to attempt to shed light on the violence of our presence.

plays. In *Littoral* and *Incendies*, in one strand the past moves towards the present and in another the present moves towards the past, the timeframes eventually intersecting. Instead, *Forêts* oscillates between various pasts that instead of moving together, intersect and interrupt each other. Each interruption is of a different time and place, conditioned by a given physical environment. Traces are what transcend time and place. The traces of past lives manifested help make visible that which has been lost; as we shall see, in *Forêts*, it is physical traces that guide the mind beyond the here and now, towards other places. These other places are the sites of encounters with others.

In *Forêts*, the physical space of the stage is persistently intersected by various times and locations. This process begins slowly. In the print edition of the play, *Forêts* has twenty-four scenes divided into seven sections, one for each of the main female characters of the play. They are titled as follows:

Le cerveau d'Aimée (1989-2002)
Le sang de Léonie (1917)
La mâchoire de Luce (1943-2006)
Le ventre d'Odette (1872)
La peau d'Hélène (1890s)
Le sexe de Ludivine (1917-1944)
Le cœur de Loup (1990-2006)⁹ (Mouawad (2009c))

In each of the seven sections, the first name of a female character is associated with a bodily noun. The intense physicality of the references highlights the

⁹ Aimée's brain
Léonie's blood
Luce's jaw
Odette's stomach
Hélène's skin
Ludivine's sex
Loup's heart

significance of the physical existence of each woman, and draws the reader's attention to the character as flesh and blood. It is the physical existence of these characters, rather than a temporal sequence, that forms the structure of the play.

Section 1, 'Le cerveau d'Aimée' has six scenes and initially appears to follow a similar progression to that of *Littoral* and *Incendies*, oscillating between a mother and a daughter's life. The mother's story progresses from her pregnancy, through her cancer diagnosis, towards her daughter's birth. The daughter's story moves backwards towards the conditions leading up to her birth. Scene 1, titled 'Oracle', is divided into five sub-sections, lettered A to E. In sections A to C, Aimée welcomes her friends and makes a speech at the party she is hosting, on what turns out to be on 9 November, as the Berlin wall is falling.

J'en ai pas d'opinion, fuck, je ne sais même pas ce que je vais faire demain, comment voulez-vous que je puisse avoir une quelconque opinion sur un mur que je ne sais même pas qui l'a construit ni pourquoi! Notre vie doit être assez plate pour avoir besoin du bonheur des autres!¹⁰ (Mouawad 2009c: 12)

Throughout Aimée's speech, there is an emphatic division between the external, historical world and the personal. She rejects the significance of the historical world that seems to have little impact on her everyday life. In addition to her overt rejection of the external, the stage directions indicate that Aimée's party, the world of her close friendships, is insulated from the outside cold (*Froid*

¹⁰ I don't have an opinion, fuck, I don't even know what I am going to do tomorrow, how could I possibly have some sort of opinion about some wall when I don't even know who built it or why! Our lives must be really crap for us to rely on the happiness of others!

extrême au-dehors. Fête au-dedans).¹¹ For these few short sub-sections (A-C), the stage space is singular and isolated.

Shortly after this, however, Aimée attributes a great personal significance to the date: she announces that she is expecting a baby girl, and wants this to be a pre-birth birthday celebration. In the verbal exchange that follows between the guests, the ties between the historical and the personal intensify. One guest makes the connection between 9 November and the Kristallnacht, and another guest implies that the connection with such historical events gives the unborn child an historic lineage worthy of a tragedian, comparing her to Clytemnestra. The guest then recites a speech by Clytemnestra from Act IV of Racine's *Iphigénie* ending with 'De mes bras tout sanglants il faudra l'arracher./ Aussi barbare époux qu'impitoyable père./ Venez si vous l'osez, la ravir à sa mere.' At the end of this speech, Aimée has her first of three epileptic seizures (subsection D), during which she cries out:

Un seul est le père et les fils sont au nombre de trois
Chacun a autant de filles et la césure au milieu
La dernière, née à midi, morte à minuit !
Oracle de l'oblique,
Du Dieu qui frappe de loin.¹² (Mouawad 2009c: 14)

The riddle is the first of Aimée's three oracular pronouncements, and has three key functions for the rest of the play. First, it initiates the subsequent events of the story and breaks the spatio-temporal isolation of the first scene, as it is

¹¹ Extreme cold outside. Party inside.

¹² Single is the father and the sons number three.

Each has as many daughters and the caesura in the middle
The last, born at noon, dead at midnight!
Oracle of the oblique,
Of the God who strikes from afar.

immediately followed by a staged shift in location, time period and character focus. Second, it introduces a sense of foreboding: the prophetic tone contrasts sharply with Aimée's previous discourse, and its enigmatic nature combined with the physical violence of the seizure helps create a sense of unease. The reference to Apollo, the 'God that strikes from afar', recalls the Oracle of Apollo at Delphi. The riddle also encapsulates the female genealogy as presented in the play, and in the reading that follows, points to the significance of the spatial. In her Master's thesis on Mouawad's work, Marie Jacomino contends that the riddle may reference the story of the Atrides, particularly given that Aimée's seizure follows the citation from Racine's *Iphigénie*, but struggles to find the correct numerical correlation (only two sons, Agamemnon and Menelaus, and only Agamemnon has three daughters). (Jacomino 2012: 73)

In order to clarify this riddle that initiates the events of the play, it is helpful to first address its origins. This is a reformulation of a famous riddle by the sixth-century BCE Greek statesman Cleobulus, who is referenced as one of the 'seven sages' in Plato's *Protagoras*.¹³ The original riddle appears in Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, and is included in Giorgio Colli's *La sagesse grecque*, which Mouawad frequently cites as a reference text. It reads: 'One sire there is, he has twelve sons, and each of these has twice thirty daughters different in feature; some of the daughters are white, the others again

¹³ 'Such men were Thales of Miletus, Pittacus of Mytilene, Bias of Priene, Solon of our city, Cleobulus of Lindus, Myson of Chen, and, last of the traditional seven, Chilon of Sparta.' (Plato *Protagoras* 343a) See <http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0059.tlg022.perseus-eng1:343a>

are black; they are immortal, and yet they all die.’¹⁴ The answer is ‘the year’, and provides a clear formulation of the division of time. Mouawad’s reformulation is numerically difficult to elucidate, particularly given the seven women (not nine as in the riddle) for whom the plays’ sections are named. Where the original riddle is temporal, Mouawad’s reformulation emphasizes the spatial, and can be deciphered by working backwards. There are nine ‘daughters’ who appear on stage over the course of the play. These are not commensurate with the titular divisions of the play, which feature only seven women, and include Odette, the mother figure (see beginning of section). The nine ‘daughters’ are as follows: Hélène; Hélène’s daughters Jeanne, Marie and Léonie; Léonie’s daughter Ludivine; Ludivine’s friend Sarah; Sarah’s daughter Luce; Luce’s daughter Aimée and Aimée’s daughter Loup.

The ‘father’ of the riddle is the theatrical space in which the play comes into being; the ‘sons’ are three distinct locations with which three women in the family lineage are each associated: The Ardennes, France and Canada.¹⁵ The caesura in the middle is Ludivine, who marks the break from the Keller to the Cohen lineage. The third line of the riddle: ‘The last, born at noon, dead at midnight’ is a reference to Loup, whose adolescence dies as she explores the ‘shadows’ of the past, yet, who discovers who she is as she discovers the truth.

¹⁴ See:

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0004.tlg001.perseus-eng1:1.6>

¹⁵ Hélène, Jeanne and Marie are all born in the forest and never leave. Léonie, Ludivine and Sarah are all born in, or go to, France. Luce, Aimée and Loup all grew up and live in Canada.

Here again we encounter the theme of self-revelation that is common to the first three plays of the *Le Sang* tetralogy.¹⁶

Geography is therefore fundamental to the play's thematic emphasis on self-discovery, return, escape and reinvention. Although the three spatial environments of the Ardennes, France and Canada coexist throughout the production, the first section, 'Le cerveau d'Aimée', takes place entirely in Canada. However, the arrival of Frenchman Douglas Dupontel marks the transition to a period after Aimée's death, and concludes the first scene of the section. The rest of the section consists of five scenes, which simultaneously stage a number of sub-sections that alternate between past and present. The final scene is Loup's birth, followed by Aimée's second seizure. During it, she gives her second riddle:

La jumelle tua son jumeau, le jumeau tuera sa jumelle.
Deux hémisphères de temps, pour autant d'univers inversés.
On t'appellera Loup comme un loup car un loup, il te faudra être :
Loup.
Oracle de l'oblique.
Du Dieu qui frappe de loin.¹⁷ (Mouawad 2009c: 26)

¹⁶ Mouawad begins the print edition of *Forêts* with a citation from Heraclitus: 'Nature aime se cacher' (Mouawad 2009c: 7). He specifies at the end of the book that this citation is taken from Giorgio Colli's *Les origines de la sagesse grecque*, in which Colli provides an extensive analysis of Apollonian and Dionysian cults and representations. Where Dionysus is the god of wisdom in the sense of knowledge derived from the moment, from life experienced in all of its fullness, Apollo is the god of wisdom granted to human beings through communication, i.e. the God who strikes from afar. Colli writes: 'Apollon accorde la sagesse aux hommes, ou mieux encore, à un homme, mais lui se tient à l'écart' (Colli 1990: 23-27) ('Apollo grants wisdom to men, or better still, to one man, but he himself remains at a distance.') In certain respects, *Forêts* is a play that thematically incarnates the tension and unity between what is distinguished as the Dionysian and Apollonian, as explained by Colli. In contrast to Nietzsche's characterisation of the Dionysian and Apollonian as dichotomous, Colli stresses the unity between both gods, between the different forms of wisdom derived from their respective traits: wisdom from life experience (and its correlates of bestiality, intensity, lack of restraint, and extremism) and wisdom from knowledge (and its correlates reason, vision, light, illusion and destruction).

¹⁷ The female twin will kill her male twin, the male twin will kill his female twin.

This riddle joins the past, present and future, as will be woven together in subsequent scenes. In 1900, Hélène caused her brother's death by driving him to madness; at the time of her seizure and prophetic statement, Aimée is in the process of dying from the 'cancer'; in 2002, she will die from the disease. In the riddle, time is represented as spatial.¹⁸ Rather than drawing attention to distinctive time periods, the metaphor enmeshes the concept of time with that of space, drawing the two hemispheres of the distant past and immediate present (Hélène and the Ardennes; Aimée and Canada) into a form of coexistence. This coexistence is made physically manifest immediately following the end of Aimée's seizure: the scene ends the 'Le cerveau d'Aimée' section, and is followed by the 'Le sang de Léonie'. As Aimée's seizure ends, the stage directions indicate '*Neige. Aimée dans une cage de vitre. Chimiothérapie. Neige. Forêt des Ardennes.*

Two hemispheres of time, for as many inverted universes.
 We will call you Loup like a wolf, for a wolf you will have to be:
 Loup.

Oracle of the oblique
 Of the God who strikes from afar.

¹⁸ There is one hemisphere per twin, a characterisation of space that reflects Mouawad's persistent interest in twins. Twins recur frequently in Mouawad's plays: Jeanne and Simon in *Incendies*, the multiple sets of twins in *Forêts*, Edward and Arkadiy in *Temps*. There are three sets of birth twins in *Forêts*, Hélène and Edgar, Léonie and her monstrous twin, and Aimée and the twin that she has incorporated. There are two other sets of twin figures in the play: Lucien and the brother that he kills, Louis, and Ludivine and Sarah. Interesting material on this is provided in the writings of Lise Lenne (Lenne 2007) and Aude Campmas. Campmas has discussed the various types of twins in Mouawad's plays, notably the distinction between physical twins and metaphorical twins, and the twin relationship between family and war. Of *Forêts* she states:

Un violeur parricide et incestueux, un monstre cannibale vivant comme une bête et incapable de parler, de penser, et enfin une tumeur : les jumeaux concentrent toutes les formes de monstruosité. Ils sont l'essence de la guerre entre civiles qualifiée justement de monstrueuse dans la pièce. S'ils renvoient tous à la gémellité famille / guerre, ils ne sont pourtant pas tous figures du mal. Les jumeaux signalent plutôt l'espace d'un traumatisme intérieur hérité. La gémellité renvoie à la lignée, à l'origine partagée, le partage de l'utérus, forme de crypte intérieure, la caractérisant. (Campmas 2014: 482).

*Lucien tue Louis et plonge dans la rivière.*¹⁹ Canada and the Ardennes are simultaneously represented, bringing two time periods and two spatial aspects of the narrative into direct proximity.

From this point onwards, the simultaneous on-stage spatio-temporal representations increase. While the scenography remains relatively simple, the physical interplay between characters emphasizes their trans-historical relationship. Scenes oscillate between the Ardennes forest in 1917, Canada in 2002 (featuring Aimée and Loup) and Canada in 2006 (Loup and Douglas). The last sub-section of scene seven, '*g. Deux extrémités*' (*Two extremities*), has the following sequence: two distinctive spaces appear on stage, one Aimée's hospice room, the other Léonie's room in the forest. The sequence begins with an exchange between Aimée and Baptiste, where Aimée is calling for her mother; only her father, Achille, has come. Aimée wails: 'Tu m'as abandonnée! Maman!'²⁰ (Mouawad 2009c: 38). Jeanne, Léonie's sister then speaks: 'Il arrive! Léonie... Il arrive!'²¹ (Mouawad 2009c: 38). The stage directions then specify '*Naissance de Ludivine*' (*Birth of Ludivine*). This is followed by:

LUCIEN C'est une fille ! Léonie... C'est une fille !
Crise d'épilepsie d'Aimée
AIMÉE Les choses qui sont,
Se punissent et se vengent toujours l'une de l'autre.
La prophétie nous terrasse !
Oracle de l'oblique,
Du Dieu qui frappe de loin.
*Aimée meurt.*²² (Mouawad 2009c: 38)

¹⁹ Snow. *Aimée in a glass cage. Chemotherapy. Snow. Ardennes forest. Lucien kills Louis and plunges into the river.*

²⁰ You abandoned me! Mother!

²¹ It's coming! Léonie... It's coming!

²² LUCIEN It's a girl! Léonie... It's a girl!

Aimée has an epileptic fit

AIMÉE The things that are,

The birth and death of these two women is followed by a brief exchange between Lucien and Léonie in which they name their daughter Ludivine. This is followed by the final exchange of the scene between Douglas and Loup, in which Douglas suggests they begin searching for answers by visiting Loup's grandmother Luce.

The chain of events described above is constructed to create physical links between different groups of characters, before the audience fully understands their relationships to each other. By simultaneously staging three different time periods and locations that are the site of major events Mouawad achieves a double effect. On the one hand, characters are perceived within a given physical reality. On the other, there is a sense in which the momentous events of birth and death transcend a given spatio-temporal context, as their simultaneous representation binds the characters' narratives. This process continues throughout the rest of the play, as the stage provides a space wherein different spatial realities are physically proximate.²³

The emphasis on individual lives in their specific context reflects Jan Patočka's notion of world. Despite the shared physical space of the stage, the conceptual space remains specific to each set of characters. That is, characters never transcend the spatio-temporal world in which they are presented. Loup never steps back into the Ardennes of 1917; Léonie never sets foot in twentieth-century Canada. Conceptual spatio-temporal unities are maintained throughout

Always punish and avenge themselves of each other.
Prophecy brings us down!
Oracle of the oblique
Of the God that strikes from afar.
Aimée dies

²³ There is not always a physical distinction on stage between the different spatio-temporal worlds simultaneously presented.

the play. This approach is essential in two key respects. First, it makes it clear that the characters operate within a given 'world', in a Patočkan sense of the term. Second, it magnifies the spatio-temporal distance that is necessary for communication, and for the revelation of meaning made possible through language. These ideas will be addressed in detail in the following two sections.

1.1.4 'Hardness of the real'

Jan Patočka formulated space as a process that arises through relationality, based on a specific characterisation of the individual being. Patočka's essay 'L'espace et sa problématique', considers the various philosophical approaches to the concept of space over the course of recent philosophical history. In light of developments in geometry, the natural sciences and philosophy, with particular emphasis on Leibniz, Newton, Kant, Jean Nicod and A. N. Whitehead, Patočka identifies various characterisations of space that he attributes to an implicit distinction between form and content, or abstract versus lived space. He then emphasizes the importance of space as realized in experience, which he contends is the basis for the abstraction of space as realized in geometry. Although Patočka distinguishes between a number of forms of space (namely objective space, subjective space, physical space and psychological space), he explains that the notion of space is what arises from the process of ordination, understood as the ordering of structures through the identification of a series of relations, that is, the process of relationality.

L'espace devra donc être compris, non pas comme ordre fixe et achevé, mais comme *ordination*. [...] Il est une manière de se rapporter à l'univers – le rapport à la totalité des êtres qui rend possible l'insertion de la vie de l'être singulier (en l'occurrence, de l'être humain) au sein de la totalité.²⁴ (Patočka trans. Abrams 2002a: 46)

There are three distinct components to this citation. The first is the notion of ordination, that is, a structuring process. Space is the process whereby the 'subject enters into a relation with the world, integrates the world and orients herself in the world' (Patočka trans. Abrams 2002a: 80). The second is the distinction between the individual and the totality in which the individual exists. The third is the world implied as the site of relationality. Patočka draws these three elements together in his conclusion of this essay on the question of space.

L'espace, ancré ainsi dans le mouvement de la vie, n'est pas un concret purement *objectif*. [...] Pour que des relations objectives puissent se présenter à nous, s'ordonner et se regrouper, se réunir enfin dans des systèmes, nous devons d'abord constituer une scène sur laquelle ces relations pourront apparaître.²⁵ (Patočka trans. Abrams 2002a: 80)

Space is the 'stage' that 'makes manifestation possible', and manifestation is inherently relational.²⁶ It is not fixed, but emerges through 'the movement of life'.

²⁴ Space must therefore be understood, not as a fixed and completed order, but as *ordination*. [...] It is a way of relating to the universe – the relationship to the totality of beings that makes possible the insertion of the life of the singular being (in this case, the human being) within the totality.

²⁵ Space, thus anchored in the movement of life, is not a purely *objective* fact. [...] In order for objective relationships to be able to present themselves to us, to order themselves, regroup, to unite finally in systems, we must first constitute the stage on which these relations can appear.

²⁶ The disclosure here recalls Heidegger's notion of *Lichtung*, often translated as 'clearing' (Heidegger, trans. Stambaugh 1996; Heidegger, trans. Hofstadter 2001: 51). Yet unlike Heidegger, for whom the clearing precedes beings and enables 'access to the being that we ourselves are', the stage of which Patočka speaks is constituted by the being in question.

In *Body, Community, Language, World* Patočka clarifies movement as the Aristotelian conception (to which Heidegger is indebted) of ‘movement as transformation, as possibility being realized. [...] The movement is not a result, a sediment, but rather a process of realisation.’²⁷ (Patočka trans. Kohák 1998: 145). And again, ‘le mouvement est ce qui fait apparaître qu’il y a, pour un temps déterminé, une place dans le monde pour une réalité singulière déterminée parmi d’autres réalités singulières.’²⁸ Space is what arises through life as the realisation of possibilities in the world by a corporeal, manifest being. For Patočka, the world is that which makes possible manifestation, including the manifestation of the individual.

We arrived at the conclusion that the world in the sense of the antecedent totality which makes comprehending existents possible can be understood [...]²⁹ as that which makes it possible for individual things within the *universum*, and the *universum* as a sum of things, to be. Here again the phenomenon of human corporeity might be pivotal since our elevation out of the world, our individuation within the world, is an individuation of our subjective corporeity; we are individuals in carrying out the movements of our living, our corporal movements. (Patočka trans. Kohák 1998: 178)

²⁷ Patočka further distinguishes between three different modes of movement: 1. Movement of sinking roots (the most fundamental, instinctive movement wherein humans lack self-understanding); 2. Movement of self-sustenance, of self-projection (movement whereby humans come into contact with the world and are concerned with self-preservation); 3. Movement of existence (movement whereby humans seek to bestow meaning on the first two movements of life). See Patočka (1998:148) and the ‘Phenomenology of Movement’ section in Findlay (2002: 42-48)

²⁸ ‘Movement is what makes apparent that there is, for a determinate time, a place in the world for a determinate singular reality among other singular realities.’

²⁹ Patočka here discusses world as that which makes truth possible, which is beyond the scope of this chapter on space. See Chapter 4, p.220 for a discussion on Patočka’s notion of truth and its relevance to Wajdi Mouawad’s plays.

World is the totality that makes existents possible and precedes the individuation of the corporeal self. It is as such that humans are 'not only innerworldly beings but also beings in the world'. (Patočka trans. Kohák 1998: 178).

1.1.5 Embodied encounters

Je conçois le corps comme étant le seul théâtre qui peut être un lieu de rencontre avec l'autre. Il y a beaucoup de mots dans ce que je fais : s'ils ne sont pas incarnés, il n'y a pas de rencontre. Le mouvement du corps, pour moi, est porteur de sens parce qu'il est le théâtre.³⁰ (Côté 2005: 142)

Mouawad's approach to space reflects Patočka's phenomenological association between space and movement as relational, as the site of meaning and the encounter. Mouawad's characters are 'incarnated'; they are resolutely beings-in-the-world,³¹ existing within a given spatio-temporal reality. Patočka speaks of the 'hardness of the real', which Erazim Kohák summarizes as follows:

Patočka is convinced of the irreducible hardness of reality, that reality is genuinely autonomous, presupposed by and so irreducible to consciousness. Thus the subject's relation to objectivity cannot be a subsuming one but must be dialectical, a relation of two fundamentally nonidentical realities. (Kohák 1989: 88)

³⁰ I think of the body as being the only theatre that can be a site of the encounter with the other. There are a lot of words in what I do: if they are not incarnated, there is no encounter. The movement of the body, for me, carries meaning because it is theatre.

³¹ This term is indebted to Husserl's formulation of the *Lebenswelt* and is the favoured translation of Heidegger's *Dasein*; however it is also addressed by other philosophers in the phenomenological tradition, namely Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricœur and Jan Patočka.

Patočka articulates a space between the subject and the reality with which the subject enters into a dialectical relationship. Subjects are corporeal beings, which Patočka takes great care to emphasize, calling them ‘individuals carrying out the movements of [their] living, [their] corporeal movements’ (Patočka trans. Kohák 1998: 178). In Mouawad’s theatre, movement is what carries meaning, for movement is theatre, in the sense that it exists insofar as an animate or inanimate body moves.³²

Throughout *Forêts*, character corporeity is persistently emphasized, in particular as that which comes up against the ‘hardness of the real’, often represented as the violence of the world. This results in two distinct yet interrelated effects. First, there is a relationship between the body and violence in which the body becomes a palimpsest, subject to erasure yet bearing the traces of history that highlight the fragility inherent to human existence. Second, corporeity both points to, and makes possible, a relationship between seemingly unrelated characters. In her work on the palimpsest, Sarah Dillon offers this definition:

The palimpsest is an involuted phenomenon where otherwise unrelated texts are involved and entangled, intricately interwoven, interrupting and inhabiting each other. Another word that describes this structure is the neologism ‘palimpsestuous’. (Dillon 2005: 245)

The ‘involved phenomenon’ is this entangled relationship between texts, which in *Forêts* is inherently corporeal. With Ludivine and Edmond bearing tattoos that mark them as belonging to the zoo, the body is a literal text. Yet for Ludivine, this inscription is the trace of an unknown past. Ludivine’s origins are hidden from

³² See Chapter 3, p.176.

her, obliterated as a result of her abandonment. It is through the trace of the tattoo that the past is able to resurface. Where the trace enables Ludivine to discover her own past, Ludivine is in turn reduced to a trace as a result of the violence of history. The reappearance of her jawbone is a form of 'reappearance of underlying script' (Dillon 2005: 245) enabling the emergence of a narrative that becomes entangled with Loup's story. Genealogically distinct, it is the body as palimpsest that enables Loup and Ludivine's lives to intersect, and that reveals the significance of the relationship of friendship and the promise.

The play offers numerous emphases on physical intersubjectivity or relationality in terms of staging and narrative. In the 2009 run of *Littoral*, *Incendies* and *Forêts*, Aimée's cancer was personified as a naked, pallid male figure wrapped in a semi-transparent shroud who followed her, carrying a knife, creating a palpable physical threat. Two sets of characters have staged sex scenes, first Lucien and Léonie, then Albert and Hélène. The foreign object at the heart of Aimée's brain is identified as a fragment from Ludivine's jaw. Luce's life was destroyed by physical violence: the removal of all of her teeth in her youth scarred her for life. And Ludivine's clue to her own past is tattooed on her back. In *Forêts*, characters are manifest: they are physical, living entities, constantly confronting the world in which they exist. Their manifestation emerges in relation to given surroundings, including other characters. Relationality is only possible through corporeal manifestation whose palimpsestuous heritage

emphasizes the trans-temporal, trans-spatial and emergent³³ nature of the encounter.

