

of Charlie Chaplin, Al Jolson, and the like. There are jabs at this colonial past in some of the photographs. In *John Dollar Emeka*, an actor dons a nineteenth century military uniform and nurses a broken arm in a sling. In another image, *Obechukwu Nwoye*, the actor sports a sailor's uniform and an oversized string of pearls, her face painted in whiteface make-up and eyes rimmed in fake blood. Slouching on a leather sofa and holding a smouldering cigarette, she gazes at the camera irreverently. These portraits capture the characters' numbness to these globalizing times, while proclaiming a unique history with which we are, as yet, unfamiliar. One of the drollest photographs, *Emeka Uzzi* portrays the poker-faced actor dressed in a hairy Yeti-like costume, sitting heavily with a bottle of Coca-Cola.

Just what happens when a distinctly American industry and cultural production is reconstituted by the Other? Hugo depicts this tension between old and new in his half-fictions, half-realities. In a repurposing of Hollywood, Nollywood subverts its colonial past and moves towards a new global expression of cultural hybridity.

PERFORMANCE

The Movement Project's *How We Forgot Here*: Some Lessons in Navigating Political Turbulence

by *Spy Dénommé-Welch*

For politicized artists experimenting with the tenuous and ever-fluctuating frontiers between art and life, real danger is always present, especially when the art event takes place outside the protected space of cultural institutions.

—Guillermo Gomez-Pena, *Dangerous Border Crossers*¹

All it took was twenty bucks and I was able to buy myself a one-way ticket with Eagle Airlines (“Canada’s Indigenous Airline”), which, in my

opinion, was a bargain too good to refuse. So I packed a handy carry-on bag and made sure not to bring any liquids or sharp objects—after all, airport security can be awfully tight these days, and for “Canada’s newest Indigenous-run Airline” there was no exception to be made. For that reason alone, I did not want to get held up at security over a tube of toothpaste and miss my flight to *How We Forgot Here*.

How We Forgot Here is the first piece of a series of movements being developed by The Movement Project—a collective that was formed in 2007 and features writer/composer Gein Wong, actor/dancer Marika Schwandt, filmmaker Malinda Francis, actor Eva Rose Tababondung, actor Ryan Symington, and musician/performer Rosina Kazi.

I chose to fly on Sunday afternoon of March 28, 2010, catching their final performance in flight. Having arrived twenty minutes early, I decided to check in with the friendly and professional front desk clerk, who stamped my passport/ticket, thus validating my ticket...or so I thought. In the reception area there were a few passengers ahead of me waiting to go through security, and I was the fourth person in line to be processed.

Just before two in the afternoon, the security gates opened, and Customs Officer Betty Brown began calling all the passengers up to the inspection counter. She proceeded to check the bags, pockets, and wallets of those ahead of me, which to most seasoned travelers is a protocol we have come to expect at airport security. However, to this unsuspecting group of passengers, the performance was already in full swing and we were suddenly made part of the act, forced to interact in a pseudo performance art space, or what Guillermo Gomez-Pena would describe as a “living diorama.”

Customs Officer Betty Brown rummaged through luggage like a hawk, purposefully looking for “suspicious” items such as water bottles and interrogating the three travelers ahead of me. She demanded to know if any of the contents contained lethal substances, and ordered the travelers to drink the liquid, stating: “If it’s not

poison then you have nothing to worry about.” It was eventually my turn to be processed, and I soon found myself in the hot seat, being asked a myriad of personal questions, including where was I born, why was I flying, and where did I study.

Naturally, this spectacle was used to recreate notions of privilege, power dynamics and profiling. When the passengers began boarding, Betty Brown started to separate everyone, sending some directly up to the Executive Lounge where they received first class treatment, while others were sent to the Interrogation Room, myself included.

It was at this point when the performance gradually shifted from an ad lib/agitprop style of theatre to a much more scripted approach. This was especially evident when the planted character, an obnoxious John Smith, started causing a raucous over being sent to the Interrogation Room and began to confront the Customs Officer, which subsequently led to his own detainment.

Meanwhile, the remainder of the group was granted “temporary boarding visas” and finally allowed to board the plane minutes before take-off. As the confrontation between Smith and the Customs Officer took place before me, I could not help but be reminded of the captivity narratives that have been told through history about First Nations, most famously that of Pocahontas and Captain John Smith. Although it might have been tempting to try to spare John Smith from his fate in detainment/captivity, particularly as he cried out for help, no one made any attempts to save him, but rather we all simply made our way up to the plane and avoided further trouble.

As we took to the air, the sense of uneasiness among the audience began to dissipate and the performers proceeded to take us on a multi-media journey through a series of monologues, music, movement and live-recorded video projections that addressed historical and contemporary issues of migration, immigration, and colonialism. While these topics were taken up in relevant ways, the most arresting moments of the performance piece occurred when the audience

was involved, as this in itself made the work unpredictable, unnerving and, thus, fascinating. Overall, *How We Forgot Here* was an engaging experience of flight, and I am certain that for some audience members this was an insightful look into how we navigate the political turbulences of privilege and class, oppression and migration.

1 Guillermo Gomez-Pena, *Dangerous Border Crossers*, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 112.