

# Travels with Tony Kushner and David Beckham, 2002–2004

Peter Dickinson

History is always written from a sedentary point of view and in the name of a unitary State apparatus, at least a possible one, even when the topic is nomads. What is lacking is a Nomadology, the opposite of a history.<sup>1</sup>

[P]ublic becomes private becomes public. People who work in the theater, which is never pure, should be comfortable with this dialectical impurity, this seesaw mixing-up of spheres, this paradox. And it is a paradox: the personal is the political, and yet it is important, somehow, to maintain a distinction between the two. Which is to say that the personal and the political are the same, and aren't.<sup>2</sup>

It may be hard to remember amid the World Cup clamour, but the beauty of football, like other games, lies in its sublime pointlessness. It is an end in itself with no higher purpose. The paradox is that precisely because it is utterly trivial, sport becomes saturated with meanings.<sup>3</sup>

The published version of Tony Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul* contains seven epigraphs.<sup>4</sup> I have only three. They outline the general parameters of this article and serve as a textual frame for the travelogue that follows. The word is chosen strategically; my essay is as much the personal narrative of a trip I took in the spring of 2002 to Europe with my partner, Richard, as it is a political and performative analysis of some of the events—and their ongoing local and global resonances—we experienced while there.

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In writing this paper, I owe thanks to many people, not least Sean Saunders, whose research assistance proved invaluable; Amy Zhang, whose own brilliant undergraduate thesis on *Homebody/Kabul* I was privileged to supervise; Richard Cavell, who gamely puts up with me as a companion in travel and in life; and the students who responded so enthusiastically and incisively to Kushner's play when I taught it in two different seminars in 2004.

<sup>1</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 23. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text as *TP*.

<sup>2</sup> Tony Kushner, "Notes about Political Theater," *Kenyon Review* 19, no. 3–4 (1997): 21.

<sup>3</sup> Mike Marqusee, "Football's phoney war," *Guardian* (Manchester), 6 June 2002, 17.

<sup>4</sup> See Tony Kushner, *Homebody/Kabul* (New York: TCG, 2002), 7–8. Subsequent references, unless otherwise noted, are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text as *H/K*.

The trip was conceived as a chance to meet up with old friends in London and to revisit with one of those friends, Cathy, some familiar haunts in Lombardy and the Veneto: thus the *dramatis personae* and the setting for our trip.

There was, as well, a play within this play (as theatrical history might lead us to expect). As a Canadianist who has for some years been reinventing himself as a scholar of modern drama, I had an interest in scouting out some of the theatre then playing in London, particularly Kushner's controversial new work, which was due to open while we were there. Academics who work in cross-disciplines such as cultural studies and performance studies are comfortable with these dialectical impurities, with the mixing of the personal and the professional, the social and the scholarly. It is a paradox we wield adeptly: to saturate all cultural and experiential phenomena, all performative spaces, with multiple meanings. Thus I found myself sitting in the audience at London's Young Vic Theatre on 14 May 2002 listening to Kushner's *Homebody* quote Frank Sinatra:

It's very nice to go trav'ling  
To Paris, London and Rome.  
It's oh so nice to go trav'ling,  
But it's so much nicer yes it's so much nicer  
To come home.

(H/K 29)

What follows, then, is my attempt to (re)construct the nomadology of that moment. Drawing on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari—particularly their suggestion in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) that the nomadic rhizome functions as a space of negotiation between the globally relative and the locally absolute claims of history—I juxtapose the *Homebody's* gloss on the “war machine” that is Afghanistan with my own critical and representational responses to some of the political and media performances engulfing Europe around the time of my viewing of Kushner's play. Of special interest are the contests between discourses of globalism, nationalism, and migrancy that emerged in the press in the lead-up to the 2002 World Cup. David Beckham is not paradigmatically a nomad, but the sport he plays, and the fans who follow its theatrics, resist easy conscription by the State, even as powerful a governing body as the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA). Thus, a sketch of Beckham's peregrinations—both on and off the field, pre- and post-World Cup—serves to contextualize the confluence of the local, the national, and the global that provided the backdrop to my trip, and that mobilizes my reading of Kushner's play.

In this regard, my essay attempts to enact—in structure, methodology, and tone—the theory of “as if” interconnectedness and nomadic becoming outlined by Rosi Braidotti in *Nomadic Subjects*, deterritorializing the different levels and locations of my own experiences as they flow into and merge with other sites of embodiment, performance, and knowledge production.<sup>5</sup> Following Braidotti, in the ensuing sections I adopt a “theoretical style based on nomadism,” crossing and mixing different disciplinary epistemes and speaking voices as “a way of inscribing my work in a collective political [moment].”<sup>6</sup> Thus, while the autobiographical reflections in the first

<sup>5</sup> See Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), especially 5–8.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 36, 37.

section provide a point of entry into my discussion of Beckham's performance of a reflexive nomadism in global sporting culture, they provide a point of exit (quite literally) from my hermeneutics of close reading, as applied to Kushner's play, in section 2. This in turn allows me, in section 3, to remap yet again some of the critical connections I see between Beckham's, the Homebody's, and my own different brands of nomadic consciousness. As such, the metatheatrical, theme-and-variations movement of my paper—what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as the nomadic "intermezzo" (*TP* 381)—also aims, in the words of Braidotti, to construct "reading positions outside or beyond the traditional intellectual ones. In this process I hope to be constructing my potential readers as nomadic entities as well."<sup>7</sup>

### Act 1: Venice and Milan

If one consequence of globalization is an increased flow of financial capital, then another is an increased flow of human capital. While large-scale migrations of peoples have always been a part of world history,<sup>8</sup> in today's globalized age both the patterns of and reasons for migration have changed. Middle- and upper-class religious, environmental, and terrorism refugees from Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America have joined the traditional migratory poor from these same regions in seeking supposed asylum in the so-called advanced capitalist and democratic nations of Western Europe, North America, Australia, and elsewhere. The addition of economic refugees from the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and even post-bubble Japan has made for fierce competition between immigrants for both jobs and political and social favor among their host countries' citizens.<sup>9</sup> This was brought home to me (so to speak) most viscerally in Venice. Just off the Piazza San Marco or in front of the Accademia Bridge I nightly saw groups of North African and Russian men competing to sell Louis Vuitton and Chanel knock-offs to tourists. Later I'd hear the hostess at the *osteria* we liked to frequent denounce both groups with equally phobic fervor.

In Italy we spent a lot of time in restaurants in order to escape the rain. The worst in twenty years, we were routinely told by the locals, and we believed them. The night we flew into Milan the Po had overflowed, a foretaste of the flooding and displacement that was to affect so much of Eastern Europe that spring. At the time, however, I could only marvel to my Italian Canadian boyfriend at the extraordinary inefficiency with which his compatriots loaded a shuttle bus. Fortunately, we attached ourselves to a Japanese couple who looked like they knew what they were doing. We followed their gigantic Samsonite suitcases assiduously; this strategy eventually paid off in a shared cab ride from Milan's Stazione Centrale to the *locanda* where it turned out we were all staying. This happy coincidence was discovered in a typically intercultural moment, with Richard speaking Italian to the cab driver, the Japanese couple speaking even better Italian to the cab driver, who then astounded us all by speaking Japanese back to them. I kept silent. When, passing the Pirelli Building, the cab driver mimed a

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>8</sup> See Wang Gungwu, "Migration History: Some Patterns Revisited," in *Global History and Migrations*, ed. Wang Gungwu, 1–22 (Boulder: Westview, 1997); and Robin Cohen, "Diasporas, the Nation-State, and Globalisation," in *Global History and Migrations*, 117–44.