Space is divided according to the sets of relationships constitutive of a given space. The 'three sons' of Aimée's riddle, if considered to be Ardennes, France and Canada, act as markers for a specific spatial area that comes into being as each narrative associated with each of these locations unfolds. These spatial areas are as follows:

- Space one: The world inhabited by Aimée, Baptiste, Loup, Douglas, Luce, Achille and Aimée's doctors (Canada, 1989-2006).
- Space two: The world inhabited by Alexandre, Albert, Odette, Edgar, Edmond, Hélène, Jeanne, Marie, Lucien and Léonie (Alsace and the Ardennes, 1872 – 1917).
- Space three: The world inhabited by Ludivine, Sarah, Samuel, Damien and the Cigogne³⁴ network (France, 1940-1943).

The staged narrative is a process of exploring the relationship between the individual and the world, the space that comes into being through manifestation and relationality. This is what characterizes the narrative worlds that emerge in

³³ It is emergent in that it is made possible through the unconcealment of something hidden whose presence is indicated only by a residual trace.

³⁴ Names in Mouawad are often allegorical or carry strong cultural associations. Here *cigogne*, or stork, is a reference to the network's activity saving children, but also to the prominent theme of birth and lineage. See Chapter 4, p.239 on the significance of names in Mouawad's work.

the play. Each set of specific relationships creates a 'space' not necessarily physically demarcated during the production. Because spectators are familiar with space as that which arises through existence in a world and the relationships possible within that world, the audience is able to differentiate between simultaneously staged narratives.

The relationality that constitutes staged space applies to the relationship entertained between the actors and spectators. For Mouawad, the stage is the site where narrative worlds come into being, and where actors pursue self-revelation through their characters. The theatre is the site of the encounter between those creating the performance (writer, director, actors) and the spectators. Whilst embodied, this encounter is distinctly philosophical:

[C]hacun d'entre nous est assis à une fenêtre par laquelle il lui est possible de regarder. Chacun ne peut regarder que par sa propre fenêtre. [...] Empli de tout ce que je vois, je me tourne vers ceux qui sont avec moi et je le leur raconte. Théâtre. [...] Pourquoi décrire ce que l'on voit par la fenêtre? Pourquoi ne pas se taire et se contenter de seulement regarder? À quoi cela sert-il ? « *Il n'y aura de l'histoire qu'aussi longtemps qu'il y aura des hommes qui ne se contenteront pas simplement de "vivre", qui seront au contraire prêts à renoncer à la vie nue pour poser et défendre les fondations d'une communauté de la reconnaissance mutuelle.* » (Jan Patočka, in *L'Europe après l'Europe*.) [...] Décrire ce que l'on perçoit par la fenêtre, s'intéresser à ce que les autres voient et pousser ceux qui se taisent à faire part de leur vision, cela signifie, je crois, prendre part au monde, au temps, dans l'espace qui est le nôtre puisque justement l'insatisfaction de la vie est puissante et nous touche tous, dans son incohérence et dans sa violence terrifiante.³⁵ (Mouawad 2009e: 24-27)

³⁵ [E]ach of us is sitting at a window through which it is possible to look through. Each of us can only look out of our own window. Filled with all that I see, I turn towards those who are with me and I tell them what I see. Theatre. [...] Why describe what we see out of the window? Why not keep quiet and content ourselves with simply looking? What is the point? 'There will only be history for as long as there will be people who will not content themselves with simply "living" but who will on the contrary be ready to renounce plain life in order to lay down and defend the foundations of a community of mutual recognition.' (Jan

For Mouawad, storytelling is a form of ‘taking part in the world’. To take part is to act, which is here characterized as defending a solidarity of mutual recognition based on the rejection of life as mere survival. Patočka’s ‘mutual recognition’ has its foundations in his conception of the subject as existing in movement, particularly in a movement towards meaning. For Patočka, the human experience of reality is ‘meaningful in a nonrelative sense’ (Findlay 2002: 162). It is nonrelative in that there is inherent meaning in the struggle towards meaning, even if life is determined within a given context.

As explored in Chapter 2, for Patočka meaningfulness is the depth that opens up through self-enquiry. This enquiry leads to conflict with oneself, and with the world as given. This conflict is the encounter with the ‘hardness of the real’, which makes possible the recognition of the otherness of the other.³⁶ This is the ‘recognition’ to which Patočka is referring in the passage cited by Mouawad. In bringing the audience into contact with an experience of the movement of life, of life as the projection and actualisation of possibilities within a space that emerges as a result of the relationship between beings, Mouawad considers the theatre as a space wherein a broader ‘recognition’ can be made manifest.

Patočka, in *L'Europe après l'Europe.*) [...] To describe what we see out of the window, to be interested in what others see and to push those who remain silent to communicate their vision, is, I believe, to take part in the world, in time, in the space that is ours, precisely because the dissatisfaction of life is powerful and touches all of us, in its incoherence and terrifying violence.

³⁶ See Patočka (1998: 74); Erazim Kohák (2002: 105, 132).

3.1.1.6 Embodying trace: artefacts and promises

The previous chapter explored the significance of absence for the recognition of temporal and finite existence. Absence through death is a recognition of temporal existence, which for phenomenologists such as Patočka is inherently corporeal. Time and space in Patočka, and in the plays of Mouawad, are co-constitutive dynamic processes. In *Forêts*, the corporeal and linguistic traces of the past, which disrupt the present (Loup in 2006), make this act of recognition possible. Again, as in *Littoral* and *Incendies*, traces are frequently embodied in artefacts that function as recognition devices: the trace makes anagnorisis possible.

There are three instances in *Forêts* of the physical embodiment of the past disrupting the present of a given character: Luce's upper jaw in Aimée's brain; the tattoo on Ludivine's back; and Edmond's notebook.³⁷ In each instance, the past embodied by the trace is beyond the bounds of the character's control. It is a surging forth of another spatio-temporal reality. As Douglas tells Loup: 'Qui est cette femme qui a sauvé, au-delà du temps et de l'espace, dans un moment inimaginable d'horreur, un fragment d'elle-même [...]'³⁸ (Mouawad 2009c: 37) This fragment as trace of Ludivine transcends time and space, and simultaneously points to life and death. It is a marker of what once was, and is no longer. Consequently, its manifestation in the 'present' of Aimée's life creates a

³⁷ Two of the three are corporeal; again it is the body as palimpsest, as that which bears the trace of a concealed past.

³⁸ 'Who is this woman who, beyond the confines of time and space, in a moment of unimaginable horror, saved a fragment of herself?'

strong physical link between Aimée and Ludivine.³⁹ This is characteristic of all three artefacts. Each provides a tangible link between the different worlds of *Forêts*.⁴⁰

These traces are artefacts that point to a past life made manifest on stage. The manifestation of presence is therefore problematized: each character that comes into being on stage is one whose existence is conditioned by something, or someone not present. Space as manifestation is not a pure, unproblematic showing, but rather a reflection of the Heraclitus fragment DK B123 with which Mouawad opens the printed edition of *Forêts*: 'Nature aime se cacher' (nature loves to hide). In the case of Mouawad's physical artefacts, they are in each instance similar to a prophetic statement. Although they point to something, articulate or make something manifest, they require further interpretation in order to be decoded.⁴¹

The artefact also shows and conceals in another way; by pointing to the absence of the life of which it is an indication. As Anne Ubersfeld's work on the theatrical object helps to articulate, the artefact as theatre object already has a double status as the 'signe d'un objet du monde réel'⁴² and 'un élément de la représentation'⁴³ with an aesthetic and semantic value (Ubersfeld 1996: 71). The semantic value that Mouawad places on the artefact is simultaneously one of

³⁹ Trans-temporal twinning. Again, see Aude Campmas on twinning in Mouawad.

⁴⁰ Ludivine's jaw connects her to Aimée's world; Ludivine's tattoo connects her to the world of her ancestors whom she never knew; Edmond's notebook connects the world of the Kellers to Loup.

⁴¹ In itself, each artefact is incomplete, or rather shows itself whilst concealing its significance. In this sense, each artefact is Apollonian, something from afar, both in time and space, that carries signification requiring interpretation.

⁴² 'sign of an object from the real world'

⁴³ 'element of representation'

presence and absence. The audience makes the connection between the skull from the concentration camp that Douglas is investigating ('probablement concassé à coups de marteau'⁴⁴) presented in section two, 'Le sang de Léonie', and Ludvine, when Sarah tells Luce that her mother was murdered 'la tête fracassée à coups de marteau dans le camp de concentration de Treblinka en mai 1944'⁴⁵ at the end of the third section, 'La mâchoire de Luce'. Although these lives are eventually embodied on stage, this embodiment is only ever partial, as the narrative consistently emphasizes the limitations of staged representation. For instance, the audience knows that Ludvine's life ends in a concentration camp, yet her murder, and the events leading up to it (including her capture by the SS) are neither narrated nor staged. The character's life is always shown to physically and conceptually overflow the staged narrative, resisting appropriation. Mouawad's plays always remain encounters: encounters with that which clearly remains 'other'.

Where physical space emerges through corporeal movement, conceptual space is created through language. In *Architecture d'un marcheur*, Mouawad explains the link he perceives between physical space, language and conceptual space.

Il y a une scène, dans *Littoral*, où les personnages sont en crise les uns avec les autres parce qu'ils n'arrivent pas à se mettre d'accord sur le lieu où ils se trouvent. L'espace est vide. [...] Il suffit donc au personnage de dire qu'il est dans une chambre à coucher pour que nous nous y retrouvions. Or voilà que les personnages [...] ne sont pas d'accord les uns avec les autres. L'un affirme « Nous sommes dans la cuisine » et l'autre lui rétorque « Non ! Nous sommes au salon funéraire ! » Le public

⁴⁴ Probably fractured by hammer blows.

⁴⁵ 'her skull fractured by hammer blows in the Treblinka concentration camp in May 1944.'

éclate de rire puisque si l'un a raison et l'autre tort, c'est sur le fond d'une simple convention de la désignation d'un lieu vide. J'ai toujours aimé cet éclat de rire, parce qu'il signifie que le public comprend l'illusion, sans décrocher de l'histoire. Il est pris en flagrant délit d'imagination!⁴⁶ (Mouawad in Côté 2005 : 133)

Three distinct entities share a common space; the two actors and the audience. On the empty stage, language 'designates space'. Each actor states his perceived location, and, through language, a particular imagined space comes into being. Yet, in the passage cited above, the presence of two actors makes for a conflicted communication, highlighting a gap in the characters' understanding and perception. This gap distances the two characters conceptually (each thinks he is in a different space) and draws attention to their differentiation within shared space. The dialogue is therefore forging ties between the three distinct entities (actor, character and audience) while at the same time emphasising their separateness (each character is spatially distinct from the other, and the audience understands the illusion, conceptually distinguishing between the two 'designated' spaces on stage, and their own presence in the theatre.)

Mouawad is highly attentive to the spatial function of language. In *Forêts*, Mouawad plays with language as distantiating. Loup's distinctive *joual* clearly contrasts with Douglas' polished French, and *Forêts* concludes with a lyric

⁴⁶ There is a scene in *Littoral* where the characters find themselves in a crisis with each other because they cannot agree on where they are. The space is empty. [...] It is therefore enough for the character to say that he is in a bedroom for us to find ourselves there. Yet, here, the characters disagree with each other. One says: 'We are in the kitchen' and the other retorts: 'No! We are in the funeral parlour!' The public bursts out laughing, because if one is right and the other wrong, it is on the basis of a simple convention of designating an empty space. I have always loved this burst of laughter, because it means that the public understands the illusion, without switching off from the story. The public is caught in the act of imagining!

monologue by Loup, wherein she draws a distinction between her own familial and linguistic heritage, emphasising the significance of language in the form of the promise.

LOUP Moi qui croyais être liée par mon sang au sang de mes
ancêtres
Je découvre que je suis liée par mes promesses
Aux promesses que vous vous êtes faites.
Et que vous avez tenues. [...]
Odette, Hélène, Léonie, Ludivine, Sarah, Luce, Aimée, Loup
Comme une promesse tenue à jamais.⁴⁷ (Mouawad 2009d: 100)

Here, Loup's relationship to the women that came before is no longer simply ancestral or a genetic heritage of blood ties. Instead, it is rooted in promises made and kept. The importance of specific individual existence is emphasized as each woman is named, and Loup is tied to the seven women across space and time through her own promises.

As evidenced by the title of this cycle, the notion of promise is central to these plays. For Mouawad, the promise embodies language physically; it is the possibility that arises out of the physical encounter that is speech:

Dans l'éruption du langage entre les belligérants, il y a la
possibilité d'une promesse qui consiste à s'engager. Car les
mots nomment le silence. Et à partir du moment où le silence
est nommé, un autre silence survient et cette irrigation par les
mots va permettre une construction à deux qui est impossible
autrement. On n'a pas trouvé d'autre moyen pour se

⁴⁷ LOUP I who thought that I was tied by my blood to the blood of my ancestors,
find that I am tied by my promises
to the promises that you made to each other
and that you kept.
Odette, Hélène, Léonie, Ludivine, Sarah, Luce, Aimée, Loup
Like a promise kept for all eternity.

rapprocher. [...] Se parler, s'envoyer des mots, c'est déjà une rencontre physique.⁴⁸ (Mouawad in Delvaux 2015)

In this interview with *Le Soir* promoting his adaptations of Sophocles, Mouawad explicitly links language and the promise to spatiality. Language is a 'physical encounter' that enables conflicted participants (belligerents) to 'build'. Language is a channelling that contains the possibility of a promise, and this promise is one of commitment.

Here Mouawad is drawing on themes pervasive in twentieth-century philosophy, particularly in the work of Jacques Derrida. For Derrida, every promise is simultaneously a commitment to action, and something suspended; a form of communication that entertains a specific relationship to action. As Derrida notes: 'Every speech act is fundamentally a promise.' (Derrida 1997: 23). In a footnote in *Le monolinguisme de l'autre*, Derrida further explains the promise:

[...] il n'est pas nécessaire que cette promesse, pour être proprement ce qu'elle est, soit tenable, ni même qu'elle soit sincèrement ou sérieusement tenue pour tenable. Pour qu'une promesse s'élançe comme telle (impliquant donc la liberté, la responsabilité, la décidabilité), il faut que, par-delà tout programme contraignant, elle puisse toujours se laisser hanter par la possibilité, précisément, de sa perversion (conversion en menace là où une promesse ne peut promettre que du bien, engagement non sérieux d'une promesse intenable, etc.).⁴⁹ (Derrida 1996: 127)

⁴⁸ In the eruption of language between belligerents lies the possibility of a promise that consists of commitment. Because words name silence. And as soon as silence is named, another silence arises, and this irrigation through words will make it possible for two people to build something that is otherwise impossible. We haven't found another way of coming together. [...] To speak, to send each other words, is already a physical encounter.

⁴⁹ [...] for this promise to be properly what it is, it is not necessary that it is able to be fulfilled, nor does it need to be sincerely or seriously considered able to be fulfilled. In order for a promise to throw itself out there as such (therefore

The promise is forever haunted by the possibility of being broken or unfulfilled, which highlights the spatial separation between beings. In *Forêts*, there are numerous instances of promises being broken, perverted or corrupted. Albert's promise to create a paradise for his family in the Ardennes dooms them to his perversions: Hélène becomes his lover, Edgar is driven mad, and Edmond escapes, only to live in a mental asylum. Edmond promises Hélène he will return, but fails, leaving her a prisoner to her beast-like son. Ludivine was tattooed with 'Je ne t'abandonnerai jamais' (*I will never abandon you*) but was left at an orphanage. Luce was told that her mother Ludivine had promised she would return for her, and slowly descended into a life of sex and alcohol as she realized that she would never come. The promise carries, *a priori*, the possibility of failure; the concept's negative is inscribed within it, and is a condition for its very possibility. This is precisely because the promise lies suspended in the language exchanged between two separate entities. Although it is a way of 'coming closer', as Mouawad states, the gap between individuals is manifested in the possibility of failure. A person promising is not subsumed by the person to whom the promise is made, and remains free to fulfil or negate the commitment.

In a passage from her final monologue, Loup brings together the two nouns used in the title of Mouawad's tetralogy, *Le Sang des promesses*. First she had thought herself as 'liée par mon sang' (tied by my blood) and instead finds that she is 'liée par mes promesses' (tied by my promises). The last of the initial

implying freedom, responsibility, decidability), it must, beyond any restrictive programme, always be able to let itself be haunted, specifically, by the possibility of its perversion (conversion into a threat when a promise can only promise good, non-serious commitment of a promise that cannot be held, etc.).

trilogy of plays in the *Le Sang* cycle,⁵⁰ *Forêts* emphasizes the notion of the promise as commitment within a world that strains the very possibility of commitment. Characters persistently struggle to fulfil their promises: Loup's promise to bury her mother as soon as she dies; Edmond's promise to return; Sarah's promise to find Luce, etc.. Yet, the promise marks responsibility towards another being. It is the relationship of responsibility inscribed in language as communication and responsibility towards others as perpetually haunted by the possibility of the irresponsible. In Mouawad's work, it is the violence that this tension represents in praxis that haunts the lives of all those affected by the promise. Language as communication and commitment, as well as the possibility of the failure of communication and commitment, bears the trace of the promise that makes possible a tie moving beyond the confines of the spatio-temporal present.

2 Theatre as absence

Il ne s'agit pas d'un héritage conscient. Mais de tout ce qu'on se transmet de génération en génération, comme une malédiction, dans le silence et l'ignorance, et qui pourtant déchire notre existence et broie notre destin.⁵¹ (Mouawad 2006: 17)

In Mouawad's plays, silence is a response to the revelation of truth (Nawal in *Incendies*); silence is protection (Noëlla in *Temps*); silence is violence (Charlie

⁵⁰ A fourth play, *Ciels*, was later conceived as a counterpoint to the first three, and the trilogy became a tetralogy.

⁵¹ It is not a question of a conscious heritage. But of everything that is transmitted from generation to generation, like a curse, in silence and ignorance, and which at the same time destroys our existence and massacres our destiny.

Eliot Johns in *Ciels*); silence is what lies in the wake of death (Valéry in *Ciels*). Mouawad's highly verbal plays are often performed with a characteristic sustained delivery tempo. Moments of silence therefore stand out. The following sections will explore the significance of spatial absence and the relationship between language, silence and space in Mouawad's *Ciels*, the last play of *Le Sang*.

2.1 *Ciels*

2.1.1 Synopsis

The francophone cell of an international anti-terrorist operation (codename Socrates) is charged with deciphering information to prevent an impending terrorist attack. The cell has five members: Blaise Centier⁵² (director), Valéry Masson (cryptanalyst), Dolorosa Haché (translator), Vincent Chef-Chef (computer specialist) and Charlie Eliot Johns (video and audio surveillance engineer). The team has been working in complete isolation and secrecy for eight months. Six days before 23 December, when they will hand over their work to a new team, Valéry Masson commits suicide. He leaves a note, advising the team to contact his former student, Clément Szymanowski, who arrives as his replacement. Shocked by Valéry's death, the team is informed that their assignment will be extended indefinitely, and suddenly they are trying to decipher the information gathered on the possible terrorist attack, as well as

⁵² In *Ciels* names frequently link a character with a historical figure who reflects their abilities or talents, e.g., Blaise to Blaise Pascal; Valéry to Paul Valéry; and Anatole to Anatole France. On the significance of names in Mouawad's plays, See Chapter 4, p.239.

unlock Valéry's encrypted computer. They suspect that Valéry's death, and the information contained on his computer are connected to their research.

The group has two possible leads to the terrorists behind the attack. The first is an Islamist group, led by Ali Al Lybie. The second is an international anarchist attack by a group of people who have been identified as between twenty-five and thirty-five years of age, which the team refers to as the 'Tintoretto' lead. The wire taps associated with this group, which punctuate the unfolding of events, yield a number of cryptic messages that border on the poetic. Team members disagree on the significance of the second lead; Vincent's conviction that 'Tintoretto' is a red herring is endorsed by the operation's Directorate General, with whom the team is in contact by video feed. They are instructed to abandon fanciful poetic theories and focus exclusively on Ali Al Lybie. Taking a break from work, the team retreat to their rooms. Blaise calls his divorce lawyer; Dolorosa takes a pregnancy test that proves positive; Charlie has a videoconference with his son Vincent, and he explains that his mission has been extended, to his son's fury; Clément moves from room to room trying to decipher the code to access Valéry's computer.

When attempting to access the computer, a video recording of Valéry prompts the user, saying 'Identification: Nom et prénom'. The team members conclude that it requires Valéry's voice saying his surname and first name to open the computer. However, when prompted, Clément says his own surname and first name, and the video responds with 'Mot de passe, Monsieur Szymanowski' ('Password, Mr Szymanowski'). It becomes clear that Valéry meant for Clément to decipher the password. Clément visits every team member

and has them respond to the prompt, stating their surnames and first names. Each time, the video responds with a short poetry quotation. Clément recognizes the poetry as that of Valéry's grandfather, translated by Valéry from Russian to French. The last person Clément visits is Dolorosa, and he arrives just in time to stop her from committing suicide, and asks for her help to obtain the last poetry citation: 'À l'instant minotaure / L'Orient bleu d'une perle au coin de l'œil surgie / Et ce bleu bu d'un trait qui effondre les phrases.'⁵³

At Christmas, the group gathers for a toast. Blaise and Vincent argue, and Vincent informs everyone that he has submitted a formal complaint against Blaise for his focus on the Tintoretto lead, and refusal to allow Vincent to hack Valéry's laptop. Blaise, Charlie and Vincent depart, leaving Clément alone with Dolorosa. Clément tells Dolorosa that he can tell she was Valéry's lover, and asks for her help. He wants to know whether there was a word that Valéry repeated to her, a word that carried some sort of meaning. He goes on to explain that his friendship with Valéry was based on words, on playing with words and their relationship to numbers. Together Valéry and Clément had devised an encryption and decryption method for combining mathematics and poetry. Using the poetry fragments disclosed to each team member, Clément has prepared the decryption computer programme using the algorithm he created with Valéry, but he needs a variable. Dolorosa asks Clément whether he knows that Valéry had a son named Anatole, and confides that she is expecting Valéry's child. As she turns to leave, she tells Clément that the word he is looking for is 'douleur', repeated twice; Valéry used to call her 'Douleur Douleur'.

⁵³ 'At the instant, minotaure / The blue Orient of a pearl at the corner of the eye emerges / And this blue drunk in one go that dissolves sentences'

With this variable, Clément is able to unlock Valéry's computer with the poetry issued from the decryption. He is immediately confronted with a video of Valéry, who tells him that the correct lead is Tintoretto. Yet Valéry says that he cannot tell Clément what he has found, only that the information is on the computer.

It is 31 January, the date on which Blaise is relieved of his command of the unit, which is transferred to Vincent. Clément presents his findings to the gathered team members, explaining why the Tintoretto lead is correct. Valéry identified a terrorist reading of Tintoretto's *Annunciation* that transformed the painting into the terrorists' code. According to that reading, Mary represents the West (*l'Occident*), who will be raped by the archangel Gabriel and the putti in order for her to realize her purpose. The Holy Spirit in the painting is that which lies between Mary and the archangel; that is, the rape itself, a symbol of the terrorist attack.

Clément discovered that Valéry identified eight longitudes and latitudes that corresponded to eight cities in eight of the world's richest countries: Paris, New York, London, Padua, Saint Petersburg, Berlin, Tokyo and Montreal. By overlaying the map of each city with a miniature version of the painting, the location of the planned attack is identifiable. However, Valéry had not determined the scale of the map. The last message Valéry intercepted was coded in lines from his grandfather's unpublished poetry, a communication from his son, Anatole, the leader of the terrorist group, addressed to his father, asking him to die before Anatole's suicide attack. This reveals the reason for Valéry's suicide.

Clément asks Vincent to focus on the Tintoretto line of enquiry; Vincent objects, to the frustration of the group.

Charlie calls his son Victor, who is frustrated with his father's absence, and with a school project he needs to complete on the subject of beauty. Charlie suggests Victor go to the museum to help him figure out what he thinks about beauty. After Charlie finishes speaking with Victor, Vincent returns to the group and explains that the Directorate General will not tolerate any further mention of the Tintoretto lead. The team urges Vincent to defy these orders, and change the key words to reflect the themes of the Tintoretto lead. He gives in and Charlie then discovers the scale of the map for each city, based on the number of putti in the Tintoretto painting. It becomes clear that in each case, the target is a museum. Vincent tries to contact HQ but the phone lines have been cut. The team is forced to wait until the phone rings, informing them that the terrorist attack took place five hours previously at the museums Charlie identified. Vincent whispers something to Blaise as Charlie frantically tries to contact his son Victor. He runs to his computer, where he finds two emails from Victor, sent from the museum. In the first Victor explains that he has found some paintings he likes. In the second, he has sent his father a slideshow of the paintings. It was sent at 12.58; the attack took place at 13.00. The phone rings, and Charlie discovers that Victor was among the victims of the attack. As Victor's slideshow opens, projected on the wall, Charlie runs through the audience crying. Simultaneously, Dolorosa's water breaks and she gives birth in the midst of the projected paintings. The final stage direction is 'Un enfant naît' (*a child is born*).

2.1.2 Isolation

Ciels' distinctive performance space is co-constitutive of the play's narrative structure. *Ciels* is Mouawad's only foray into environmental theatre.⁵⁴ The 'stage' is a large four-sided white box, at the centre of which the audience sit on rotating stools. Along each inside 'wall' are two connected compartments whose front and dividing curtains can be opened and closed as required. The audience is therefore at the centre of the action, constantly moving to follow the actors as they appear in the spaces along the four walls. The space is intimate: the stools are close together and the actors in close proximity to the audience. At times, the actors perform among and between audience members, who are described as 'statues' in the play's second scene:

BLAISE CENTIER Ils ont aménagé le jardin dans les années soixante pendant la Guerre froide à la suite de la première mission ; pour prévenir la dépression des équipes. Une bonne blague ! D'ailleurs aucune plante n'a survécu, aucune bête, canari, pigeon, colombe, tout ça mort en deux semaines, que de l'humain ! Faute de mieux, ils ont installé les statues.⁵⁵
(Mouawad 2009d: 16)

Although the spectators are 'dans le corps meme de la représentation'⁵⁶

(Mouawad 2009d: 8) it is explicit from the outset that there is a clear division between actors and audience. Through Blaise's speech, the spectator is relegated to the role of an inanimate object. Although incorporated at the heart of the

⁵⁴ Non-frontal site-specific production.

⁵⁵ They set up this garden in the sixties, during the Cold War, after the first mission, to prevent depression among team members. What a joke! In fact, no plant, no animal, survived: canary, pigeon, dove, everything died in two weeks, only humans left! So instead, they put in the statues.

⁵⁶ 'within the very body of the performance'

performance space, the audience remains apart, separate and inanimate, uninvolved in the play's action.

In some productions, the distantiation between audience and performers occurs even before the audience enter the performance space: in ideal large open areas (e.g. the Parc des Expositions in Avignon where the play premiered on 18 July 2009, or a large empty warehouse on the outskirts of Béthune, October 2009) the large illuminated box in which the play was performed appeared a small confined space within the vastness of the site and audience members were kept outside the box until a short time before the show began. The overall impression was of relinquishing the familiar and entering into another world. In these large spaces, the unease is further enhanced with the use of pulsating white lights on the walls of the box, and indecipherable sounds moving from one side of the box to the other. To enter the box was to enter a threatening, ominous unknown.⁵⁷

The close intimacy of the setting helps magnify the rising tension between characters, and increases the threat of conflict. It expresses the enforced secrecy, isolation and stressful conditions within the unit. Inside the box, the atmosphere is one of tension, frustration and desperation, yet, throughout the play, the outside world has been transformed into a world of threat, danger and an omnipresence of the state. The box physically demarcates the external world from the internal world of the play, yet, as the conclusion brutally shows, the internal isolation of the unit is completely subject to external control. The unit is

⁵⁷ This distantiation was muted in indoor theatres such as the Théâtre National de Toulouse, where the white box fit tightly within the black box theatre. In these situations, the outside walls of the box were practically invisible.

controlled by orders from the state; when they disobey, their access to the outside world is cut off. The inside world of the box is akin to Mary's room in Tintoretto's *Annunciation*: like Mary, those inside are entirely subject to an external will.

Unlike with the first three plays of *Le sang*, the performance space of *Ciels* remains confined to its location. There is no travel and no change of physical or conceptual space. The actors each play a single character throughout, and the time of the production is confined to four months. In the introduction to the print edition, Mouawad states:

Contrairement aux trois autres, *Ciels* ne supporte aucune référence au passé, ni à l'enfance, ni aux origines des protagonistes.⁵⁸ (Mouawad 2009d: 7)

Ciels unfolds entirely within the confines of four white walls, and seemingly concerns only the mission that the characters have been assigned. However, instead of focusing attention exclusively on the contained environment, this performance space emphasizes the significance of what is absent; the world beyond the insular performance space. Contrary to Mouawad's statement above, *Ciels* makes explicit references to the past, and oblique references to the childhood and origins of the terrorists. Valéry's past is not only the key to unlocking the mystery of the Tintoretto lead, but in fact to the identity of the terrorist leader. There are repeated references to the terrorists being aged between twenty-five and thirty-five, and to their childhood experiences in the shadow of various wars. The geographic choice of targets is based on countries'

⁵⁸ Unlike the three other plays, *Ciels* does not make any reference to the past, neither to the childhood nor the origins of the protagonists.

involvement in the first two World Wars, which is made explicit prior to Clément's explanation in Scene 14 (cited below) by means of deafening projected footage of bombardments from various wars.

CLÉMENT SZYMONOWSKI Ces pays sont coupables d'avoir versé le sang des fils du siècle ! Cette géographie doit être vue comme la géographie des puissances des deux premières guerres mondiales, matrices des guerres d'aujourd'hui, d'un siècle mécanique et de son cortège de morts. [...] Cette voix qui nous condamne et nous menace, c'est la voix de ceux qui sont nés pendant les guerres, Vietnam, Liban, Iran-Irak, et qui ont grandi à l'ombre des hécatombes : Bosnie, Rwanda, Kosovo, Tchétchénie.⁵⁹ (Mouawad 2009d: 59)

The terrorists are motivated, then, by past killings, inflicted by the target countries on their own home countries. And while the terrorists seek to inflict death in revenge for past death, the unit seeks to prevent death, guided and galvanized by a death in their immediate past. The unit's physical isolation is therefore never absolute. Despite physical confinement, the characters are tied to the past, to the outside world and to the actions of others.

2.1.3 Absence

In *Ciels*, then, what is absent (everything outside the boundaries of the cell/performance space) profoundly affects those within. Two clear forms of

⁵⁹ These countries are guilty of having spilled the blood of the sons of the century! This geography must be seen as the geography of the world powers involved in the First and Second World Wars, the matrixes of today's wars, of a mechanical century and its procession of the dead. [...] This voice that condemns and threatens us is the voice of those who were born during wars, Vietnam, Lebanon, Iran-Iraq, and who grew up in the shadow of carnage: Bosnia, Rwanda, Kosovo, Chechnya.

absence operate: physical and conceptual absence. Physical absence is made apparent from the outset. The play begins with the following stage directions:

Lieu sans présence humaine.
Technologie informatique.
*Ciel de millions de voix.*⁶⁰ (Mouawad 2009d: 13)

Spectators leave the world of the familiar behind, entering into an aseptic environment characterised by technology. The first scene consists solely of sounds, thousands of voices mixed with technological noise. A single, ominous voice slowly becomes clear, speaking about blood, death, burning, infanticide, killing, prey, damnation, parricide. As the voices fade away Blaise and Clément enter, and Blaise refers to the audience as garden statues. He then characterizes the nature of life within the unit as dehumanized:

BLAISE CENTIER Évitez les confidences, l'affectif. Ici, vous êtes un outil. C'est tout. Chacun ici est un outil qui remplit une fonction. Personne ne sait rien sur personne. [...] [N]e cherchez surtout pas à savoir qui sont les autres ni pourquoi ils sont là, vous n'êtes pas ici pour créer des liens.⁶¹ (Mouawad 2009d: 16)

Like the spectator, Clément has stepped out of one world and into another, where he is himself dehumanised and transformed into an *outil*, an instrument. Like the other team members, Clément is cut off from the 'chaleur agréable et confortable du doux foyer.'⁶² (Mouawad 2009d: 17).

⁶⁰ *Site without human presence.*
Information technology.
Sky of a million voices.

⁶¹ Avoid emotions and confiding in others. Here you are a tool. That's it. Everyone here is a tool that fulfils a function. Nobody knows anything about each other. [...] Above all, do not try to find out who the others are or why they are here. You are not here to bond with each other.

⁶² 'cut off from the pleasant and comfortable warmth of the home'.

Like the absence of the threatening speaker, and the physical exclusion of the familiar everyday world, Valéry's absence is central to the play. His death occurs prior to the play's action, yet Valéry's death catalyses the play's key events: Clément's arrival; the extension of the mission; the quest to unlock Valéry's computer; and eventually, the renewed focus on the Tintoretto lead.

BLAISE CENTIER Le suicide de Valéry confirme l'imminence d'une tempête et tout indique que nous serons pris dedans, parce qu'il faut bien que quelqu'un tente d'empêcher que ça arrive, et ce quelqu'un, putain de bordel de merde, c'est nous ! [...] Pour répondre à la question « pourquoi Valéry s'est-il suicidé », il faut découvrir ce qu'il a découvert.⁶³ (Mouawad 2009d: 26)

Blaise is convinced that Valéry's suicide confirms the imminence of an attack, and creates an additional mystery for the group to solve. His absence also brings together the two characters who had a connection to him, as Valéry's friend Clément defies Blaise's initial order to remain distant from other unit members when he asks Valéry's lover Dolorosa for help.

Aidez-moi. [...] Vous pouvez me faire confiance Dolorosa ! Je crois que vous et Valéry avez été proches, bien plus proches, bien plus amis, bien plus amants. Vous avez aimé Valéry.⁶⁴ (Mouawad 2009d: 47)

Clément goes on to speak of his close friendship with Valéry, its basis in mathematics and poetry, and of his quest to find the word that is the right variable for the algorithm. It is only by eschewing the role of the 'instrument',

⁶³ Valéry's suicide confirms the imminence of a storm, one that everything seems to indicate we will be caught up in, because someone has to try and stop *it* from happening, and that someone, for fuck's sake, is us! [...] To answer the question: 'Why did Valéry commit suicide?', we need to discover what he discovered.

⁶⁴ Help me [...] You can trust me Dolorosa! I think that you and Valéry were very close, more than close, more than friends, more than lovers. You loved Valéry.

and focusing on human ties of love and friendship, that Clément is able to unlock Valéry's computer.

This leads to the key role of conceptual absence in the play. The francophone unit's motive is to prevent a terrorist attack, and to do so they rely on knowledge. The absence of knowledge drives the plot in *Ciels*. First, there is the ambiguity regarding whether the Ali Al Lybie or the Tintoretto lead is worth pursuing. Second, information on the attacks is derived from multiple sources in multiple languages. Nothing is clear or immediately available, and the unit relies on Dolorosa's translation skills to decipher communications. The knowledge imparted through language is indirect. When responding to Valéry's prompt of 'Surname, first name', each character is provided with an excerpt of Valéry's grandfather's poetry. Clément has to work out an algorithm and discover the missing variable to access the computer. Once unlocked, Valéry's message to Clément is itself cryptic, ambiguous and poetic.

VALÉRY MASSON Nous cherchons à cerner une organisation terroriste, mais il s'agit d'autre chose [...] ça ressemble plutôt à un réseau d'individus, très jeunes [...] il y a chez eux un mal de vivre qui s'apparente à un chagrin ou de la peine infinie...qui se traduit par la poésie [...] Ce que je peux te dire c'est que la vraie piste, celle que nous devons...celle que vous devez suivre, c'est celle du *Tintoret*.⁶⁵ (Mouawad 2009d: 52)

Valéry advises his colleagues to pursue the Tintoretto lead. Though their superiors consider the Arab group's threat more credible, ultimately the Ali Al Lybie lead lives up to the Latin etymology of its French homonym 'alibi';

⁶⁵ VALÉRY MASSON We are trying to contain a terrorist organisation, but this is something else [...] it is more like a network of individuals, who are very young [...] they seem to share a certain despair that seems like sorrow or infinite misery...which translates into poetry [...] What I can say is that the true lead, the one that we must... that you must follow, is the *Tintoretto*.

'elsewhere'. The lead is a non-existent red herring that points to an 'elsewhere' for the source of the attack. The cryptic and poetic Tintoretto lead is the correct one, and this reaffirms both the absence of given meaning, and the need for interpretation.⁶⁶

Like the first three plays of the trilogy, *Ciels* is an exploration of a protagonist's odyssey towards revelation. Although the play seemingly inverts their structure, with Valéry's revelation and death occurring prior to the start of the play, the progression of the story is in fact Clément Szymanowski's journey towards revelation. In discovering what Valéry knew, and delving into Valéry's past, Clément finds the truth. What is implied throughout the play is that the absence of knowledge that leads to the failure of the mission. What in fact transpires is that absence of communication is to blame. In spite of having unlocked Valéry's information and identified the targets, the state's unwillingness to communicate with an entity that disobeyed its orders has disastrous consequences.

2.1.4 Silence and violence

On oublie l'inhumanité d'un monde silencieux.⁶⁷ (Levinas 2009: 69)

⁶⁶ For an analysis on the relationship between technology and given meaning in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger and Jan Patočka, and its significance to the work of Wajdi Mouawad, see Chapter 4, 'Bearing witness to the event', p.247-249.

⁶⁷ One forgets the inhumanity of a silent world.

In *Ciels*, silence marks the spatial gap between entities. From the first scene there is a palpable silence at the heart of the performance space: the audience.

Although the performance takes place in close proximity to those seated at the centre of the box, the division between actors and audience remains. The threatening voice sequence in the first scene is followed by a brief moment of silence: the recording stops, and in its wake the only sound is the shuffling of audience members on their stools; the uncertainty of what is to come generates an almost tangible anxiety among spectators. This silence also momentarily shifts the spectator's attention to other spectators in the absence of sound or focus. In a sense, the performance is structured around this silence, a silence that lies at the heart of the performance.

Silence functions in a number of ways in *Ciels*. Silence is absence of sound that resonates after loud scenes (such as bombing footage). It is inherent to dialogue, as the instant that 'calls forth speaking' (MacKendrick 2001: 19). And it makes the distance between two speakers apparent; Clément strives to overcome the distance between himself and Valéry by understanding the reason for Valéry's suicide through the artefacts he left behind. It is a distance that in this instance can to an extent be reduced in that Valéry has left a message behind. Yet ultimately it is an absolute distance: Valéry is dead. As in Mouawad's other plays exploring the relationship between the living and the dead, *Ciels* highlights the partial nature of communication. Death's silence that can only be partly bridged through remnants such as language and artefacts.

Silence is also the gap that operates within language between words and their meaning; it simultaneously and paradoxically marks the absence of

meaning and the possibility of its emergence. This is most evident in the play's use of poetry, and in the gaps represented between the intercepted messages and their interpretation. Finally, silence is violence. Conflict aims to silence the opponent: the terrorists aim to silence the murderous ideology of prior generations by murdering their offspring; the entity responsible for the unit imposes silence on the unit, thereby enabling the suicide bombings. Silencing is an act of violence, and the space in which violence is committed.

There is also the silence of absent speech, i.e. the 'missing phrase' (see citation below) because *Ciels* is the story of a search for words. While the unit's mission is to discover and decipher speech threads, Clément also needs a missing phrase to solve the algorithm and unlock Valéry's computer. As Clément says:

Nous la cherchons avec avidité, cette phrase manquante qui pourrait redessiner les contours de la ville perdue dont les portes des maisons restaient ouvertes au passage des étrangers, cette ville-reine qui portait et porte encore le nom oublié avec lequel nous appelait, il y a longtemps, la voix tant aimée, nous enjoignant de rentrer avant que ne tombe le jour. Cela, la poésie de son grand-père le lui avait appris!⁶⁸ (Mouawad 2009d: 62)

In this passage, the missing phrase is more than the search for an external variable that will solve an enigma; it is capable of bringing back a person's past – a 'lost city'. The longing for the past is spatial. And the missing phrase is something intensely personal, a quest for meaning that bears a relation to

⁶⁸ We avidly seek it, this missing phrase that could redraw the contours of the lost city in which the doors to the houses remained open to passing strangers, this queen-city that once carried and still carries the forgotten name with which, a long time ago, the much beloved voice called us, entreating us to come home before the dark. This, the poetry of his grandfather taught him!

forgotten words or a beloved voice. It is the search for a form of existence that remains open to the encounter.

Clément's characterisation of the search for the missing phrase perhaps echoes the relationship between silence and space as characterized in the work of Maurice Blanchot. As MacKendrick writes:⁶⁹

Silence calls us to an unknown, to the outside/within of language. Yet our sense of this unknown is not pure future – that which we shall find – nor is it presence, as if we could see it before us. Silence calls to memory, to our sense of having forgotten. It calls, more precisely, to what we could never remember, never re-collect, because it began without origin, in fragmentation as the very site of disruption. (MacKendrick 2001: 27)

As Clément explained in the passage above, the search for the missing phrase is motivated precisely by this sense of having forgotten. It is not the missing phrase of the algorithm that Clément is referring to, but rather the missing phrase of forgotten meaning cryptically alluded to in the passage. For Clément, the sense of having forgotten is what draws the self towards a 'lost city' whose doors always remain 'open to passing strangers'. The lost city that Clément describes is the site of a child's familiar world that is open to the encounter with the stranger; crucially, it is a world that is necessarily beyond reach, recalling Mouawad's 'L'enfance, qui est le véritable pays. Celui où l'on arrive jamais.'⁷⁰ (Mouawad 2009a: 91). The search for meaning, and the impossibility of ever finding the true original contained in the 'missing phrase' is what poetry teaches.

⁶⁹ Given the complexity Blanchot's writings on silence, I cite the work of Karmen MacKendrick in the interest of brevity.

⁷⁰ 'Childhood, which is the true homeland. The one we never reach.' See Introduction, p.29.

In an interview given on the occasion of *Ciels'* premiere at the Avignon Festival in 2009, Mouawad discussed the significance of language in *Ciels*:

Je veux une langue de colère, d'action, d'engagement, de gestes qui ne puisse pas être récupérée. Il me faut donc inventer une langue qui permet la distance, une langue forcément poétique.⁷¹

The language of *Ciels* is one of anger, but also of the distantiation that is 'necessarily poetic'. The language used by the Tintoretto terrorists baffles the unit and resists explanation (unlike the Ali Al Lybie lead whose cliché Arabic-sounding name points to an evident, given meaning, i.e. an Islamist threat). Valéry's encryption remains untouchable until the end, hidden within poetry. For Mouawad, poetry makes distantiation possible as a result of its ambiguity. Resisting appropriation, it requires infinite interpretation on the part of the reader or listener.

In *Profanations*, Giorgio Agamben makes the case for the space of the poem as one characterized by an exchange that is itself conditioned by absence:

The place of the poem – or, rather, its taking place – is therefore neither in the text nor in the author (nor in the reader): it is in the gesture through which the author and reader put themselves into play in the text and, at the same time, are infinitely withdrawn from it. (Agamben 2007: 71)

The poem as that which 'takes place', an event that generates a space for itself, requires an exchange between poet and addressee; yet it is a communication that

⁷¹ I want a language of anger, of commitment, of gestures, that cannot be appropriated. I therefore have to invent a language that makes distance possible, a language that is by definition poetic.
See <http://www.theatre-contemporain.net/spectacles/Littoral-Incendies-Forets/ensavoirplus>

is never fully satisfied. Presence is in play through language, but simultaneously withdraws, and does so 'infinitely'. The poem marks the author and reader's inability to ascribe and confine definitive meaning. Poetic language also pays particular attention to the sound of language, and on the spacing between words; the silence that lends the text its cadence. The sound and form of the word is not subject to its meaning. Instead, poetry plays with the deferral of meaning through polysemy and the gaps that emerge between words and their interpretation.⁷²

Agamben, drawing on Paul Valéry's definition of poetry as the 'hésitation prolongée entre le son et le sens'⁷³ states that 'poetry lives only in the tension and difference (and hence also in the virtual interference) between sound and sense, between the semiotic sphere and the semantic sphere' (Agamben 1999: 109). For Mouawad, the multiplicity of meaning and sound engendered by poetic play is precisely a rejection of the violence of language as imposed meaning. In other words, the interpretation that poetry requires refuses a single, attributed meaning and thereby incarnates both activity (the mind must interpret and attribute meaning) and responsibility.⁷⁴ Clément cries out: 'Anatole nous redonne la poésie, et nous en prive du même coup, car sa colère se retrouve

⁷² In *La Sagesse grecque*, which Mouawad often references, Colli explains: '[L]a poésie est aussi parole, et la parole est le domaine d'Apollon. La parole ne peut dire la vision suprême d'Éleusis, elle ne peut que la ménager, la suggérer, peut-être même la susciter, et cela aussi renvoie à Apollon, à sa nature oblique, indirecte, ambiguë.' ('Poetry is also speech, and speech is Apollo's domain. Speech cannot speak the supreme vision of Eleusis, it can only accommodate it, suggest it, even perhaps elicit it, and this also refers to Apollo, to his oblique, indirect and ambiguous nature.') (Colli 1990: 37)

⁷³ Prolonged hesitation between sound and sense.

⁷⁴ For the relationship between meaning and responsibility in Mouawad's work, see Chapter 4..p.259.

encore imbriquée au siècle de la colère.⁷⁵ (Mouawad 2009d: 64) Anatole's poetic violence is another manifestation of the twentieth century's cyclical violence. His poetry cannot extricate itself from death. As Clément explains: 'Pour moi [...] la beauté, son océan, son architecture ne peuvent pas être complices au sang!'⁷⁶ (Mouawad 2009d: 64). For Clément, associating poetry with blood is to impose a specific meaning to that which should remain open to interpretation; this reaffirms the supremacy of violence by imposing silence, in this case in the form of death.

Violence is therefore intimately connected to silence in *Ciels*. There are two entities that represent different forms of violence in the play, and both exist outside of the closed premises of the unit. They are the anarchist terrorists, and the state. Each represents a different form of silence. The unit strives to dispel the silence in which the terrorists' messages are hidden in order to prevent death. There is a sense throughout the play that this is achievable; communications are intercepted, the painting can be interpreted, meaning can be deciphered and silence can be counteracted. On the other hand, the state imposes an absolute silence on the unit. At the end of the play, the unit is cut off from all communication with the outside world by the state entity that controls them. This silencing of the truth⁷⁷ facilitates violence and death. Powerless to act on the information they have deciphered, team members are reduced to waiting

⁷⁵ 'Anatole is giving us back poetry and depriving us of it in one stroke, because his anger is still intertwined with the century of anger.'

⁷⁶ 'For me [...] beauty, its ocean, its architecture, cannot be accomplices to blood!'

⁷⁷ The scene in which Clément explains his discovery of the Tintoretto information on Valéry's computer is entitled 'The Truth'.

for communication initiated by the state. This imposed silence has a direct impact on the group: it is the reason for Charlie's son's death.

In *Ciels*, silence as resistance to appropriation is distinguished from silence as violence. The former brings the space between entities into relief, preserving a separateness that makes dialogue, and therefore the encounter, possible. The latter is a refusal to acknowledge the voiced existence of the other, whereby the perpetrator feels justified in silencing the other. This amounts to an annihilation of the spacing required for the recognition of alterity, and is enacted by both entities that perpetrate violence in *Ciels*. The terrorists annihilate young people as a result of their vengeful ideology that perpetuates the cycle of violence that gathered momentum over the course of the twentieth century. Their use of poetry and symbolic imagery ascribes a specific interpretation to works of art and poetry, denying the silence inherent to these art forms that resists appropriation. Ultimately, the silence aimed for and imposed by the terrorists is that of death, which marks the end of poetry. The addressee is removed from poetic play, destroying the space in which the poem as event comes into being.

The state operates its own imposition of silence, also based on ideology. The state silences the unit when the unit fails to comply, overtly disobeying the order to cease following the Tintoretto lead. By the end of *Ciels*, the state is revealed as the perpetrator of the technicized structures that refuse to acknowledge the individual voice.⁷⁸ Spatially, the silence imposed by the state suddenly reduces the action of the play to the confines of the unit; the phone

⁷⁸ For more information on the contrast between the technological and the individual, see Chapter 4, 'Bearing witness to the event', p.247-249.

calls, video transmissions, and projections of footage that have marked the first part of the play end, creating both silence and a feeling of spatial enclosure, even claustrophobia, that the characters and audience share.

Charlie's grief contrasts with the simultaneous birth of Dolorosa's child. Life and death come together, and the audience and actors encounter the complete cycle of life in the closing scene. However, any optimism implicit in the birth of Dolorosa's child is tenuous at best, as Charlie continues to weep and cry as Victor's slideshow is projected on the walls. Bearing witness to the traumatic effects of state-imposed silence, and spatial enclosure, the witnesses to Charlie's pain are aware of the structure into which the child is born. The stage space embodies Paotčka's 'hardness of the real', a space governed by external powers (in this case, the State) with which the seemingly powerless individual must contend. Although the world determines the context into which a person comes into being, the corporeal self is co-constitutive of that which is made manifest. Resistance to State power and the assertion of individual agency governs the whole performance: Valéry's use of poetry and enigma shifts control away from the political state by making the discovery of the missing phrase contingent on human action, interaction and friendship. Conceptual space in *Ciels* therefore emerges and is transformed through manifestation and relationality.