<sup>9</sup> See James H. Mittelman, *The Globalization Syndrome: Transformation and Resistance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 58.

plane flying into the side of it, and pointed out the hole it had left behind, it was at last a language I could understand.

Another truism of current thinking regarding globalization, that transnational social movements—including the physical movement of peoples—have created a hybridized culture that has sounded the death-knell of the individual nation-state as a political entity,<sup>10</sup> perhaps is in need of reconsideration. This is especially true in the wake of 9/11. At every turn on that same trip to Europe we seemed to be witnessing not the waning of nationalism but its forceful, vengeful, and xenophobic rearticulation: in the National Front victories in local elections in northern England; in Jean-Marie Le Pen's presidential run in France; in the rhetoric that swirled around the aftermath of Pim Fortuyn's assassination in Holland; in the debates in the press about which countries (including Canada) would agree to take in the thirteen remaining Palestinian hostage-takers from the siege of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. For us, nowhere were Europe's divided loyalties more forcefully played out than in the plethora of media stories about the impending World Cup that steadily accrued throughout the course of the trip. No matter the publication or language, the story was always the same: over their baguette or brioche or bangers or bratwurst, men and women from all over Europe hotly contested the fact that their nation's World Cup aspirations often hinged on a star striker from elsewhere.

As Joseph Maguire and Robert Pearton have argued, "Elite labour migration is now an established feature of the sporting 'global village.'" <sup>11</sup> This phenomenon is perhaps nowhere more evident than in what we in North America call soccer, but which everyone else in the world calls football. Thus, in the lead-up to the 2002 World Cup, we heard much about the Nigerian phenom (Emmanuel Olisadebe) who was playing for Poland; Japan's fleet-footed Brazilian import (Alessandro dos Santos); the so-called divided loyalties of English coach Sven-Göran Eriksson (a Swedish national); Cameroon's coach Winfried Schafer (from Germany); and Japanese coach Philippe Troussier (a Frenchman). For some commentators writing in the European press in advance of the event's kickoff, this was a sign of football's "benign" globalism, with the World Cup "as important as the United Nations in promoting international understanding."<sup>12</sup> Never mind that as one consequence of this "international understanding" Japan was preparing to defend its shores and citizenry against an anticipated influx of barbaric hordes of English football hooligans.<sup>13</sup>

Other pundits looked forward theatrically to what they saw as the almost certain "battles between professionalism and patriotism [that would] provide an intriguing sideshow" to the matches themselves.<sup>14</sup> As, indeed, they proved to be. Thus, while

<sup>10</sup> See Cohen, "Diasporas, the Nation-State, and Globalisation," 135.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Maguire and Robert Pearton, "Global Sport and the Migration Patterns of France '98 World Cup Finals Players: Some Preliminary Observations," in *The Future of Football: Challenges for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Jon Garland et al. (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 175. See also Maguire, *Global Sport: Identities, Societies, Civilizations* (Oxford: Polity, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> "Football is so much more than just a game," *The Independent*, 1 June 2002, 20.

<sup>13</sup> See Michael Sheridan, "Japan on red alert for the barbarians from England," *Times* (London), 3 February 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Bill Edgar, "Cameroon coach confronts conflict of loyalties," *Times* (London), 5 March 2002.

Japan and South Korea's unique cohosting duties were being trumpeted as auguring a new era of "Asian detente" for the region,<sup>15</sup> as both countries' teams progressed through their respective round-robin play, with Japan making it to the round of sixteen and Korea all the way to the semifinals, the gloves eventually came off. Old enmities were played up in the press, with South Korea being accused of match fixing and referee bias, and many wishing that Japan could have gone it alone in hosting the event.<sup>16</sup> But even this took a back seat to the frenzy of anticipation around the second-round meeting between bitter rivals Argentina and England in Sapporo. Not only did Beckham's winning penalty kick allow him the chance to relive and redeem his personal humiliation at being ejected from the match against Argentina four years earlier, it also allowed all of England a chance to re-fight—and win all over again—the Falklands War.<sup>17</sup>

Writing in the *Guardian* the day before the much-heralded England–Argentina rematch, Mike Marqusee argues that "[s]ports patriotism is often misleadingly described as 'tribal.' In the age of globalisation, it is less rooted and more malleable than that. Whether paroxysmic and febrile, or laid-back and ironic, it remains curiously hollow and . . . can easily be turned against imagined national enemies, within and without."<sup>18</sup> There is one place in football (as in most sport), however, where the virtues of a borderless world are regularly trumpeted: corporate sponsorship. Coca-Cola, for example, covered its assets nicely by backing both England and Argentina at the 2002 World Cup.<sup>19</sup> The market imperative was also very much on display in FIFA president Sepp Blatter's fight to secure re-election amid a bribery and corruption scandal that made the International Olympic Committee look like choir-boys. In the same way that Western democratic powers routinely threaten rogue states with economic sanctions unless they clean up their acts, major sponsors were threatening to pull out of the 2006 World Cup in Germany unless Blatter stopped treating FIFA as his own personal fiefdom.<sup>20</sup>

However, in European football the potential conflicts between tribal nationalisms and global economics, between players' various competing affiliations and fans' equally mercurial franchise loyalties, are further complicated by another more localized site of sporting imagination and cultural contestation. As the bidding war between Real Madrid and bitter rival Barcelona escalated during the summer of 2003 to sign Manchester United's most famous (and most costly) superstar, the global sporting community witnessed the city emerge as the most immediate and manifest locus for the production and circulation of what Michel Foucault would call "bio-power

<sup>15</sup> See John Gitting and Jonathan Watts, "World Cup scores for Asian detente," *Guardian* (Manchester), 26 March 2002, 15; and Doug Struck, "Japan, S. Korea: World Cup's Strange Bedfellows," *Washington Post*, 28 April 2002, D01.

<sup>16</sup> See Richard Pendlebury, "Conspiracy theory in the land of the bribing sons," *Daily Mail* (London), 25 June 2002, 64.

<sup>17</sup> See Ian Cobain, "We sang, screamed, sighed, then we celebrated as one," *Times* (London), 8 June 2002.

<sup>18</sup> Marqusee, "Football's phoney war," 17.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> See Erskine McCullough, "'Blattergate' throws World Cup future in doubt," *Agence France Presse*, 9 May 2002.

in its many forms and modes of application."<sup>21</sup> That is, the globe-trotting Beckham—on a product-placement tour of Asia at the time his trade was announced—suddenly found his subject-body, so used to transcending national borders, being disciplined, regulated, administered, and managed at a very metropolitan level, as he was ordered to report to Real Madrid's headquarters by the first week of July for a medical.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, alongside fellow travelers Zinedine Zidane, Ronaldo, Luis Figo, and Raul, Beckham's occupation, re-invention, and transformation of the urban center of Madrid (if only for the duration of the Champions League's regulation season) must also simultaneously serve as an instructive lesson in global citizenship and/as spectatorship.