This shift towards the relational is what brings about the collective certainty in the validity of the Tintoretto lead. It is in bearing witness to Valéry's life that the unit members come to believe in something other than the ordering and appropriation of knowledge commanded by the state. As we shall see in the following chapter, Mouawad persistently emphasizes that it is by bearing

witness that individuals can come to experience shakeness. It is shakeness that is the ever-shifting basis of solidarity; instead of silencing the other, the shaken acknowledge the silence of the other as the other's unequivocal alterity.

Chapter 4

Bearing witness to the trace

Le théâtre que j'ai envie de faire consiste à placer sur une scène des êtres qui font témoignage, et non pas étalage, de leur ébranlement.¹ (Mouawad 2009a: 52)

The preceding three chapters have explored the significance of the self's disjunction from itself, and the role of time and space in disrupting the continuity of the present, for a given self, in the plays of Wajdi Mouawad. As has been shown, for Mouawad, 'now' is always intersected by other times, predominantly by the past, in the form of those who came before. 'Here' is never pure space, but persistently affected by other places. These disruptions of the present by the past, and of the internal by the external, are enacted by traces; both the conceptual and the physical. Conceptually, references to other times and places persistently interrupt the continuity of the 'here and now'. Physically, artefacts and staging techniques create tangible links between past and present, internal and external. These intersections of time and space help dispel the illusion of a cohesive, unproblematic self, fully immersed in the present. This enables the self to move beyond the rooted life of sustenance and towards a meaningful existence through the metamorphosis provoked by shakeness.

Mouawad has stated that his aim for theatre is to stage the act of bearing witness to shakeness. As we have previously seen, an individual is shaken when

¹ The theatre that I want to create consists of placing on stage beings who bear witness to, and do not simply demonstrate, their shakeness.

experiencing an event that leads to self-awareness,² and consciousness of one's existence in the world.³ This experience is a form of metamorphosis that leads the individual to reject the life of everyday sustenance in favour of a meaningful life. It is this process to which Mouawad wants his actors to bear witness.

Bearing witness is crucial to the notion of 'solidarity of the shaken'. The following chapter therefore seeks to address the meaning and significance of 'bearing witness'; how it relates to shakenness, and its relevance in terms of Patočka's third movement of human existence. First, the chapter will consider recent critical approaches to the term. Second, it will address the significance of testimony in Mouawad's plays. Third, it will clarify the significance of bearing witness to Patočka's notion of a life in truth and its role in making possible the 'solidarity of the shaken'. These sections will be followed by an analysis of the role of bearing witness in two of Mouawad's more recent plays, *Temps* and *Sœurs*, and a discussion of how this relates to the wider ambitions of Mouawad's theatre.

² See Chapter 1, p.82.

³ See Chapter 3, p.156-157.

1 Bearing witness

1.1 Definitions and implications

In order to discuss bearing witness, it is important to first define the complex web of meanings encompassed by this phrase and by its synonym, 'testimony'.⁴ 'Testimony' is used in four distinct, though often interrelated ways. It has a legal meaning: to give testimony in a legal framework as a third-party witness to an event. More generally, 'testimony' refers to the account provided by a person who experienced and survived an event. 'Testimony' and 'bearing witness' have a long history of association with truth, specifically with humanity's relation to Divinity as written in scripture and in the Judeo-Christian tradition generally. And finally, the first two senses of 'testimony' have been magnified and transformed since the Holocaust into what Elie Wiesel has characterized as a literary genre. (Eaglestone 2004: 15)

Although each form of testimony has a specific nuance, all share the same four components characteristic of testimony: an event, the witness to the event, the witness' testimony, and the receiver to whom the testimony is addressed. In

⁴ The etymology of testimony has been addressed in a number of critical texts. Giorgio Agamben provides a concise explanation of the Latin root of the first two meanings of testimony: *Testis* 'signifies the person who, in a trial or lawsuit between two rival parties, is in the position of a third party'. (Agamben 1999: 17) This *Testis* is the witness as bystander. Alternatively, *Superstes*, meaning survivor, 'designates a person who has lived through something, who has experienced an event from beginning to end and can therefore bear witness to it'. (Agamben 1999: 17) *Superstes* is the witness as subject of an event. The survivor's testimony is a formulation of personal experience that may or may not be evoked in a legal context. See also Jacques Derrida, 'Poétique et politique du témoignage'. (Derrida in Mallet and Michaud 2004: 521-539)

her work on testimony and fiction, Marie Bornand cites Claude Burgelin when she writes that in testimony: 'un *je* [...] et un *tu* récepteur, soit deux sujets, se rencontrent : « il n'y a pas d'écriture-témoignage sans un *je* témoin et un *tu* à qui la confier ».」⁵ (Bornand 2004: 61) Although Bornand's focus is on written testimony, the addressee is a key feature of all forms of testimony. Testimony is, by its very nature, an encounter. It is a specific form of communication, defined by its appeal to the addressee, and its relationship to truth.

In *Poétique et politique du témoignage*, Jacques Derrida draws attention to the distinction between testimony and proof: '*témoigner n'est pas prouver*. Témoigner en appelle à l'acte de foi.'⁶ (Derrida in Mallet, Michaud 2004: 527) He then clarifies the significance of belief in the act of bearing witness, as follows:

« Je témoigne » cela veut dire : « j'affirme (à tort ou à raison, mais en toute bonne foi, sincèrement) que cela m'a été ou m'est présent, dans l'espace et dans le temps (sensible donc), et bien que vous n'aviez pas accès, pas le même accès vous-mêmes, mes destinataires, *vous devez me croire*, parce que je m'engage à vous dire la vérité, j'y suis déjà engagé, je vous dis que je vous dis la vérité. Croyez-moi. Vous devez me croire.⁷ (Derrida, in Mallet, Michaud 2004: 527)

Testimony is an appeal by the witness to the addressee for belief. In giving testimony, the witness asserts a commitment to truth. Testimony as exchange therefore depends on truth, or authenticity on the part of the witness, and belief

⁵ 'An *I* [...] and a *you* receiver, that is two subjects, meet: "there is no testimony-writing without an *I* witness and a *you* to whom to convey the testimony.'"

⁶ 'Bearing witness is not proving. To bear witness calls for an act of faith.'

⁷ "I bear witness" – that means: "I affirm (rightly or wrongly, but in all good faith, sincerely) that that was or is present to me, in space and time (thus, perceptible), and although you do not have access to it, not the same access, you, my addressees, *you have to believe me*, because I am committed to telling you the truth, I am already committed to it, I tell you that I am telling you the truth. Believe me. You have to believe me." (Derrida, trans. Bowlby in Clark 2000: 189)

on the part of the addressee. This is what Bornand refers to as the 'truth contract': 'Le contrat de vérité est l'enjeu fondamental de l'écriture du témoignage.'⁸ (Bornand 2004: 63) The relationship between witness and addressee is contingent on a linguistic evocation of the witness' experience of an event that relies on both memory⁹ and language. The authenticity of the witness' presence, memory and articulation affect the level of belief on the part of the addressee.¹⁰

Implicit in the above association between expression of truth and call to belief is the ability of language to convey the truth of the witness' experience. What testimony highlights is the potential disjunction between experience and language. Levinas, Derrida, Agamben and Eaglestone¹¹ (to name but a few) point to the gaps and silences characteristic of testimony literature. In *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, philosopher Giorgio Agamben observes that 'testimony is the disjunction between two impossibilities of bearing witness; it means that language, in order to bear witness, must give way to a non-language in order to show the impossibility of bearing witness.' (Agamben 1999a: 39) Silence plays an important role in the articulation of testimony, in particular the testimony of the survivor. In *Histoires de fantômes: Spectralité et témoignage dans les récits de femmes contemporains*, Martine Delvaux explains:

⁸ 'The truth contract is the fundamental aspect of the writing of testimony.'

⁹ Bornand characterises memory as not only memory of the distant past, but as the recollection of an experience, however immediate, that can be formulated in language.

¹⁰ Paul Ricœur has explored this at length in *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*. He makes an explicit reference to the connection between the witness and belief on the basis of the witness' implicit demand to be believed. Cf. Ricœur 2000: 205.

¹¹ Cf. Eaglestone's work on post-Holocaust testimony in *The Holocaust and the Postmodern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Le témoin témoigne de ce qui a survécu. Pour cette raison, la vérité du témoignage dépend non seulement de ce qui est affirmé, mais de ce qui est tu, du secret que renferme toute parole. Car même si nous le souhaitons, nous ne pouvons tout dire. [...] parler, écrire, témoigner constituent également l'expression d'une perte qui a lieu durant le processus qui consiste à traduire le savoir expérientiel en mots. Parler est, en soi, une expérience de désobjectivation, suggère Giorgio Agamben s'inspirant de Keats. Et c'est aussi ce qu'est le témoignage. Même s'il peut représenter la parole dans sa forme la plus mimétique (son but étant de rendre compte d'un événement et d'une expérience vrais), le témoignage, comme toute énonciation, est aussi l'acte d'un «je» qui est un autre.¹² (Delvaux 2005: 40)

Here the truth expressed in testimony depends on the silence inherent in all speech. The inability to express anything in full points to the division inherent within the self. The self is never fully given to itself in words; experience necessarily overflows the words used to express it. The self as experiencing subject and speaking subject is divided, what Agamben refers to as the 'irreducible presence of the "I" to itself',¹³ (Agamben 1999a: 106), or as Levinas says, in the passage cited by Agamben: 'the intolerable presence of the self to itself'. (Levinas in Agamben 1999a: 105) Agamben goes on to explain:

But precisely this impossibility of conjoining the living being and language, *phōnē* and *logos*, the inhuman and the human – far from authorising the infinite deferral of signification – is what allows for testimony. If there is no articulation between the living being and language, if the "I" stands suspended in this

¹² The witness bears witness to what survived. For this reason, the truth of the testimony depends not only on what is affirmed, but what is silenced, on the secret enclosed in all speech. For even if we wished to, we could not say everything. [...] to speak, to write, to bear witness also constitutes the expression of a loss that takes place during the process that consists in translating the knowledge of experience into words. Drawing on Keats, Giorgio Agamben suggests that speaking is, in itself, an experience of desubjectification. This is also the nature of testimony. Even if it can represent speech in its most mimetic form (its aim being to give an account of an event and a real experience), testimony, like any utterance, is also the act of an "I" that is an other.

¹³ This recalls Derrida's auto-affection as discussed in Chapter 1, p.41.

disjunction, then there can be testimony. The intimacy that betrays our non-coincidence with ourselves is the place of testimony. (Agamben 1999a: 130)

This non-coincidence, the space between the 'living being and language', is the site of testimony. Testimony bears within it the trace of that which is incomprehensible, what cannot be grasped, owned, understood. It is paradoxically enacted through language, yet simultaneously carries that which language fails to apprehend: the unspeakable event. Hence, the gaps, the 'tropes and strategies' to which Eaglestone refers, point to that which has been witnessed by the individual but which eludes the individual's abilities of articulation.

1.2 Testimony in Mouawad

These characteristics of testimony, its four-part structure, its relationship to truth and belief, and the internal alterity which it highlights through the disjunction between experience and articulation, are all significant in relation to Mouawad's plays and his ambitions. Witnessing, as it occurs in Mouawad's theatre, is double. First, the characters bear witness to an event that provokes a confrontation with their current existence; second, the actors are called to bear witness to their own experience of shakiness and to transmit this through their characters. The aim of this hybridity is to lend the plays the veracity characteristic of testimony. The following section will explore the relationship between the inner multiplicity of self, the convergence between the fictional and the real, and the significance of truth in Mouawad's theatre, before turning to the

significance of truth in Patočka's writings, and the role of truth in the solidarity of the shaken.

The self-division characteristic of testimony has been noted in numerous recent studies on testimony and theatre. In 2011, the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3, the Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art and the Université Catholique de Louvain co-hosted a conference entitled 'Le geste de témoigner : un dispositif pour le théâtre'.¹⁴ In his summary of the first day of the conference, Simon Chemama refers to a history of testimony in theatre.

Chez Artaud, chez Adamov, témoins d'eux-mêmes, s'opère également un dédoublement, une division de l'être en deux : l'expérimenté et le témoin (analogues au montré et au démonstrateur chez Brecht). Une altérité se constitue.¹⁵ (Chemama *in* Sarrazac, Naugrette, Banu 2011: 76)

Chemama is referencing Artaud's 1925 statement: 'Je suis témoin. Je suis le seul témoin de moi-même'¹⁶ and divides the experiencing being from the witness, a duality that is characterized as an internal alterity.¹⁷ Recognition of the self's division is part of the process to which Mouawad's characters bear witness: shakiness is only made possible once a person becomes self-aware of inner division or non-coincidence with the self.

¹⁴ Organised by noted theatre specialists Jean-Pierre Ryngaert, Catherine Naugrette, Joseph Danan, Pierre Piret and Jean-Pierre Sarrazac.

¹⁵ In Artaud, in Adamov, witnesses to themselves, a division is also at work, a division of being in two: the experiencing being and the witness (analogous to the character and the demonstrator in Brecht). An alterity comes into being.

¹⁶ 'I am the witness, I am the only witness to myself'

¹⁷ A clear emphasis is here placed on witnessing as an internal, intimate act. During this same conference, Jean-Pierre Sarrazac drew a distinction between testimony used for public purposes, and intimate testimony. Sarrazac draws a parallel between these two forms of testimony and his identification of a shift in theatre from the intersubjective to the intrasubjective.

However, integral to the act of witnessing is the witness' communication to an other. For Mouawad, this is the act of storytelling, an idea expressed by Simone in *Littoral*: 'On va aller raconter des histoires. Tout ce qu'ils veulent nous faire oublier, on va l'inventer, le raconter!'¹⁸ (Mouawad Leblanc 2009: 62) Simone draws a correlation between the remembering of events, and the fictional. Like the recounting of events, storytelling makes it possible to 'savoir ce qui s'est passé' (know what happened) (Mouawad Leblanc 2009: 67; 73), so the fictional provides access to knowledge, to truth. The truth of a communication is not contingent on the facts communicated but upon the veracity of the experience expressed. To bear witness in Mouawad's plays is only secondarily a bearing witness to external events. Foremost, it is the bearing witness to an individual's experience (and the impact of that experience) of a given event. It is the event that 'donne un sens pour parler au monde' (gives a sense of meaning to speak to the world). (Mouawad Leblanc 2009: 73) Mouawad's aim for his actors is to communicate this experience of shakeness through the depiction of fictional events.

The communication of this experience is significant as the basis for Mouawad's insistence on the solidarity of the shaken. In calling for a theatre of testimony, Mouawad is articulating a specific conceptualisation of theatre, wherein a truth contract between the actor and audience is invoked. In presenting characters whose experience onstage stimulates a process of self-discovery, combined with the actors' own emotion communicating their experience of shakeness, Mouawad is appealing to spectators to believe in the

¹⁸ 'We are going to go and tell stories. Everything that they want to make us forget, we will invent it, we will tell it!'

authenticity of the experience presented. The authenticity of the actors' experiences is emphasized by instances of silence at particularly significant moments, because, as described above, silence points to an experience which cannot be verbally articulated. In every external articulation of intimate experience, something remains unspoken, lost or reserved.

1.3 Truth, Patočka and the solidarity of the shaken

Mouawad, then, seeks to establish a truth contract with his audience based on the authenticity of an intimate experience (shakeness), which is subsequently externalized through testimony. Mouawad's understanding of truth reflects the Patočkan definition. In his third heretical essay, Patočka gives a concise precis: '[T]ruth means that being is intelligible and accessible to understanding and explanation.'¹⁹ (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 55) However, this truth is not given, it is something that emerges only through a form of praxis:

What, though, makes humans just and truthful is their care for their soul. [...] Care for the soul means that truth is something not given once and for all, nor merely a matter of observing and acknowledging the observed, but rather a lifelong inquiry, a self-controlling, self-unifying intellectual and vital practice.

For Patočka, care for the soul is care for the three movements of human existence. This care involves an acknowledgement of the significance of rootedness and the importance of the life of sustenance, through the third

¹⁹ This is similar to Heidegger's definition of truth (*aletheia*) as unconcealment. In his Parmenides seminar, Heidegger explained: 'The unconcealed is originally what is saved from withdrawing concealment and hence is secured in disclosure and as such is uneluded.' (Heidegger 1992: 132)

movement, which seeks to continually question the givenness of these first two movements. As James Mensch notes: 'The first two movements of human existence are marked by concealment.' (Mensch 2013: 10) The third is the movement towards truth, towards unconcealment, i.e. making 'being intelligible and accessible to understanding' through lifelong inquiry. Truth is what becomes visible through questioning. The shaken are those who, as a result of questioning, are shaken in their faith in everyday concepts (day, life, peace), who reject an absolute foundation (metaphysics) as well as absolute nothingness (nihilism) and instead 'live with a sought for and problematic meaning'. (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 75)

Patočka places strong emphasis on the community ('solidarity') between those who have experienced shakenness. Here lies the crux of the significance of testimony for Mouawad's theatre. Testimony, as the externalized articulation of intimate experience, is a movement towards the other, to whom this testimony is addressed. It is an attempt to forge a truth contract with the other (in this case, the audience) and in doing so, to bring the other to believe in the veracity of this experience. In Mouawad's plays, this truth contract is established in two complementary aspects. First, as the narrative discloses the protagonist's quest to investigate, and come to terms with, the past, the truth of that past is brought to light, and the catalyst for the experience of shakenness is made intelligible to the audience.

Pourquoi ne pas vous avoir parlé ?
Il y a des vérités qui ne peuvent être révélées qu'à la condition
d'être découvertes.²⁰ (Mouawad 2009b: 92)

²⁰ Why did I not speak to you?

This excerpt from Nawal's final letter to Jeanne and Simon describes the experience of the play. The audience has been brought to discover the truth of Nawal's story during the course of the performance. Second, the physicality of the theatre – including its vocal cadence and embodied movement – facilitates a representation of the effects of shakiness in a medium other than language. Crying, singing, bellowing, painting and heavy breathing all articulate the physical reaction to a destabilising event. These forms of non-verbal communication, and their seemingly spontaneous (and sometimes involuntary) nature suggests the veracity of the character's experience or recollection.

There is another crucial aspect to this process. As each actor strives to bring his or her experience of shakiness to the stage, the spectator is transformed into a witness. The character's experience of shakiness, catalysed by the play's events, is simultaneously a physical articulation of the actor's own intimate experience. The spectator is confronted with the actor's emotional response to the character's transformation, as he or she moves towards a life of 'sought for and problematic meaning'. This is the third movement of human existence, which in Patočka terms is the 'movement of existence in the true sense [...] a task for all life in its integrity'. (Patočka trans. Kohák 1998:151) In *Le théâtre est-il nécessaire ?* published in 1997, Denis Guénoun understands theatre as the site of the *jeu* (play) which is in fact an 'exhibition intègre' (integral exhibition) on the part of the actors.

Intègre veut dire : entière (le jeu saisit tout, capte tout sur la scène) et probe à la fois : le jeu se cherche comme éthique et

There are some truths that can only be revealed on condition that they are discovered.

technique ensemble. Les joueurs veulent d'une vérité à même la vie, d'une vérité scéniquement vivante qui témoigne du proprement vivant de la vie, de toute vie.²¹ (Guénoun 1997: 151)

Here, testimony is closely tied to the truth and life: the staged truth 'bears witness' to that which is the truly living aspect of life. For Mouawad, theatre as a living art seeks to testify to the very truth of life; this truth is life as movement, disclosure, and a reaching out to others who are similarly concerned with the truth of life as 'sought after' and 'problematic'.

2 *Temps*

Developed over the course of a nine-week winter rehearsal run, and with a running time of only 105 minutes, *Temps* began without prior research, theme or title. (Mouawad 2011c: 8) This working method contrasts with that utilized for the *Le Sang* cycle in which each play evolved from extensive research and rehearsals. *Temps* is further distinguished from its predecessors by the subject. War and political violence do not figure prominently; instead, *Temps* involves familial violence. The play has three acts. Each act is named for one of the children in the de la Forge family: Temps d'Edward; Temps d'Arkadiy; Temps de Noëlla. In a text drafted for the *Temps* press kit, Mouawad explains that these three characters each represent a different form of time:

²¹ Integral means: complete (the play grasps everything, encompasses everything on stage) and probing at the same time: the play seeks itself as a combination of the ethical and the technical. The players want a truth that is life, a truth that is scenically alive and that bears witness to that which is truly alive in life, in any life.

Temps, à travers trois enfants, deux frères et leur sœur aînée, s'est avéré être une rencontre entre ces trois temps, celui d'Edward l'historique, Noëlla la mythique et Arkadiy le messianique.²² (Mouawad 2011c: 8)

Mouawad associates historical time (Edward) with a linear conception of time; time as an arrow that draws the past along with it in a 'cause and effect logic' (Mouawad 2011c: 8). Messianic time (Arkadiy) is based on preparing for and awaiting the future end of time, and the resolution of evil. (Mouawad 2011c: 8) Mythical time (Noëlla) is elliptical and circular, based on a 'dialogue between the living and the dead'. (Mouawad 2011c: 8) As we shall see, Noëlla's form of time is suspended between the living and the dead: she is the link between her brothers, who have no recollection of their pasts, and between her dead mother and dying father. While linear time moves forward sequentially, elliptical time perpetually cycles back, and messianic time ceaselessly looks to the future. As will become clear through this analysis, by exploring various concepts of time, *Temps* investigates different forms of bearing witness, and the witness' relationship to the past, present and future.

2.1 Synopsis

Napier de la Forge, a wealthy miner in the small town of Fermont, Quebec, is dying of Alzheimer's. His daughter Noëlla has written to her biological brothers Edward and Arkadiy, who were long ago adopted, inviting them to return and

²² Through three children, two brothers and their older sister, *Temps* developed into an encounter between these three forms of time, that of Edward (historical time), that of Noëlla (mythical time) and that of Arkadiy (messianic time).

settle their inheritance. However, before they arrive, Napier disappears, barely clothed, into the wintry landscape, scattering papers. The search, led by Napier's lover Blanche Leblanc (frantically gathering scattered papers) and daughter Noëlla (who is deaf, and accompanied by her interpreter, Meredith-Rose), is called off due to the sounding of the Fermont warning siren: the hordes of rats that have recently plagued the city twice daily, at dawn and dusk, are arriving.

Napier is found at the side of the road by the newly arrived Major Edward Ferland, who is, unbeknownst to either party, Napier's son. Edward's arrival prompts a series of revelations: that his mother Jacqy committed suicide by self-immolation, that Noëlla is awaiting not only Edward's arrival but also that of his twin, and that the rats represent an 'unpunished injustice' (Mouawad 2012a: 26) linked to Jacqy's suicide and Napier's illness.

At the beginning of the second act (*Temps d'Arkadiy*), the nature of Noëlla's relationship to her father begins to emerge when Blanche asks to keep Napier's poetry manuscripts and Noëlla responds that she may, on the condition that Blanche agrees to Napier suffering a violent death. In the following scene, Napier enters alone, unfolds a child's dress, hangs it up and masturbates. Edward and Noëlla enter just as Napier ejaculates; a shocked Edward looks from Noëlla to Napier.²³

Arkadiy Tatarine, formerly Archange de la Forge, arrives and meets his siblings. Arkadiy was adopted by a Communist extremist who fled to Russia, and speaks no French. He is accompanied by an interpreter, Vera Pavlova. The twins discover that they both fought in Afghanistan for their respective countries.

²³ Stage directions indicate that Noëlla cleans him up while Edward sees the dress and 'trembles'.

Arkadiy offers Napier a Russian doll set as a gift. As the rats pass through the city again, Arkadiy explains that he is familiar with rats, and that the only way to remove them is to find the right pied piper. The twins ask Noëlla about their mother. The act concludes with two testimonies by Noëlla, the first to her mother's death, the second to her own sexual abuse by Napier. The brothers ask why she remained in his house; Noëlla explains that she demanded that Napier pay her one thousand dollars a week, on pain of death, should he forget a payment, so that she would not remain an eternal victim. The hordes of rats emerged when Napier forgot his first payment as a result of Alzheimer's. Noëlla explains that she will kill Napier on Christmas day, and wants her brothers to be present.

Act III alternates between two escalating plotlines: deputy mayor Apolline Delf and the state army are sent to annihilate the rats, and Noëlla prepares to murder Napier with the twins. While Apolline is unable to delay state intervention, Arkadiy solders together a weapon that can 'only fire once'. Noëlla operates on Edward to remove the bullet lodged in his shoulder. Blanche says goodbye to Napier, and the three children go to Napier and present him with the Russian dolls. He opens the last one to find the bullet, which he hands to Noëlla. Noëlla loads her weapon, kneels down and masturbates her father. Napier becomes aroused, cries out: 'Forgive me!' and ejaculates. At this instant, Noëlla fires and kills Napier. The siblings transport Napier's body to the Salt Forest, where they meet Apolline, who explains that the rats are eluding the army's efforts at extermination. Noëlla, Edward and Arkadiy place Napier on the site where their mother died, and cover him with the money he paid Noëlla. The play

concludes with a final goodbye scene in which Vera Pavlova and Meredith-Rose leave together; Apolline returns the bullet, which she managed to retrieve, and explains that there will be an autopsy on Napier's skeleton, which is all that remains due to the rats. She tells the siblings that the rats have gone, and leaves. The three siblings speak directly to each other for the first time. Noëlla asks Edward and Arkadiy if they can hear, and they reply they can. She then says 'Springtime!' and the play ends with the three children hugging to the sounds of birdsong.

2.2 The witness and the voice

The act of bearing witness is central to *Temps*, a play that articulates the incest survivor's transition from silent trauma victim to a vocal and active agent. Two different forms of bearing witness feature: witnessing an act (on-stage, present) and testimony (recalling an off-stage past). The first form, in which a character witnesses a staged event, occurs twice. Firstly, when Edward witnesses Napier masturbating while looking at a child's dress, at the beginning of Act II. Secondly, when Edward and Arkadiy watch Noëlla kill Napier at the end of Act III. The second form, in which a character recalls an off-stage past, occurs twice, in quick succession, at the end of Act II. When her brothers ask Noëlla about their mother, Noëlla gives an eyewitness account of their mother's death through her interpreter, Meredith:

J'ai connu une femme splendide. Elle venait du nord. Elle s'est immolée et le feu a chassé les rats de la Forêt de sel. Elle m'a dit: « Pardonne-moi! » et je l'ai vu craquer l'allumette.

« Embrasse-moi ! » j'ai hurlé. Elle s'est embrasée. J'avais six ans. [...] Elle a encore hurlé : « Occupe-toi de tes frères ! » et j'ai vu fondre l'Amazonie de ses yeux, même si le feu ne parvenait pas à sécher ses larmes. J'ai couru pour trouver quelqu'un. J'ai crié mais je n'entendais plus rien. À mesure que je me rapprochais de la maison les bruits du monde s'éteignaient. Je suis devenue sourde en passant le pas de la porte.²⁴ (Mouawad 2012a: 44)

Noëlla is both bearing witness to an event, and demonstrating the effects of her trauma, as Jacqy's violent death destroyed Noëlla's hearing and voice. Both are events to which Noëlla is subject; she is powerless to stop her mother's suicide, or to retain her hearing and voice. Noëlla's loss of voice and hearing are not solely the result of her mother's suicide. Her first testimony is followed by a second revelation, that her father sexually abused her from the age of five.

J'ai cinq ans quand il m'a violée pour la première fois et il a recommencé chaque fois que sifflait le vent. « Le vent m'érotise », me disait-il après en pleurant. Elle n'a pas voulu me croire. Quand elle a vu, elle s'est tuée. Je suis restée. Effrayée à chaque fois que j'entendais le vent souffler.²⁵ (Mouawad 2012a: 45-46)

Noëlla's revelation to her mother of her father's paedophilia is met with disbelief ('She didn't want to believe') yet it caused Jacqy to witness this abuse. Noëlla's

²⁴ I knew a magnificent woman. She came from the north. She immolated herself and the fire chased the rats from the Salt Forest. She said to me: 'Forgive me!' and I saw her strike the match. 'Kiss me!' I screamed. She went up in flames. I was six. [...] She screamed again: 'Take care of your brothers!' and I saw the Amazon blue of her eyes melt, even though the fire was unable to dry her tears. I ran to find someone. I screamed but could no longer hear anything. As I neared the house, the sounds of the world were dying out. I became deaf as I walked through the door.

²⁵ I was five years old when he raped me for the first time and he started again every time the wind howled. 'The wind turns me on,' he would say afterwards, crying. She didn't want to believe me. When she saw, she killed herself. I stayed. Terrified every time I heard the wind blowing.

revelation leads to four great losses: of her mother, her hearing, her brothers and her voice.

The connection between trauma and silence has been extensively addressed in studies focused on identifying the nature and effects of trauma.²⁶ Cathy Caruth states in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* that '[t]here is no firm definition for *trauma*, which has been given various descriptions at various times and under different names.' (Caruth 1996: 117) She does however explain trauma as follows:

In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. (Caruth 1996: 11)

Likewise, in 'Trauma Theory and Postcolonial Literary Studies', Irene Visser provides a possible definition of trauma as 'the memory of an overwhelming, unassimilable and violent wounding directly incurred as a first-hand experience in order to differentiate it from secondary or vicarious traumatization'. (Visser 2011: 275) Both characterisations incorporate the significance of the delay (response, memory) in the experience of trauma. The effects of the event exceed the temporal instant of the event itself. In Noëlla's testimony above, there is a temporal progression that incorporates this sense of delay, because only as Noëlla runs home, 'à mesure que je me rapprochais de la maison' (as I neared the house), do the effects of trauma take hold.

²⁶ Trauma studies developed over the course of the past half-century as a discipline drawing on a number of fields including psychology, literature and cognitive science.

According to the psychiatrist Judith Herman, traumatic events can ‘destroy the victim’s fundamental assumptions about the safety of the world, the positive value of the self, and the meaningful order of creation’. (Herman 1992: 51) These three descriptors apply to Noëlla in the wake of her mother’s suicide. The world becomes fundamentally hostile, both indoors and outdoors (the home is the site of sexual abuse; the outdoors infested by hordes of rats); Noëlla is condemned to her father’s repeated abuse and therefore to her continued ‘annihilation’ (Mouawad 2012a: 46); meaningful order is entirely inverted, as, through the mother’s suicide, a six-year-old daughter is forced to take her mother’s place, both as the father’s lover and her brothers’ guardian.²⁷ Herman also explicitly links silence to the survivor’s lack of agency;²⁸ ‘[t]he silencing of trauma survivors is always about the disempowerment of traumatized people.’ (Herman in Caruth 2014: 137) After witnessing her mother’s death, the world falls silent for Noëlla. This occurs in tandem with the confirmation of her powerlessness. Despite her pleas, Noëlla is unable to stop her mother’s suicide and her own consequent isolation. Through the act of suicide, the child’s voice is

²⁷ ‘There is an enormous power imbalance between the father and mother. The mother is incapacitated. [...] Under those circumstances, the oldest daughter is often deputised to be the concubine of the father as well as the caretaker for the whole family.’ (Herman in Caruth, 2014: 133) The mother’s abandonment through death effectively places her daughter in this role; this is exacerbated by Napier’s Alzheimer’s as she becomes a mother figure for him:

Napier de la Forge éclate en sanglots.

NAPIER DE LA FORGE Maman... maman. Les bras les bras!...

Il va dans les bras de Noëlla.

(Napier de la Forge bursts into tears.

NAPIER DE LA FORGE Mother... mother. The arms, the arms!...

He goes to be held in Noëlla’s arms)

²⁸ In Cathy Caruth’s set of interviews, *Listening to Trauma: Conversations with Leaders in the Theory & Treatment of Catastrophic Experience*.

proven powerless. This progresses as Noëlla desperately tries to 'find someone', fruitlessly crying for help. The only result is the progressive extinguishing of sound, as Noëlla rushes home. As a consequence, the child is left subject to others (her father's abuse, her mother's injunction to look after her brothers, her reliance on an interpreter). She is rendered a powerless eyewitness from whom even the ability to give testimony is taken.

Noëlla's transition from disempowerment to agency is expressed via the interrelation of the two instances of bearing witness (staged event) with the two instances of giving testimony (narrative account) that occur in the play. First, the association between Napier's masturbation scene and Noëlla's account of her father's sexual abuse strengthens the veracity of her testimony. Edward (and, by extension, the audience) has witnessed Napier in a state of paedophilic arousal, confirming Noëlla's testimony at the end of Act II. The contrast between Noëlla's account of her experience of powerlessness in the face of Jacqy's suicide, and her killing of Napier, encapsulates the distinction between Noëlla as powerless subject and Noëlla as agent, the dominant theme of the play. In the first account, the child was helpless and subject to the event. In the second, it is the child as adult who acts, and in acting, claims her voice.

2.3 Memory and transmission

In addition to her own witnessing of events and testimony, there is a third sense in which Noëlla bears witness. Noëlla is the living witness to her father and mother's relationship. Noëlla's name derives from something her father said to

her mother before she was born: 'Je t'aime tant Jacqy que ce sera Noël tous les jours de la vie.'²⁹ (Mouawad 2012a: 27) First mentioned by Napier in Act I, this phrase is reiterated in the following act. It is later the first full sentence that Noëlla speaks with her own voice.³⁰ In this scene, the sentence is explicitly linked to the act of remembering:

MEREDITH-ROSE ³¹ Le jumeau. Ils étaient deux. Il faut attendre le second. Il est comme le vent. Il arrivera. Il arrivera et nous nous souviendrons tous ensemble.
 APOLLINE DELF De quoi ?
 NOËLLA DE LA FORGE (*avec sa voix*) Je t'aime tant Jacqy que ce sera Noël tous les jours de la vie.
 MEREDITH-ROSE De ce qu'il a dit : « Je t'aime tant Jacqy que ce sera Noël tous les jours de la vie. »
 NOËLLA DE LA FORGE (*Isq*) 3-DIRE-3... 3-CROIRE-3 NOËLLA MOI NÉE... FRÈRE JUMEAU REVENIR... NOËL PROCHE-PORTE-OUVERT (CL) ...PTÉ 4 FÊTER PTÉ 4 FÊTER...MALHEUR PTÉ 4 ENLEVER.
 MEREDITH-ROSE Il l'a dit. Elle l'a cru. Je suis née. Noëlla. Les frères jumeaux seront de retour et Noël sera à notre porte ! Nous le fêterons ! Nous le fêterons et nous écraserons le malheur.³² (Mouawad 2012a: 24)

²⁹ 'I love you so much Jacqy that it will be Christmas all the days of our lives.'

³⁰ Noëlla spoke two words: 'Ta sœur', earlier in the act, when she introduced herself to Edward.

³¹ Meredith-Rose is cited as translating for Noëlla. Any instances where she speaks on her own behalf will be indicated.

³² MEREDITH-ROSE The twin. There were two of them. We have to wait for the second. He is like the wind. He will come. He will come and we will all remember together.

APOLLINE DELF Remember what?

NOËLLA DE LA FORGE (*in her own voice*) I love you so much Jacqy that it will be Christmas every day for the rest of our lives.

MEREDITH-ROSE What he said: 'I love you so much Jacqy that it will be Christmas every day for the rest of our lives.'

NOËLLA DE LA FORGE (*Isq*) 3-SAY-3... 3-BELIEVE-3 I NOËLLA BORN... TWIN BROTHER RETURN... CHRISTMAS SOON-DOOR-OPEN (CL)... POINT 4 CELEBRATE POINT 4 CELEBRATE... TRAGEDY POINT 4 REMOVE.

MEREDITH-ROSE He said it. She believes him. I was born. Noëlla. The twin brother will be back and Christmas will be on our doorstep! We will celebrate! We will celebrate and we will annihilate tragedy.

The sentence belongs to a past that is disappearing in the mind of its only remaining participant, Napier. Yet it is a sentence inscribed on Noëlla in the form of her name. Noëlla transmits the phrase from the past into the present. She is the living testimony to her father's phrase. This is made clear the first time Napier speaks the sentence.

NAPIER La fille dans ton ventre, on lui donnera un nom de fée qui dira la naissance de nous deux. Je t'aime tant Jacqy. Noël tous les jours de la vie !³³ (Mouawad 2012a: 24)

Napier chooses the name Noëlla to 'tell of the birth' of his life with Jacqy. Noëlla is therefore made to bear witness to her parents' lives prior to existing in the world. Transformed into a symbol, she is verbally appropriated by the father before his sexual appropriation of her body. This verbal designation denies Noëlla self-determination; even more striking is the temporal stasis it introduces. In associating Noëlla with a lifelong repetition of the same day, Napier allocates his daughter a life of predetermined recurrence before her birth. Noëlla's time is indeed cyclical; she is denied the agency to determine her own life, even prior to the events to which she bears witness in the play.

In a sense, *Temps* itself bears witness to Noëlla's progression from silenced subject to self as agent. The play's central event is not external – Noëlla's rape, Jacqy's death, Napier forgetting his payment – but rather Noëlla's decision at the age of thirteen to, as she terms it, reject victimisation by demanding payment from her father. Her testimony of her father's abuse is followed by an

³³ NAPIER We will give the daughter in your belly a fairy name that will speak the birth of the two of us. I love you so much Jacqy. Christmas every day of our lives!

explanation of this decision, as her brothers are unable to understand why

Noëlla returned to Fermont after giving them up for adoption.

Partir aurait fait de moi à jamais une victime. [...] Dix ans pour trouver. J'ai treize ans. Il éjacule. Il pleure. Je lui dis : « Je veux de l'argent. Pour le reste de tes jours, tu devras me payer une fois par semaine. Chaque lundi, je veux mille dollars. Je veux aussi les arriérés depuis la première fois que tu as éjaculé dans mon ventre. Si tu refuses, je te dénonce. Le jour où tu oublieras de me payer, je te tuerai. »³⁴ (Mouawad 2012a: 46)

There is a twofold rejection of victimhood in Noëlla's explanation. First, there is the immediacy of the payments in the face of the threat, the first form of agency that Noëlla claims. Second, there is Noëlla's anticipation of Napier's forgetting and death. In the face of Edward's incredulity, Noëlla explains this moment in which she made the first transition from victim to agent.

EDWARD FERDLAND De l'argent?! [...]
MEREDITH-ROSE Pourquoi pas ? Tout le monde vient à Fermont pour faire de l'argent. Pourquoi pas moi ? L'argent est là. Voici. Un peu plus d'un million de dollars. Je n'ai rien touché, mais j'ai repris ma vie en main. Je l'ai reprise. Je ne subissais rien. Il est devenu la victime. Je n'avais plus qu'à attendre. Un jour il oubliera. Il y a huit mois, il a oublié. Sa maladie. Les hordes ont surgi. Cela était juste. Je l'abattraï le jour de Noël. Ce sera tous les jours de la vie ! Je vous ai écrit. Les frères devaient être là. Il faut liquider la succession.³⁵ (Mouawad 2012a: 48)

³⁴ Leaving would have made me forever a victim. [...] Ten years to find it. I'm thirteen. He ejaculates. He cries. I tell him: "I want money. For the rest of your days, you have to pay me once a week. Every Monday, I want a thousand dollars. I also want the arrears from the first time that you ejaculated in my stomach. If you refuse, I will denounce you. The day that you forget to pay me, I will kill you."

³⁵ EDWARD FERLAND Money?! [...]

MEREDITH-ROSE Why not? Everyone comes to Fermont to make money. Why not me? The money is here. Here it is. A little more than a million dollars. I haven't touched it, but I took my life back into my own hands. I took it back. I was not subjected to anything. He became the victim. I only had to wait. One day he will forget. He did eight months ago. His illness. The hordes appeared. This

This testimony oscillates between past and present tenses. The two uses of the future tense, 'one day he will forget' and 'it will be all the days of life', draw past events into a continuity with present revelation and future possibilities. The first use is a reference to the futurity envisaged by Noëlla upon making her decision to require payment from Napier. The second is a reference to the future after Napier's death. It is by 'taking her life in hand' through two speech-acts (demanding money, and promising death) that Noëlla transforms her context at the age of thirteen; however, at this stage she also envisages her future killing of Napier in her certitude that he will forget.³⁶ She rejects her father's appropriation and anticipates an active role in his future destruction. Noëlla's repetition of Napier's phrase subtly changes its grammatical structure. In removing the predicate 'Noël', the adverbial of time becomes the predicate. This broadens the possible meaning of the sentence, as 'all the days of life' are not relegated to an eternal recurrence of Christmas. The death of the father thereby ends the cyclical nature of time and Noëlla's entrapment.

At the end of the passage cited above, Noëlla likens Napier's murder on Christmas Day to the destruction of the labyrinth and the Minotaur:

MEREDITH-ROSE S'il est vrai que le fil du désastre ne peut plus se casser, il peut encore nous conduire vers le monstre qui

was just. I will slaughter him on Christmas day. It will be all the days of life! I wrote to you. The brothers had to be there. It is necessary to settle the estate

³⁶ Noëlla states that by extracting payments from Napier she transformed him into the victim. However, this equation of violent sexual abuse with pecuniary extortion rests on a shaky foundation given the philosophical and psychological analyses of trauma as addressed in the works of theorists such as Cathy Caruth and more recently Ruth Leys. See in particular Leys on victim collusion and the victim as perpetrator in *Trauma: A Genealogy* (2000. Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

le détient. Les labyrinthes, il ne suffit plus de rentrer dedans. Il faut maintenant les dynamiter.³⁷ (Mouawad 2012a : 48)

The 'thread of disaster' is the guiding thread of transmission, i.e. the language of Napier's phrase. Napier is the monster who holds the thread, controlling the use and dissemination of language, imposing silence on his daughter. Like the minotaur, Napier is a creature to whom childhood is sacrificed. However, Napier also parallels the figure of Daedalus, the engineer. Daedalus was the architect of the labyrinth, the structure that contains the monster; Napier is referred to as the architect of the city of Fermont. For Noëlla, the labyrinth is not human conflict but the physical and psychological structure within which she is trapped.³⁸ It is not enough for the monster to disappear through illness, as, for Noëlla, the structure in which she is trapped would in that case remain behind. Noëlla specifies that 'En le tuant, j'arracherai de mon cœur la beauté de cette phrase.'³⁹ (Mouawad 2012a: 56) It is only by actively destroying the monster that Noëlla is able to detach herself from Napier's phrase and fully reclaim her life as her own.

The destruction of the monster and his labyrinth is contingent on the presence of Edward and Arkadiy, the witnesses to whom Noëlla entrusts her testimony. As Noëlla says, they 'had to be there.' These witnesses enable their sister to bear witness to the past, lending a narrative structure to her trauma

³⁷ MEREDITH-ROSE If it is true that the thread of disaster can no longer be broken, it can still lead us to the monster that holds it. It is no longer enough to enter the labyrinths. Now they need to be dynamited.

³⁸ There are also overtones of the labyrinth's association with the structure of the mind, as referenced by Freud, particularly in light of Napier's Alzheimer's.

³⁹ 'In killing him, I will tear the beauty of that phrase from my heart.'

(and to the play itself),⁴⁰ breaking her silence and creating new familial bonds. In witnessing her testimony, the brothers enter into a different relationship to their past; the loss of their original family was a preservation of innocence. Mouawad signals that it is due to the presence of the brothers/witnesses that Noëlla is able to enact her plan to kill Napier (which she perceives as an act of recovery from victimhood) as Arkadiy creates the weapon, and Edward provides the bullet.

2.4 Deferred communication

Deferral of meaning is a strong motif throughout *Temps*, and problematizes the assumed immediacy of verbal communication. The ability to communicate directly is called into question most visibly through the presence of the translators, Vera and Meredith-Rose. Noëlla and Arkadiy rarely communicate directly with the other characters; their communication is necessarily mediated. This creates a temporal gap between what is said (i.e. what the audience sees Noëlla and hears Arkadiy say) and what is made intelligible by the interpreter. This deferral of meaning is further expressed by the recurring use of various forms of symbolism. Words and phrases have multiple meanings extending beyond their initial, immediate content. These associations contribute to the conceptual atmosphere of the play, creating thematic links with a mythico-literary heritage, emphasizing ambiguity as an intrinsic element of communication, interpretation and revelation.

⁴⁰ As the brothers' arrival sets off play's revenge plot, and their presence facilitates Noëlla's exegetical narrative, revealing the motivations and context for her decision to kill Napier.

Following the family's disintegration, Noëlla and Arkadiy lose their ability to communicate with the community presented in the play, and are forced to speak through interpreters. By its nature, translation suggests linguistic instability and deferral or loss of meaning, which the play frequently emphasizes. For instance, at the end of Act II, when asked by Arkadiy why she didn't leave, Noëlla provides a relatively short answer, and Meredith-Rose's translation is significantly longer. The fleeting sense of doubt this raises in performance is compounded in the printed edition of the play:⁴¹

NOËLLA DE LA FORGE (*Isq*). MOI CHERCHER CHEMIN COURT /SI MOI QUITTER VEUT DIRE MOI VICTIME... MONSTRE FALLOIR TUER... /10 ANS TROUVER... ÂGE 13 LUI ÉJACULE-1 PLEURER... MOI DIRE-3 JUSQU'À TOI MORT 1 FOIS-SEMAINE FALLOIR 3-PAYER-1 (1) TOUT-LUNDI MOI VOULOIR \$1000 AUSSI AVANT DÉJÀ TOI ÉJACULER VENTRE-1 TOI PAYER-1 SI TOI REFUSE MOI PLAINDRE /1-JOUR TOI OUBLIER PAYER-1 MOI TUER-3

MEREDITH-ROSE Je cherchais le raccourci. Partir aurait fait de moi à jamais une victime. La première fois que j'ai vu le sexe de mon père, j'ai cru que c'était un scorpion violet accroché à son corps. J'ai pensé : « C'est mon père. Il va me défendre. » Au contraire. Mon père a fait entrer un scorpion dans mon ventre et je l'ai vu y prendre un très grand plaisir. Plus que son viol, c'est de le voir complice de l'infect insecte qui m'a anéantie. Quand j'ai su que j'étais enceinte de lui, j'ai prié et l'enfant sans doute m'a entendu et il est reparti croûte épaisse et rouge. Caresse inconsolable. Dans mon ventre, il y aura à jamais un navire vide voguant vague à vague aveugle vers la dérive, la vie sans vie sans voix, variation lente d'une grandeur. Mais j'en sortirai vivante et joyeuse. Les monstres, il faut bien les abattre.⁴² (Mouawad 2012a : 46)

⁴¹ The last portion of Meredith-Rose's translation of this speech was cited on p.235 above. It accurately translates Noëlla's speech from 'MUST KILL MONSTER' onwards (translated by Meredith-Rose as 'Monsters must be slaughtered').

⁴² NOËLLA DE LA FORGE (*Isq*) I LOOK FOR SHORTCUT /IF I LEAVE MEANS I VICTIM... MUST KILL MONSTER... /10 YEARS FIND... AGE 13 HE EJACULATES-1 CRIES... I SAY-3 UNTIL YOU DEATH 1 TIME-WEEK MUST 3-PAY-1 (1) EVERY-MONDAY I WANT \$1000 ALSO BEFORE ALREADY YOU EJACULATE IN STOMACH-1 YOU PAY-1 IF YOU REFUSE I DENOUNCE /1-DAY YOU FORGET PAY-1 I KILL-3

Meredith-Rose's translation to Edward and Arkadiy includes a long section that is never mentioned by Noëlla, from 'The first time I saw my father's penis' to 'But I will come out of it alive and happy.' The highly personal nature of this additional section introduces ambiguity at the heart of Noëlla's testimony. Meredith-Rose is embellishing Noëlla's statement, and the provenance of her narrative is unclear. The temporal discrepancy between Noëlla's speaking and Meredith-Rose's speaking creates a gap that destabilizes the assumed homogeneity between the original and translated speech, and momentarily disrupts the mimetic power of the speech. This is an overt instance of something Derrida claims is central to testimony, the possibility of fiction. Yet, despite the space Mouawad leaves for doubt and uncertainty, the essential veracity of Noëlla's testimony is not called into question. And, despite the questionable mediation of Meredith-Rose, the act of bearing witness remains substantive.