But I'm getting ahead of myself here. At the time of our trip, the English team was just preparing to decamp for Dubai for climate-specific training, and media reports (when they weren't focusing on his new haircut) were fretting over the status of Beckham's heavily taped foot. Meanwhile, the French press had conscripted the globalized face of football for much more urgent political ends. In the lead-up to Le Pen's presidential runoff with Chirac, members of France's defending World Cup Championship team, including Ghana-born captain Marcel Desailly and 1998 hero Zinedine Zidane, whose father is Algerian, urged voters to turn out en masse and vote against Le Pen. It was a powerful indictment of the National Front leader's racist policies and an embarrassing reminder of remarks he had made four years earlier in criticizing France's football team, because many players were immigrants and apparently couldn't even sing the *Marseillaise* (thereby putting a public—and expressly political—spin on the general undercurrent of racism that pervades the football world, from players to fans to commentators).<sup>23</sup> Several days after Le Pen made these remarks in 1998, France beat Brazil 3–0 in the final; Zidane, who scored two of the winning goals, had his picture projected on the Arc de Triomphe under text that read variously "Merci Zizou," "La victoire est en nous," and "Zidane President," which seemed to signal for the country a moment of multiracial harmony.<sup>24</sup> That moment was short-lived, however, as Le Pen's political persistence keeps reminding the world. Perhaps it was only fitting that in the 2002 World Cup, defending champion France lost in the first round to the team from its former colony, Senegal. A historic past was running up against a nomadic present.

## Act 2: London and Kabul

In terms of my own nomadic present in London in May 2002, it was not an image of David Beckham kitted out for the globalized soccer pitch that I took with me into the Young Vic Theatre the night I saw Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul*, but rather one of him in a sarong. This was because earlier that afternoon Richard, Cathy, and I had attended

<sup>21</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), 141.

<sup>22</sup> Beckham offers an account of this in the introduction to his recent autobiography (written with Tom Watt), *Beckham: Both Feet on the Ground* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 1–15.

<sup>23</sup> See Jon Garland and Michael Rowe, *Racism and Anti-Racism in Football* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); and Richie Moran, "Racism in Football: A Victim's Perspective," in Garland et al., ed., *The Future of Football*, 190–200.

<sup>24</sup> See Lisa Marlowe, "Le Pen and French soccer hero clash in war of words," *Irish Times*, 1 May 2002, 1; and Peter Wilson, "World Cup champs urge voters to deliver Le Pen the red card," *Australian*, 30 April 2002, 6.

the “Men in Skirts” exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, which featured the Jean Paul Gaultier–designed silk sarong that Beckham wore as a signifier of his confident metrosexuality during the 1998 World Cup. Beckham’s nomadic fashion sense, in which his exportable celebrity image within the global marketplace (particularly in Asia) allows him to import and appropriate emblems of the orientalist and feminine other through mechanisms of aesthetic adornment and commodity fetishism, is a reminder of the Homebody’s assimilation as an other in Kushner’s play. More pertinently, her apparent decision to go native, disappearing underneath a burqa and settling placidly into her new role as dutiful Muslim wife, is first preceded by her exoticization of the other—via her description and eventual display of the ten “fezlike pillboxy attenuated yarmulkite” hats purchased from a “Third World junk shop” in London to add “something catalytic, some fizz” to a party for her husband (*H/K* 16, 17, 15). Here, I draw on a brilliant article by Framji Minwalla, who argues that the Homebody’s “allegory of the hats” is paradigmatic of a tension that exists between two kinds of history being staged in Kushner’s play: one in which the Homebody is positioned, as a result of the “outdated guidebook about the city of Kabul” from which she quotes at length (*H/K* 9), as an “indiscreet observer” of the imperialist and “picturesque” history of Afghanistan; and one in which she is “interpellated,” through her encounter with the Afghan merchant who sells her the hats, as “a post-colonial subject” in her own right.<sup>25</sup> Although Minwalla’s reading restricts itself to the Homebody’s opening monologue, his nuanced observations on the many paradoxes operating therein—not least its apparent twinning of narratives of cultural tourism and political engagement—overlap with my own take on the play in many ways. Moreover, the issues raised by Minwalla in his article are a sobering reminder that—theories of nomadism notwithstanding—what most connects my autobiographical musings on David Beckham in the previous section with the scholarly dissection of Kushner’s play that I am about to undertake here is that both were occasioned by my occupation, first and foremost, of the roles of cultural tourist and cultural consumer. Thus, this paper, however localized I attempt to make it, cannot help but reproduce the rhetoric of a globalized (and globalist) souvenir narrative.

Extraordinarily perspicacious, fiercely intelligent, and thrillingly verbose, *Homebody/Kabul* explores, among other things, contradictions and confrontations between the local and the global, the past and the present, the personal and the political, history and nomadology. The play first began life as an hour-long monologue commissioned by the actress Kika Markham and London’s Chelsea Theatre Centre in 1997 (fig. 1). In this early version, an unnamed, middle-aged, upper-middle-class British woman too much in love with both the world and with words, an armchair traveler whose “borders have only ever been broached by books” (*H/K* 12), reads from the aforementioned guidebook to Kabul. She slowly describes the process of empathic connection—what she calls “touch”—she achieves with an Afghani hat salesman in London, an encounter with her postcolonial other that eventually propels her to leave the safety of her comfortable kitchen, “her culpable shore” (*H/K* 27), and join “the drowning” (*H/K* 28) of Afghanistan’s “awful Present” (*H/K* 11). However, between the summer of 1999 and the summer of 2001, Kushner added several more characters and two more entire

<sup>25</sup> See Framji Minwalla, “Tony Kushner’s *Homebody/Kabul*: Staging History in a Post-Colonial World,” *Theater* 33, no. 1 (2003): 31–33, 40.



Figure 1. "Where stands the homebody." Kika Markham as the Homebody in the Cheek by Jowl production of *Homebody/Kabul* (2002) by Tony Kushner, directed by Declan Donnellan at the Young Vic, London. Photo: Keith Pattison.

acts to the play. In them we discover how, in the wake of the Homebody's sudden and precipitous journey to Afghanistan, her bewildered husband, Milton Ceiling, and her angry daughter, Priscilla, have followed. As they struggle to discover whether or not the Homebody is in fact dead, as the Taliban government claims, Milton and Priscilla cross paths with, and are forever changed by, four individuals who together encapsulate the paradoxes of Kabul: what it once was, what it has become, and what it has always been. Khwaja Aziz Mondanabosh, a Tajik Afghan man who serves as Priscilla's guide and interpreter, agrees to help her find her missing mother in exchange for Priscilla's transporting back to London several poems he has written in Esperanto. Quango Twistleton is a British aid worker and government liaison who shows Milton how to heal his broken heart through heroin. Mahala is a Pashtun Afghan woman and former librarian unable to work under the Taliban who pleads with the Ceilings to help her immigrate to England. Finally, Mullah Aftar Ali Durranni is the very real face of Taliban authority, advising Milton and Priscilla to return to London as quickly as possible early in the play, only to return at the end just as they are about to leave, accusing Priscilla of smuggling coded documents destined for the Northern Alliance in the form of Khwaja's poems, and threatening to shoot Mahala in retaliation (fig. 2).