Another subtler form of deferred meaning occurs through the use of symbolism. Names in *Temps* are often symbolic, 'Noëlla' being the first and most explicit symbolic instance. The name 'Napier' is associated with linen, a reference to sheets of paper and fabric; Napier the writer, who marks white sheets of paper with words (as he verbally marked Noëlla). The association with fabric perhaps

MEREDITH-ROSE I was seeking a shortcut. Leaving would have made me forever a victim. The first time I saw my father's penis, I believed that it was a purple scorpion attached to his body. I thought: "It's my father. He will defend me." On the contrary. My father forced a scorpion into my stomach and I saw him take great pleasure from it. More than his rape, it was seeing him an accomplice to the vile insect that annihilated me. When I found out I was pregnant from him, I prayed and the child undoubtedly heard me and it left a thick red crust. Inconsolable caress. In my stomach, there will always be an empty ship floating from wave to wave, blindly drifting, the lifeless voiceless life, the slow variation of a grandeur. But I will come out alive and happy. Monsters must be slaughtered.

recalls the notion of 'dirty linen' and soiled sheets. Edward, from the Anglo-Saxon *ead* (wealth) and *weard* (guard) assumes a protective role towards Noëlla, and intervenes when Napier seizes Blanche. Arkadiy is derived from *Arkadios*, the Ancient Greek for Arcadia. This carries multiple meanings: *Arkadios* is a third-century martyr, a region in Greece and a pastoral idyll. It is specified that Arkadiy's French name was Archange de la Forge. (Mouawad 2012a: 34)

According to Mouawad, Arkadiy represents messianic time, so his name perhaps suggests a parallel with 'Archangel' as harbinger (the time to come), and Arcadia as a fictional past era in which natural harmony was unspoilt by evil (messianic time as an ideal and unfulfilled time). The deputy mayor, Apolline, explicitly references the god Apollo in her appearance as archer. At various moments Apolline turns and shoots an arrow at a target to the side of the stage, recalling the image of Apollo as 'the god who shoots from afar'.⁴³ Apolline is the representative of order, the voice that negotiates between individual and state. The prophetic overtones of her insights concerning the rats echo Apollo's oracle at Delphi. Arkadiy's translator is named Vera, which in Latin means 'truth' and in Russian 'faith'. As an interpreter, Vera's act of translating implies truth in terms of faithfulness to the original, and also requires faith on the part of the addressee. As noted in previous chapters, Mouawad frequently makes symbolic use of names, incorporating traces of meanings that defer the unity of the character beyond the temporal present. The character's name reaches out to another figure or connotation that adds a layer to the immediate significance of the name.

⁴³ References to Apollo abound in Mouawad's plays. See Chapter 3, p.169, p.206

The setting of *Temps* is also steeped in symbolic meaning. The wall of Fermont forms part of the mythico-literary imagery that pervades the play. Constructed by Napier, this structure is labyrinthine in that it is the structure within which Noëlla's childhood is sacrificed to the 'monster', her father. Greek mythology is explicitly referenced when Napier is likened to the minotaur, and echoed in the sacrificial offering of Napier's body to the rats in the forest. The rats represent the most pervasive and ambiguous symbolism in the play. Often associated with disease, filth, destruction and corruption, the story of the Pied Piper of Hamelin is also referenced by Arkadiy when he explains to Apolline, through Vera, how to eradicate the rats:

APOLLINE DELF Donner à manger quoi ? [...]
 VERA PAVLOVA Le joueur de flute. [...]
 APOLLINE DELF Qui est le joueur de flute ? [...]
 VERA PAVLOVA Un de ses ennemis.⁴⁴ (Mouawad 2012a : 40-41)

Like *Temps*, and the legend of the Minotaur, the Pied Piper of Hamelin is concerned with the loss and destruction of children. In many versions of the tale, rats are associated with a form of justice, because the piper takes the town's children after being refused the promised payment for his services. Likewise, in classical literature, rats are often associated with Apollo,⁴⁵ god of prophecy and justice. The relationship between rats, prophecy and justice is explicit in *Temps*, as Noëlla provides two explanations for the sudden appearance of the rats. The

⁴⁴ APOLLINE DELF Give him what to eat? [...]
 VERA PAVLOVA The flute player. [...]
 APOLLINE DELF Who is the flute player? [...]
 VERA PAVLOVA One of his enemies.

⁴⁵ In line thirty-nine of the *Iliad*, Apollo is specifically referred to by the surname 'Smintheus' which is debated as to its reference to Sminthe (location) or sminthos (mouse). It is perhaps unsurprising that in *Temps* the rats' advocate is named Apolline.

first occurs at the very end of Act I, in which the rats represent Jacqy's voice, after death, speaking to Napier (Mouawad 2012a: 26). Noëlla's second explanation of the rats occurs at the close of Act II, a brief reference that connects Napier's forgetting his payments to Noëlla and the appearance of the hordes of rats («*Il y a huit mois, il a oublié. [...] Les hordes ont surgi. Cela était juste.*»⁴⁶ (Mouawad 2012a: 48)). The rats appear in hordes at the moment when the condition for the fulfilment of Noëlla's promise to kill Napier is met. Here, the prophetic nature of the rats is pronounced: they foretell the coming death of Napier, and they demand a sacrifice for an unpunished injustice. They are satiated, and removed, only by his death.

Deferrals of meaning, then, are repeatedly utilized in in *Temps*, and these lapses in direct signification serve a variety of functions. They highlight the fragility of communication, as for instance in Noëlla's 'translation' by Meredith-Rose. They point to a multiplicity of meaning and the need for interpretation, a demand often placed on the audience through the play's heavy use of symbolism, which is frequently abstruse or arcane. And yet, in terms of testimony, deferral of meaning not only complicates and problematizes the process of bearing witness, it also adds to its power and veracity. The use of legend and symbolism serve as a foil to the harsh realism of Noëlla's abuse testimony, emphasizing its veracity. The hyperbolic, chiaroscuro lexicon of mythology creates an intense emotional atmosphere that effectively communicates both the trauma of sexual abuse, and perhaps also hints at the binary and intense worldview of the child or adolescent abuse victim. Therefore, despite the difficulties of communication, testimony

⁴⁶ 'Eight months ago, he forgot. [...] The hordes emerged. That was just.'

remains possible in *Temps*, and the solidarity arising from this bearing witness is not contingent on absolute linguistic certainty but depends upon what is substantive in the communication, emotional experience and the truth contract emerging from the witness' appeal for belief.

3 *Sœurs*

Sœurs, Mouawad's most recent play, follows *Seuls* in what Mouawad calls his 'Domestic cycle'.⁴⁷ Like *Seuls*, *Sœurs* is a solo performance that makes extensive use of audio-visual technology to create multiple environments. Unlike *Seuls*, which has a single onstage character, *Sœurs* features two protagonists and three minor characters, all played by actress Annick Bergeron.⁴⁸ Two off-stage characters – a parent of each protagonist – also feature prominently.

Sœurs is structured around duality: two acts, two protagonists, two parents. Each act focuses on a different form of testimony. In Act I, the audience bears witness to Geneviève's breakdown. In Act II, Layla and Geneviève each bear witness to the other's testimony (also, of course, witnessed by the audience). Although in many respects different, the testimonies of these two women converge with the self-revelation experienced by both. For both, testimony articulates what Levinas calls the 'unalterably binding presence of the I to itself'. (Levinas trans. Bergo 2003: 64) Levinas speaks of the 'impossibility of fleeing oneself' and *Sœurs* is a play that stages the process of this realisation.

⁴⁷ For the time being, it is envisaged that this cycle will eventually include plays entitled *Frères*, *Mère* and *Père*.

(<http://www.wajdimouawad.fr/spectacles/soeurs>)

⁴⁸ Played Nawal in *Incendies*.

However, it is through testimony that the two protagonists become reconciled to the impossibility of escape and emerge from hiding under the mattress into the world.

Sœurs was inspired by the lives of Wajdi Mouawad's sister, Nayla Mouawad, and actress Annick Bergeron. Initially planned as a production based on the life of Nayla alone, the development process changed the structure of the play.⁴⁹ In the printed edition of the play, Mouawad includes a letter to Emmanuel Clolus, his set designer for the production, in which he explains the play's genesis. The subjects and themes of the play grew out of conversations, interviews and interactions between Annick and Nayla as they became acquainted over a period of two years, at Wajdi's request. The play is both a testament to their lives, and to the encounter between 'deux femmes qui n'auraient pas dû se rencontrer, mais les guerres et les exils et les injustices ont crée les conditions géopolitiques pour qu'elles se rencontrent.'⁵⁰ (Mouawad 2015: 8)

As we shall see, in the act of formulating her testimony, each woman articulates her own experience of 'shakeness'. In so doing, Geneviève and Nayla come to terms with the past and redefine their relationship to the world. Their mutual recognition as 'sisters' forms a community of the shaken that enables them to live a life that resists subsumption in the world of the everyday.

⁴⁹ In his prologue, Mouawad explains that this process changed the play from singular to plural, '*Sœur* est devenue *Sœurs*.' (Mouawad 2015: 8) However, given Mouawad's trend of plural titles, including *Seuls*, the first play in the cycle of which *Sœurs* is part, as well as Mouawad's interest in having Annick and Nayla work together, it is possible that this dual structure was conceived or at least considered prior to this stated transition.

⁵⁰ 'Two women who should never have met, but the wars and exiles and injustices created the geopolitical conditions necessary for them to meet.'

3.1 Synopsis

Sœurs opens with Geneviève Bergeron alone, singing along to a live performance of *Je ne suis qu'une chanson* by Ginette Reno. Gradually the sound of traffic breaks through, and a car windscreen, with a blizzard beyond, appears behind Geneviève. She is shaken from her daydream by a phone call from her mother to announce that Geneviève's uncle has died. Geneviève's mother asks her to travel to Winnipeg for the funeral. Geneviève refuses; she is on her way to Ottawa for a conference, then leaving for Mali to manage a conflict mediation. In response to her mother's reference to her departure from Winnipeg forty years earlier as an exile, Geneviève dismisses her mother's description as hyperbole, and promises to make the necessary travel arrangements on her mother's behalf.

In Ottawa, Geneviève gives a presentation on conflict mediation. The snow has prevented her return to Montreal, so she checks into a hotel, and on arriving in her room discovers it is interactive, with voice activation only in English. She turns to three trays of food, prepared by a Syrian restaurateur for the conference, and left untouched by the attendees. She tries to put the trays into the talking refrigerator, only to find the sensors are misfiring, and frantically adding charges to her bill. Geneviève gives up and leaves the trays outside. She calls her assistant back and asks her to research the fate of a young Amerindian girl named Irène, placed in Geneviève's family years before.

Geneviève tries to set the TV alarm clock, which addresses her as 'Genevivi Burger-on' and will not reset voice activation to French. After speaking to the manager, Geneviève gives up and sets the alarm clock in English. After a

pause, she calls the manager again and asks for a wake-up call from the front desk in French, to which the manager replies that there will be no French speaker onsite. Geneviève begins throwing drinks and snacks at the walls and attacks the room, tearing it apart while the refrigerator continues to add items to her account. Finally, she crawls under the mattress.

Some time later, the television provides Geneviève's wake-up call,⁵¹ but there is no response from under the mattress. A cleaning lady arrives and on discovering the disastrous condition of the room calls the director, who calls the police. An officer arrives and tells the manager to make an insurance claim. They all depart, marking the end of Act I.

The new act opens with the arrival of a loss adjustor, Layla. After glancing around the room, she calls her father. In mixed French and Arabic, she explains that due to the storm she will be sleeping in Ottawa, which her father resents. Layla completes her assessment, and, as she prepares to leave, discovers the trays, and tastes the familiar Syrian food with surprise. A phone rings, and Layla finds Geneviève's mobile. Layla has a long conversation with Geneviève's mother, the first of two testimonial monologues. During the conversation, she instructs Geneviève's mother to thank her daughter. After hanging up, Layla collapses in tears. As she prepares to leave, Geneviève says 'thank you', frightening Layla. This begins an exchange between the two women, each exploring her own past. Layla finally decides that she has had enough as well, and crawls under the mattress with Geneviève. Time passes and finally Layla crawls out from under

⁵¹ The television is voiced by Wajdi Mouawad; use of English throughout the play is non-idiomatic even in cases where it is supposed to be the language of a monolingual English speaker. Grammatical and idiomatic errors will be preserved in subsequent citations.

the mattress, telling Geneviève that they need to leave the room and face the world. She irons Geneviève's clothes for her, and leaves.

Geneviève crawls out and checks her phone, playing a voicemail message. In the message, her assistant explains that she has located Irène: she changed her first name back to her Amerindian name, but retained the surname Bergeron and is now a cellist with the Berlin philharmonic.⁵² Geneviève calls her mother and tells her that she understands her mother's trauma, that she shares the burden with her. She says that there is hope for the future in a life of 'resistance'. The play concludes with a projected image of Geneviève lying on the floor but seemingly floating, with the stage direction 'La voilà légère' (Now she is light).

3.2 Bearing witness to the event

Je me suis montrée presque nue
Sur une scène trop éclairée
J'aurais du mal à me sauver de moi
Mais moi je ne suis qu'une chanson
Je ris, je pleure à la moindre émotion
Avec mes larmes ou mon rire dans les yeux
J'veus ai fait l'amour de mon mieux⁵³
(Ginette Reno, *Je ne suis qu'une chanson*)

Sœurs opens with Geneviève's dawning recognition of the self-reflexivity found in Ginette Reno's 'Je ne suis qu'une chanson' ('I am nothing but a song').

⁵² Presumably a nod to the play's premiere on March 3 2011 at the Berlin F.I.N.D. festival.

⁵³ I showed myself nearly nude
On a too brightly-lit stage
I would have a hard time saving myself from myself
But I am nothing but a song
I laugh, I cry at the slightest emotion
With my tears or laughter in my eyes
I made love to you as best I could

Geneviève is beginning to acknowledge an internal alterity expressed in the song (whose lyrics include, 'I would have a hard time saving myself from myself'). This opening scene suggests Geneviève's dawning self-revelation; just as Reno's song is about revealing herself to her audience, Geneviève is also revealing herself to an audience. As in the opening of *Seuls*, the audience watching the play assumes the role of audience to whom the character is addressing themselves, when in fact that audience is internal. The self is divided between an observing self (associated with the external structures of existence) and an emerging internal self that refuses to be subject to the order of the world. Geneviève's division of self intensifies over the course of Act I, until she experiences a sort of madness, and tears the hotel room apart. This 'madness' marks the advent of Geneviève's shakiness, brought about by her rejection of the dehumanizing, technical world.

The technologically developed, dehumanizing world portrayed in *Sœurs* resembles one characterisation of Jan Patočka's 'everyday life'. Drawing on Martin Heidegger's work on technology (in particular 'The Question Concerning Technology' from Heidegger's 1949 Bremen lectures), Patočka states that 'being ceased to be a problem once all that is was laid out before us as obvious in its quantifiable meaninglessness.' (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 116) The apparent cessation of the problematic (which for Patočka is essential to human life) is attributed to two things: the availability of everything to understanding (all that is being laid out before us); and a quantifiable ordering that is in itself meaningless. For both philosophers, technology is a specific form of ordering;

technology is understood not as individual manifestations but rather an 'essence'. This is what Heidegger calls *Gestell*, translated as Enframing.

Enframing means the gathering together of that setting-upon which sets upon man, i.e., challenges him forth to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve. (Heidegger 1977: 20)

Standing-reserve is the ordering of things to 'stand by, to be immediately at hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering'. (Heidegger 1977: 17) Therefore, that which reveals itself is revealed in terms of its 'standing-reserve', its potential utility. Heidegger explicitly states that Enframing does not occur exclusively in man, but rather that man is 'set-upon' and put into a position 'to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve'. (Heidegger 1977: 24) It is therefore something all-encompassing; that which subsumes man into its framework as it calls upon man, which Patočka explains in his 'Séminaire sur l'ère technique'. Patočka states of *Gestell*: 'C'est donc le rassemblement de toutes les choses et la compréhension de cet ensemble, la compréhension de la réalité en tant que *Gestell*. Le *Gestell* ne laisse aucune chose être ce qu'elle est, extrait de chacune ce qu'il veut.'⁵⁴ (Patočka trans. Abrams 1990a: 285-286) In this structure, all things revealed are drawn upon in terms of their utility. As objects, they are transformed from things in themselves to things-for-something, a process which Heidegger calls 'destining'.

⁵⁴ 'It is therefore the gathering of all things and the understanding of this gathering, the understanding of reality as *Gestell*. *Gestell* does not let any thing be what it is, it extracts what it wants from each thing.'

In his 'Séminaire sur l'ère technique', Patočka explains that the structure of *Gestell* is not external, but rather the internal order whereby manifestation is structured on the basis of its 'standing-reserve'. This applies to the self, which is perceived in relation to its utility in the world (i.e. the roles that it can assume and execute), in other words, within the structure of *Gestell*.

Que signifie cette forme ultime de la dichotomie intérieure de l'être ? C'est dire que l'être fait apparaître que la vie est la vie [...] que le monde se manifeste à nous, que nous apparaissions à nous-mêmes dans le monde – voilà ce que « vivre » signifie. Or. Il y a dans notre vie un conflit entre ce qui apparaît et ce qui fait apparaître : du fait que les choses apparaissent, ce qui les fait apparaître se dissimule dans le retrait. [...] L'homme a donc perdu quelque chose. [...] L'être se présente sous les espèces d'une réquisition : mets-toi en place et fournis tel ou tel rendement.⁵⁵ (Patočka trans. Abrams 1990: 285-286)

A human being is called upon to fulfil a role, and in this structure becomes objectified, subsumed within the system of *Gestell*. This formulation of the conflict engendered by the internal dichotomy between appearing self (subsumed within an alienating system founded on transactional production) and that which enables manifestation (an 'authentic' self that manifests in shakiness) is an accurate reflection of Geneviève's character as it unfolds in Act I.

In Act I, Geneviève exists in a world that is defined by technology and transaction. First, she is distanced from all direct communication. It is either

⁵⁵ What does this ultimate form of the internal dichotomy of being signify? It means that being makes apparent that life is life [...] that the world manifests itself to us, that we appear to ourselves in the world – that is what "living" means. Yet there is in our life a conflict between what appears and what makes that which appears appear: due to the fact that things appear, what makes them appear pulls back in withdrawal. [...] Man has therefore lost something. [...] A being presents itself subject to the forms of a requisition: take your place and provide this or that yield.

mediated by technology (phone), or, in the case of her presentation, one-sided and impersonal. The only other 'characters' Geneviève directly speaks with are electronic, i.e. the refrigerator, television and the alarm. Here, her experience is one of frustration. Language both excludes Geneviève from the technological structure of her surroundings, and highlights the absurdity of impersonal technologically mediated communication. Geneviève's desire to communicate in her mother tongue expresses her need to come to terms with the past and her process of coming into conflict with the structures that define her surroundings.

Sœurs is replete with transaction-based communication that emphasizes the alienating nature of the contemporary world. Geneviève's opening conversation with her mother is strictly utilitarian; she avoids engaging with her mother's suffering by focusing on pragmatics. The refrigerator communicates the costs incurred by Geneviève's actions. Geneviève's communication with her assistant marks the point at which the internal self begins to vie for expression:

En tout cas / Je voulais te demander un petit service. Est-ce que ce serait possible pour toi de / Puis non, ce n'est pas important / Je t'assure, ce n'est pas important, par contre pourrais-tu acheter un billet d'avion Montréal-Winnipeg en classe affaires pour après-demain ?⁵⁶ (Mouawad 2015: 20)

Here the inner self attempts to communicate with another being, only to be silenced as transactional structures take hold once more. As the play continues, Geneviève's sense of exclusion from technological and transactional social structures (depicted through the malfunctioning, foreign language-speaking

⁵⁶ In any case / I wanted to ask a small favour. Would it be possible for you to / Never mind, it's not important / No really, it's not important, however could you buy a Montreal-Winnipeg business class return ticket for the day after tomorrow?

room) forces her to confront her internal self-alienation. Geneviève is transitioning from certainty to uncertainty, and thereby progressively rejecting (and being rejected by) the existing communication and transactional structures embodied by the hotel, a process described by Patočka in his 'Séminaire sur l'ère technique':

Le conflit n'est rien de nouveau dans notre monde [...] Cet aspect moral [du conflit] est plus essentiel encore là où, sans savoir raffiné ni dialectique, on le voit sous la forme pure d'un homme qui entre en conflit avec la concentration du pouvoir qui a constitué jusqu'à présent la substance de la vie humaine en société et le fondement de l'aliénation. Intégré à ce système, soumis à ce pouvoir, l'homme n'est plus seulement compréhension, mais aussi chose comprise. Si l'on voit cela à l'arrière-plan, on verra aussi que le conflit ne peut être résolu dans la sphère du savoir. Le savoir est dérivé.⁵⁷ (Patočka trans. Abrams 1990a: 286)

It is subsequent to the failure of reason that Geneviève enters into conflict. The structures depicted through the television, refrigerator and hotel manager subject Geneviève to a system of power that negates Geneviève's ability to express herself. In so doing, Geneviève is placed into the same position as the one her mother was placed in as a child.

Ahhh! L'Anglais fonctionne toujours par défaut / Oui, mais si la personne ne sait pas parler Anglais, qu'est-ce qu'elle fait ? Elle est punie ? Vous la punissez d'avoir été mauvaise à l'école et

⁵⁷ Conflict is nothing new in our world. [...] This moral aspect [of conflict] is even more essential where, without refined knowledge or dialectic, we see it in the pure form of a man who enters into conflict with the concentration of power that has until now constituted the substance of human life in society and the foundation of alienation. Integrated into this system, subject to this power, man is no longer simply understanding, but also a thing understood. If we see this as the background, we will also see that conflict cannot be resolved in the sphere of knowledge. Knowledge is derivative.

d'avoir coulé son cours de langue seconde, c'est-tu ça ?⁵⁸
(Mouawad 2015: 26)

This reference to Geneviève's mother's experience as a French-speaking child in an English-speaking school (which she subsequently describes in greater detail in Act II) reflects Geneviève's appreciation of her mother's life that grows in tandem with her dissatisfaction with the dominant power system, symbolized by the use of English. The consequence of not conforming to the linguistically and cognitively alienating system is punishment by an intransigent system. During her conversation with the hotel manager, Geneviève says: 'Je sais que vous avez reçu une formation pour répondre aux clients insatisfaits mais oubliez un instant votre formation et adressez-vous à moi'⁵⁹ (Mouawad 2015: 26) The manager is unable to respond to Geneviève's reasoned argument, and offers a scripted reply. Everything associated with the hotel is organized, structured and determined on the basis of utility, without regard for the human.

In destroying the hotel room, Geneviève attempts to respond to the absurdity of the structure by destroying it. Tearing at the walls, Geneviève exposes the components behind the façade, pulling them into disarray. The cables, insulation, wall panels, pillows, drinks and food are no longer functioning according to their 'standing-reserve'. By engaging in conflict, Geneviève is also tearing herself out from her own standing-reserve as a lawyer (she is acting illegally) and as a conflict mediator (she is provoking conflict). She is no longer a

⁵⁸ Ahhh! English always works by default / Yes, but if someone doesn't speak English, what happens then? That person is punished? You punish someone for having been bad at school and failed their second language, is that it?

⁵⁹ 'I know that you have completed a training in order to be able to respond to dissatisfied customers, but forget your training for a moment and speak to me.'

'*chose comprise*', in the sense of a thing 'comprehended' or subsumed into the system, and she is refusing the integration and self-alienation imposed by a technicized order. Geneviève's retreat beneath the mattress at the end of Act I signals her self-removal from the ordered world. She remains silent in the presence of those who enter the room (the cleaning lady, hotel director, police officer, etc.). As beings that are integrated in the ordered system rejected by Geneviève, they are unable to understand her actions.

In Act I, the audience bears witness to Geneviève's initial transformation. It is the rejection of the organized, technical structure of the everyday that is manifested in Geneviève's actions. However, her furious destruction of the hotel room and consequent evasion under the mattress is a form of the orgiastic⁶⁰ escape which Patočka characterizes as an attempt to escape the everydayness of life, as explored in Chapter Two (III.2). Geneviève, dissatisfied yet unable to move beyond the first two movements of human existence (the rootedness of her relationship to her childhood and her life of sustenance as an attorney conflict mediator) requires contact with someone else whose dissatisfaction leads her towards questioning. This is the community that Patočka speaks of in his *Heretical Essays*.

The destiny of the truthful and the just, of those who opt for a life in truth, renders the idea of such a new human community indispensable: only in such a community of truth will they be capable of living without perishing in a conflict with reality. (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 82)

⁶⁰ As James Dodd notes: 'We evoke the demonic when we wish to represent the sense that there is somehow, against all reason and expectation, an escape from our existence, our very self.' (Dodd in Chvatík and Abrams 2011: 205)

The encounter with Layla is one of shared truth that enables both women to find their own meaning in life. For the audience, it also marks the transition from witnessing the externalised event to bearing witness to testimony, to the self-reflection of the effect of internal conflict.

3.3 Bearing witness to the witness

Act II begins with the arrival of Layla Bintwarda. Thematically, the transactional structure of the external environment is initially upheld; Layla enters the room in order to fulfil her role as an insurance assessor and proceeds with her report, assessing Geneviève's damage by translating it into financial consequences. As with Geneviève in Act I, something is troubling Layla, and her report is interrupted by a sudden burst of tears – her professional purpose is disrupted by emotion.

Layla initially witnesses the aftermath of Geneviève's outburst. It is a witnessing circumscribed by the structure of a report, classified for insurance purposes. However, when she calls her director, an affinity is drawn between Layla and Geneviève.

Jean-Guy, tu sais lire ? / Qu'est-ce qu'il y a écrit ? / Laisse faire la reception de l'hotel et sers-toi de tes yeux, qu'est-ce qu'il y a écrit ? / Oui : Geneviève Bergeron, pas « Dgenevivi Burgueron ». Y a pas de burger là-dedans / On voit bien qu'il n'y a jamais personne qui a écorché ton nom, toi, Jean-Guy Croteau / Quand tu seras capable de dire « Bintwarda » sans te prendre les pieds dans le W du tapis on en reparlera / Avocate / Elle a tout arraché / Je ne dirais pas ça / Qu'est-ce que tu en sais ? /

Tu la connais, toi, cette femme-là ? / Tu sais ce qui s'est passé dans sa tête ?⁶¹ (Mouawad 2015: 37)

First, Layla distinguishes between Geneviève's real name and that bestowed by the hotel (Dgenevivi Burger-on). In doing so, Layla wrests Geneviève's name, the physical proof of her identity and trace of her existence in the face of her disappearance, from the absurdity of the *Gestell* represented by the hotel. Layla's affinity with Geneviève first appears in the mispronunciation with which Layla identifies, because mispronunciation is a marker of a person being external to the prevalent linguistic system; Layla has often had her Arabic surname mispronounced, and experienced the exclusion that has so infuriated Geneviève.

The phone conversation with Jean-Guy is followed by Layla's discovery of the food trays. This signals the transformation of the notion of exchange, which has until now been perceived as transaction, conditioned by 'standing-reserve'. Layla's discovery is a form of gift from Geneviève in which memory is stimulated through food. The exchange is unintentional, not conditioned by utility. Layla is gradually moving towards a recognition of self that is not conditioned by her role. This becomes even more apparent in her conversation with Geneviève's mother, during which Layla speaks about her own life.

Ella a quel âge votre fille ? / Comme moi [...] [Mon père] passe sa journée à se plaindre, il pleure un pays qui n'a jamais existé et il me fait porter le poids d'une guerre qu'il ne m'a jamais

⁶¹ Jean-Guy, do you know how to read? / What do you see written? / Ignore the hotel reception and use your eyes, what do you see written? / Yes: Geneviève Bergeron, not "Dgenevivi Burguer-on". There's no burger in there / You can see that no one has ever screwed up your name, you, Jean-Guy Croteau / When you can say "Bintwarda" without tripping up on the W, then we'll talk / Lawyer / She tore everything apart / I wouldn't say that / What do you know? / Do you know her then, this woman? / You know what went on in her head?

racontée. [...] Même moi il me voit en carton, sa fille de cinquante ans en carton sur laquelle il peut se permettre d'écrire ce qui lui passe par la tête, de la plier et de la déplier comme si c'était son jouet à lui tout seul [...] Geneviève a de la chance d'avoir une mère comme vous / Au moins vous on peut vous parler.⁶² (Mouawad 2015: 38-39)

Layla's intensely personal account of her difficult relationship with her father and the loss of her mother communicates a suppressed inner self. In contrast to her father's interpretation of Layla, as a two-dimensional cardboard figure on whom the trace of the past is inscribed, Layla affirms the need for 'chair et os' (flesh and blood). For Layla, the transactional structure of her existence is communicated by her utility to her father. Such structures dehumanize the individual; yet there is a form of internal rebellion against subsumption into the determinant structure. In speaking about her life, Layla is articulating her intimate experience, giving testimony to Geneviève's mother.⁶³ Layla speaks her testimony to belie the inauthenticity of the structure.

Layla's initial testimony to Geneviève's mother prompts Geneviève to speak, and later give her own testimony. Geneviève's testimony first acknowledges her mother's silenced suffering, through which she bears witness to the 'chagrins ancestraux de leur mère' (ancestral sorrows of their mother).

⁶² How old is your daughter? / Same as me [...] [My father] spends his days complaining, he mourns a country that never existed and makes me carry the weight of a war that he has never told me about. [...] He even sees me as a cardboard person, his fifty-year-old cardboard daughter on which he feels he can write whatever comes into his head, that he feels he can fold and unfold like a toy all to himself. [...] Geneviève is lucky to have a mother like you. / At least you are easy to talk to.

⁶³ Layla and Geneviève's speeches contain the four components characteristic of testimony: they describe an event, they witness that event, attest to the veracity of the event and address their account to an addressee.

(Mouawad 2015: 43) She also bears witness to the existence of Irène, her Amerindian 'sister'.

J'étais trop petite pour me souvenir de son arrivée et déjà trop grande pour oublier son départ lorsque la porte s'est ouverte et qu'une Indienne, sa sœur de sang, est entrée « ma petite sœur n'a rien à voir à faire icitte » et la prenant par la main elles sont parties à tout jamais. Layla, moi non plus je n'ai rien à voir à faire icitte, mais il y a, c'est vrai, maintenant là, en ce jour d'aujourd'hui, l'envie de voir cette porte s'ouvrir et qu'une grande sœur surgisse pour me chercher en me disant : « Tu n'as rien à voir à faire icitte. »⁶⁴ (Mouawad 2015: 43)

Irène was placed in the Bergeron household, presumably as a result of what came to be known as the 'Sixties Scoop', in which thousands of aboriginal children were taken from their homes and fostered out to white Canadian families in the interest of 'integration'.⁶⁵ Irène symbolizes the position of both Geneviève and Layla: both are living a life in which they are expected to integrate into an inhumane, unfamiliar external system.

Layla's second testimony, following Geneviève's, describes her childhood, exile, and existence for others. Her testimony expresses the experience of exile often expressed in Mouawad's work,⁶⁶ a damaging, traumatic event that terminates childhood and entails a division of between the life lived in exile, and

⁶⁴ I was too little to remember when she arrived and already too big to forget her departure, when the door opened and an Indian girl, her blood sister, entered "my little sister has no reason to be here" and taking her by the hand, they left forever. Layla, I too have no reason to be here, but there is, it is true, here and now, on this day, the desire to see this door open and to have a big sister emerge to come and get me, saying to me: "You have no reason to be here."

⁶⁵ For more information on the Sixties Scoop, please see <http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/government-policy/sixties-scoop.html>

⁶⁶ For a detailed discussion of the significance of exile in Mouawad's theatre, see Yana Meerzon's chapter 'Wajdi Mouawad: To the Poetics of Exilic Adolescence' (Meerzon 2012: 213-253)

the possibilities offered before exile. Exile is the event to which Layla is subjected, and by which her dreams are consumed:

[T]u sais, à ce moment précis, que non seulement l'enfance est terminée, mais qu'elle est la corde brisée de cette guitare que tu viens juste de ranger. [...] Je suis pleine à craquer de mes rêves démembrés. [...] Je suis l'exil. Je n'avais pas compris que rêver n'était pas pour moi et que je ne suis née que pour porter le chagrin de ma mère, l'humiliation de mon père et dégager le chemin pour mes frères.⁶⁷ (Mouawad 2015: 45)

Layla articulates an inner, unexpressed self, whose silence was a part of the experience of exile. By forcing herself into silence (visualized through the broken guitar string), Layla has subjugated herself to the lives of others. This entails a self-alienation that Layla describes in her detachment from her family: 'On voit mourir sa mère avec détachement, on voit partir ses frères avec indifférence, on les voit réaliser leurs rêves sans éprouver la moindre envie.'⁶⁸ Layla's life is conditioned by material satisfaction and assistance provided to others. This is what Patočka describes as 'humans estrang[ing] themselves by becoming bound to life and its objects'. (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 101)

After her testimony, Layla embraces seclusion from the world by hiding under the mattress. The mattress is a space associated with safety. Yet it is also an escape. It is a false refuge from a situation that continues to exist beyond the mattress (for Layla it was war; for Geneviève the technicized world). The

⁶⁷ [Y]ou know, at this specific moment, that not only is childhood finished, but that it is the broken string of the guitar that you have just put away. [...] I am full to breaking with my dismembered dreams. [...] I am exile. I hadn't understood that dreaming wasn't meant for me and that I was born to bear my mother's sorrow, my father's humiliation and to clear the way for my brothers.

⁶⁸ 'You watch your mother die with a sense of detachment, you watch your brothers leave with indifference, you see them fulfill their dreams without feeling the slightest desire.'

external world is inescapable and must be encountered because the world only ceases with death. Refuge is merely another form of bondage to the everyday, an abnegation of responsibility in the face of existence within the world. When Layla finally emerges from the mattress, she tells Geneviève that she must assume responsibility for her actions.

Je vais faire de mon mieux pour t'aider mais tu dois déclarer ta responsabilité dans les dommages que tu as causés. Ne tarde pas. [...] Geneviève...tu n'as plus rien à voir à faire icitte.⁶⁹
(Mouawad 2015: 49)

Layla helps Genevieve realize that her freedom consists not in hiding from the structures of the world but rather in 'self-revealing action' (Findlay 2002: 150), whereby the self both acknowledges its inner conflict and assumes responsibility for its actions. This is an articulation of Patočka's notion of responsibility. Tamás Ullmann explains that for Patočka: 'Activity directly implies responsibility, since freedom is not projection of possibilities, but responsibility for actions.' (Ullmann in Chvatík and Abrams: 85) As noted in Chapter 3, for Patočka, life is movement, and movement is activity. However, authentic life, that is, life in truth as the third movement of human existence draws away from 'avoidance, escape, deviation into inauthenticity and relief.' (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 98) The 'soul is responsible only as that double refusal of the positive oblivion of the world, as well as the negative oblivion of its destruction.' (Dodd in Chvatík and Abrams: 206)

⁶⁹ I am going to do my best to help you, but you must declare your responsibility for the damages that you have caused. Don't delay. [...] Geneviève...there is no longer any reason for you to be here.

It is through bearing witness, both as bearing witness to the event and bearing witness to testimony, that a form of problematic understanding is facilitated and accepted. In acknowledging the inner self, which resists appropriation, yet whose manifestation is made possible by the 'irreducible presence of the 'I' to itself', (i.e. through testimony) the encounter between Layla and Geneviève is transformed from one based on transactional value (founded on Layla's role as insurance inspector), to one whose emphasis is proximity (articulated through the sharing of the confined under-mattress space). Proximity and acceptance become possible as a result of the truth contract established between the two women, each as witness to the other's expression of inner self. Yet it is an acceptance that acknowledges the otherness of the other; it resists appropriation. As Geneviève concludes in *Sœurs*:

Je voulais aussi te dire, maman, que ce n'est pas parce que la corde de ta guitare se casse que tu ne peux pas te trouver un violoncelle quelque part pour continuer à vivre et savoir ça.⁷⁰
(Mouawad 2015: 50-51)

No longer silencing her mother's testimony to her childhood trauma, Geneviève is recognizing her mother's experience and existence as an other. She is accepting to bear witness to her mother's testimony. Through this acknowledgement, Geneviève's mother's linguistic silence and exile, as represented by the broken guitar string, are no longer immutable, but open to future possibility, to 'continuing to live', as represented by the cello.

⁷⁰ I also wanted to tell you, mom, that it is not because your guitar string breaks that you cannot find yourself a cello somewhere to continue to live and know this.

3.4 Loss: solidarity and responsibility

Nous ne sommes rien. C'est ce qui nous bouleverse qui est tout.⁷¹ (Mouawad 2012a: 49)

Two forms of bearing witness are depicted in *Temps* and *Sœurs*; bearing witness to an event, and bearing witness to testimony. Both forms entail loss, the trace of which points to that which lies beyond the witness' mastery. The event cannot be controlled or even experienced in full: it is often recalled piecemeal after a period of delay.⁷² Witness testimony simultaneously expresses the event, and the loss that occurs in the very process of ordering the event in language. (Delvaux 2005: 40) Witnessing marks the limit of consciousness' ability to verbally externalize experience. It is in experiencing and acknowledging these limitations that the self's inner alterity emerges.

Confronting internal self-division entails another form of loss, namely the loss in the belief in a unified identity. It is a loss of given meaning, that is, of meaning attributed externally by a system that orders the world and the people in it according to their latent utility. This is Patočka's idea of shakiness. Gustav Strandberg explains that for Patočka:

Meaning can, in other words, only emerge through a radical destruction of all given meaning, and even then it only appears as something unapparent, as an "indirect epiphany" or as a sudden glimpse of that which withdraws from all given meaning: it appears as the unapparent gift of the given. (Strandberg 2015: 101-102)

⁷¹ We are nothing. It is what overwhelms us that is everything.

⁷² E.g. Geneviève's loss of Irène, Layla's loss of childhood etc.

In Mouawad's plays, the realisation of the self's inner complexity occurs in tandem with the radical destruction of the unquestioned given meaning of everyday life (jobs, external obligations, technology, expected human interaction). This loss and rejection of everyday structures and meaning is not, however, a form of nihilism, but instead a process necessary for the self to consciously define meaning. This process is described in the *Heretical Essays* as follows:

Passing through the experience of the loss of meaning means that the meaning to which we might perhaps return will no longer be for us simply a fact given directly in its integrity; rather, it will be a meaning we have thought through, seeking reasons and accepting responsibility for it. (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 60)

For Jan Patočka, the act of attributing meaning carries with it responsibility. In his philosophical biography of Patočka, Erazim Kohák explains that:

[A]uthenticity means the assumption of responsibility for our freedom, inauthenticity the resignation of freedom and responsibility, letting ourselves be borne along by an anonymous other. (Kohák 1989: 126)

Shakeness, therefore, is the event whereby authenticity emerges, in contrast to the everyday 'life of mere sustenance', and the demonic-orgiastic escape from the everyday. It is that which enables a responsible life in truth.

Mouawad's plays regularly depict the progression towards shakeness and the third movement of human existence, as described in Patočka's work. They also emphasize the crucial significance of testimony in developing a solidarity among those striving to live a life in truth. In *Temps* and *Sœurs*, Noëlla,

Edward, Arkadiy, Geneviève and Layla all come to confront the world in which they exist, and their inner selves. By rejecting the imposed, everyday life as cyclical recurrence (e.g. in *Temps* symbolized by Napier's phrase 'Christmas every day for the rest of our lives'), as well as the demonic as flight from existence (e.g. in *Sœurs*, Geneviève's destruction of the room and refuge under the mattress), characters accept responsibility. This is both responsibility towards others (e.g. Geneviève's new compassion for her mother's trauma) and the self (Noëlla's emphatic statement that in killing Napier, she claims back her life). In bearing witness to inner shakeness, responsibility emerges and redefines the individual's relationship to others. It is a relationship of mutual recognition that resists appropriation, and rejects life as mere sustenance. In acknowledging one's own shakeness in relation to the meaning imposed by everyday life, as well as the radical alterity of the other, solidarity emerges. This solidarity is founded on the loss of universal meaning, occasioned by self-confrontation, and the communication with the other through testimony. It is through the truth conveyed in testimony that another human being's inner experience of shakeness can be recognized and acknowledged. It is only through the solidarity that emerges from this recognition that a 'community of truth' may emerge. Through the confrontation with the self, world and others, articulated through testimony, Mouawad attempts to depict or catalyse in his characters, actors and audience, a process described by Patočka, and best articulated by him: '[to] meet in the shaking of a given meaning, and so create a new way of being human – perhaps the only mode that offers hope amid the

storm of the world: the unity of the shaken but undaunted'. (Patočka trans.
Kohák 1996: 43)

Conclusion

1 Summation

This thesis has explored the complex influence of phenomenology, and specifically the writings of Jan Patočka, on the plays of Wajdi Mouawad. As we have seen, Patočka has exerted a profound and continuous influence on Mouawad's drama, from his earliest to his most recent dramatic works. Patočka's notions of 'care for the soul', the 'three movements of human existence', the 'hardness of the real' and the 'solidarity of the shaken' provide Mouawad with an ethical and ideological framework. Seeking to rectify the current dearth of scholarship on Mouawad's philosophical influences in general, and on the convergence between Patočkan phenomenology and Wajdi Mouawad's theatre in particular, this thesis addressed each of these key concepts in turn.

Chapter 1 considered the multiplicity of self in Mouawad's work and its relationship to Patočka's 'shakeness' and 'care for the soul'. For Mouawad, theatre facilitates the exploration and articulation of the inner multiplicity of self, that is yet somehow united in the perspectival frame. This incarnates Jan Patočka's 'care for soul', which 'means to want to be in unity with one's own self. Man, originally and always, is not in this unity with himself.' (Patočka trans. Lom 2002b: 189) In Mouawad's plays, a form of internal confrontation leads to self-awareness. This is when 'the soul discovers itself, through its own movement, through thinking self-definition and reflection on this defining: precisely this is the care of the soul, care of oneself.' (Patočka trans. Lom 2002b: 124) The

process of discovery is brought about by 'life [...] *confronted* by its finitude and the permanent precariousness of life. [...] Nothing of the earlier life of acceptance remains in peace.' (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 38-39; author's emphasis) This realisation enables the 'scales [to] fall from the eyes of those set free, not that they might see something new but that they might see in a new way.' (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 40). This idea recurs in a number of Mouawad's plays, for instance in Harwan's self-blinding in *Seuls*,¹ or the flash of lightning in *Willy Protogoras*.

Chapter 2, building on the notions of inner multiplicity, shakiness and care for the soul explored in Chapter 1, explained temporal awareness and correlate metanoia that provoke shakiness. For Patočka, human life consists of three distinct yet constantly interpenetrating movements: 'the movement of acceptance, the movement of defense, and the movement of truth.' (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 29) The first, associated with the past, is a person's rootedness in the world into which she comes into being. This is the world that Wilfrid escapes by running away from his family at the funeral home, when he refuses to be ruled by his aunts and uncles. The second movement, associated with the present, is the movement of sustenance and survival: it is the world of work. In *Incendies*, this is the world of both Jeanne and Simon, who at the beginning of the play are defined by their professional careers as a mathematician and a boxer, i.e., their literal means of sustenance.² For Patočka, these two movements together form what he calls the 'everyday', in which

¹ 'Comment on fait pour se crever les yeux et pouvoir enfin voir notre sens, notre rythme, notre vie, notre place?' (*How does one blind oneself in order to finally see one's meaning, one's rhythm, one's place in the world?*) (Mouawad 2008a: 152)

² See Chapter 2, p.121.

humans are either in danger of losing themselves (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 99), or which they seek to escape through what Patočka calls the sacred and orgiastic. The sacred-orgiastic is that whereby human beings are ‘*enraptured*’ and ‘tend to *forget* the entire dimension of the struggle for ourselves.’ (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 99) The orgiastic is Wilfrid’s world at the play’s start: ‘On baisait et c’était formidable. [...] À cet instant je tirais la baise de ma vie!’³ (Mouawad Leblanc 2009: 12-13) The opening sequence of *Sœurs* is also an expression of this experience of rapture, as Geneviève tries to escape through a form of intense fervour. (Mouawad 2015: 14) A confrontation with death⁴ engenders the metanoia which brings characters to confront their own temporal existence. In confronting the past, characters seek to understand their own existence and become reconciled to life as a process of questioning. This is Patočka’s third movement, the movement of truth. Truth for Patočka is not simply uncoveredness, or unconcealment, to use Heideggerian terminology. Truth is also the act of revealing; it is *praxis*. It is this act of uncovering that drives Mouawad’s protagonists, the ‘*envie de clarté*’ (*desire for clarity*) that leads to the discovery of how to ask questions. (Mouawad in Côté 2005: 15)

Chapter 3 turned to space, as that which arises through embodied action within a specific reality. For Patočka, ‘Le corps personnel n’est pas une chose dans l’espace objectif. Il est une vie qui, par elle-même, *est spatialement*, qui

³ We were screwing and it was incredible. [...] At that moment I was having the best lay of my life.

⁴ In the *Le Sang* tetralogy, this is always a confrontation with a familial death. In the first three plays it is the death of the parent; in *Ciels* it is the impending death of the son.

*produit sa propre localisation, qui se rend elle-même spatiale.*⁵ (Patočka trans. Abrams 1995: 59) Space comes into being through the embodied life that produces its own spatiality. This spatiality arises through the individual, corporeal individual's relationship to the world, what Patočka calls the 'hardness of the real.' This reality is always given perspectively, 'le monde – la totalité de ce qui est – nous est donné perspectivement, c'est-à-dire dans une structure déterminée par l'apparition du corps propre en tant que point zéro entouré d'une périphérie.'⁶ (Patočka trans. Abrams 1995: 62) This is represented by Mouawad's insistence on the spatial as frame of reference, the 'point de vue dans le temps, le mien.'⁷ (Mouawad in Côté 2005: 105) Characters are typically situated within a specific spatio-temporal environment, and must come to terms with their own perspectival relationship to that environment. *Littoral* begins a reconfiguration of space that combines multiple environments encountered by the characters on their quest to fulfil an obligation. The spatial openness of the journey is combined with the spatial intersection that arises through human encounters. For instance, it is with the self-knowledge gained through her journey and encounters that Loup perceives her own spatial existence; 'Je vois un horizon complet se dégager devant moi / Et c'est effrayant / Effrayant de grandeur et de profondeur [...] / Je vois tout à coup l'espace qui s'en va là-bas.'⁸

⁵ The body is not a thing in objective space. It is a life that, in itself, *is spatially*, that *produces* its own localisation, that renders itself spatial.

⁶ 'the world – the totality of what is – is given to us perspectively, that is, in a structure determined by the appearance of the body itself as the zero point surrounded by a periphery.'

⁷ 'point of view in time, my own.'

⁸ I see a wide open horizon unfolding before me / And it is terrifying / Terrifyingly vast and deep [...] / I suddenly see the space that spreads out into the distance.

(Mouawad 2009b: 98) The world and the self are co-constitutive: the self has agency, and actualises possibilities that are made possible by world. The world determines the context into which a self comes to exist, yet the self influences that world as a corporeal manifest being. Space emerges through manifestation (the world and the subject as co-constitutive of that which appears) and relationality (the self's relationship to others).

Chapter 4 turned to the central role of testimony in developing the solidarity that emerges through the encounter with the other in the writings of both Patočka and Mouawad. It is in bearing witness to inner shakenness, provoked as a result of the metanoia, made possible by confrontation with the past and encounter with the other, that the self assumes responsibility in his relationship to others. For Patočka, the person who has the privilege of 'la fascination par la totalité et par l'être, par cet intérêt primordial qui est la source de toute clarté [...] devient celui qui est envoyé dans le monde pour rendre témoignage à la vérité.'⁹ (Patočka trans. Abrams 1990: 235) The truth to which the characters in Mouawad's plays bear witness is that of clarity; the clarity that comes through revelation, metamorphosis and shakenness. In disclosing the inner experience of shakenness, the character's testimony offers a truth contract to the addressee, which in the theatre consists of both other characters within the fictional world of the play, and the audience without. In presenting the inner experience of shakenness, the self demands to be recognised and acknowledged. As Willy cries out at the end of the play, 'c'est moi qui me tiens devant cette

⁹ 'being fascinated by the totality and by being, by this primordial interest that is the source of all clarity [...] becomes the person who is sent into the world to bear witness to the truth.'

fenêtre [...] c'est à travers elle que je vous parle [...] vous m'écoutez toujours
[...] vous m'écoutez sans cesse!¹⁰ (Mouawad 2004: 89)

2 Objectives and limitations

Through its investigation of Mouawad's engagement with the work of Patočka, this thesis has delineated the relatively unexplored phenomenological foundations of Mouawad's plays. Mouawad often expresses a set of philosophical and ethical aims for his theatre in interviews, exegetical texts (press kits, programmes, and other supplemental material) and, increasingly, in the plays themselves. Having explored Mouawad's use of philosophical sources and their significance in terms of the themes and structures of his work, this thesis is now in a position to address the degree to which Mouawad achieves his stated philosophical and ideological objectives. The conclusion will therefore progress by reviewing the four key philosophical ambitions that Mouawad frequently references, the means by which he tackles them, and the extent to which they are fulfilled in his dramatic corpus. Finally, the conclusion will address their relation to the central issue of trace, and how the function of trace in Wajdi Mouawad's plays is key to his philosophical achievements and limitations.

The four ambitions to which Mouawad repeatedly lays claim are metamorphosis, the recognition of the other, responsibility, and the solidarity of

¹⁰ 'I am the one standing here before this window [...] I am speaking to you through this window [...] you will listen to me for all time [...] you will listen to me endlessly!'

the shaken. As this thesis has demonstrated, these themes are also highly Patočkan.¹¹ We will now explore each of these four ambitions in turn.