Written before 9/11, this version of the play has, since that time, had a fascinatingly nomadic production itinerary. It opened at the New York Theatre Workshop on 19 December 2001, just three months after the collapse of the World Trade Center, in a production directed by Declan Donnellan and designed by Nick Ormerod, featuring Linda Emond in the pivotal role of the Homebody. Donnellan and Ormerod also



oversaw the production I attended at London's Young Vic in May 2002, with Kika Markham once again in the title role. Throughout 2002, with the West suddenly clamoring for information about Afghanistan and its complicated political history, Kushner's play became one of the most produced in the United States, starting with Oskar Eustis's Trinity Rep production in March of that year. Over the course of this period, Kushner, despite having already published a version, continued to revise and rework the play. This resulted in an acclaimed co-production by Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre Company and Los Angeles' Mark Taper Forum in the summer and fall of 2003, under the direction of Frank Galati. Capitalizing, it would seem, on Kushner's recent success with the HBO television adaptation of *Angels in America*, and the off-Broadway premiere and subsequent Broadway transfer of his first musical, *Caroline, or Change*, this revised version of the play opened at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) in May 2004, with several members of the original New York production—including Linda Emond as the Homebody—reprising their roles. Thus, as with any discussion of the globe-trotting Beckham, who in early 2004 was himself jetting back and forth between Madrid and London in a desperate bid to save his marriage, a critical analysis of Kushner's play must remain in flux, adopting its own nomadic perspective. Nevertheless, while I will have occasion to comment on the BAM production and the revised text at the end of this essay, as I hope to demonstrate in what follows, my reading of *Homebody/Kabul* crucially corresponds to the original location of my own itinerant viewing of it.



Figure 2. "My Beautiful Beautiful Kabul, Where Have They Taken You." Left to right: Priscilla (Jacqueline Defferary), Zai Garshi (Silas Carson), and Khwaja (Nadim Sawalha) in the Cheek by Jowl production of *Homebody/Kabul* (2002). Photo: Keith Pattison.

The play's "timeliness" and "prescience" (two words used repeatedly in reviews) stem not so much from Kushner's definitive explanation of "The Source" of Afghan/Anglo-American relations—what Deleuze and Guattari deride in *A Thousand Plateaus* as "arbolescent" thinking—as from an examination, in the words of the Homebody, of "all that which was dropped by the wayside on the way to The Source" (*H/K* 9). For example, the lines that Mahala screams in act 2, scene 6—"You love the Taliban so much, bring them to New York! Well, don't worry, they're coming to New York!" (*H/K* 83)—and that virtually every review published since the play's opening has dutifully quoted, are part of a much larger peroration. She locates the United States' complex (and at one point CIA-funded) relationship with the Taliban not simply in the latter regime's willingness to serve as a bulwark against the Soviet Union in the dying days of the Cold War, but even more importantly, in the US's need for compliance from Afghanistan—and Pakistan—over a proposed oil pipeline from the Persian Gulf that cannot go through Iran. (Just as it cannot, for obvious reasons, go through Iraq, which is why the United States has to continue to tread carefully in its relations with Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, and perhaps most importantly, Turkey.) As the Homebody suggests throughout the course of her monologue, sooner or later most everyone and most everything passes through the Hindu Kush. And, like the Homebody's gloss on the guidebook she reads, the history lesson offered by Kushner in this play proceeds "[e]lliptically. Discursively" (*H/K* 12). Nomadically. In this, *Homebody/Kabul* continues the "Great Work" begun by the playwright in *Angels in America*.<sup>26</sup>

The connections between the two plays are multiple and manifold, not least in their epic and dialectical approach to dramatizing both the global and local histories of our awful present, of which AIDS and Afghanistan serve as Brechtian metonyms, iterable "interruptions" that, rather than standing in supercessional place of, instead "quote" intercessionally from historical incidents and lived lives, in order that they might be examined critically. Here, Kushner is, as several critics have noted, very much a student of Bertolt Brecht and of Brecht's great interpreter, Walter Benjamin.<sup>27</sup> In *Angels in America*, the storm "blowing from Paradise"<sup>28</sup> finds its visual corollary in a Heaven designed to look like San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake and fire.<sup>29</sup> It's a space which Prior Walter, infected with the AIDS virus but very much wanting to live, is anxious to flee; it's also a space, at least in its contemporary earthly manifestation, towards which Harper Pitt—who shares with the Homebody a wildly empathic imagination, as well as a healthy appetite for barbituates and an acute case of agoraphobia tempered by a sudden urge for travel—consciously makes her way at the end of the play.<sup>30</sup> Harper could not have known then (February 1986, according to the

<sup>26</sup> Tony Kushner, *Angels in America, Part One: Millennium Approaches* (New York: TCG, 1993), 119.

<sup>27</sup> Kushner himself acknowledges his debt to both men in the Afterword to *Perestroika*, "With a Little Help from My Friends," in *Angels in America, Part Two: Perestroika* (New York: TCG, 1994), 149–58. On "interruption," "quotation," and "historicization" in epic theatre, see Bertolt Brecht, "Short Description of a New Technique of Acting Which Produces an Alienation Effect," in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett (London: Methuen, 1964), 136–47; and Walter Benjamin, "What is Epic Theater?," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 147–54.

<sup>28</sup> Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in Arendt, ed., *Illuminations*, 258.

<sup>29</sup> Kushner, *Angels in America, Part Two: Perestroika*, 50–51, 122.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

play's chronology) what awaited her at the other end of her journey, the 1989 San Francisco earthquake in many ways as devastating to the city psychologically as its 1906 predecessor—just as the Homebody could not have known that her precipitous departure for Kabul would coincide with the American government's August 1998 resumption of bombings in the region in response to attacks on its embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. Instead, both of these unlikely nomads fly obliviously—but no less bravely—into the eye of the storm. “The dust of Kabul's blowing soil smarts lightly in my eyes,” recites the Homebody at the end of her monologue, quoting from the seventeenth-century Persian poet Sa'ib-I-Tabrizi,

But I love her; for knowledge and love both come from her dust.  
[. . .]  
I sing to the gardens of Kabul;  
Even Paradise is jealous of their greenery.

(H/K 30)

These are the last words spoken by the Homebody; she then walks off the stage and, in some senses, out of the play altogether. In Donnellan and Ormerod's staging of the play at the Young Vic, the shock of the Homebody's sudden exit after sixty minutes of enthralling verbal pyrotechnics was accompanied by a simple yet equally thrilling bit of design magic: the lush mauve fabric that had up until this point been covering the raised thrust stage was suddenly retracted inward through a hole in the stage, revealing the bare, unfinished plywood beneath. We had been transported, in a single swift stroke, to the dusty streets of Kabul.

Donnellan and Ormerod are coartistic directors of Cheek by Jowl Theatre Company, and the husband-and-husband director/designer team who staged the British premiere of Kushner's *Angels in America* in 1992 and 1993. As Art Borreca asserts, that production seemed to reveal an intuitive understanding on the part of both director and designer of the Brechtian/Benjaminian dialectics at work in Kushner's play.<sup>31</sup> In the staging of *Homebody/Kabul*, playwright, director, and designer appeared to be on a similar dramaturgical wavelength. This time, however, everyone seems to have been reading Deleuze and Guattari's theories of nomadology.