Metamorphosis is at the heart of Mouawad' project;¹² Mouawad has stated that his aim is to create a theatre of metamorphosis, and metamorphosis is the foundational structure of the plays. Characters literally transform; growing up, growing old, and occasionally dying, processes at times represented through the use of different actors sharing one role.¹³ Metamorphosis, understood as the internal transition from a life of sustenance, submerged in the everyday, towards a shaking of accepted meaning, drives the protagonists' character progression and the action of the play. This progression is provoked by a confrontation with finitude, a revelation that destabilises the protagonists' understanding of the world. Jan Patočka's emphasis on *metanoia*, conditioned by a person's confrontation with finitude and consequent temporal awareness, resonates with Mouawad's sense of the significance of the past. Mouawad strives to represent Patočka's sense of the historical as man's realisation 'that rising above the mere biological level may be what it means to be human' (Chvatík 2010: 4). However, for all their transformations, Mouawad's characters' internal metamorphoses often conclude with a reintegration into the biological, rather than a rising above it. This is particularly applicable to female protagonists, whose transformation frequently entails a coming to terms with their biological, social or familial

¹¹ For Patočka's notion of '*metanoia*' see Chapter 2, p.100; for the recognition of the other, see Chapter 3, p.123-129; for responsibility, see Chapter 4, p.259-263 and for the solidarity of the shaken, see Chapter 1, p.82-90.

¹² See Chapter 2, p.91.

¹³ E.g., in *Incendies*, Nawal is played by three different actresses.

roles.¹⁴ Where Harwan, Willy, and Wilfrid effect a self-discovery, Nawal, Jeanne, Loup, Noëlla, Geneviève and Layla all discover their bond to family. Given the preponderance of female protagonists, the form of metamorphosis that occurs most frequently in the plays is therefore constrained by a relationship to the biological ties that define protagonists' existence.

Personal metamorphosis undeniably shapes Mouawad's dramatic structures, as characters undergo a philosophical and ethical awakening, an internal odyssey often represented through an external, geographical journey. Yet, due to directorial stylistic decisions, the characters' transformation is at times obliquely represented in performance. Mouawad insists on the urgency of all his words: 'Je demande aux acteurs d'aller très vite dans leur texte. C'est la cinétique du texte. [...] Il faut trouver le 24 images par seconde dans le rythme de la parole qui devient ici a la fois notre pellicule et notre projecteur.'¹⁵ (Mouawad in *Côté 2005*: 135) In urging his actors to speak their lines with sustained intensity and speed – the 'shouting' delivery considered a trademark of his performance style – identifying changes in emotion characteristic of a transformative experience of metamorphosis can prove difficult. The shared speed and intensity with which lines are delivered also homogenizes characters, as they react similarly to widely varying situations.¹⁶ The elevated voice and tone are meant to convey the overwhelming nature of the internal experience, yet the

¹⁴ For more on gender in Mouawad's plays, see below.

¹⁵ 'I ask the actors to go very fast in their delivery. It is the cinematic text. [...] It is essential to find the 24 images per second in the rhythm of speech that here becomes both our film reel and projector.'

¹⁶ For instance, Wilfrid's speech at the beginning of *Littoral* in 2009, describing the moment he finds out his estranged father has died outside his apartment, is delivered with a tone strikingly similar to Deianeira's speech in the 2011 *The Women of Trachis*, when she proclaims joy at her husband's return.

lack of modulation can lead to a dulling of that very intensity. This becomes particularly evident in the back-to-back cycle performances that Mouawad favours. The 2009 performances of all three plays in the *Le Sang* cycle had a running time of eleven hours; Mouawad's Sophocles cycle triptych performed in Mons in 2015 took a total of nineteen hours (including breaks). When all the plays of a given cycle, or multiple cycles, are performed at once, the high intensity tone and delivery makes it difficult for the spectator to differentiate after a while between experiences, and nuances become subsumed into the general cadence of the dialogue.

Mouawad strives to use his theatre as a space to voice of the experience of the other. He explicitly states his intention to bear witness on behalf of those frequently marginalized or forgotten by society.¹⁷ Indeed, throughout Mouawad's corpus there is a genuine effort to represent different religious and ethnic groups. His characters include white francophone Canadians (*Le Sang* tetralogy, *Temps*, *Sœurs*), indigenous Canadians (*Sœurs*), Arabs (*Willy Protogoras enfermé dans les toilettes*, *Journée de nocces chez les Cromagnons*, *Littoral*, *Incendies*, *Ciels*, *Seuls*, *Sœurs*), Russians (*Temps*), French (*Forêts*, *Ciels*), Canadian Christians (*Forêts*) and French Jews (*Forêts*). Mouawad has also frequently expressed his interest in representing adolescents, and verbalizing their

¹⁷ In *Inflammation du Verbe Vivre*, his adaptation of *Philoctetes*, Mouawad's character Wahid speaks of the forgotten youth and encounters four young Greeks who have committed suicide. Wahid tell them that he will act on their behalf: 'Porter aux vivants la parole des adolescents morts pour que les morts puissent s'adresser aux vivants. [...] J'irai témoigner pour vous.' (*Carry the words of the adolescent dead to the living so that the dead can speak to the living. [...] I will bear witness on your behalf.*) (Mouawad 2016a: 49)

experience of the world. Many of Mouawad's protagonists are teenagers,¹⁸ and in 2011, Mouawad affirmed his commitment to contemporary youth beyond his theatre narratives by organizing the five-year 'Avoir 20 ans en 2015' (*20 in 2015*) project, which promoted creativity and global awareness in a group of adolescents.¹⁹ The variety of participants selected and locations included point to Mouawad's insistence on the significance of the multicultural.

However, Mouawad's interest in giving a voice to the other, or to marginalized voices, is most evident in the prevalence of his female protagonists. Although only 16 of the 42 characters in the *Le Sang* tetralogy are female, each play has a female protagonist. Recent plays *Temps* and *Sœurs* are both female-led. And Mouawad began his adaptations of Sophocles with the three plays about women, naming this 'cycle' *Des Femmes*.²⁰ In all of Mouawad's plays, female characters play pivotal roles, emphasising the importance of the female voice. Female characters are also highly gendered in Mouawad's corpus, and often physically defined. Female bodies are repeatedly articulated, uncovered and exposed through regular depictions of sex, menstruation, rape and childbirth. They are also graphically depicted in dialogue, often focusing on the sexual

¹⁸ Willy, Abgar and Naïmé in *Willy Protogoras enfermé dans les toilettes*; Walter and Neel in *Journée de nocces chez les Cromagnons*; Edwige and Vaklav in *Les Mains d'Edwige au moment de la naissance*; Wilfrid in *Littoral*; Nawal in *Incendies*; Loup in *Forêts*; Victor in *Ciels*.

¹⁹ The project was based on the five verbs in Nazira's exhortation to Nawal, 'Apprends à lire, à écrire, à compter, à parler: apprend à penser.'¹⁹ (Mouawad 2009b: 31) Fifty francophone adolescents from five locations across three continents (Réunion Island, Montreal, Namur, Mons and Nantes) were selected to participate in a number of cultural activities over the course of the five years in their respective hometowns. All participants met once a year in a new location (Athens, Lyon, Auschwitz, and Senegal) before dispersing to visit seven different cities (Casablanca, Istanbul, Beirut, Reykjavik, Budapest, Tirana and Vienna). There was a final regrouping in Athens at the end of the project.

²⁰ And *Incendies* is a re-telling of the Oedipus myth from Jocasta's perspective.

corporeity of women, for instance the references to Léonie's menstrual blood, Hélène's vagina, Luce's body (as revealed through stripping), and Ludivine's genitals in *Forêts*; Noëlla's graphic description of rape and miscarriage in *Temps*; Nawal's vivid description of her sexual torture by Abou Tarek. Across the 8 plays discussed in detail in this thesis, there are 71 explicit references to violence against women, the majority of which are either accounts or staged instances of rape, sexual violence or murder. Every play in the *Le Sang* tetralogy features a description or staged representation of sexual violence against a woman or girl. On the other hand, there is no instance of a man being raped in Mouawad's dramatic work.²¹

In addition to the prevalence of rape and sexual violence to which they are subjected, women characters are heavily associated with childbirth, which occurs in numerous plays. They are viewed through a biological lens that defines women as daughters or mothers. There is a staged birth scene in every play in the *Le Sang* tetralogy, and a strong focus in the plays on women's generative role, often central to the action of the play. The lives of female protagonists are therefore shaped and defined by rape, sex, pregnancy and birth, whereas male protagonists are usually separate from the generative life-cycle. This mirrors the subtle gendered difference in the metanoia progression experienced by the protagonists. Male characters explicitly experience a process of coming to terms with their inner selves. Female characters generally experience metanoia as a result of their confrontation with their physical, bodily relationship to the world.

²¹ Though in *Littoral* the story is told of a man being forced to rape his young daughter, a form of rape against him, as well as the female victim. (Mouawad Leblanc 2009: 58)

Mouawad's emphasis on female corporeity and his preoccupation with sexual violence against women are recurring problematic themes that were compounded by what has been termed 'the Cantat affair'.²² In 2011, Mouawad chose Bertrand Cantat, a musician convicted of murdering his girlfriend, the actress Marie Trintignant, and also questioned in connection to the death of his ex-wife Krisztina Rády, as the coryphaeus in his *Des Femmes* trilogy. This created an immediate maelstrom of criticism. Despite Mouawad's protestations that Cantat's role was 'la part la plus humble du spectacle' (*the most humble role in the show*), he elsewhere specified that 'c'est le chœur qui dit la justice et l'injustice.[...] Au fond, le chœur est là pour dire aux protagonistes qu'ils sont fous.'²³ (Mouawad in Wynants 2012) In the context of three plays in which female protagonists suffer violence and death under male authority, Mouawad attributes authority over these women's reason to a man, and one who murdered a woman.

Cantat's personal history was apparently a significant factor in Mouawad's decision to cast him in the role of the chorus:

²² What became known as the 'Cantat Affair' erupted in April 2011 when Mouawad asked Bertrand Cantat to compose the music for his *Des Femmes* cycle and to perform it live. In 2003, Cantat was convicted of murder in the death of his girlfriend Marie Trintignant. Marie, the daughter of well-known actor Jean-Louis Trintignant and screenwriter Nadine Trintignant, died after Cantat assaulted her in a hotel room in Vilnius. In the end, Mouawad's 'artistic decision' as it was called, was rendered moot, as due to Canadian immigration law, a convicted criminal whose crime would incur a sentence of more than ten years under Canadian law requires a special dispensation to enter the country. The Canadian government was unequivocal in its refusal. Although Cantat remained absent for the 2011 Avignon festival performance of the trilogy out of respect for Jean-Louis Trintignant, he has been included in recent performances in Europe.

²³ It is the chorus that speaks justice and injustice. [...] In the end, the chorus is there to tell the protagonists that they are mad.

Il y avait le rapport de ce que ça provoquait de l'entendre chanter ça, avec le vécu qu'on lui connaît. Au lieu de créer un malaise autobiographique, ça donne au contraire une théâtralité d'une force incroyable.²⁴ (Mouawad in Wynants 2012)

Mouawad notes that Cantat's 'theatricality' contributes 'an incredible strength' to the performance. The emphasis here is on Cantat's own experience of tragedy: 'comme son histoire est connue par tout le monde, le spectateur dans la salle allait forcément se retrouver face à un homme qui contemple le désastre de sa propre vie.' (*Mouawad defend ses choix*: 9'35") By converting Cantat's story into one of the main foci of the tragedies, in adaptations that place Cantat's powerful choral songs at the centre of each performance, Cantat's story becomes likened to that of a tragic hero. This is a move beyond a simple return to the stage; it is an articulation of suffering and personal disaster that shifts the focus of the adaptations away from the female protagonists to Cantat's own 'tragedy'. And in these adaptations, the male choral voice (consisting of Cantat and three male musicians) dominates.²⁵

In response to the Cantat affair, Mouawad argued that in fulfilling his sentence, Bertrand Cantat had assumed responsibility for his actions, actions which provoked the 'catastrophe' of his life which Mouawad likens to a form of shakiness. Responsibility in the face of shakiness is central to Mouawad's work. As Chapter 4 showed, responsibility is the act of facing the consequences

²⁴ There was the relationship between what it evoked in hearing him sing that, with the life that we know he has had. Instead of creating an autobiographical malaise, it on the contrary lends a theatricality of incredible strength.

²⁵ On the significance of Mouawad's changing the chorus from young women (*Women of Trachis*), wise men (*Antigone*) and adult women (*Electra*) to a chorus of four men, see Adrian Filip's 2012 Master's thesis *Le chœur tragique chez Mouawad: un nouveau protagoniste ?*

of one's actions. Patočka explicitly connects responsibility, shakiness and meaning:

In accepting responsibility for themselves and others humans implicitly pose the question of meaning in a new and different way. They are no longer content with a life of bondage to itself. [...] The result of the primordial shaking of accepted meaning is not a fall into meaninglessness but, on the contrary, the discovery of the possibility of achieving a freer, more demanding meaningfulness. (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 62-63)

Mouawad's protagonists follow the progression described in Patočka's philosophy, discovering 'meaningfulness' as they accept responsibility for their actions, and their relationships to others. Responsibility is one of the main outcomes of the *metanoia* or change in thinking that every one of Mouawad's protagonists experiences as they transition from a life of unconscious action to conscious, assumed decision-making. Yet, as with metamorphosis and the voice of the other, the form that responsibility takes in Mouawad's plays is subtly gendered. Male protagonists tend to assert their individuality and self agency (responsibility for themselves), whereas female characters' responsibility is defined in relation to the world, usually family, and often involves caring for male relatives or bearing children. In the *Le Sang* tetralogy, Simone, Jeanne, Loup, and Dolorosa all serve a 'sidekick' or 'helper' role, helping male characters tell their stories (Simone); confront reality (Jeanne); or solve a mystery (Loup and Dolorosa). In *Temps*, Noëlla, the victim of sexual abuse, is perceived as responsible for all of the men in the family, including her abusive father. In *Sœurs*, both Geneviève and Layla re-affirm their responsibility to family

members at the play's close.²⁶ In other instances, female protagonists' acceptance of responsibility is an act primarily characterized by its enabling future generations to exist.²⁷ Mouawad's female characters are bound by their roles as caregivers and mothers, and the responsibility they assume through their *metanoia* is a reaffirmed responsibility towards others. This differs from the responsibility for personal choices and the self that characters such as Wahid, Wilfrid and Harwan come to embrace:

C'était vers d'autres dieux que le poète impeccable m'envoyait. La grâce, la force, le courage, la liberté, à tous ces signes qui rendent éminente la nature des hommes. Ces dieux sont de toute éternité, et [...] nous sommes chacun, notre vie durant, un temple abritant de tels dieux. [...] C'était à ces dieux [...] que je devais me rendre.²⁸ (Mouawad 2016:58)

Therefore, in plays with a male protagonist, such as *Seuls* and *Littoral*, Mouawad fulfils his stated aim in depicting a form of metamorphosis and personal growth that is related to the Patočkan notion of *metanoia*, with his protagonists gaining intellectual freedom through a recognition of time and mortality. Conversely, in female-protagonist works such as *Temps* and *Sœurs*, the metamorphosis depicted is one towards a recognition of biological identity, and the assumption of physical care of the family. In Patočkan terms, Mouawad is transitioning his female protagonist towards priorities associated with survival and the everyday;

²⁶ See Chapter 4, p.259-263.

²⁷ As when Nawal accepts her children and Dolorosa foregoes suicide to instead give birth at the end of the play.

²⁸ It was towards other gods that the impeccable poet was sending me. Grace, strength, courage, freedom, all of those signs that render eminent the nature of men. These gods are eternal, and [...] we are each, for the duration of our lives, a temple housing such gods.[...] It was to these gods [...] that I had to surrender.

in other words, the states out of which Patočka insists an individual must transition in order to achieve her *metanoia*.

As we saw in Chapters 1 and 2, Mouawad has devoted his career to staging Patočkan shakeness in an effort to create a solidarity of the shaken, as described by Patočka in the *Heretical Essays*. The notion of shakeness shapes the character progression of his protagonists, as they experience *metanoia*, recognition of the other and responsibility, all of which are necessary for the shaking of accepted meaning. For Mouawad, these experiences are provoked by the trace. Physical traces of past lives (bodies and artefacts such as letters, wills and objects) bring about a confrontation with death and finitude. The trace inherent to the ambiguity produced by deferred meaning stimulates a questioning that leads protagonists to experience a destabilisation of accepted meaning. Through questioning, protagonists discover the traces of the past which they carry within: echoes of former lives that have made the protagonist's existence possible; the resurgence of buried or forgotten formative experiences. It is in pursuing the unknown, hinted at by these traces, that protagonists come into contact with other beings with whom solidarity is possible.

Solidarity between shaken individuals, perceived by Patočka as the only effective solution to violence and war, drives Mouawad's thematic and directorial choices. The objective of fostering this solidarity is one reason for the common delivery tonality (see above) that Mouawad asks of his actors. It is intended to reinforce the shared experience of shakeness. In striving to create a theatre where characters do not simply describe, but rather bear witness to their shakeness, Mouawad implies a specific relationship between actors and with

audience members. Actors are asked to express their own personal experience of shakiness, and in turn, other cast members and the audience are asked to believe in the actor's testimony, to recognise the truth of that which is being unveiled on stage. Mouawad's multiple depictions of characters finding other similarly shaken individuals successfully depicts the significance of the encounter; the possibility of authentic interaction with an other.

Yet despite the many instances of staged solidarity, Mouawad's appeals to shared opinions and didacticism detract from the solidarity as expressed in Patočka's philosophy. In Patočka's work, shakiness and solidarity emerge through conflict and confrontation: 'solidarity of the shaken for all their contradiction and conflict'. (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 131). Mouawad's plays stage conflict, yet ultimately they leave little room for contradiction or conflict in their drive towards unity and stasis. Final-act resolution is the norm, typically through a didactic, philosophical monologue in which the protagonist provides a specific interpretation of the play's meaning. This is an aspect that works against Mouawad's philosophical objectives of provoking shakiness in the audience, as Patočkan shakiness is not reached through the external enforcement or persuasion of another individual's preconceived beliefs, but by a shaking of existing beliefs through confrontation. In addition to this, for Patočka, sources of meaning are dynamic, as meaning 'arises' through the interaction between the meaning bestowed on the object, its 'significance, conception', and the meaning the object addresses to the person. These are endless processes, whereby meaning is never wholly present and given, but constantly in development, intersected by other temporalities, and a 'task for all of life in its integrity.'

(Patočka trans. Kohák 1998: 151). By unequivocally stating the meaning of a play in dialogue, in effect providing a final act *moralitas*, Mouawad is essentially discouraging audience members from developing an independent interpretation of events, thereby discovering meaning independently, and creating an interpretative stasis. In so doing Mouawad diverges from the praxis central to Patočka's phenomenology. The plays generally become increasingly doctrinal in tone throughout, essentially moving away from an expression of the absurd and futile (which, for Patočka, triggers the questioning essential for shakeness), and towards didacticism, which Patočka characterizes as 'the most pleasing slogans of the day' (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 136). Patočka states that such slogans fail to stimulate shakeness, solidarity and an inherently meaningful life because 'in reality [they] call to war, whether they invoke the nation, the state, classless society, world unity, or whatever other appeals, discreditable and discredited by the factual ruthlessness of the Force, there may be.' (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 136)

As we have seen, for each of Wajdi Mouawad's key philosophical ambitions, the ways in which the plays succeed in their aims, are in tension with their emergent limitations. His protagonists experience a metamorphosis, yet the way in which it is expressed can make the transition difficult to perceive. As the identities of his characters demonstrates, Mouawad is committed to providing a space for the voice of the other. His characters come from multiple cultures and backgrounds, he represents characters of all ages, and numerous plays contain female protagonists. However, Mouawad's female characters are repeatedly subject to violence and defined by their corporeity, constraining their expression

to experiences defined by biological gender. This same limitation surfaces in terms of responsibility. Although all protagonists move towards a life of responsibility, the form of responsibility is ultimately gendered. All three of these notions are evoked in order to stage the processes that provoke and result from shakeness and solidarity. The staged representation of a character's shakeness is reinforced by the actor's expression of his or her own experience of being shaken, evoking a truth contract with those present, i.e., other actors and spectators. The solidarity that develops between characters during performance demonstrates the possibility of an authentic relationship with others, as well as of the community that Patočka describes in his *Heretical Essays*. Yet Mouawad's ambitious goal of generating a solidarity of the shaken through theatre is ultimately undermined by his determination to verbalise this objective, to didactically promote shakeness, specifically in terms of the function of trace in effecting shakeness and solidarity.

3 Embodied meaning

Wajdi Mouawad's theatre is one of resistance. Mouawad perceives himself as engaged in an active rebellion against what he sees as contemporary life's ardent emphasis on the meaningless:

La question du sens se fissure depuis déjà assez longtemps. [...] Malgré tout, nous sommes habités continuellement par cette « soif insatiable de l'infini » dont parle Lautréamont. Si la vie

n'a pas de sens, à quoi sert cette « soif insatiable de l'infini » ?²⁹
(Mouawad in Côté 2005: 36-37)

This emphasis on meaninglessness is also arguably a strong component in contemporary Francophone theatre, which, to borrow Sarrazac's terminology, displays multiple characteristics of the 'rhapsodic', including trends such as the rejection of stable character and character-driven plot, the jettisoning of narrative and the dismantling of structural coherence, often seeking to problematize and undermine stable meaning. Yet in the writings of Jan Patočka, Mouawad finds a philosophical and ethical framework with which he can assert the potentially meaningful nature of life; an antidote to what he sees as the 'fragmenting' of meaning in contemporary life and drama (quote above). Patočka states in the *Heretical Essays* that 'humans cannot live without meaning' (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 70), and through Patočka's notions of *metanoia*, voice of the other, responsibility and shakiness, and their stimulus, trace, Mouawad seeks to represent the individual's movement towards a meaningful life through his protagonists' internal journeys. He even attempts to provoke a revelatory encounter for his audience members that will allow them to experience a change in thinking, and therefore assume the responsibility of a 'shaken' life in which recognition of 'what life and death are all about' (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 134) facilitates meaningfulness. In Patočka's own terms, 'living in truth'. (Patočka trans. Lom 2002b: 43; Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 82)

²⁹ The question of meaning has been fragmenting for quite some time. [...] And yet, despite everything, we are continuously inhabited by this "insatiable thirst for the infinite" that Lautréamont discusses. If life has no meaning, what use is this "insatiable thirst for the infinite"?

Mouawad, then, strives to both assert the meaningful nature of existence, and locate the source of this meaning. For Patočka, meaning ‘arises’ (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 76) through endless processes. (Patočka trans. Kohák 1998: 151). In Mouawad’s plays, it emerges through such a process of self-questioning, which is instigated and oriented by trace. The sudden appearance of traces of past lives, in the forms of bodies and artefacts, initiates protagonists’ discovery of their temporal existence. It is as a result of this confrontation with death through the remnants of life that protagonists embark on a quest that transports them into their familial past. As protagonists acknowledge the past and its relevance to the present, they come to realise that they in fact embody traces that connect them with other beings. These traces disrupt the present and enable protagonists to liberate themselves from the numbness of the everyday and accept shakiness. In this sense, the ‘origin of meaning [...] is always already engaged in the “movement” of the trace.’ (Derrida 1993: 96). For Mouawad, this process makes it possible to ‘trouver la cohérence d’une vie incohérente.’³⁰ (Mouawad in Côté 2005: 77).

Trace is also key to identifying what is realized, and what is problematic, in terms of the playwright’s philosophical ambitions and their fulfillment. As demonstrated above, the verbalisation of trace in performance weakens the power of the trace to provoke. When ties between characters are spelled out and meaning clearly identified, when trace is described and linked to the processes of *metanoia* and shakiness, the spectator is not entrusted with the task of interpreting trace as embodied in performance. This is a hermeneutic activity,

³⁰ Discover the coherence of an incoherent life.

which Patočka considers fundamental to avoid 'yield[ing] to the inclination to absolutize particular ways of understanding meaning and the meaningfulness appropriate to them.' (Patočka trans. Kohák 1996: 58).³¹ For Patočka, it is through an endless, active engagement with the spatio-temporal disruption of the present and presence that individuals come to understand meaning. In Mouawad's plays, this process is catalyzed by trace, embodied through remnants of past lives (artefacts and bodies) or dialogue's potential for multiplicity of meaning (translation, symbolism and polysemy). And these stimulate the protagonists' revelation of their own corporeity as an embodiment of trace. Aside from Mouawad's didactic passages and overt explication, his protagonists discover life as inherently meaningful, precisely because of their realisation that they embody an ephemeral connection to past lives, and carry the possibility of meaning within. Where trace is spoken, Mouawad necessarily falters in his stated philosophical and ethical ambitions. Yet where trace is embodied, Mouawad is able to create a theatre that embraces Patočkan phenomenology in order to depict, and attempt to provoke, Patočka's life lived in truth.

³¹ See the significance of movement in discovering meaning in Chapter 3, p.177

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Note: In order to distinguish between multiple works published by one author in the same year, in these cases a letter follows the year of publication.

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