Like Beckham's deterritorialized soccer pitch, both the form and content of Kushner's play are rhizomatic, an “assemblage” of “multiplicities,” to use Deleuze and Guattari's terminology, in which there are no fixed “points or positions,” only multidimensional—and multidirectional—“lines of flight,” each laid out on a single “exteriorized” plane: “lived events, historical determinations, concepts, individuals, groups, social formations” (TP 8, 9). The Homebody's opening monologue is paradigmatic; while, as Minwalla rightly argues, the Homebody's reading from her guidebook follows a fairly linear, positivist-historicist trajectory,<sup>32</sup> her tale about buying the party hats is for the most part composed of “nomadic thoughts” that are “anti-genealogical” (TP 21) in the

<sup>31</sup> Art Borreca, “‘Dramaturging’ the Dialectic: Brecht, Benjamin, and Declan Donnellan's Production of *Angels in America*,” in *Approaching the Millennium: Essays on Angels in America*, ed. Deborah R. Geis and Steven F. Kruger (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 252–54. On *Homebody/Kabul* as a similar Benjaminian allegory of “cultural and political apocalypse,” see M. Scott Phillips, “The Failure of History: Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul* and the Apocalyptic Context,” *Modern Drama* 47, no. 1 (2004): 1–20.

<sup>32</sup> See Minwalla, “Tony Kushner,” 30ff.

extreme. These thoughts erupt from and interrupt her narrative, a result of her desire to summon up for us in her “salt-wounded mind’s eye” (H/K 17) “every animate and inanimate thing, corporeal or incorporeal, actual or ideational, real or imagined, every, every discrete unit of . . . of *being*” (H/K 10; ellipsis in original), a process which she herself admits exceeds her “capacity for syncretism—is that a word?—straying rather into synchysis, which is a word” (H/K 12): “I . . . seem forever to be imploding and collapsing and am incapable it would seem of lending even this simple tale to the Universal Drift, of telling this simple tale without supersaturating my narrative with maddeningly infuriating or more probably irritating synchitic expeseges. Synchitic expeseges. Jesus” (H/K 14). Nowhere are the multiple lines of flight in the Homebody’s thinking more apparent—“more detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable” (TP 21)—than in what she imagines to be the hat merchant’s response to her query about the missing fingers on his right hand:

I was with the Mujahideen, and the Russians did this. I was with the Mujahideen, and an enemy faction of Mujahideen did this. I was with the Russians, I was known to have assisted the Russians, I did informer’s work for Babrak Karmal, my name is in the files if they haven’t been destroyed, the names I gave are in the files, there are no more files, I stole bread for my starving family, I stole bread *from* a starving family, I profaned, betrayed, according to some stricture I erred and they chopped off the fingers of my hand.

(H/K 23)

Earlier in her monologue, the Homebody describes how, when she had first caught sight of the merchant’s ruined right hand as he accepted her credit card to process payment for the hats, she had recoiled from it, retreating from this immediate and proximate bodily imprinting of Afghanistan’s history to the safely retrospective and relatively empirical compendium of so-called facts she has culled from her dry and dusty tomes: “I know nothing of this hand, its history, of course, nothing. I did know, well I have learnt since through research that Kabul [. . .] was it was claimed by the Moghul Emperor Babur founded by none other than Cain himself. Biblical Cain” (H/K 21). Indeed, this episode culminates in the Homebody’s reading from her guidebook for the last time, relating the birth of “modern Afghanistan” under the coalitionary leadership of Ahmed Shah Durrani, before adumbrating successive post-eighteenth-century invasions of the country by the British and the Russians, leading to the rise of both the Mujahideen and the Taliban (fig. 3). But the Afghan hat merchant’s own tale, the Homebody soon realizes, remains unassimilable within such a narrative. Indeed, it remains defiantly apposite to it (as its appearance on the facing page in the published playtext brilliantly illustrates), forcing the Homebody to revise her previous conceptions about the simultaneously “sad” and “marvellous” dislocations of global history (H/K 18), and how those dislocations reterritorialize the local. If one cannot adequately explain, in a linear, cause-and-effect manner, the history of a single ruined hand, how can one hope to account for the history of an entire ruined city, country, continent, globe? The Afghan hat merchant, speaking through the Homebody, continues, issuing a direct challenge to his medium:

*Look, look at my country, look at my Kabul, my city, what is left of my city? . . . only God can save us now, only order can save us now, only God’s Law harsh and strictly administered can save us now, . . . save us from God, from war, from exile, from oil exploration, from no oil exploration, from the West, from children with rifles, carrying stones, only children with rifles, carrying stones, can save us now.* You will never understand. It is hard, it was hard work to get into the U.K. I am happy here in the U.K. I am terrified I will be made to leave the U.K. I cannot wait to leave the U.K. I despise the U.K. I voted for John Major. I voted for Tony Blair. I did not, I cannot



Figure 3. "What after all is a child but the history of all that has befallen her?" Linda Emond as the Homebody in the Steppenwolf/Mark Taper Forum production of *Homebody/Kabul* (2004) by Tony Kushner, directed by Frank Galati at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Photo: Stephanie Berger.

vote, I do not believe in voting, the people who ruined my hand were right to do so, they were wrong to do so, my hand is most certainly ruined, *you will never understand*, why are you buying so many hats?

(H/K 23–24; italics in original)

After this, there is no chance of the Homebody returning to her guidebook. Rather, after some literal wringing of her own hands and worrying about “degrees of culpability” versus “degrees of action,” of the difference that “agglutinates between Might and Do” (H/K 24), she describes for us how she accepts the offer of the hat merchant’s outstretched right hand, holding on tightly as he magically leads her through a parted curtain and on a guided tour of Kabul, eventually letting him touch her in the most intimate of places: “We kiss, his breath is very bitter, he places his hand inside me, it seems to me his whole hand inside me, and it seems to me a whole hand” (H/K 26). With what Minwalla describes as her literal internalization of the other,<sup>33</sup> the Homebody completes her own process of “supercessional displacement” (H/K 27), of nomadic transformation. Significantly, as with Beckham’s surprisingly affecting and deterritorialized conclusion to his autobiography—sitting in a hotel room in Thailand watching on television his new team playing several time zones away, he refers to himself as “a boy from Chingford, England. United born and bred. And going to play for Real Madrid”<sup>34</sup>—this transformation is narrated in the third person: “Where stands the Homebody, safe in her kitchen, on her culpable shore, suffering uselessly watching others perishing in the sea. . . . Never *joining* the drowning. Her feet, neither rooted nor moving. The ocean is deep and cold and erasing. But how dreadful, really unpardonable, to remain dry” (H/K 27–28).

Deleuze and Guattari argue that “[a] rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things. . . . *Between* things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one *and* the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle” (TP 25). This description applies not only to the speech from the Afghan hat merchant that I have just quoted, but arguably to the Homebody’s entire “schizoanalysis”<sup>35</sup> of Afghanistan’s—and her own—many paradoxes. And, just as arguably, it can be applied to the structure of Kushner’s play, which steadily picks up speed in its middle scenes, documenting, with increasing urgency, what happens when the deterritorializing and nomadic tendencies of both the “desiring machine” (what Deleuze and Guattari here and elsewhere refer to as the “body without organs” [TP 4]) and the “war machine” (what, in a Foucauldian reading of Deleuze and

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>34</sup> Beckham, *Both Feet*, 366.

<sup>35</sup> “Schizoanalysis” is the term developed by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*, the companion volume to *A Thousand Plateaus*, to describe the process by which Freudian psychoanalysis, with its focus on the neurotic ego and the unconscious as the locus of repressed desire, is deterritorialized, liberating individual desires and mobilizing their flow into a collective subjectivity (the “desiring-machine”) that makes a revolutionary politics possible; see Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 296ff. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, “schizoanalysis” is used as a synonym for nomadic thought.

Guattari, we might call power without government)<sup>36</sup> come up against the reterritorializing impulses of the State. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the operations of language and other systems of communication in the play. For Rosi Braidotti, the polyglot is the nomad par excellence, someone who “knows that language is not only and not even the instrument of communication but a site of symbolic exchange that links us together in a tenuous and yet workable web of mediated misunderstandings, which we call civilization.”<sup>37</sup>

Thus, not only does the Homebody magically find herself able to communicate with the Afghan hat merchant in fluent Pushto, but Khwaja, who speaks Dari, Pashtun, and English, chooses to write his love poems in Esperanto because, as he tells Priscilla, “It is a language that has no history, and hence no history of oppression” (*H/K* 65). Having learned the language while in prison following the military coup against the democratically elected People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) in 1978 that preceded the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, when a common “international language, spoken in every country on earth” still looked like a marvelous possibility, Khwaja continues to write in Esperanto because he finds he has “an ear for its particular staccato music [. . .]. I love its modern hyperrational ungainliness. To me it sounds not universally at home, rather homeless, stateless, a global refugee patois” (*H/K* 67). But to Mullah Durranni and the Taliban government, Khwaja’s attempts at Deleuzian “decoding,” his hymns to a world free from hierarchy and opposition, look suspiciously like secret plans to attack and attempt to dismantle the State. “These papers are not of poems but Tajik informations for Rabbani and Massoud,” he tells a frightened Priscilla, Milton, and Mahala at the climax of the play. “Placements of weapons and this” (*H/K* 130).

Just prior to this scene, while waiting for Priscilla to emerge from a private interrogation by the Mullah, Milton, the computer network engineer, and Mahala, the librarian—who in a bravura scene at the end of act 2 decries the successive State apparatuses that have ruled Afghanistan (and the country’s women in particular) in a mix of Dari, Russian, French, and English, and who now struggles to make herself understood (even attempting German) to the man who just might save her life—discover that they can communicate numerologically. Their respective “strange languages” are reduced to a simple binary code that crosses boundaries and banishes “confusion” (*H/K* 124–26). Excited by their discovery of a common link, Milton and Mahala proceed to apply their networking, or deterritorialization, model to Afghanistan, the “passing-through place” that serves as a “perfect metaphor,” according to Milton, for the “intersection” of opposing forces: “Afghanistan! Armies, and, and gas pipelines, licit and illicit markets, and even Islam, communism, tribes, the incommensurable interests of the West and the East, heroin, missiles, refugees, and each in a language, moving chaotically” (*H/K* 127). The machine that Milton would make to

<sup>36</sup> In their “Treatise on Nomadology,” Deleuze and Guattari take great pains to distinguish the war machine, which they admit in its “pure form of exteriority” “remains difficult to conceptualize,” from the “magic violence of the State,” especially as that violence is institutionalized in the military (*TP*, 354). In its directionless “flows and currents that only secondarily allow themselves to be appropriated by the State,” in its existence “only in its own metamorphoses,” the war machine is resistance, the “*nomos*” that is outside the “law” (*TP* 360).

<sup>37</sup> Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 13.

banish such confusion is the war machine described by Deleuze and Guattari. Its “numerical composition”—what they call the “numbering number”—replaces the “lineal” or territorial organization of the State and redistributes power, not as hierarchical “segments” or “centers” but as relational “series”—much like Beckham trading his number 7 Manchester United jersey for Real Madrid’s number 23. “Arithmetic composition, on the one hand, selects, extracts from the lineages the elements that will enter into nomadism and the war machine and, on the other, directs them against the State apparatus, opposing a machine and an existence to the State apparatus” (TP 392, 390–91).

In the production of *Homebody/Kabul* that I saw, what I have been describing as the nomadic form and content of Kushner’s play found its visual corollary in the design and staging of Ormerod and Donnellan. Ormerod transformed the Young Vic’s theatre-in-the-round studio space into a raised thrust stage extending, rhizomatically, into the audience as a walkway that connected with a doorway in the south wall of the theatre. This arrangement, together with the ingenious system of moveable brick walls at the back of the stage, allowed for multiple points of entry and exit, deftly exploited by Donnellan in the swift pacing of the transitions between scenes, when the actor-driven set changes foregrounded the stage as a space of intersection and contestation.<sup>38</sup>

Like Deleuze and Guattari, in their “anticultural” book, and like Beckham in his autobiography, Kushner has given his play “a circular form,” although presumably not “only for laughs” (TP 22). Rather, the play ends with a quietly moving scene between Priscilla and Mahala. They are back in London, in the same room occupied by the Homebody in act 1. It is the only scene to which Kushner, in the published text, gives a title: “Periplum.” The word, we are told courtesy of Hugh Kenner in the fourth of Kushner’s seven epigraphs to the play, “is Pound’s shorthand for a tour which takes you round then back again. And such a tour is by definition profitable, if not in coins then in knowledge” (Kenner, quoted in *H/K* 8). I will return to the significance of this final scene shortly; for the moment, let me explain how Richard, Cathy, and I experienced our own curious form of periplum the night we saw *Homebody/Kabul*.

Place and displacement, location and dislocation: these are central concerns in Kushner’s play. The audience is aware, given her plummy accent and accompanying narrative, that the Homebody is meant to reside in one of London’s tonier enclaves. But we are never entirely sure of where, or even if, her encounter with the Afghan hat merchant takes place. For, as one of the playwright’s notes makes explicit, “When the Homebody, in Act One, Scene 1, refers to the street on which she found the hat shop, she doesn’t mention its name; instead, where the name would fall in the sentence, she makes a wide, sweeping gesture in the air with her right hand, almost as if to say: ‘I know the name but I will not tell you.’ It is the same gesture each time” (*H/K* 5). This mysterious London nonlocation finds its Kabuli corollary in the Homebody’s obses-

<sup>38</sup> It is worth remembering that Donnellan and Ormerod founded Cheek by Jowl in 1981 as a touring company, staging classic plays in a stripped-down, antispectacular style that travels well and showcases actors hitting—and occasionally missing—their targets. (See Declan Donnellan, *The Actor and the Target* [London: Nick Hern, 2002]). In this, their first production since returning to England following a long hiatus working in Russia, director and designer are staging as much their own cultural and professional itinerancy as they are that of playwright Kushner’s characters.



sion, noted above, with “[t]he Grave of Cain. Murder’s Grave” (H/K 21). Later we learn that the Homebody, at the time of her disappearance in Kabul, had apparently been searching for the grave site in Cheshme Khedre, which she had noted with a question mark in her guidebook. As Khwaja summarizes to Priscilla, “This says, not ‘Grave of Cain,’ but rather, ‘Grave of Cain?’ She was pursuing a rumor. On no official map is there ever a question mark. This would be an entirely novel approach to cartography. The implications are profound. To read on a map, instead of ‘Afghanistan,’ ‘Afghanistan?’ It would be more accurate, but—” (H/K 63).

Eventually Khwaja leads Priscilla to what is supposed to be the gravesite itself, which is in the middle of a minefield, presided over by a resigned Sufi marabout, and which, perhaps befitting the final resting place of a marked man, is unmarked. Priscilla is typically despondent, unable to express exactly what she hoped to find there: “I thought I’d, I dunno, there’d be some sort of sign . . . for me here. That she’d marked the map for me” (H/K 110). What Priscilla fails to understand is that her mother, in moving from her sedentary life in London to her nomadic one in Kabul, can only announce her presence in terms of an absence, can only locate herself in relation to a question that cannot be answered. As Deleuze and Guattari summarize,

If the nomad can be called the Deterritorialized par excellence, it is precisely because there is no reterritorialization *afterward* as with the migrant, or upon *something else* as with the sedentary (the sedentary’s relation with the earth is mediatized by something else, a property regime, a State apparatus). With the nomad, on the contrary, it is deterritorialization that constitutes the relation to the earth, to such a degree that the nomad reterritorializes on deterritorialization itself. . . . The earth does not become deterritorialized in its global and relative movement, but at specific locations, at the spot where the forest recedes, or where the steppe and the desert advance.

(TP 381–82)

Or where a city vanishes beneath the horizon line of the rubble it has become. Cheshme Khedre, an area on the outskirts of Kabul littered with undetonated land mines, is quite literally a no-man’s-land. Even less so, as Priscilla is repeatedly reminded, a woman’s.

In their treatise on nomadology and the war machine in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari note, among other things, that nomadic space is “a tactile space, or rather ‘haptic,’ a sonorous much more than a visual space” (TP 382). To this end, at the close of this scene, as “*A muezzin’s call for prayers*” sounds (H/K 115), Priscilla gives Khwaja the Discman retrieved from the site where the Homebody is supposed to have disappeared, or where the remnants of her body were supposed to have been found. Either way, it is the sole remaining possession she has of her mother, one she now instructs Khwaja to pass on to Zai Garshi, an Afghan actor-turned-hat salesman who has previously testified before Priscilla that her mother is alive but does not want to be found, and who shares with the Homebody a love of Frank Sinatra. In exchange, Khwaja gives Priscilla “[o]ne last packet of poems” for delivery to London (H/K 116), a city whose “striated space[s],” in Deleuze and Guattari’s terminology, represent a migratory beginning or end point rather than a nomadic “intermezzo,” a space of the “*relative global*,” of assigned direction (coming or going), rather than of the “*local absolute*,” or polyvocal direction (always moving) (TP 380–82). Thus, for both Khwaja as a former migrant, and Mahala as a future one, London’s geography is very tangible, the minutest of locations within it absolutely pinpointable, despite its vast urban

sprawl. To this end, when Khwaja asks Priscilla to transport his poems back to his friend and fellow Esperantist, Mr. Sahar, in London, he alone among the characters in the play names a specific address: “17 Pindock Mews, Maida Vale” (*H/K* 65). It’s a street that very much exists, one of those typically English lanes that emerges out of nowhere and that doesn’t seem to go anywhere else. It’s about a block and a half from the Warwick Avenue Tube stop, on the Bakerloo Line, just off Castellain Road. It’s also fewer than five hundred meters from Cathy’s flat. We had passed it, oblivious to its significance, on our way to dinner and the theatre earlier that night. Returning home, we couldn’t help but pause in front of it, and count from the corner to what we guessed would likely be the shuttered windows of number 17.

### Act 3: Vancouver and New York

The multiple journeys enacted in Kushner’s play point to the fact that theatre, like soccer, is a contact sport. The stage, like the stadium, is a space of nomadism, of global wandering and local encounter, where intersecting and polyvocal points of arrival and departure give rise to what Jill Dolan calls further “geographies of learning.” As Dolan puts it, theatre can be “a site of world traveling and world building,” especially when political theatre is also a theatre of empathy, in which “the emotion theater inspires [is used] to move people to political action, to desire reconfigured social relations, to want to interact intimately with a local and a global community.”<sup>39</sup> This harnessing of emotion to action—or even activism, as Dolan notes in the subtitle to her book—is the key. In this sense, it is important to distinguish empathy from what Kushner identifies as the bugbear of catharsis, which, in a neat little capitalist equation, involves an initial expenditure of emotion for a guaranteed return of transcendence.<sup>40</sup> In contrast, empathy implies a reciprocal exchange between producer and consumer (or actor and spectator), an acknowledgment that both are in the event, that the liveness of theatre creates a space in which we can collectively “engage with the social in physically, materially embodied circumstances.”<sup>41</sup> As Kushner puts it, “Theater, like dialectical materialist analysis, examines the magic of perception and the political, ideological employment to which the magic is put.”<sup>42</sup>

So too with global sporting culture, where any drama performed by Beckham on the field cannot be separated from its economic and cultural context. In this respect, I truly feel for Beckham, as I have followed, from my home in Vancouver, his uneasy exile in Madrid over the past two years. Not only has he had to deal with those nasty tabloid rumors about marital infidelities, but, even more seriously, with open criticism from English and Spanish fans alike about his uncharacteristically sluggish play. This reached a nadir with the double ignominy of Real Madrid’s quarterfinal exit in the Champions League knockout round in March 2004, followed by England’s quarterfinal defeat by the Portuguese host team at the UEFA Cup in late June. The latter match was decided on penalty kicks, with Beckham, normally a precise dead-ball striker, crucially missing on his attempt. While English coach Sven-Göran Eriksson has insisted that Beckham’s position as team captain leading up to the 2006 World Cup in Germany is

<sup>39</sup> Jill Dolan, *Geographies of Learning: Theory and Practice, Activism and Performance* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 91, 90.

<sup>40</sup> Kushner, “Notes about Political Theater,” 22.

<sup>41</sup> Dolan, *Geographies of Learning*, 90.

<sup>42</sup> Kushner, “Notes about Political Theater,” 27.

not in any jeopardy, and while his various product-endorsement contracts no doubt remain secure, there is a sense that the world's most famous itinerant footballer can't ever go home again. Or at least not in the manner that he might wish. That is, not only are the playing styles of England's big three Premier League teams—Chelsea, Arsenal, and Manchester United—somewhat at odds with Beckham's unique strengths, but none of them can really afford him. To be sure, Beckham's particular refugee status needs very much to be distinguished from the diasporas of terror and despair that have, respectively, propelled Mahala and the Homebody to swap places by the end of Kushner's play. Nevertheless, the emotions that his movements both on and off the field inspire in his deterritorialized viewing audience—myself included—can work proportionately to prompt a rethinking, at the local level, of one's transnational, globalized identifications and affiliations.

This, then, is the crux of the personal/political dialectic—or paradox—in modern theatre: empathic identification must lead inevitably to cathetic alienation, and finally to critical analysis. It's something Kushner recognizes when he follows the Homebody's rapturous paean to the beauties of Kabul with Doctor Qari Shah's clinical—but no less vivid—description of a body's (presumably the Homebody's, now quite literally a "body without organs") brutal dismemberment in act 1, scene 2. A burqa "draped over the arm of a chair" on this stage suddenly crowded with men (including Milton, Quango, and the Mullah) bespeaks not only the Homebody's absent presence but also, more proximately, that of Priscilla, whose shadow we gradually see emerge in hunched profile against "a bedsheet which has been hung across one corner of the room" (*H/K* 31). Indeed, Priscilla's emergence from the long shadow of her mother's ghost—her "*corpus vile*," the "body, alive or dead, of no regard to anyone" (*H/K* 113)—and effecting her own slow, painful identification across difference, her own corporeal connection with Mahala, is the central conflict of *Homebody/Kabul*. This in part explains the nature of the changes Kushner has made in the revised text of the play, where the background to Priscilla's domestic estrangement from her parents, and from her self (the result of an attempted suicide that killed her unborn fetus), is fleshed out in longer scenes with Milton, and where the shrill tone and petulant anger that had previously dominated many of Priscilla's exchanges with Khwaja are replaced by a new openness and sense of wonder toward her own "sad and marvellous" cultural dislocation in Kabul: "Look up there! Look at that sky! Black! Black! Those stars! Crikey. We could be on the moon! Oh sweet Christ it's . . . Unearthly! [. . .] Kabul has changed me. I've listened."<sup>43</sup> This also explains the casting of Hollywood ingenue Maggie Gyllenhaal as Priscilla in the Steppenwolf Theatre/Mark Taper Forum production of the play that arrived at BAM in May 2004. At the very least, her star wattage would ensure that audiences kept watching, even if, despite Kushner's changes, nothing else in the four-hour evening still quite measured up to the verbal brilliance of the Homebody's opening monologue (fig. 4).

And yet, in revising his play so that it might—in the words of Steppenwolf Artistic Director Martha Lavey—survive "the sensationalism of its public birth," and "receive a reading that concentrated on its intrinsic force as a human drama (instead of as a record of extrinsic world events),"<sup>44</sup> Kushner would not deny that its return to New

<sup>43</sup> Tony Kushner, *Homebody/Kabul*, rev. ed. (New York: TCG, 2004), 112; first ellipsis in original.

<sup>44</sup> See Martha Lavey, "A Foreword," in Kushner, *Homebody/Kabul*, rev. ed., ix.



Figure 4. "She gave—nothing—and so she . . . demanded interpretation."  
Milton (Reed Birney) and Priscilla (Maggie Gyllenhaal) in the Steppenwolf/Mark Taper Forum  
production of *Homebody/Kabul* (2004). Photo: Stephanie Berger.

York shouldn't also provoke a renewed local debate about the United States' unsettled and unsettling role as global law enforcer. This was especially true in light of the US invasion of Iraq and the images of torture that were at that very moment emerging from Abu Ghraib prison, and the strange spectacle of the Republican National Convention that would descend on the city later that summer, in addition to the far-from-resolved situation in Afghanistan. In this regard, I would argue that locally produced live theatre, as much as any electronically mediated global sporting event on the scale of FIFA's World Cup, can function as a "disaporic public sphere" of the sort envisioned by Arjun Appadurai, a space of connection and contestation where "mobile texts and migrant audiences" come together to produce "communities of sentiment," transnational sodalities "capable of moving from shared imagination to collective action."<sup>45</sup> Thus I found myself sitting in the audience at BAM's Harvey Theater on 12 May 2004, almost two years to the day since I had first followed the *Homebody* through a parted curtain to Kabul. Fresh from having seen her crosstown sister, *Caroline*, on Broadway the night before and—still on Vancouver time—acutely conscious of my own sense of displacement in a city I was visiting for the first time since the Twin Towers fell, I kept thinking about the politics and performance of mourning. Not that *Homebody/Kabul* hasn't always been a play about grief. But in the revised version, the recreative and regenerative possibilities of mourning, the produc-

<sup>45</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 8–10.

tive transformation of loss into a new model for social action and intercultural connection, are emphasized through the addition of a key speech by Priscilla in her closing scene with Mahala:

I miss her. I love her. She was my mother. But . . . Can I say this?  
 In the space she's left . . . Some . . . joy? or something has been rising. Something  
 unpronounceable inside is waking up. I . . . I've no words for this.  
 [. . .]  
 Y'see Mum? One sharp goad from a terrible grief and . . . the soul is waking up.<sup>46</sup>

As Judith Butler has recently written, with special reference to 9/11, "Loss has made a tenuous 'we' of us all," by virtue of the shared "social vulnerability of our bodies": "Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure."<sup>47</sup> For Butler, the issue is how we transform this loss into a new social ethics, reconfiguring a "model of the human" that accounts for the "you" in "me," and that bears witness to the fact that "I am as much constituted by those I do grieve for as by those whose deaths I disavow, whose nameless and faceless deaths form the melancholic background for my social world."<sup>48</sup> This is the lesson Priscilla learns over the course of *Homebody/Kabul*, which is especially foregrounded in the revised version of the play. Without her mother's body to recover and grieve over, Priscilla is forced to take back home with her "the spectacle of [Kabul's] suffering": "she's scattered all over Kabul. The whole city. It's her."<sup>49</sup> Moreover, in following Khwaja's advice and not "[holding] her [mother] back from traveling," Priscilla is gently encouraged to shrug off her own dry despondency and join humanity's drowning. This is what, we discover (in one of the few revisions to the *Homebody's* monologue), her mother had wished for her all along: "I so wanted her to be out in the world, my daughter. Of use."<sup>50</sup> In the end, Priscilla can no more make sense of what her mother hoped to find in the ruins of Kabul than Mahala can understand what clues she might have left behind in her neglected English garden and in her "strange" library. Rather, the *Homebody's* "strangeness," her undecipherability, become the means by which Priscilla and Mahala together plant their dead and reflect on their own cultural estrangement, on the knowing that comes through not knowing, and on the nomadism they are allowed to experience through the *Homebody's* proxy.

"You need an idea of the world to go out into the world," announces Hannah Pitt at the end of the second part of Kushner's *Angels in America*. "But it's the going into that makes the idea. You can't wait for a theory, but you have to have a theory."<sup>51</sup> It's a paradox that Hannah herself has had to live in making her way uncertainly from the safety and sameness of Salt Lake City to the chaotic clash of difference in New York City. It's once again enacted for us by the *Homebody* in the extraordinary performance of her transformation into a nomad. And a version of it is repeated in the mantra of metaphysical questions that bookend Beckham's autobiography: "Who are you?

<sup>46</sup> Kushner, *Homebody/Kabul*, rev. ed., 139; ellipses in original, except where indicated.

<sup>47</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004), 20.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 46, 49.

<sup>49</sup> Kushner, *Homebody/Kabul*, rev. ed., 115, 60.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 116, 28.

<sup>51</sup> Kushner, *Angels in America, Part Two: Perestroika*, 147.

Where have you come from? How did you come to be here? Where are you going?"<sup>52</sup> In theorizing globalization through theatre, we need to ask such questions not only of the mobile texts we study, but also of ourselves as migratory audience members and critics. Above all, we who fancy ourselves scholar gypsies, itinerant cultural workers, nomadic intellectual laborers, sojourner-artists; we who purport, in our work, to negotiate between the local and the global, between place and the performance of place, between the ethnographic gaze and the tourist gaze; we would do well, when descending from our towers, aeries, and studios to board our planes for London or New York or Kabul or \_\_\_\_\_, to make sure that whatever theories we may have packed will travel well.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Beckham, *Both Feet*, 15, 364.

<sup>53</sup> On the uses (and abuses) of traveling theories, see Edward Said, "Travelling Theory," *Raritan* 1, no. 3 (1982): 41–67; and "Travelling Theory Reconsidered," in *Critical Reconsiderations: The Relationship of Fiction and Life*, ed. Robert Polhemus and Roger Henkle, 251–65 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).